

Mayor celebrates Drug Court, Veterans Court graduates

By [Jason Blasco The Garden Island](#) | Wednesday, December 2, 2020,



Courtesy of Hawai'i State Judiciary

The Kaua'i Drug Court graduates are awarded certificates of completion Monday afternoon in Fifth Circuit Court in Lihu'e. From left are Drug and Veterans Court Judge Michael K. Soong, Veterans Court graduate Gerald Nash, and Drug Court graduates Sovaleni Lucidarme-Musika, Winna Kaohelauli'i and Alfred Montero. Not shown are Clayton Koerte and Shan Costa-Brum.

LIHU'E — Mayor Derek Kawakami shared his triumph over alcohol dependency during the 2020 Drug Court and Veterans Court graduation held via Zoom Monday afternoon at the Fifth Circuit Court courthouse.

Kawakami, who is now 630-plus days without consuming alcohol, shared his struggles with the graduates.

“I had a divine intervention, and I never was in a formal program,” Kawakami admitted to the graduates during his Zoom speech.

Kawakami used his personal story in hopes of inspiring graduates, letting them know of additional tests they will have upon completion of the program.

“It was the best decision I ever made,” Kawakami said. “Your family, your kid, your loved ones will be relieved that you folks got it on track, and you have a lot more tools than I do.”

Kawakami commended the graduates for demonstrating their will power.

“I am here to tell you, you can overcome any obstacle,” Kawakami said. “You must keep on grinding and moving forward towards your journey of sobriety and hold each other accountable, because we are all in this together.”

‘All or nothing’

Drug court, one of the most rigorous forms of probation, has been referred to as an “all-or-nothing” deal by various attorneys and judges.

Because of the high level of intensity and restrictions, the failure rate for drug court is high.

A long journey

The 18-month-long program is an intensive, court-based, outpatient substance-abuse treatment program, with follow-up medical and mental-health evaluations.

The program includes frequent and random drug and alcohol testing, assistance with obtaining employment, random home visits and strict curfew monitoring, all of which make it a difficult journey to complete.

Kaua’i District Court Judge Michael K. Soong shared stories of the various graduates overcoming challenges.

“What you accomplished is a major turning point in your lives,” Soong said. “In order to achieve the milestone, it took a lot of time and effort to get where you are.”

Soong said days like the Drug and Veterans Treatment Court graduation are the most gratifying personal experiences for him in his position.

“Of all of the different Drug Courts and Veteran’s court, this is the most rewarding for me,” Soong said. “You folks should be proud of what you are able to accomplish over the last year or two.”

Since 2003, when the Kaua’i Drug Court began, there have been 245 graduates.