



# PRESS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### SECRETARY OF STATE ERIC CLARK SALUTES PROJECT CATCH GRADUATES

Leakesville, Miss. - Secretary of State Eric Clark was the keynote speaker today at the second annual graduation of the **Project CATCH** (Choosing Activities that Create Healthiness) program held at South Mississippi Correctional Institution in Greene County. Eleven offenders received special diplomas signifying their successful completion of the yearlong rehabilitative training program. The major goals of **Project CATCH** are: to teach social skills, to focus on interpersonal relationships, and to teach the ability to get along with peers while incarcerated as well as after release. The basic design of the unique program incorporates classroom activities developed for group interaction as well as one-on-one encounters. The program requires self-discipline, determination, and commitment from each participant. The offenders must maintain a good behavior record to remain in the therapeutic program.

"I'm delighted to speak today to the **Project CATCH** graduates," said Secretary of State Eric Clark. "Each of you have successfully completed a voluntary program which can help you return to society, stay out of prison, and lead a better life."

**Project CATCH**, which began in February 2000, was developed by Michelle Eubanks, Director of SMCI's Alcohol & Drug treatment and Pre-Release programs. Michael Sumner, a coworker, assisted Eubanks in the program's implementation by approving workshops, screening offender participants, approving program volunteers, and monitoring behavior of the **Project CATCH** participants. Eubanks and Sumner, who are enrolled in the State Personnel Board's Certified Public Manager training program, jointly submitted **Project CATCH** as a model project in competition with 169 other projects from Mississippi. The Mississippi Department of Corrections' (MDOC) project was selected to receive the American Academy of Certified Public Managers prestigious George C. Askew Award for 2001. Eubanks and Sumner are the first MDOC employees to receive the George C. Askew Award. They were presented bronze medallions at the American Academy of Certified Public Managers conference held in Atlantic City in April.

"The Mississippi Department of Corrections is extremely proud of **Project CATCH**," said Chris Epps, Deputy Commissioner of Institutions. "We truly feel that this innovative program is having a positive impact by aiding offender participants to become productive citizens upon their release from incarceration."