



## **In music or politics, Caleb Rowden focuses on relationships**

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By Guimel Sibingo

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COLUMBIA — It is not unusual to see creative types run for office or engage in politics. Former actor Ronald Reagan became president of the United States. Former bodybuilder and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger became governor of California.

And Caleb Rowden, a former Christian musician, became state representative for the 44th district in Missouri. A life marked by involvement in church ministry, music and politics makes Rowden a unique character among candidates for legislative office.

Rowden's story is one of repeated successes. As a Christian musician, he signed deals with major record labels and had a single that made it into the top 10 on the Christian charts. He started his own business, the marketing firm Clarius, in 2012. And he won his first political race in 2012.

With his blondish-red hair and cheerful personality, Rowden has won his way into the hearts of a lot of people. But he doesn't want to be remembered by what he does; he wants to be remembered for the relationships he has built.

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Creativity defined Rowden as a child.

His family moved around a lot. Rowden's father was in the grocery business and moved around from one Missouri city to another time after time. The Rowdens lived in Joplin,

Osage Beach and Springfield, but they always found their way back to Columbia. They made a final move to Columbia in 1992, when Rowden was in second grade.

"There were times when we had lived in more houses than years we were in age," said Rebekah Jouret, Rowden's older sister.

Rowden attended Mill Creek Elementary School, Gentry Middle School and Jefferson Junior High. He graduated from Rock Bridge High School, where he played baseball and basketball, in 2001.

Rowden was a witty and funny child, even when he wasn't trying to be. Family members say he was entertaining even when he was very young.

"He was fascinated with professional wrestling," Jouret said. He even gathered data on all his favorite wrestlers from names, to weight, to hometown. He created his own wrestling ring in the house and often would create his own matches, mimicking wrestling announcer's voices.

"You had to be careful if you were lounging on the floor watching TV," Jouret said. "That made you a prime target for him jumping off the couch and landing on top of you."

Music was Rowden's most creative outlet. He started playing drums at 4, and his grandfather bought him a ukelele at the same time. He taught himself how to play the piano and learned guitar from a youth pastor at his church. He later picked up the bass guitar.

When he was in kindergarten, he performed his first duet with his sister at their church.

In an effort to put on his own shows, Rowden would type up tickets. He created his own set lists and came up with ideas for "sparkly outfits" that his sister could wear when performing with him. He recorded songs that he had written.

"He loved having an audience and would take full advantage of having one," Jouret said.

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It was a rainy day at the Celebrate Freedom Festival in Dallas, Texas, in 2008. The Christian festival was taking place in Southfork Ranch, where the television show "Dallas" was filmed. Because of the rain, and the ensuing mud, the performance schedules were delayed. Rowden got a call from management. They had to move

through the sets very quickly, so he would have to play without his band. It was one of the few shows Rowden had to play solo — and there was a crowd of 75,000.

"It was fun, obviously," he said. "They probably would have enjoyed it more with the band, though."

Rowden was heavily involved in music in high school. He participated in contests and led worship services at his church. He joined Wisdom's Cry, a group originally formed by his sister and three other girls. They asked Rowden to play drums, but he eventually began to sing with them.

The group, now with only three members — including long-time friend Jessica White — recorded three albums and performed in area churches. It disbanded when White and Jouret decided to leave the music business.

Rowden attended MU briefly before signing a record deal with a Nashville label, leading to a song called "Made" that hit the nation's top 10 for Christian music and No. 1 in several markets, including Nashville and Los Angeles.

He and his team, including his father, put 200,000 miles on a vehicle as they toured from coast to coast.

Rowden's goal was never to be famous. He viewed what he did as ministry. There were plenty of flat tires and horror stories, but overall it was a good experience.

"He was very passionate about what he was doing," said Rowden's father, Rick Rowden, who managed the tours.

Still, the touring life began to take a toll. He spent 200 days on the road during his first year of marriage to Aubrey Rowden, and they had begun talking about starting a family.

"I never lost the passion to actually play and sing," he said. "I still love that. It's fun, but the traveling part at some point kind of gets old."

In the end, it was an easy decision. He recorded a second album in Seattle and soon after began working as a pastor and creative director for Christian Chapel in Columbia. He eventually was hired full time for the position and stopped touring in 2010.

There were two things that Aubrey Rowden said she never wanted to be: a pastor's wife and a politician's wife. She was destined to become both.

"Originally, when I married him, he was going to be a rock star, right?" she said with a laugh. She was surprised when Caleb Rowden decided to run for public office.

"But at the same time I realize Caleb was made for it," she said.

Caleb Rowden decided to run for state representative as a way of connecting with the community. He also joined and became active in the Columbia Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club.

Dave Griggs, a long-time family friend, was among the people who talked to Caleb Rowden when he was thinking about entering politics.

"Caleb is just a really good guy," he said. "He's a good, honest, hard-working, very bright man who is pretty straightforward and has decided that he should take the opportunity to go to public service."

Griggs thinks that Caleb Rowden has done a good job so far.

"He is very considerate, conscientious," he said. "He listens very astutely to both sides of the issue and votes his conscience."

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Caleb Rowden said that although what he does as a politician is important and has a lot of impact, life does not end there.

"You have to go home at night, and you have to hang out with your family," he said. "You realize that there is more to life than politics."

After eight years of marriage, Caleb Rowden and his wife had a son, Willem Rowden, on Feb. 9, 2013. He was born during the legislative session, but Aubrey Rowden said her husband was never absent from family life.

"He's such a good dad," she said. "I'm so blessed to have him."

Having a child changed everything for Caleb Rowden.

"All for the good," he said. "Except for you don't sleep."

Caleb Rowden said Willem is a lot like him, which he finds a bit scary. He is surprised every day by Willem's intelligence and resourcefulness.

"That's really fun to watch," he said.

Music has never left Caleb Rowden's life. Willem's middle name, Keane, is the name of one of Caleb Rowden's favorite bands. He still plays music and occasionally leads worship at Christian Chapel. He said he's inspired by passionate people, but his main inspiration is his faith in God.

"I'll never be the guy that preaches on the counter-top or on the dinner table," he said. "That's not my personality, but how I do what I do very much stems from my faith."

Politics is not a legacy that Rowden wants to define him. He considers his relationships and his family more important. He hopes people will remember him as someone who cared regardless of whether they are happy with the votes he's made.

"There's so much more to life and the opportunities that I have to impact the community and impact those around me," he said. "That's an ongoing journey that probably doesn't have a destination. I don't know if I'll ever get there, but I'll keep trying."

*Supervising editor is [Scott Swafford](#).*