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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Zoom Addiction Intervention Court Graduation
for Woodland Man**

(Woodland, CA) – May 15, 2020 – On May 14, 2020, 59-year-old Woodland man Steven Scharl successfully graduated from Addiction Intervention Court in Department 14 of the Yolo County Superior Court. The graduation was done virtually using the Zoom platform.

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, all AIC court appearances were cancelled to avoid further spread of the virus. In early April, Yolo County’s justice partners rebooted Mental Health Court (MHC) and Addiction Intervention Court (AIC) by having its first informal “Zoom Court” where participants met with team members and the AIC and MHC judge through Zoom video conferencing. In preparation, the treatment team contacted participants and helped them learn how to use Zoom. On Thursday, April 9, 2020 the MHC team held its first ever live, virtual informal court hearing. The first AIC informal Zoom court occurred on April 16.

After nearly two years in AIC, Steve Scharl had met all requirements and was ready for his graduation. The graduation was put on hold due to the COVID-19 crisis until AIC team members decided that there was nothing preventing the graduation from occurring by Zoom. Scharl was very much in favor of this.

Addiction Intervention Court (AIC) is a specialty court program that serves up to 20 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 recidivism.

On May 14, 2014 at 2 pm, Scharl, his family members, other AIC participants, and Woodland Police Department (WPD) Deputy Chief Anthony Cucchi entered the Zoom “waiting room” and were “admitted” into Zoom Court for Scharl’s graduation. AIC team members also were “in court” by Zoom. Scharl had been arrested by WPD in May 2018 for crimes for his physically and verbally aggressive acts against WPD officers. Ironically, Scharl had served as a police officer in Hawaii for 20-year prior to moving to Woodland. Scharl was referred to Addiction Intervention Court. His first day in that court was June 26, 2018. Initially, Scharl had some difficulty following direction from the treatment team. As the months passed and with the support of the AIC team, Scharl became a believer and fully surrendered himself to the program. As a result of his dedicated efforts, he became a leader for others in the program.

Judge David Reed, who presides over AIC, made some initial remarks stating that “this is a special day and an unusual situation having a graduation by Zoom.” “Zoom is becoming more and more natural and is a good way to feel a personal connection in these COVID times,” said Reed. He continued, “you are ready for graduation and to leave AIC behind you. This is the end of a chapter in your life but the beginning of a new chapter. Congratulations!” Judge Reed then invited team members to offer comments and congratulate Scharl.

Deputy Probation Officer Stephen Svetich stated “You have committed yourself and strengthened your resolve, Steven. You could easily have taken the easy way out but you chose AIC and committed yourself to change.” Deputy Public Defender Bret Bandle, who represents Scharl, said “early on I realized you were going to do it and by golly you did. Congratulations!” Next Health and Human Services Forensic Case Manager Amanda Navaez spoke. “I’m so proud of you, Steven,” said Navaez. “You’ve come a long way. You humbled yourself, let go of a lot of stuff, and moved on.” Finally, Chief Deputy District Attorney Jonathan Raven offered his congratulations to Scharl. “We told you that you needed to surrender yourself to the treatment team and it paid off. You are a shining example to the rest of the participants here today. I’m so proud of you.” Raven then told Scharl he was giving to him a \$50 gift certificate to Paesano’s restaurant in Davis that was given to him by a community member.”

Judge Reed then asked WPD Deputy Chief Anthony Cucchi for his remarks. Chief Cucchi stated “I hope our future contacts are positive. Come to our ‘Coffee with a cop’ and let’s discuss issues in our community. Well done!” Scharl’s sister then spoke to him. “I’m so happy you’re back with us, Steven. I love you.” Then, Scharl’s daughter Zooming from Hawaii tearfully spoke to him. “I want to congratulate you on your long journey. Our relationship getting restored his huge. This is such a beautiful blessing.”

At last it was Scharl’s chance to speak. “I don’t take this lightly, Chief. Thanks for your words of encouragement.” Scharl continued, “there are so many people I want to thank and I am so filled with thankfulness. I will give back in any way I can since AIC has now provided me with the tools and life skills. I love the team members who are now my lifetime friends.”

Normally, MHC and AIC graduations conclude with cake and pizza. Just as the graduation started, the team had pizza delivered to Scharl at his home in Woodland. Scharl will also participate in the AIC alumni program which allows graduates to stay involved with the program and mentor others who are still in the program.

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