



Ribbon-cutting celebrates new facility for Jackson County CASA in Pascagoula

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By



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Jackson County CASA officials hosted a ribbon-cutting and balloon release to celebrate CASA moving into a new office soon. Underneath the large, shady oak trees on the grounds of the Jackson County Youth Court, officials prepare to snip the ribbon on the spot where CASA will receive a trailer as its new office facility. Cutting the ribbon are, from left, Sharon Sigalas, Valerie Damazio, Mike Mangum, Carolyn Moore, Sally Erny, Laurie Johnson, Lynda Knight and Cynthia Wilson. (The Mississippi Press/Beverly Tuskan)

PASCAGOULA, Mississippi -- Standing underneath large, shady oak trees on the grounds of the Jackson County Youth Court, Frances Allsup was fighting to hold back tears as she spoke without reserve about Court Appointed Special Advocates, or CASA volunteers, and the children they represent.

"It's bittersweet, because it's sad to know that a program like this is needed, that there are abused children," Allsup said, "But if it has to be, then I'm excited that there's a building that we can call our own."

Allsup, Jackson County's CASA executive director, spoke to guests during a ribbon-cutting ceremony and balloon release to welcome CASA moving into a new office

facility.

The trailer will serve as part of the training facility where CASA must host 30 hours worth of instruction along with 12 hours of in-service a year, according to national CASA guidelines, Allsup said.

There are presently 64 CASA volunteers in Jackson County.



The move into the new office facility is expected to take place toward the end of summer.

"The Jackson County Board of Supervisors was gracious enough to give us one," she said of the trailer. "I'm thrilled. It's going to be amazing."

Among special guests at the ceremony were Mark Smith, deputy executive director of the Mississippi Department of Human Services; Earl Scales, representing the attorney general's office; Sally Wilson Erny, chief program office for National CASA; Laurie Johnson, CASA Mississippi director; and Sharon Sigalas, the county's youth court judge.

"One of the things CASA provides the De

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Jackson County CASA officials hosted a ribbon-cutting and balloon release on Tuesday to celebrate CASA moving into a new office soon. Guests and CASA supporters gather on the grounds of the Jackson County Youth Court to release balloons that represent each child in CASA's care. (The Mississippi Press/Beverly Tuskan)

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Frances Allsup, the county's CASA executive director, speaks to guests in attendance at a ribbon-cutting ceremony and balloon release at the Jackson County Youth Court on Tuesday.

partment of Human Services is teamwork," Smith said. "That's one thing we have to have because there no way that we, at the Department of Human Services can do it by ourselves. It's just impossible to do with all the economic problems we have in the country today. We have to have this support."

Smith called CASA team members great.

"I learned a long time ago that players play but teams win. And with CASA as part of our team, we are winning the battle, one child at a time."

Youth Court Judge Sharon Sigalas said Jackson County CASA is the oldest CASA program in the state of Mississippi.

"I'm proud, as a community, we do what we need to do to provide those children a safe permanent place to

call home," Sigalas said.

After the ribbon-cutting, everyone moved to the front of the youth court and watched as more than 350 blue balloons, each one representing a child in foster care, were released into the air.

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