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Contact: Nate Poppino
Phone: 208-296-9055
Email: npoppino@idcourts.net

Idaho Judge Honored for Innovative Work with Treatment Courts

Judge Ralph L. Savage on Thursday became the first Idaho magistrate judge to receive the Daniel T. Eismann Award for Excellence in Treatment Courts.

Treatment courts are evidence-based tools to support Idahoans in the justice system who are at risk of recidivism and in need of behavioral health services. They reduce criminal behavior in our communities, address treatment needs, provide accountability and help Idaho avoid costs associated with incarceration.

Throughout his career, Judge Savage was instrumental in the operation of four treatment courts in the Seventh Judicial District that found new and innovative ways to address the needs of Idaho residents.

“He is a decent, compassionate and patient person who has spent his life’s work serving his fellow man ... especially those who were among the most troubled,” Justice Gregory Moeller said when presenting the award at the 2024 Idaho Treatment Court Conference.

Judge Savage served as Butte County’s magistrate judge for 20 years. Just one year after taking the bench, he led the creation of the Butte/Custer County Drug Court, which he presided over until his retirement in March 2023. Breaking the cycle of addiction for generations of families continues to have a ripple effect in the two counties. The heavily rural drug court – possibly one of the smallest in the country – is known for high graduation rates and for the success of its graduates in changing their behaviors.

While Judge Savage’s chambers were in Butte County, he spent significant time in Bonneville County handling juvenile and child protection cases. Starting around 2009 he became the presiding judge for the Bonneville County Juvenile Drug Court, a role that again lasted until retirement. He also helped create two more treatment courts. The Bonneville County Juveniles Making Progress Court addresses youth mental health. The Bonneville County Young Adult Court focuses on people 18-25 years old and was the first of its kind in Idaho – “We recognized a hole,” Judge Savage said.

In all of the courts he was involved in, Judge Savage introduced new ways to advance accountability, treatment and compassion for participants.

When presented with the award, Judge Savage thanked all of the treatment court team members who have helped make the courts a success. He talked about his love of helping kids and of seeing participants improve their lives. “To be recognized this way is really a great honor,” he said.

The Daniel T. Eismann Award recognizes a judge who currently or previously presides over a treatment court, and who demonstrates exceptional leadership and commitment to the success of their team and participants. It is named after former Chief Justice Eismann, who was also the first drug court judge in the state and the first chair of the statewide Treatment Court Committee.

Learn more about Idaho’s state treatment courts at annualreport.isc.idaho.gov/treatment-courts/.

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