

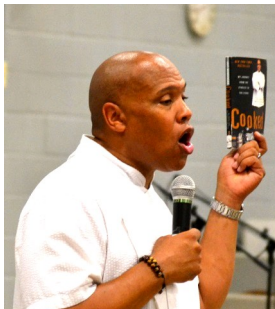


# “Chef Jeff” Henderson Comes Back to Prison.

Over 300 inmates and S.C.D.C. staff were in attendance as award winning chef, best-selling author, public speaker and noted T.V. personality “Chef Jeff” Henderson gave his life changing testimony about eradicating the criminal mindset. At the age of 23, Mr. Henderson was sentenced for drug charges to Federal Prison where he served nearly a decade. He credited his incarceration as the place his illustrious cooking career began. After two years in prison he had an epiphany. That is when Jeff finally stopped blaming everyone else for his situation and started accepting responsibility for his own actions. Chef Jeff started his talk by saying, “I didn’t come here to put myself beyond anybody. I am a convicted felon and I always will be, but one thing I can say about what prison did for me is that prison saved my life.”



A.C.I. A/W Randall Williams  
with the Chef



**While in prison Chef Jeff began as a dishwasher and eventually became the head cook. This is where he found his passion for food and even started his first book from behind the fences. In 2001, Chef Jeff made history in Las Vegas, when he became the first convicted felon to be named “Chef de Cuisine” Executive Chef at Caesar's Palace. His latest T.V. show is “Flip My Food.” Here he is holding up his second book “Cooked,” a New York Times best seller.**

Part of the message was to let the men know that no one is born a criminal, people choose that way of life. He insisted they must find a way to rid themselves of that “criminal mindset” if they are serious about staying out of the system. During his testimony he retraced the steps that led up to his eventual arrest nearly 30 years ago. Beginning with petty theft, he progressed to breaking into houses, and ultimately to dealing drugs. Chef Jeff explained how each of these activities were learned behaviors. By looking back and reconstructing his past he was able to demonstrate each point in his life where he began to embrace the criminal lifestyle.

This same day Chef Jeff spoke at the Allendale Elementary School and High School. His trip to A.C.I. was facilitated by the Ed-venture Children’s Museum in Columbia S.C. and their commitment to changing the culture of poverty inside the Promise Zone. The South Carolina Promise Zone is located in the Low Country, and encompasses portions of Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Colleton, Hampton, and Jasper Counties. The area is home to 90,000 residents, 28.12% of whom live in poverty. Median Income for the Promise Zone counties is 25% less than South Carolina’s Median Household Income. Educational attainment and employment rates are low among residents and quality, affordable housing is scarce. “There is a movement going on to help the children we left behind and that is why I am here,” said Chef Jeff, just before asking the audience how many of them had children. Most of the men raised their hands.



Chef Jeff tries to get an inmate to give up his favorite prison recipe.

He then asked, "How are we going to change our legacy? What are your children going to think of you in the long run?" "My daddy was in prison, he left me, and he didn't love me." He explained that while the inmates are in prison their focal points should be: eliminating the criminal mindset, valuing education, and learning as



much as they can while "inside" in order to parlay it into a business on the "outside." He went on to ask the inmates to consider what their child is thinking when they are asked where their father is. Chef Jeff said that he was proud to say all of his children, except his oldest son, were born after he was in prison. "Now, my oldest son can say "My daddy wasn't just a convict. He wasn't just a criminal. My daddy was a chef. He started 4 T.V. shows. He

wrote books. He cooks California French Cuisine. He helps men and women who made poor choices in their lives change the way that they think." That is my legacy! No matter who you are and no matter what your story is and no matter what you did, everybody has the power of potential and everybody has the power to do what I did. Everybody has the power to get out of here and never come back again because, we as men have a responsibility to go back to the neighborhood and plug the pipeline to prison. Do we want to see our children end up in here?"

Many were surprised when the Chef confessed he doesn't cook much any more but makes over \$500,000 a year doing speaking engagements. "Being a Chef is not my purpose in life but, I would not be here today if I was not Chef Jeff." He explained that the cooking piece of his life laid the foundation for other opportunities. While in prison he was the Sargent-at-Arms of Toastmasters International, a club that helps teach and develop leadership and public speaking skills. This seemed to echo his theme of taking skills learned in prison and parlaying them into job opportunities on the outside. So of course he was excited to learn that Allendale had a *Select Distinguished* Toastmasters Club.



In closing, he said October 2nd 2016 would mark the 20th anniversary of his release from prison and that he hasn't been in handcuffs that entire time. Just as Chef Jeff was finishing his testimony and passing the microphone back to the Warden, John Pate handcuffed the Chef and told him "now he can add South Carolina to the list of states in which he had done time!" The Warden even gave him and other guests orange prison sporks and challenged them to eat with it, and no other utensils, all week so they would remember the men here at ACI. Before leaving the institution "Chef Jeff" pledged to pay 6 months of dues for all of the inmates who are currently in Toastmasters. It looks like the handcuffs and the spork worked!



**Warden Pate and the "handcuffed" Chef Jeff** (on the middle right and left.)

**Chef Jeff being presented with his prison spork** (on the right.) **The Chef was a very good sport through it all!**

