

Business

A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Q&A with Miss America 2000, Heather French Henry

In 2000, I had the amazing privilege of serving as the National Director of Marketing and Public Relations for the Miss America Organization in Atlantic City, NJ. I stood in awe at everything the pageant brought to life, and on the evening of the live telecast, I witnessed as the millenium Miss America was crowned, Heather French Henry, who would be the very first Miss America I would have the honor of representing for that next year.

Heather is by far one of the most impressive, well spoken, passionate and motivated women I have ever known, and it has been incredible to follow her successful journey during these last 15 years. To celebrate that anniversary, I recently caught up with Heather and learned more about her new professional role, her world in fashion, her strong love of family, and the lessons she has learned and passed down along the way. My time with Heather and with the Miss America Organization will always stand out as one of the memories in my mind to last a lifetime, and I am so proud to have her on the pages of *The Backdrop* today.





Being crowned Miss America 2000 in Atlantic City, NJ

The KDVA operates with a \$70 million annual budget. We serve over 311,000 veterans including 24,000 women veterans. We operate four veterans nursing homes, five veterans cemeteries and over 740 employees statewide. This year, we began a unique focus on female veterans called KY Women Veterans UNITE 2015. We also implemented new programs to work on homeless veterans and benefits. I am honored to be able to serve those who have served our country.

K: If you could tell anyone just one thing about your cause, what would you want people to know?

H: Serving our nation's veterans is the responsibility of all Americans. We all must do our part for those who have given so much sacrifice for our country.

K: So taking you back to the moment in 2000 when you became Miss America, how did that experience change your life?

H: The experience of Miss America changed not only my life, but the lives of my family. The crown has given me a national platform to shed light on the needs of our veterans and to help create new programs for the future. It also set me on a path that I will be on the rest of my life. Fifteen years later, the crown is still providing me extraordinary opportunities that I would never have received otherwise.

K: Thank you so much for talking with us! We know as a former Miss America, you are always on the go and with your platform as awareness for our homeless veterans, we are very excited to hear about your new role as Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. Tell us about that role and what it means to you after supporting this cause for so many years.

H: Being the Commissioner of the KY Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA) is the role of a lifetime for me. As Miss America, I championed veterans issues as my national platform and worked on legislative issues that fundamentally changed the way the VA serviced our nations' veterans, and now I get to work more specifically on the veterans population in KY.



Speaking at press conference with Governor of Kentucky, Steve Beshear



With former Miss Americas at Patriot Plaza





At Kentucky Derby with husband Steve Henry, former Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky

K: As you know, September is traditionally the “fashion issue” for magazines nationwide. As an entrepreneur who owns both the Heather French Henry gown collection and the prom gown line, Frenchy, and as a fashion designer, what would you say is your biggest fashion obsession on the market today?

H: Although, I had to make the decision to place my company on hold in order to become the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs for KY, I am still obsessed with fashion. My biggest obsession right now is finding the right overcoat. I feel that I need to update my outer wardrobe - it is possible to be stylish and warm this winter!

K: What do you wish in fashion would just go away?

H: Short shorts! No one looks great in super shorty shorts but runway models, and those are few and far between. Let's add a bit of class back into street wear!

K: In addition to all of your professional achievements, you are also a wife and mom. What is your trick as a woman to balancing it all?

H: There is no one size fits all solution for this problem that all working moms face. Everyday I try to be keenly aware of the needs of my children and my husband. I strive everyday to either incorporate my family into my work and my appearances when it is appropriate so they know how important they are to me. My daughters have loved being

able to take part in special programs in the Miss America System and helping while I am filming programs for various companies or commercials. Often, my entire family can be seen helping during events pertaining to our military veterans. Harper and Taylor actually serve on the Veterans Youth Council through the KY Department of Veterans Affairs so they have a unique opportunity to create a voice for themselves within the veterans' community. My husband has been in a similar leading role in KY, and has a unique understanding of the pressures I face on a daily basis so his input is priceless to me.

K: What is the best advice you have ever received?

H: There are many sayings, quotes, and scriptures I live by and I often repeat them on a daily basis. However, there is one that sticks out and it happens to be a Babe Ruth quote: "Never let the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game." There are so many situations and opportunities I am given that have elements of uncertainty, but I can't let that fear keep me from moving forward.

K: What is your next goal to conquer?

H: I am blessed that I have many options for my future, however, there is a large amount of pressure for me to run for a political office. I have a great desire one day to be the Governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, however, I also have a desire to have another child and at 40, that could be a challenge. I haven't made the decision on my path yet but I will soon.



A personal fashion sketch

And now our Top Fun Fast Five!:

BEST BEAUTY SECRET:

SLEEP! That's no secret, but my face shows a lack of sleep big time. I use green tea bags under my eyes when I haven't had enough.

FAVORITE MOVIE:

Sabrina - the newer version with Harrison Ford and Julia Ormond. I play it constantly and it drives my husband crazy, but I love everything about the movie and the soundtrack!

WHAT IS ONE THING NO ONE WOULD GUESS ABOUT YOU?

I still get extremely nervous before I speak or perform - like seriously nervous. Once I enter the stage or podium I am fine, but moments leading up to the speech or performance I am a wreck.

BEST GUILTY PLEASURE?

Graeter's Mint Chocolate Chip Ice Cream...which I rarely get to have because I have always had to watch my diet!!

FAVORITE COLOR TO WEAR TO MAKE A STATEMENT?

Red! Every time I need to make my point such as with my legislative agenda or in a debate, I wear red along with my patriotic ribbon and Ann Hand Eagle brooch.



With the Kentucky National Guard



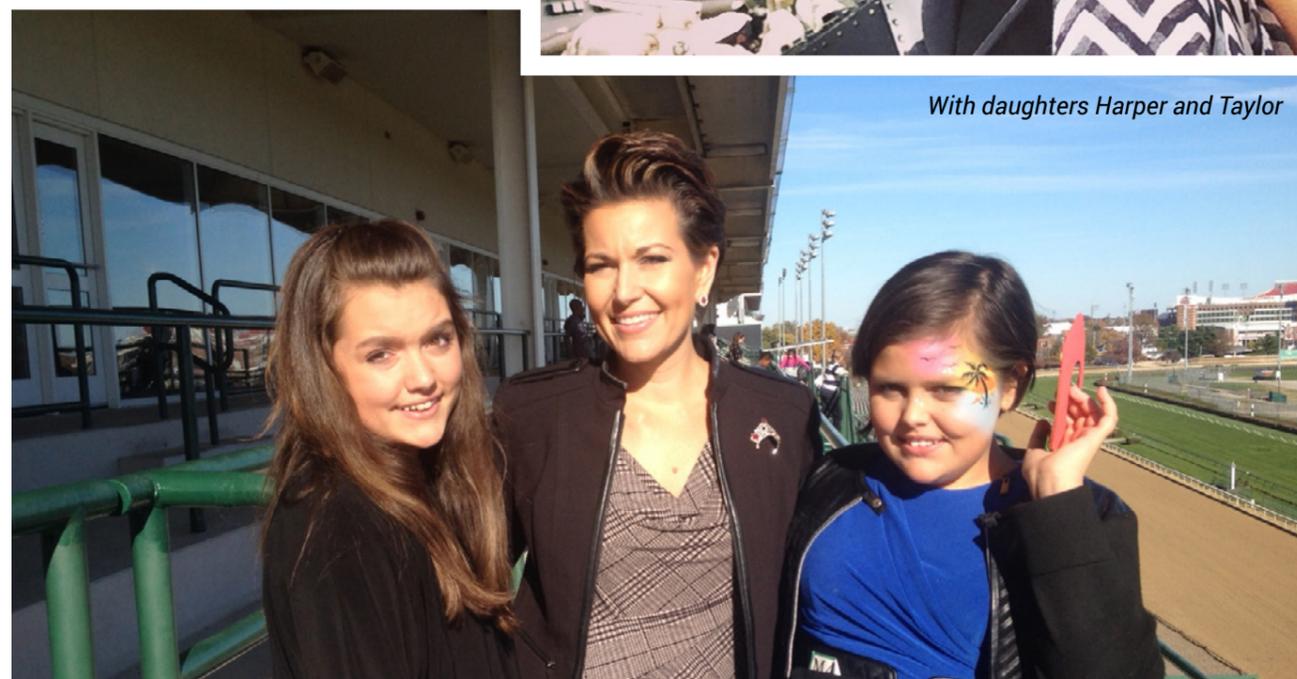
Heather with Kristin



On a Black Hawk



In her official new role



With daughters Harper and Taylor