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## HOW *DANCING WITH THE STARS* CHAMP BOBBY BONES GOT HIS START AS A DJ AND BECAME THE KING OF KINDNESS



When he was 5 years old, **Bobby Bones** got his first radio—a present from his Aunt Cindy. But the real gift was the on-air birthday greeting she requested from the local radio station. From the moment he heard it, Bones (born Bobby Estell) knew what he wanted to do with his life.

So on a kindergarten school assignment, when he was asked to share a future career goal, Bones confidently wrote, “I want to be on the radio and TV, and I want to be a stand-up comedian.”

More than three decades later, Bones, 39, is living his dream as host of *The Bobby Bones Show*, the nationally syndicated No. 1 country music radio show in America. Every weekday morning, Bones and his crew of co-hosts—all longtime friends—entertain 9 million listeners on more than 140 radio stations with their chatty best-friend-style banter.

“I wanted to be in the cars of people sitting in traffic, making them laugh,” says Bones, who was the youngest person, at 37, to be inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame. “Later it became a much bigger thing, and I realized I could influence and affect people’s lives in a big way.”

But Bones’s career has accelerated far beyond radio. The Mountain Pine, Arkansas native has carved out a place for himself in nearly every corner of the entertainment world. He’s a permanent fixture on ABC’s *American Idol* as a mentor to the show’s fledgling contestants. And last year, he [snagged the coveted Mirrorball trophy](#) on *Dancing With the Stars*. He’s written two *New York Times* [best-selling books](#), and he regularly plays sold-out shows with his comedy band The Raging Idiots.

And while the perks of celebrity aren’t lost on him, empathy is the real fuel to Bones’s work.

“I’m someone who understands what it’s like to need help,” he says. “It’s the reason I do what I do.”



### **How Bobby Bones Became One of America’s Favorite DJs**

Bones was raised in poverty, mostly by his grandmother, who influenced his love of [country music](#) and his eye for helping others. He remembers depending on donated food and secondhand school clothes as a child—an experience that drives his perspective and priorities today.

Bones knew college was his ticket out of hardship, and he started working toward his radio dreams as a senior in high school, when he was hired as a janitor and part-time control board operator at KLAZ-FM in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

“I’ve always wanted to show people who come from similar circumstances as me that it can be done—even if you didn’t have the best education or parents who could support you, you can still find your way up,” Bones says.

He moved on to a DJ gig at the campus radio station at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, where he graduated with a degree in radio and television in 2002.

Bones got his big break at 22, when he was hired for the evening shift at KISS-FM in Austin, Texas, where *The Bobby Bones Show* was eventually born. In 2013, the show was nationally syndicated and moved to [Nashville](#), where Bones's popularity and philanthropic efforts have taken root.

### Close to the Cause

Over the years, Bones has helped raise more than \$11 million for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital by mobilizing his listeners to action. And to him, it's a cause that feels somewhat personal. As a kid, he spent weeks in a hospital after falling from the roof of a house—an accident that nearly took his life. He remembers the good will that made the near-tragedy feel less bleak.

"Our medical bills were all covered, and I'm not sure what we would have done if that hadn't happened," he says. "I want to be able to help in that same sort of way."



*Bones with Rick Shadyac, President of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and patients Mack Ward and Allie Allen, during the Million Dollar Show for St. Jude in 2015. (John Shearer/Getty Images for The Raging Idiots)*

Bones also uses his microphone to rally support around causes like the American Red Cross, Susan G. Komen, orphanages in Haiti and Building Homes for Heroes, an organization that gifts handicap-accessible homes to wounded U.S. military veterans.

"We've done a few of these houses," Bones says. "One for a guy named Capt. Nathan Nelson—he lost his legs and couldn't move around his own house. He has a baby girl, and he couldn't get around. When I heard his story, I knew this was something our people would come together for. I've been repeatedly blown away by the generosity of our listeners."

Much of Bones's crowdsourced charity is spurred via the show's [Pimpin' Joy](#) movement, a clothing line and kindness initiative that aims to support a rotating lineup of charities financially while urging fans and listeners to spread joy with their own acts of goodness.

"I've been put here to help others," Bones says. "But we're able to do so much more when everyone gets in on it."



*Bones participated in 28th Annual City of Hope Celebrity Softball Game on June 9, 2018 in Nashville, Tennessee. (Rick Diamond/Getty Images for City of Hope)*

### **Is Bobby Bones Running for Governor?**

Bones's career milestones might suggest he's already accomplished his goals, but he's still hopeful for a few others—a television talk show, for one. Another aspiration his listeners hear about often: He'd like to eventually be elected governor of Arkansas. And yes, he's completely serious. But why politics?

"I represent the folks who don't have someone speaking for them," he says. "I was a food stamps kid, a welfare kid. People who come from a little get overlooked a lot. That's what draws me there. How can I help those who aren't getting the help they deserve? That's what I want to do."