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NEWS LOCAL

ADDICTION: Now a free man, D.J. Edwards took counselling, passed drug screens, performed volunteer service and has been clean for a year thanks to his hard work in a unique treatment program

Drug court graduate shares his success story



By Randy Richmond, The London Free Press
Tuesday, April 30, 2013 7:07:02 EDT PM



Drug court graduate D.J. Edwards (MIKE HENSEN, The London Free Press)

After 190 hours of drug counselling, 81 negative drug screens, 40 hours of volunteer service and 12 months clean, D.J. Edwards stood in court Tuesday a free man.

Free with his words, too.

"It's not a dress," Edwards joked about Justice Wayne Rabley's robes after Rabley took the unusual step of coming down from the bench and the even more unusual step of inviting people to take photos.

The friendly, somewhat casual session in Courtroom 2 in London marked the third time in 2½ years someone has graduated from the city's drug treatment court.

The court runs differently than regular court: people struggling with addiction who have been charged with property offences can avoid jail time if they undergo an intense treatment program.

They're allowed to continue committing one crime, possessing and using illicit drugs, for a time while they work their way through the program.

Once they've been clean for a long period, and have their lives in better order, they can graduate to a year of probation.

Edwards was profiled in a *Free Press* story last month about the court, which featured two previous graduates and a fourth halfway through the program.

That fourth man has run into some trouble and sat in the prisoner's box Tuesday, awaiting a ruling on his continued participation in drug court.

Edwards spoke directly to him and others still in the program as he described his success.

"You guys can make it," he said. "It's been a long journey, a good journey."

Drug treatment counsellors, two Crown attorneys and Rabley all praised Edwards, 32, who had spent six years and nine months on probation and 1,325 nights in jail the past 13 years.

He was arrested Jan. 31, 2012, on 13 charges, and joined drug treatment court in April 2012.

His lawyer, Carolyn Ayre, broke into tears as she hugged him.

"I had no idea you would be my first successful client," she said.

Tuesday was also Edwards' birthday, and besides grad gifts, he received a cake and several rounds of applause from family and friends, not to mention the occasional shout from his one-year-old son.

He had one more reward coming, a chance to visit Rabley's chambers.

And finally see, Edwards joked, "the big screen TV."

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