

Cobb opens drug court aimed at helping abusers

By [DON PLUMMER](#)
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Cobb County today opened an updated version of a court aimed at getting drug users off the cycle of addiction.

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Drug Court administrator Kristie Gaskin said the court will begin small and grow to 100 participants by the end of the first year.

At today's first meeting of the court's admission panel, one of two potential participants was accepted, Superior Court Judge George Kreeger said.

"We decided that one of the candidates was just too far gone to benefit," Kreeger said. Each participant will be required to submit to weekly reviews and random drug testing through four phases of the program, Kreeger said.

"If they successfully complete the treatment after a year we will have six-month reviews of their status," he said. "The emphasis will be on treatment because the goal is to turn them into productive members of the community."

Gaskin, a licensed drug abuse counselor with six years' experience, said the treatment component of the program will be handled by WellStar's Windy Hill hospital. By keeping the full-time staff small and contracting out the ongoing treatment, the county expects to be more flexible in adjusting the program based on experience, she said.

Cobb's drug court is modeled in part upon one established in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1992, Gaskin said. The program, the nation's third, now treats about 700 participants a year, she said.

"When the first programs were established a lot of them didn't keep records on recidivism and didn't know their rates of success, but we've done a lot of research before beginning this effort and will track participants from day one," Gaskin said. "We will emphasize job training, family counseling and education and will be looking at the individual to determine why they offend and why they reoffend."

Cobb's Magistrate Court began metro Atlanta's first drug court in 1992, three years after the nation's first one opened in Miami. According to studies by the National Institute of Justice, the nation's two oldest drug courts in Miami and Portland, Ore., have been moderate successes.