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NEWS RELEASE

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OJJ Presents 2014 Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice Award



Monroe, LA – The Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) today presented its 2014 Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice Award at the annual Celebration of Change at Swanson Center for Youth in Monroe. OJJ holds the events in recognition of systemic reform and progress, including the transformation of Swanson Center for Youth into a fully therapeutic model.

Fourth Judicial District Judge Sharon Marchman is the 2014 Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice, awarded annually by the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice to recognize those who have championed the cause of juvenile justice reform, and whose dedication and hard work have resulted in the systemic overhaul of juvenile justice in Louisiana.

2014 Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice Judge Sharon Marchman, left, with OJJ Deputy Secretary Sean Hamilton.

This is the fifth annual presentation of the Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice Award. Judge Sharon Marchman joins four previous recipients: Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Kitty Kimball, Beauregard Parish District Attorney David Burton, physician Dr. Debra K. DePrato and Rapides Parish Ninth Judicial District Judge Patricia Evans Koch as a Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice. OJJ recognizes these Champions for their tireless work on behalf of Louisiana’s most at-risk children and their families.

“Judge Sharon Marchman is a true Champion of Louisiana juvenile justice,” said OJJ Deputy Secretary Dr. Mary L. Livers. “She gave up a successful law practice to serve as a judge, and has remained on the juvenile bench rather than moving on to a more prestigious section. She has

proven her dedication public service by working to improving the quality of life in her community, by serving the most vulnerable children and families.”

Judge Marchman was first elected in 2000. She was the first woman elected judge in the Fourth Judicial District, comprising Morehouse and Ouachita Parishes.

At that time, all the district judges heard all types of cases. Later the courts were divided into criminal and civil sections, and there was one juvenile court judge. The juvenile bench was not fulltime, and also heard adult drug court cases. Judges rotated between the sections and when it was her turn to serve in the criminal rotation, Judge Marchman agreed to serve as the adult drug court judge in order to fulfill one of her campaign promises. Because the focus of drug court is rehabilitation similar to the focus of juvenile court, she also agreed to serve as juvenile judge presiding over delinquency, Child in Need of Care, Families in Need of Services (FINS) and adoption cases.

In 2004, Judge Marchman began a two-year rotation as the juvenile and adult drug/DWI courts in Morehouse and Ouachita Parishes. Ten years later, Judge Marchman still presides over the same courts having added not only a juvenile drug court, but also a truancy court and adult DWI courts. “Juvenile court gets into your blood,” she said.

Judge Marchman recognized that substance and alcohol abuse are significant contributory factors to crime. “But there are also a large number of judicial commitments over which I preside,” she said. “Part of my learning curve was to understand that not just alcohol and substance abuse problems, but also mental health issues, drive crime. I feel very strongly that it is wrong, and not very efficient, to rely on the delivery of mental health and substance abuse treatment services through the criminal justice system.” The drug court is a program for non-violent habitual adult drug users focusing on rehabilitation designed to result in reduction of the demand for drugs. “The adult drug court was an efficient, effective model that could be put into place for juveniles, so we started a juvenile drug court to focus on rehabilitation while maintaining public safety,” she said.

In 2005, Judge Marchman established a juvenile drug court in Ouachita Parish to address the needs of children with substance abuse problems, and their families. The juvenile drug court is a MacArthur Foundation Models for Change site which utilizes ULM’s Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic as its treatment location. “MacArthur involvement helps people access the type of services that they need and helps ensure that those services are evidence based,” she said.

Judge Marchman enjoys collaborating with others throughout the community in order to understand the community, and be aware of the resources that are available and that are needed. “I like efficiency and effectiveness, and I want to see allocation of our community’s limited resources in the most effective way,” she said. “We have to be really very wise about that. I am conscious of how we spend public funds. We have to invest in people in a wise way to ensure that our community gets something of value in return. That idea has great appeal within the broader community, and especially within the business community.”

“We have to show that what we are doing is going to reduce crime and increase public safety,” Judge Marchman continued. “We are working to create an educated workforce, and an educated public.”

Judge Marchman recognizes that kids need to stay in school to be successful, and that truancy is often driven by substance abuse. Keeping kids in school is a very important factor in crime reduction and creating that educated workforce. Judge Marchman collaborated closely with the local sheriff, district attorney, and the school system to establish a truancy program, and she works with local agencies and civic organizations to provide education about substance abuse and treatment options within the community. “Things are improving— we have made significant strides in addressing truancy. It takes a lot of collaboration within the community, and there is much work still to be done,” she said.

One of the things Judge Marchman finds most rewarding is working with professionals in the field of juvenile and criminal justice. “These are people who are really dedicated to what they are doing,” she said. “They are not doing it for the money, they really do care. It’s very rewarding work.” Judge Marchman was highly complimentary of the juvenile probation and parole officers in OJJ’s Monroe field office. “They are phenomenal in the work they do,” she said. “They are the boots on the ground. The officers are responsive to the things I ask them to do, and to the needs of the kids. They just don’t ever give up. I admire that about our local officers. They work with a lot of interesting people who have a lot of challenges to overcome.”

“In juvenile court, we really try to connect children and families with the right resources to redefine success to be a situation where the children are actually thriving,” Judge Marchman said.

“We have a model diversion program for kids who commit minor offenses and do not pose a risk to public safety,” Judge Marchman said. “We recognize that kids often do not make good decisions.” Judge Marchman noted that the juvenile drug court, with the help of the MacArthur Foundation, has three tracks for different levels of offenders based on seriousness of the offense and extent of substance abuse issues. “We are fortunate to have the support of the sheriff and district attorney,” Judge Marchman said. “The local officials contribute resources and are very much on board with new programs. The great thing about our community is that people want to work together and make things better for everyone.”

Judge Marchman said a community planning and strategic assessment plan was needed. To that end, the Youth Services Planning Board was created. “OJJ fully participated and was able to identify and bring together available resources,” Judge Marchman said. “Another important entity was the Children’s Coalition for Northeast Louisiana, which was willing to step up and be a part of this.”

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