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15 Minutes With . . . Marc Brown, ABC7 Eyewitness News



Marc Brown, the 5 p.m. and 11 p.m. co-anchor for ABC7 Eyewitness News, is also a member of the board of the Museum of Latin American Art. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

Even though he lives in the San Fernando Valley, Marc Brown is a regular in Long Beach, where he has served on the board of directors for the Museum of Latin American Art (MoLAA) for about two years. He anchors ABC7's 5 p.m. and 11 p.m. news broadcasts, and has won four Emmy awards, a Golden Mike award and recognition for excellence in broadcasting from the Associated Press and the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

Born in Los Angeles, Brown earned a bachelor's degree from USC, majoring in broadcast journalism and political science. Before joining ABC7 in 1989, he worked for TV stations in Eureka, California, Reno, San Jose and San Diego.

The award-winning journalist sat down in his office at the newsroom in Glendale, where the broadcast is produced, and spoke to Long Beach Business Journal Contributing Writer Michael Gougis.

LBBJ: How did you become involved with MoLAA?

Brown: "My initial involvement with MoLAA came from the fact that Channel 7 is a pretty big sponsor of

MoLAA, their events and programs. I remember coming out – I think I was emceeding an event one night, and I had a great time and just enjoyed the vibe there. And it kind of collided with my nascent interest in art. I started participating and I was finally asked to join the board of directors. I warned them – I said, 'I don't know anything about art, I know nothing really about managing large organizations, I can't be involved in the key decision making or have much input into it because I don't have any managerial experience, but I will certainly do what I can to help this organization because I believe in its mission.'

I believe in what they're trying to do. I'm not sure who it was who said, 'Without art, the people perish,' but I do believe that. You can't ignore art, and you've got to cultivate it and you've got to bring it to people."

LBBJ: What's the most important role you play with MoLAA?

Brown: "I think my job is to bring interest if possible – I'm not so naïve to think that they chose me for my expertise in art, OK? That's pretty clear. (Laughs.) But by virtue of



Marc Brown, co-anchor of the 5 p.m. and 11 p.m. weeknight broadcasts for ABC7 Eyewitness News, is shown in the transmission room with engineer Dave Putnam. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

what I do for a living, I'm fairly well known, and I think that kind of helps bring people to the fold when it comes to either events they want to hold, or other things they want to do. I'm not involved in the programming, or any of that stuff, I just want to help bring people in if possible. I believe that if you believe in something, you have a duty to support it, depending on what your ability is."

LBBJ: What's your favorite part of your involvement with MoLAA?

Brown: "My favorite part is going to the museum! Just going there. Every time I go there, I get to look around and I get to see what's up, what's there and learning about what they're doing."

LBBJ: Do you feel a little more confident now about talking about art?

Brown: "Oh, God. I wish I could say yes! I learned about art in high school in an art history class! Going to the auctions, going to the openings, the exhibitions, is fun, and you learn things there. But it's such a vast universe of expression that to say I have some grasp on it would really be stretching it. There's some stuff I look at and say – what is that? There's other stuff I look at and I can just feel it. That's the way art is. I used to feel kind of weird about the fact that I didn't get everything. Now I understand that I don't have to get everything."

LBBJ: What time do you normally come to work?

Brown: "My Tuesday starts Monday at like 9 p.m., because I'm looking online at tomorrow's newspapers. I'm reading the Los Angeles Times, the new edition hits at 10 p.m., so I'm online at 9:58 p.m. . . . I get up about 7:30 or 8 a.m., watching CNN all day, I try to catch the noon show, it's in the background of everything else I'm doing as I go about my day. I come in at 3 p.m. . . . I don't write the stories, but as the stories are filed, I read through them, compare them to what I know, and see if they've got all the salient facts."

LBBJ: So you're familiar with the scripts before you go on the air?

Brown: "Most of the time. It's not always possible."

LBBJ: What's the most important skill to reading scripts cold?

Brown: "Think on your feet. Know what you're talking about. People think that this is just reading. It's really not, because if you're just reading, you will make really stupid mistakes."

LBBJ: This is why you're reading newspapers online at 10 p.m. . . .

Brown: "I'm like the last line of defense. I'm the last editor."

LBBJ: Are there areas where you are more or less well-versed?

Brown: "My greatest area of comfort is general assignment news. I don't know diddly about entertainment. And it's a huge industry. It's a deficiency on my part, and this is some-



The modern news anchor set. When a Long Beach Business Journal writer visited, a live news broadcast was going on. There were only three people in the entire room: two co-anchors and a set manager. The equipment in the room – including the cameras – are robotic, controlled by one person in another room. The anchor desk has a computer with Internet access, which the anchors can use to research stories while on the air. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Thomas McConville)

thing I need to correct. I was thinking about this on the way here. I can’t tell one of these young actors from another anymore. I’m not as well-versed in pop culture as I used to be.”

LBBJ: Entertainment news really is news here in Los Angeles . . .

Brown: “Exactly. It’s not just fluff. And people who think it is do so at their peril. It’s something I need to know more about. I was thinking, ‘I should watch MTV once in a while. I should listen to some of the radio stations the kids are listening to.’ Because I don’t know these people anymore.”

LBBJ: What’s the biggest challenge on a day-to-day basis to doing the job to your satisfaction?

Brown: “That’s a good question. (Long pause.) I always wish we could go into greater depth. It’s not like NPR where you can spend four, five minutes on a subject. We can’t do that. There are a lot of stories, just daily stories, where I wish we had more time. I’m thinking, I know there’s more to this, I know there’s more depth to it, but we can’t get to it because we have to move on to the next thing. Our job is to tell the story of the day. Here’s what happened in L.A., in California, in the United States, in the world. And we have an hour to do it. And we have to get the weather in, we’ve gotta do entertainment, we’ve gotta do sports, we’ve got to tell you about the baby penguin sometimes, because people want to hear about the baby penguin, too . . .”

LBBJ: What are the biggest changes you’ve seen in the industry?

Brown: “Automation has eliminated much of the need for

specialization. Unfortunately, it has eliminated a lot of jobs, as well. We’ve got robotic cameras out there. We used to have a director who sits here, an assistant director next to them whose sole job was to keep the time with a stopwatch, then there’s a technical director, and an audio person and a graphics person whose job it is to change the graphics. Everybody but the director is gone. There is now a computer program by which the director can roll the video, change the graphics, do the audio, punch up the cameras – all of it. It looks like something out of “Star Wars.” You’re basically replacing five brains and using one brain and a computer. It’s very stressful on the people who do it, but that’s the way the industry is going. It’s like the auto industry using robots.”

LBBJ: Has this affected the news gathering process and the types of stories you cover?

Brown: “I don’t think so, because we still need to fill the hour. We still need to cover the news. That’s going to be the last thing that changes, if it ever does. The way we gather content may change, there may be more one-man bands (one reporter/one technician field crews) for live shots, that has changed somewhat, but that has not affected content.”

LBBJ: Do you feel like you’re a role model for young journalists? African-American journalists? African-Americans in general?

Brown: Charles Barkley said, “I am not a role model.” I don’t agree with that. Whether you want to be or not, whether you choose the mantle of role model or not, you are. People are watching you on TV. A role model for African-



Eyewitness News co-anchor Marc Brown, top right, and several of his ABC7 colleagues held a Town Hall-type forum at the Museum of Latin American Art in February to hear ideas from Long Beach residents about possible future stories. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

American kids? I hope so. When I was growing up, there was no one on TV who looked like me. I thought it was possible to do (become a television anchor), but I found out that I was unique in my beliefs among my family, my friends . . . (Laughs.) So it's nice to point out to people that it can be done. A role model to aspiring journalists? You have to be prepared. You can't just come here, put on a suit, sit in a chair and read out loud. Because you will be found out as lacking, as hollow. You have to be prepared. You have to cover stories. You have to know how to cover stories. Because you will be called upon to do it from the chair."

LBBJ: You interview people, live, cameras rolling, the entire audience watching?

Brown: "Absolutely. That's the most fun you can have. That's the most interesting part of the job – you throw the scripts away, throw the format away, and we have breaking news. We have an earthquake, a fire, whatever it is, we're doing live interviews, trying to give people information that will actually help them avoid trouble, get out of trouble, to deal with whatever the situation happens to be. There's nothing else that competes with it. We're talking to the field reporters, we'll do phone interviews with people – we're talking to everybody. It's what I got into TV news for. Reporting is reporting, whether you're doing it in the studio or in the field. I'm asking the same questions, except I'm doing it live and trying to craft it into a story."

LBBJ: In that context, you also have to focus not on just the story, but the whole broadcast . . .

Brown: "And when I started as anchor, that took some getting used to. I started as a field reporter. I didn't get a sense of the totality of the show. I had my minute-and-a-half and that's all I was responsible for. Now I am aware of the totality of the show."

LBBJ: What's the hardest part of being a field reporter?

Brown: "The traffic. It's awful! We're going to a shoot in Riverside and I'm falling asleep in the truck. The best part is being there when things are actually happening. I mean, I had a shoe thrown at me during the riots! It's funny in retrospect, but it's odd when it's happening – it's a little unnerving."

LBBJ: We've got computers and the Internet. Has television's role in the dissemination of information changed?

Brown: It's changed because we realize that people are less inclined than they used to be to sit through an entire news broadcast to get to the two or three or four stories they really want to see. They want their news a la carte. So we give it to them on the Web that way. But having said that, there's still nothing like television, especially when something's breaking. The computer can't compete with that. We'll stream things on the Web site, but it's still us. When stuff's going crazy, and you're waiting for the Web site to update, you know what they're waiting for? They're waiting for us."

LBBJ: Glenn Beck once famously said, in terms of objectivity, that if you try to do straight news in prime-time, you're going to lose.

Brown: "Absolutely wrong. First of all, the networks dwarf what any of the cable networks get on any given night. People who really want to know what's going on, which is the vast majority of Americans – people don't just watch the news to confirm what they already know, or what they already believe, people who aren't close-minded – they just want to know what's happened. Just tell me what's happened. That is our job. There's no way I can sit here and advocate for a particular point of view." ■