

# 8 graduate from Hinds County Drug Court

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Who would have expected the son of an undercover narcotics officer to become a drug addict?

"I smoked my first joint when I was 11 years old and I loved it," Brian Walsh, 35, of Brandon told a packed Hinds County courtroom Tuesday, April 5, as he and seven others celebrated graduation from Drug Court.

"Drug Court offered me a way to get sober," Walsh said, but added that the program doesn't clean up people's addictions for them. "It's up to the participants to take control of their own lives."

Mississippi Supreme Court Presiding Justice William L. Waller Jr. of Jackson challenged graduates to reach beyond their own lives and give back to the community through service to others. Justice Waller, keynote speaker for the graduation program, said, "Those who are successful generally are those who reach out in selfless service....Take it to the next level of selfless service."

Fifty-nine people have graduated from the Hinds County Drug Court program, which began enrolling participants in March 2000. About 100 people are enrolled now. Thirteen Drug Court programs operate in Mississippi.

Hinds County Court Judge Mike Parker, who presides over Hinds County Drug Court, reveled in the success stories of the eight graduates Tuesday evening. Some completed requirements for a General Education Development (GED) degree and two are enrolled in college courses, Judge Parker said. All have jobs. Instead of being called convicts draining the public coffers, they are students, parents, workers, employers and taxpayers, he said.

Judge Parker said, "Tonight we are recognizing eight individuals who got serious about fighting addiction."

But not everyone got accolades. Rassie Alexander, 36, also known as Reggie Washington, wore an orange jumpsuit as he sat next to a sheriff's deputy on a bench at the side of the courtroom. Judge Parker summoned him to answer for dropping out of drug treatment and dropping out of sight. The judge, who already had a course of action in mind, asked the defendant what he thought ought to happen next.

Alexander said he was glad that the probation officer arrested him. "I think I deserve another chance, but if I don't get it, I accept that."

Judge Parker, seizing upon Alexander's choice of words, said nothing in Drug Court comes as "deserved. You have to work for it." He ordered the man to jail for 45 days, with one more chance to resume the treatment program. "There won't be another opportunity to go through this process," Judge Parker warned.

The two-year Hinds County Drug Court combines drug treatment with intense supervision, drug testing and frequent face-to-face meetings with the judge and Drug Court staff to monitor progress. Compliance with program requirements is backed up with the threat of jail time.

Walsh said he had been to drug treatment several times, unsuccessfully. A stint in jail was a sobering catalyst.

Drug Court for Walsh meant redirecting a path that started before he was a teenager. He was introduced to marijuana by a friend after school at age 11.

"I didn't get caught until the ninth grade," he said later. His father, who worked as an

undercover agent for the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, confronted him after finding drug paraphernalia, but decided not to tell his mother because it would be too hurtful. Afterwards, he went out with friends. “We went to the fair and I got stoned.”

Walsh’s mother accompanied him to graduation. Walsh choked back tears as he wished his father could have seen him graduate. The retired lawman died 10 days before the Drug Court graduation. Walsh said he knew his father was proud of him.

Walsh told Drug Court Coordinator Brenda Mathis about his father’s background in law enforcement the day before graduation. Judge Parker learned of it hours before the ceremony.

When asked his drug of choice, Walsh said, “I’ve never done heroin. I’ve done everything else. I was trying to trade cocaine for morphine when I got busted.”

Walsh was already on probation for a string of misdemeanors and a couple of felony counts. His drug addiction, his mouth and his temper were a volatile combination. Then, on Sept. 7, 2002, a Hinds County sheriff’s deputy arrested him on a drug possession charge in Byram. He called his wife from jail. She told him his belongings would be waiting for him on the curb. He signed the divorce papers in jail.

Three weeks after he was arrested, he landed in Judge Parker’s court. Judge Parker gave him six months in jail. After he served the jail time, he got an opportunity to participate in Drug Court.

Judge Parker confessed that he pegged Walsh’s chances of making it through the two-year program as slim. “I felt he was just marking time, he wasn’t going to make it to graduation. He proved us wrong,” Judge Parker said, noting that Walsh emerged as a leader among his peers in Drug Court. “This is a guy who got a second chance and has taken full advantage of it.”

Walsh earned his general equivalency degree (GED). The sheet metal company that fired him four years ago for fighting rehired him. His girlfriend accompanied him to Drug Court graduation.

“I’m happy leading a simple life,” Walsh said. “I’m staying clean and sober and living one day at a time.”

For more information about drug court programs in Mississippi, go to the web site of the Mississippi Supreme Court at [www.mssc.state.ms.us](http://www.mssc.state.ms.us) and click on AOC.

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