

DUI court gets \$82K to fund another year

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The Butte-Silver Bow DUI Court graduated two more participants Tuesday morning.

Now, the total number of people who have been through the program is 38.

The specialty court started in October 2010 with federal money. Recently, officials received an \$82,800 grant to help pay for the program for another year. The latest grant came from the Montana Department of Transportation for DUI court implementation.

"We're very happy to receive the grant. It won't cover everything, but it will help immensely," said Justice of the Peace Debra Williams, who oversees the court.

The court is a newer approach to dealing with repeat drunk drivers with treatment, alcohol testing and weekly meetings. On average, graduates have more than a year in the program and have experienced 160 hours of treatment, 56 meetings with a probation officer and 30 court sessions. It currently has 17 participants.

Those in the program have generally been convicted of two or three misdemeanor DUIs and are deemed likely to re-offend. Officials say 85 percent of graduates have not been arrested for driving drunk again.

The featured speaker at Tuesday morning's ceremony was Mike Thatcher, chief executive officer of Community Counseling and Correctional Services, which runs programs like Warm Springs Addiction Treatment and Change (WATCH).

"The greatest gift I get in this business is I get to see people change their lives," Thatcher told the two graduates and their loved ones in the audience.

Thatcher presented watches to the graduates to signify their journey through recovery one day at a time.

"The true success today is you," he added.