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Winters Man Graduates from Addiction Intervention Court

(Woodland, CA) – July 24, 2019 – District Attorney Jeff Reisig announced that on July 23, 2019, an audience full of supporters and family members gathered to celebrate the success of Steven Sardenga, who graduated from Yolo County’s Addiction Intervention Court in Department 14 of the Yolo County Superior Court.

Addiction Intervention Court (AIC) is a specialty court program that serves up to 15 individuals who struggle with substance use disorders and are involved in the criminal justice system as a result of their addiction. The program is a collaborative effort between the Yolo County District Attorney’s Office, the Yolo County Superior Court, the Public Defender, the Probation Department, and Health and Human Services Agency. The program provides intensive support services and supervision aimed at increasing a participant’s overall quality of life while reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

In February 2016, Steven's sister allowed him to move in with her due to his difficulty maintaining a stable living situation. His sister reported that Steven would spend his days at Cache Creek Casino and that she believed he was using methamphetamine. She kicked him out of her home in September, 2016. On October 24, 2016, Steven’s sister reported the theft of her work laptop computer from her apartment to the Winters Police Department. Steven was later charged with Petty Theft and Identity theft after using the work laptop to transfer money to his personal account from his sister’s place of employment, where she worked as a bookkeeper.

Mr. Sardenga explained his escalation to drug addiction: “A few years ago, I thought it would be exciting to try drugs. I wanted to have fun and experience anything that would get me high. I started with marijuana and gradually stepped it up through pills, powders,

free basing, and all the way to shooting heroin. I did not think that I would become an addict, although in retrospect I'm not sure why because I followed the textbook ladder to drug addiction."

Judge David Rosenberg, who presides over AIC, invited team members to offer comments and congratulations to Mr. Sardenga. Deputy Probation Officer Steven Svetich proclaimed, "You were the one who rose up from the ashes. It's not often that I get to say 'I didn't really do much.' You should be very proud of what you've accomplished in this program." He went on to say that "Steven Sardenga graduated from AIC without a single relapse or being placed in a residential treatment program. You did not look back. You not only were able to address your addiction, but to take back the things that addiction had taken from you. You really are a shining example to everyone who is in this program, showing them what it looks like when you commit to the program and all of the personal success that you've had by doing so."

Next, Deputy District Attorney Alvina Tzang shared her thoughts with the audience. "A lot of people ask me: 'As a prosecutor, what are the highlights? What are the things that you remember most?' I've been doing this for 16 and a half years, and this is one of the days that I will never forget." Ms. Tzang was originally assigned to prosecute Mr. Sardenga's case before referring him to the AIC team.

Then, Steven's sister took her turn at the microphone while fighting back tears of joy. Through his involvement with AIC, Steven was able to mend relationships with his sister and moved back in with her family. "I'm so proud of Steven. He's amazing, he worked hard, he deserves it, and I hope for nothing but the best," she said.

"My addiction is still with me, but everyday I choose to resist the temptation of use. I want to thank the AIC staff and court officers for a program like this that gives people like me a second chance. To those in the program and about to be in the program, I would say this: remember the pain addiction causes to you and your loved ones. It's easy to forget just how dangerous drugs can be and how much damage you can do to others. Do your best to make things right," Steven Sardenga explained, hoping to be a positive role model for other AIC clients.

Finally, Judge Rosenberg presented a certificate to Mr. Sardenga and praised him for his hard work and dedication. After the graduation, Mr. Sardenga and his family and friends, team members and other AIC participants celebrated by eating cake and pizza.

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