



This month's First Person needs very little introduction. John Bridges has been showing up in households across Southwest Louisiana each weekday morning since 1996 through his role as co-host of KPLC's 7News Sunrise. A life-long native of Sulphur, he began his nearly three-decade career with KPLC-TV in 1992 as an assignments editor, never expecting to become an anchor four years later.

While you may know Bridges as a long-time newsmen, this busy local celebrity is so much more – a husband, father, and avid volunteer. Bridges recently sat down with Thrive and talked about his childhood dream that destined him to become a broadcast journalist, his pride as a father, his passion for volunteerism, and his dedicated journey to weight loss and wellness.

first person

by Angie Kay Dilmore with John Bridges

Tell us about your earliest experience with radio and television journalism.

When I was seven or eight years old, we'd go shopping at Muller's Department Store. One day we were in the men's department and there was a window that faces Division St. I looked out that window and saw a large window across the street with KPLC written across it. I sneaked out a back door, crossed the street, and stood in front of the KPLC window. It was the radio station that KPLC had at the time. I stood there with my face pressed against the glass; and that's when I first fell in love with broadcasting. I was smitten with it from day one.

What exactly attracted you to the medium?

I was fascinated with the delivery system more than being on the air. When I was 15 years old, I went to radio station KIKS to drop off a public service announcement and the guy asked me if I'd like to read it on the air live. I did, and he said I had a pretty good voice. He offered me a job. I was a sophomore and stayed in it all through high school. I continued to work at several radio stations for 16 years. In 1992, I went to KPLC as an assignments editor. It was an off-air position. I had no desire to be on TV. I loved the behind-the-scenes action of news. Because I had been in radio, they asked me to anchor a few newscasts on the weekends or fill in when needed. In 1996, I became anchor of *7News Sunrise*.



What have been some highlights of your years at KPLC?

I've been blessed in my career with opportunities to travel to places I never would have otherwise traveled. I've been to Cuba, Norway, Alaska twice, Canada four times, Paris, England, Ireland . . . all because of my affiliation with KPLC. The thing I like about my job is I don't have to sit at a desk all day. I do sit at the anchor desk for two and a half hours each weekday morning, but I'm always out and about, meeting people.

What have been the greatest challenges of being an early morning news anchor?

Oddly enough, waking up at 2:00 a.m. every morning has not been that much of a challenge. I've always been a morning person. The biggest challenge has been trying to stay relevant; trying to keep up with folks' habits, their rituals, and to stay pertinent to our viewers, to keep our finger on the pulse of the community. And technology is a challenge. When I first got started in this business, we used typewriters and telephones with no voicemail. And of course, no computers or cell phones. Today, we have to multi-task, which is a challenge. There's so much more going on now than there used to be.

What prompted you to volunteer at KBYS?

In 2015, I was invited to be on air at KBYS, the radio station at McNeese State University. And I was asked if I wanted to do a weekly show. It worked out. So now I host *Rockin' Saturday Night with John Bridges* every Saturday evening. It's been fun. We just celebrated our fifth anniversary.

Fatherhood . . . what has been the most rewarding and what surprised you the most

It's been a pleasure to raise our son, Jacob. My wife Koni and I couldn't be prouder of



him and we feel so blessed. He graduated from McNeese last month with a music education degree and soon will attend Stephen F. Austin for his master's degree. He and I went through Boys Scouts together and we're both Eagle Scouts. I've enjoyed watching him learn and grow up. And the biggest surprise about parenthood, from the beginning, was that there's no instruction book.

What advice can you give to young adults moving out into the world?

The best advice I can give someone now, looking back, is to do more listening than talking. Watch people. Listen to their opinions. You learn more by listening than talking. Being a reporter gives me a license to listen.

Boy Scouts, Band Boosters, McNeese and KBYS, and the video ministry at your church . . . why is volunteerism a major priority to you?

My dad taught me at an early age how important it is to volunteer by demonstrating it in his everyday life; through church, Scouting, and community events. He did it quietly, never seeking any praise or glory. That made a big impression on me. I find when I do things for people, I want to be out of the spotlight, in the background. I don't want credit. That feels better to me. I take joy in simply watching what comes about from my volunteer efforts.

Tell us about your remarkable healthy lifestyle journey.

In 2012, I decided it was time to lose weight. I'd gotten up to 311 pounds. I felt horrible; my blood pressure was sky high. I saw myself on the TV and couldn't believe what I saw. So I decided to do something about it. I determined to take my time and do it right this time. I started eating better and lost some weight initially. Then I added exercise by walking in my neighborhood and working out at CHRISTUS Louisiana Athletic Club. And I changed my habits and mindset regarding food. I used to eat for enjoyment. I couldn't wait for the next meal. Now I eat for fuel. I still enjoy food, even fried catfish and shrimp gumbo! I just don't eat nearly as much and I eat healthier food. I've found a lifestyle I can live with. I've lost around 115 pounds. And I feel so much better. I feel I look better, too, which is important. You need to do it for you, not anyone else. You have to surrender yourself to a new lifestyle.

What's next for John Bridges?

There are a lot of things out there I'd like to experience. People have always fascinated me. If I can stay involved with the community, volunteering and helping people or organizations along the way, that will keep me satisfied. As long as we're pleasing God, that's what matters.