

Pine Lake eyes sentencing alternatives

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Small municipalities often have few options in dealing with crimes such as driving under the influence, drug abuse and habitual spousal abuse. The city of **Pine Lake** is no exception.

"We were seeing a lot of cases in the court that other than fining [the defendants] or putting them in jail, we could offer no other programs to help them," said **Pine Lake** Municipal Court Judge Alan Mullinax.

The **Pine Lake** City Council soon is expected to pass a proposal put forth by Judge Mullinax to enlist the help of Community Corrections Corp. (CCC), a private firm providing management of community correctional programs.

CCC will enable the **Pine Lake** court to use probation and community service as alternatives to jail time or fines. The firm will also provide treatment and educational services that individual judges can make use of for defendants charged with crimes related to drug abuse or domestic abuse.

CCC employs company-certified probation officers who have the same qualifications as those employed by government agencies, according to the company president, Dr. Richard Longfellow.

Community service programs are set up in cooperation with local agencies and organizations that may benefit, and defendants in the program are supervised by the community groups receiving help. CCC also collects fines for municipalities.

Pine Lake Mayor Neil Copeland has contacted at least two other communities that are using CCC and said he is impressed.

"It looks like it is a win-win proposition for everyone concerned, both the courts and the defendants," said Mayor Copeland.

Lilburn, whose municipal court is presided over by Judge Mickey Roberts, is among many Georgia municipalities using the firm.

"So far, so good," said Judge Roberts. "It gives me flexibility in my sentencing. Instead of just sending people to jail, you can do different things to help them in the situation."

The cost of CCC programs is passed on to the defendants. Those in court-mandated rehabilitation programs, community service programs, or probationary programs will be required to pay \$30 per month above and beyond any fines or punishments.

"The whole purpose of setting up the probation system is not to hurt, it is to help, and if you help them, you help their family and the community," said Judge Mullinax.

Judge Mullinax hopes to implement the program in his court on Dec. 1.