

# My Biography



Mayor Van W. Johnson, Sr.

**Van W. Johnson, Sr.**, was born in Apalachicola, Florida, as the seventh child on the seventh day of November 1959, to Abe Johnson, Sr. and Azalee Pollock-Johnson both now deceased. Both, his father and mother started down the path of public service upon which he would later follow. During the local civil rights movement, together his father and mother spent the majority of their time in service to the Franklin County African-American community. His father served as President of the Franklin County Voters League and his mother as one of the

1969 founders and President of the Franklin County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). During his mother's term as President of the local NAACP, he served as chair of the legal redress committee.

Through the third grade, He attended Holy Family School, a segregated private Catholic school on Seventh Street in Apalachicola and later attended and graduated in 1978 from Apalachicola High School. He lettered in both varsity football and basketball, and in his senior year, was selected to the "All Big Bend Conference" football team.

After High School, he attended Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City, Florida, where he majored in computer science. Shortly afterward, he left college and on March 26, 1981, he



Gail D. Johnson



Apalachicola Times November 2, 1978  
Senator Richard Stone and an aide discuss some matters with Abe and Azalee Johnson on the steps of the Franklin County Courthouse.

married his high school sweetheart the former Gail "Teddy" Simmons of Apalachicola and together raised five beautiful children: Van II, Ezekiel, Kristy, Ashley, and Randall.

Early on, he found employment in the local seafood industry and later with a conservation program on St. Vincent's Island. On March 1, 1982, he gained employment as a Laborer Trainee with the Franklin County Solid Waste Department and was promoted to Truck Driver after only eighteen

months on the job, and promoted again to the position of Heavy Equipment Operator a year later.

In November of 1991, the year his mother passed, the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners appointed him Director of the Franklin County Solid Waste & Recycling Department. The County Commission later added to his charge the administration of both the Animal Control and Parks & Recreation Departments.



All-Conference Fullback

While employed by the County, he attended the University of Florida TREEO Center and obtained certification as a Landfill Manager and later attended Santa Fe Community College and received training and certification as a Recycling Coordinator.

In 1993, during the City's election and at the age of 33, he made his first attempt at a political office. During that year, he ran an unsuccessful campaign for the Seat, 3, seat on the Apalachicola Board of City Commissioners. Losing that race by a paper-thin margin of 14 votes, he was undeterred and ran again in 1997.

During the 1997, campaign he successfully defeated the incumbent Seat, 3, City Commissioner out of a field of five candidates and was reelected again in 2001, and ran unopposed in 2005. During his first year on the City Commission and at his own expense, he attended the Florida State University Institute of Government and obtained training and certification as an Elected Municipal Official. In 1999, his fellow Board members selected him to serve as Mayor Pro-Tem and he served the board in that capacity for a total of 4-years.

Bringing certification and administrative experience to the table, the season was right and in 2007, he submitted his resignation as the Seat 3, City Commissioner in order to place his name on the ballot for Mayor. Facing a field of three candidates, a former City Commissioner, and a member of the City's Planning & Zoning Board, he won the Mayor race in a run-off election by 111 votes. He is currently serving as the first elected African-American Mayor in the History of Apalachicola, Florida, taken his place among the annals of Apalachicola Mayor's such as Dr. John Gorrie and David Greenway Raney.



1978 High School Graduation

During the span of his 37-year career as a public servant, he coached and headed the local Dixie Youth Baseball League and the Franklin County Little League Football and Cheerleading Programs.

The Mayor and his family proudly attend Smith Chapel Apostolic Overcoming Holiness Church of Christ, Inc., in the City of Apalachicola, a small home church founded by the Mayor's mother in 1979.