



Congressional Record

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Mr. Speaker, I rise today during Black History Month with appreciation of St. Petersburg native, small business owner and youth advocate, Antonio Brown. Through Brown's dedication to increasing children's literacy, especially Black and brown children, our youngest neighbors are empowered through stories and given the opportunity to turn the page on their lives to a new chapter filled with quality education and opportunity.

Mr. Brown was born in the Child's Park neighborhood of St. Petersburg, and he comes from a community-minded family. Brown's grandfather led recreation centers across the country and his grandmother helped babysit many neighborhood children. He was raised in a single-parent household and attended Boca Ciega High School and later took college courses at St. Petersburg College and St. Pete Technical College where he earned his plumbing certificate. In 2009, Brown graduated from the American Institute of Beauty.

Brown is proud the father of his son, Jaelyn and anecdotally, he strives to be a better man and father than the example he had.

Early in his career, Brown began as a telemarketer but knew this was not his calling. After spending time in meaningful reflection, he specifically thought about what was important to his life as a Black man and the impactful lessons his grandmother instilled in him while caring for children, bringing his new dream of becoming a barber and an impactful father to fruition.

While navigating fatherhood and an 18-month program to become a master barber, Brown knew his mission in life was to serve his community, particularly Black and brown youth. In 2015, he successfully opened his Barber Shop – Central Station Barbershop & Grooming – and in 2016, he began the Barbershop Book Club where kids could 'grow up in his chairs' and be surrounded by a positive environment that solidified their path for a chance at a better life.

When kids walk in for haircut at Browns' Barber Shop, they have the option to receive their service for free, if they read a book aloud throughout the duration of the haircut. The children walk away with a fresh haircut and a new book to keep at no cost. In an effort to teach financial literacy, Brown encourages the families of the children to put the money they would have spent on the haircut, in a bank account for their child.

Brown curates a selection of books that are ‘culturally relevant’ and have characters that children recognize themselves in and stories that would teach them positive messages to do good in the world. After nine years of service to the St. Petersburg community through the Barbershop Book club, Brown has given out over 1,500 books and haircuts and expanded his shop to 10 different locations.

Brown’s work with children’s literacy has sparked local partnerships between beloved bookstores in the St. Petersburg area and notably the Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation, Junior League of St. Pete, and the Juvenile Welfare Board to ensure every child that comes to his Barber Shop has the opportunity to enhance their literary skills.

When Brown is not at the Barber Shop serving local children, he serves his neighbors as the 13th President of St. Pete Heights Neighborhood Association, a St. Petersburg Sunshine City Ambassador, and a Pinellas Barbering College Instructor.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the St. Petersburg community, I am proud to recognize Antonio Brown for his selfless community service and dedication to fostering a safe environment for children to grow and thrive. Brown’s commitment to increasing childhood literacy is a priceless investment helping our future generations one haircut at a time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida – District 14