Yavapai County Attorney
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CountY Attorney Announces Drop in Crime and Meth

Sheila Polk, the Yavapai County Attorney, announced a drop in the number of felonies filed in Yavapai County Superior Court by 8% from the previous fiscal year. “This drop is remarkable, particularly in light of the fact that our population continues to increase,” she said. “What is particularly telling is that the number of methamphetamine convictions has also dropped, highlighting for all of us the undeniable connection between meth and crime.”

“There are a number of factors that contributed to this significant drop in our crime. Those factors include the efforts of our law enforcement agencies, the work of several dedicated narcotics task forces, the success of our drug court programs, and the countywide crackdown on methamphetamine,” Polk stated. “I feel particularly grateful to all the MATForce (the Yavapai County substance abuse coalition) volunteers who have worked so hard at the grass roots level to push meth awareness and its devastating effects to the forefront.”

Felonies are crimes that a person can be sent to prison for, and include offenses such as homicides, burglaries, property crimes and sex crimes. The total number of felonies filed by the County Attorney’s Office in fiscal year 06/07 was 3,162. In contrast, the total number filed for fiscal year 07/08 was 2914. The number of charged felonies has been on the rise since 1998 as the county faced a rapidly increasing population and the proliferation of methamphetamine, more than doubling between 1998 and 2007.

“Everyone recognized the connection between methamphetamine and our crime rate. One of the reasons the response to MATForce has been so great is that every agency was experiencing the impact of meth on their caseloads,” said Polk.

Polk further noted that the effect of meth on the county’s crime rate is evident on a daily basis. “Every day I pull up the list of arrests from the day before. Two years ago, between 60 to 80% of the daily arrests had a connection to methamphetamine – either a crime committed while the suspect was high on meth, a theft committed to get funds to support a meth habit, a property crime committed by a meth user who could not hold down gainful employment, or a direct drug offense. Today, I pull up the bookings and see as few as 20% meth-related offenses.”

Polk also credited her staff and her office policy that sends all meth dealers to prison for their first offense for a minimum of five years. “Our focus has been to rid our county of this scourge one dealer at a time. If you are a user, we will get you help. If you are a dealer spreading your poison on our streets, we will send you to prison.” Polk praises the work of her prosecutors and of PANT for aggressively targeting meth dealers and spreading the word to dealers to stay out of Yavapai County. Polk further credits Sheriff Waugh’s Special Crimes Unit and the efforts of the Prescott Valley NET that specifically target drug offenses. “I love it when I hear that drug dealers are afraid to deal in Yavapai County. That is the mark of success.”
The county has several successful drug court programs run by superior court judges that focus on rehabilitation for drug users. Polk complimented the judges and the drug court teams for their continued focus on helping drug offenders achieve addiction-free life styles. “Research shows that the combination of the carrot and the stick – treatment combined with court oversight – is the most successful model for rehabilitation. We are lucky in Yavapai County to have judges and probation departments willing to invest the time in these successful programs and a Board of Supervisors that understands that financing these programs is important.”

Polk warned, however, that the public should not become complacent with these positive results. “We need to remain ever vigilant about the devastating effects of substance abuse on a community. New trends indicate that prescription drug abuse is increasing, particularly among our youth.” Polk indicated that future efforts by MATForce will focus on prescription drug abuse and increasing awareness among our community members.