



# In His Own Words

## *Mayor Brown on Family, Faith and Jacksonville's Future*

By Laura Hampton

**G**rowing up in the rural South, Mayor Alvin Brown learned what would become the keys to his success—have faith in God, work hard and do your best every day.

Raised by his mother and grandmother, who both worked two jobs to provide for five children, Mayor Brown used those lessons from his childhood to become a leader in the community before becoming the city's official leader in July 2011.

For our holiday issue, we asked Mayor Brown how he celebrates the holidays, how family life has changed since becoming mayor and how his plans for the city will benefit families on the First Coast.

**Family!:** How did the values you learned from your mother and grandmother contribute to who you are today?

**Mayor Brown:** My mother and grandmother were two strong women who instilled in me a sense of faith and

hard work. They didn't go to college. They worked hard. They instilled in me a sense of—you've got to work hard and



do your best. That meant going to church, Sunday School and Bible study. Strong faith plays a big role in who one is and what they believe in. My grandmother taught me how to read by reading the King James Version of the Bible. As a kid, you couldn't even pronounce those words!

I was fortunate and blessed to have people like my grandmother and my mother who believed you have to commit yourself to not only education, but Christian education. It's important. That's why my pastor, Henry T. Rhim, is important. He's like my dad. He baptized me, married me off, and named my two boys.

**Family!:** What values, taken from the maternal influences in your life, do you want to communicate to your children?

**Mayor Brown:** We don't have a flat screen TV in the house. My boys would love to have one, but I've said to them, "There's nothing free in life." There's a cost to everything.

The *Florida Times Union* did a story about the winners and losers of the (mayoral) race, and they said the boys were the winners, because I don't have a flat screen TV. So, everybody wanted to give us a gift card to purchase a flat screen, and I was a little teed about it.

That's not my message. My message is, if they want a flat screen TV, they have to work for it. Instilling that in them is important, so they become self-sufficient, independent, and do a good job in school.

I want to know, when they become adults, they can take care of themselves. They understand they have to work for a living, and they have to literally commit themselves.

I believe you have to take a holistic approach to developing and investing in young people, academically, professionally and spiritually.

**Family!:** How do you celebrate the holidays?

**Mayor Brown:** The best time of the year for me is Thanksgiving and Christmas,

because you get to spend time with family and friends. We do the traditional thing—the turkey, and we cook the best meals. I knew nothing about desserts; my wife turned me onto desserts. I told her that was a treat—only on Sundays.

I love Christmas time. And quite frankly, I think this is the first year my boys will realize there's no Santa Claus. Middle School kids say certain things, so we're not sure. I think one of the kids told my oldest son there's no Santa Claus. Now last year, they believed!

We do a Christmas tree and we all decorate together. They look forward to doing that.

**Family!:** What are the joys of raising your children on the First Coast?

**Mayor Brown:** It's great. My boys love the city. Their favorite is the beach. They could move on the beach tomorrow. They love the outdoors. Kind of like their dad—I'm an outdoor guy—fishing, cows... We were at the Fair yesterday, so we went to see the cows and the chickens. I love the rural side. That's what makes Jacksonville beautiful, both urban and rural. And they've (residents) got a mayor who believes in urban and rural. It's just beautiful.

**Family!:** How has family life changed for you since becoming mayor?

**Mayor Brown:** I'm learning. Balancing being a parent with public life is a challenge.

I take my boys to school. I go visit them in school. They have this thing called "dudes and dads" and my son said to their mom, he doesn't want me to do "dudes and dads." I was kind of taken back by it. So she found out why. I was talking to all the kids, and it takes away

time from him and attention from him. It didn't hit me until she mentioned it to me.

So, what I did is, I had "dads and dude" at the house and prepared breakfast for my boys. And we ate and spent that quality time at the house.

That's one of the challenges of balancing—paying attention to when your son wants you to have his time versus other kids' time.

For the most part, we do everything together. We go to church together. I play football with them, and we play ball in the house. You've got to remember, my wife has three boys, my two sons and myself. We play football in the house, and we get crazy. So, we're sent outside—that kind of thing.



**Family!:** As mayor, what decisions have you made that will benefit families on the First Coast?

**Mayor Brown:** One of the biggest things I'm very proud of is appointing the first commission on education in this city. I think that's important for families—someone who believes in public education—who believes if you empower young people intellectually,

Continued on page 12



they can compete academically and achieve economically. Their education gives them options.

Parents, teachers and guardians are so important. And so, my commitment is to public education. If you really support the educational system with mentors and expose young people to the possibility of going to college, those things will be with them forever.

The second thing is focusing on the Children's Commission, Journey and Special Services, which all deal with children and family.

I want to merge all of those together, to streamline the process, to make sure we operate effectively and efficiently and to leverage our scarce resources to help more children. I think that's important. The third thing is putting Jacksonville back to work. The unemployment rate here is about 10.5 percent. I've been really focusing on the port and downtown.

My reform of city government is going to help families. Because you're going to have a commissioner for economic development to focus on jobs citywide, then you're going to have a president and CEO for downtown development to focus on downtown, to make downtown vibrant and thriving again,

supporting small business and entrepreneurs. Most people don't realize that we have more than 80 thousand small businesses in Jacksonville, and they have 10 employees or less. It's very important to our economic base.

I've appointed and elevated Military Affairs to a cabinet position. Over 250,000 military personnel live in Jacksonville. It has an economic impact of \$12.2 billion. And, so I've made it one of my top priorities. Military families, service men and women, go off and leave their family here. How do you help them? How do you help veterans?

I balanced the budget. This is to help families without raising their taxes and fees, and without tapping into the city reserves—think about that. That hasn't happened in years. I took a 20 percent pay cut. I'm not taking a city pension. And so, not raising taxes and living within our means, streamlining government, moving government out of the way to create an environment that will foster growth and economic development is the key.

**Family!:** It's been a pleasure Mayor. Thank you for sharing your holiday traditions and your plans for the future of our great city.

## Quick Questions

### What is your favorite holiday movie?

How the Grinch Stole Christmas – the original, and Home Alone.

### What is your favorite holiday food?

Turkey is great. Sweet potato pie! I love black eyed peas. I love red rice, and I love greens.

### What book are you currently reading?

*The Next American Economy* by William J. Holstein and Laura Bush's book, *Spoken from the Heart*.

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