

## Country star Jeff Bates to speak to Drug Court conference in Natchez Aug. 21

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Country music star Jeff Bates on Aug. 21 will tell a Natchez audience how landing in jail on drug charges helped him break out of his methamphetamine addiction.

It's an all too familiar story to this audience. Bates will speak at 9 a.m. at the Natchez Convention Center, leading off the second day of the annual Mississippi Association of Drug Court Professionals Conference.

The conference begins Wednesday, Aug. 20, at 1 p.m. with a welcome and opening remarks from Tracy Swafford of Cleveland, president of MADCP and drug court coordinator for the 11th Circuit Drug Court; Circuit Judge Lillie Blackmon Sanders of Natchez; Mayor Butch Brown; and Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. of Jackson.

Bates, a Marion County native, has enjoyed more than 10 years as a successful musician. He regularly uses the spotlight to tell his personal story of methamphetamine addiction, arrest and religious conversion in a jail cell. Mixed in with his calendar of musical performances are numerous appearances at churches and schools.

Bates was arrested in 2001 in Nashville, and had been clean and sober for a year when he landed a record contract in 2003, according to his official website, [www.jeffbates.net](http://www.jeffbates.net). On the web site he describes weighing whether to talk publicly about his past, or to just make music.

“Was I going to share my mistakes and tell the world of my addiction to meth, of stealing to support that addiction, of going to jail because of the drugs and theft, and finding Christ in a dirty jail cell? OR was I just going to focus on my music and put it all behind me and work on a career as a recording artist?”

“I prayed about it, and sought advice from my mentor and realized that the experience had changed ME and my LIFE forever! And I came to believe that by being open and honest about it and sharing my story that MAYBE I could help others who suffered from addiction and similar problems. And I KNEW that if by speaking out about it that there was even a remote possibility that it could reach someone who was struggling and maybe save their life and show them that there is a better way, then I HAD to tell it ALL!”

Opening day of the MADCP conference will also include personal stories from local Drug Court participants. Graduates of the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court and the Adams County Juvenile Drug Court are expected to speak after Chief Justice Waller.

About 300 people, including judges, drug court staff, law enforcement, correctional officers and drug treatment providers are expected to attend the tenth annual MADCP conference, said State Drug Court Coordinator Joey Craft.

The conference will include presentations from mental health and drug treatment professionals, judges, court staff and law enforcement. Presentations will cover current drug abuse trends, prescription drugs, street drugs, DUI's in drug court, drug treatment issues for adults and adolescents, addiction and mental illness, and ethics.

A complete agenda of the conference is at this link:

<http://www.cvent.com/events/2014-madcp-annual-training-conference/custom-17-600f01e301754266838505eff81df8d3.aspx?i=ae1efc38-6b8e-4a46-9409-3444e8682352>.

Mississippi's 39 drug courts graduated 588 people during the 2014 fiscal year that ended June 30, and collected and returned \$1,109,941 in fines to the counties, Craft said. During that time, 2,902 felony adult offenders, 115 misdemeanor level participants and 366 juveniles were enrolled in drug courts. The state has 22 felony adult drug courts – one in each circuit court district statewide – and 12 juvenile drug courts covering 13 counties, three misdemeanor level programs, and two family drug courts.

Statewide, participants were drug tested more than 105,000 times during the last fiscal year. Of those, about 5,800 tests, or 5.5 percent, were positive for drugs while under the supervision of drug courts.

Drug Courts seek to rehabilitate drug-using offenders through drug treatment and intense supervision with frequent court appearances and random drug testing. Drug courts offer the incentive of a chance to remain out of jail and be employed and the sanction of a prison sentence if participants fail to remain drug-free and in compliance with all program requirements.

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