

CATCH HIM IF YOU CAN

*With the State Assembly in his sights,
Ventnor attorney Chris Brown shows
no signs of slowing down*

BY FELICIA LOWENSTEIN NIVEN

If there is one defining characteristic about Chris Brown, it's his sense of duty. While other people may opt to take the easy way out, it's never been the way Chris operates. Perhaps that's the secret to the many achievements of this Renaissance man, a.k.a. attorney, a.k.a. judge, a.k.a. decorated army veteran, a.k.a. State Assembly candidate — and, as he puts it, his most important role of all, husband and father.

Born at Atlantic City Hospital, raised in Ventnor, Chris' story starts out like so many of the region's residents. His parents, Arthur Brown, Jr. and Shirley Brown, presided over a household that included Chris and siblings Kim and Kathleen. It was a picture perfect family, that is, until the year Chris turned 12.

"That's when my mother left us," he remembered. "My dad was left to raise three kids and he did it with great dignity."

As a result, Arthur was one of Chris' early role models. He served as chief of the Atlantic City Beach Patrol and taught his children through his actions as well as his words.

"My father treated everyone with kindness and respect," said Chris. "Whether you were the mayor or the dogcatcher, he spoke to you the same way. He believed that everyone had worth."



All in the family



Inside the State House

Chris attended Holy Spirit High School and was active on the crew team there. It's also the place where he would meet his future wife.

"Christine and I were high school sweethearts," he said. "We started dating when we were just 15."

But Chris was not ready for marriage. He planned to go to college, and eventually to enter the FBI. Since a law degree was recommended, he planned to follow that route. Of course, journeys often have little bumps along the way and Chris' career path was no exception.

He was enrolled at Rutgers University when the first detour hit. With not a lot of money for college, Chris decided to join the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). The U.S. Army helps pay for your college education and in return, the student serves a certain number of years as an officer following graduation. Chris competed with the other recruits with a physical test of endurance — pushups, sit-ups, a two-mile run — and skills evaluations, including land navigation, fire artillery and leadership. He did so well that he was awarded an Army scholarship. So both law school and the FBI would have to be delayed, just a bit, while he served his country.

After college, Chris was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He headed to infantry and airborne school. Then, he was placed in the Army reserves. That was about the time that the second detour hit.

Chris was just 21 when he learned that his father had been diagnosed with melanoma, a particularly deadly form of cancer. The decline was swift and Chris had to say a final goodbye to his dad.

"My dad had dedicated his whole life to public service," Chris said. "He particularly liked working with kids, the young life guards. We felt that we wanted to preserve his memory by helping kids go to college."

That would be the focus of the Chief Arthur R. Brown, Jr. Memorial Scholarship Foundation chiefarthurbrownscholarshipfoundation.com, which Chris and his siblings would start a few years later. The Foundation has



A gold dome adorns the State House in Trenton



Chris Brown serving his country

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— Chris Brown

awarded approximately \$200,000 in scholarships to date, and raises funds through two annual events — a Super Bowl party and a scholarship dinner in the fall.

"We are so grateful for the support that helps make a difference in so many young people's lives," said Chris. "Year after year, people continue to come out and give to this worthy cause."

While his dad's death was devastating to Chris, it only strengthened his own resolve to succeed and make a positive difference in the world. He wanted to make his dad proud.

He enrolled in Widener University School of Law. Daily life went as planned until the third year of law school. Then came the third detour. He was called in by the army to serve in Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

"Being a third year law student who had already served his time, I could have easily avoided service," said Chris. "But I didn't feel that was right. If I hadn't served, that meant that someone else, somebody's father, brother, son or husband, would have to go."

So he enlisted and spent the rest of the school year in the Persian Gulf. He returned as a decorated army veteran, awarded the Bronze Star and Combat Infantryman Badge for his service while spearheading the ground offensive in Iraq. It was one of several military awards he received.

Back on U.S. soil, Chris was just in time to make up some law school coursework in summer school. By taking extra classes

in the fall, was able to graduate law school mid-year.

It was time to pursue his lifelong dream, of applying to the FBI. Then came the fourth detour. The FBI was having problems with its entrance exam, so much so that they simply stopped giving it. It would be several years before they'd accept any new applicants. And by the time, they resumed, Chris was already well on his way to other things.

Chris began an internship with the Honorable L. Anthony Gibson, the presiding judge of the Chancery Division of the New Jersey Superior Court. He also served a judicial clerkship with the Honorable Charles R. Previti, judge of the New Jersey Superior Court.

And in between, he got married. Chris and Christine initially settled down in a house in Atlantic City but a few years later, moved to Ventnor where they still live today with their children Matthew, age 15, Daniel, age 13 and Mallory, age 11.

Married life agreed with Chris, as did his law career. He worked as the prosecutor and assistant solicitor for Egg Harbor Township and as solicitor for the Atlantic City Council and the Atlantic City Board of Education. He also served as the president and vice president of the Atlantic County Prosecutors Association. In his spare time, he was running the scholarship foundation in his father's memory.

The year that his first child was born, he opened his own law practice, Christopher A. Brown, Counselors At Law, in Atlantic City. The firm specializes in "helping people solve problems,"



The Brown Family

according to Chris. They specialize in personal injury cases and workman's compensation cases.

In 2004, Chris added another feather in his cap with an appointment as a judge in Galloway Township. It was a position where he would serve for six years.

He also became board certified by the Supreme Court of New Jersey, a distinction that only 2% of attorneys in the state hold. "I'm one of those guys who think that if I'm a member of the club, anyone can get in," he joked. "But it is a rigorous process. You have to be a member in good standing and have favorable peer reviews and reviews from judges. Then, you are invited to take a two day exam." Chris passed with flying colors.

Then came yet another detour. The year was 2009 and the army needed Chris again. This time, it was for Operation Iraqi Freedom. And even though he was a judge, which qualifies for a deferment, Chris didn't hesitate.

"This was probably the hardest time for me to leave," he admitted. "Before, I had been single. Now I had to leave a wife and three young children."

But the choice was clear to him. Quoted in a CNN story that

appears on his law firm web site (www.cbrownlaw.org), Chris said, "If I were try to find a way to avoid it and seek a deferment, then I'd have to live the rest of my life knowing that I didn't honor, stand up and be counted when I was asked to serve." That's a lesson he wants to teach his children — by example, as his own father once did for him.

The 2009 stint in the army could have been as many as 400 days but it ended up being just 110. Chris was sent to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, Ft. Lee, Virginia and Ft. Dix, N.J. The army recognized that he was due for a promotion, from major to lieutenant colonel. That meant more time at command and staff school.

"Even though I offered to sign a paper that said I would forego the promotion, that didn't happen," said Chris. By the time he would have completed the three-month course, his time of service would be up. So they sent Chris home with an honorable discharge.

Chris went right back to business. He hired an associate, Ted Strickland, at Christopher A. Brown Counselors at Law to help with the workload. Then he turned his attention to his

newest goal, becoming a Republican candidate for State Assembly.

"It was a good time for me to do this," he explained. "Now that my kids are a little older, I've gone from their coach to their chauffeur, and so I have time to devote to this. Plus, my family is the reason that I want to run for State Assembly. The issues that concern me also concern every other family in the state. Will our children be able to afford a home when they grow up? Will they be able to find a job? I've spent 20 years serving as a prosecutor to get tough on issues like crime. At the same time, I've been a judge, trying to preserve each person's dignity. I'm also a small business owner that has had to meet payroll and budgets and make hard decisions. I understand deadlines. I've shown through my actions that I've put my commitment to the public, and this country, first and foremost. I believe that we need someone with this kind of experience at the state level."


The State Assembly job is part-time, allowing Chris to continue with his law practice. He also remains active in the community, volunteering with the Boys and Girls Club and the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation, coaching one softball team this year, and serving as vice president for the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, a scholarship organization, and as a trustee for the Arthur R. Brown, Jr. Scholarship Foundation. He was a former head of the grievance committee for the NAACP. But ask him his most important role, and he doesn't even hesitate.



Chris with his wife, Christine, and their children, Matthew, Daniel and Mallory

"I always say that I've been privileged to be called many titles, from prosecutor to lieutenant to captain, major, judge and coach, but my favorite title is husband and dad," he said proudly.

He remains as involved as possible with his children, who attend the Ventnor Educational Community Complex, where Christine also teaches, and Holy Spirit, his alma mater.

"We're very supportive of each other," said Chris of his family. "I know that they'll be with me every step of this journey." 

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Mother's Day Music Festival • May 7
Michael Buble • June 11
New Kids On The Block & Backstreet Boys • July 29

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