

Jax Family Spells It Out For Readers

BY ALLEN THIGPEN | PHOTOGRAPHER ED HALL

There's hardly a dull moment when Jacksonville's **Heather Surface** and her two sons, 10-year-old Jamie and 7-year-old Peyton, commute through the city. Always on the lookout for landmarks and local history, the three have made a game of learning about the First Coast.

"It was truly just a game we played, similar to the alphabet game that lots of families play on long trips," Heather says. "I would say, think of something that begins with an A, and my younger son [Peyton] would say 'Alligator!' Then I'd say 'Jamie, you're B, but remember what Peyton said!' So Jamie would say, 'Alligators and Baseball!'"

So, it comes as no surprise that one rainy day, Heather wouldn't let the weather wash away their creativity.

"We went through all the fabulous things we could have done that afternoon," Heather says. "We

said, well, we could have gone to the Cummer, MOCA Jacksonville, even gone to the beach to collect shark teeth. There's just so much to do in Jacksonville. We're fortunate to live in a place that has such a variety of offerings, both natural and cultural."

Heather and her sons crafted their rainy-day wishes into rhymes, the very origins of their book, *Jacksonville From A to Z*. The 32-page, full-color hardback is an alphabetical view of our coastal community, as told by the Surfaces and more than 20 very special contributing artists.

In conjunction with Art With a Heart for Children, the book is illustrated from cover to cover by patients from Wolfson Children's Hospital and Nemours Children's Clinic in Jacksonville. Heather and her boys provided the words, and each child was given the chance to pick what they wanted to illustrate.

"When the children are doing artwork in the hos-

pital, they are just transported to another place," says Lori Guadagno, co-founder and director of Art Programs for Art With a Heart. "What made this project unique was that there was a very specific goal, and we were going back into the community, so they knew that their work was going to be seen and shared with others. That just validates who they are and themselves at a time when their spirits are low and their sense of self has been completely altered."

Through the course of the project, Heather would share with her sons the stories of the contributing patients.

"It was so much fun," Heather says. "Every time I would pick up a batch of the illustrations, it just made my day."

When readers are done, there's a quiz on the last pages which Heather says will test even the most seasoned First Coast readers. There's something

there for everyone, adults and children alike.

"I think they'd really like it, and they'd learn a lot of things they never knew about Jacksonville," Jamie says.

Half of the proceeds go to Art With a Heart for Children. While *Jacksonville From A to Z* is available via local retailers, the book also will be available through non-profit organizations, including schools. An additional 30 percent of the gross sales will go back to the schools and organizations that promote the book.

"We didn't set out to publish a book, but it's created a tremendous sense of pride in my children and the patients at the hospital," Heather says. "They've learned not only about Jacksonville and that they can create something that's of value that can help children, but they've learned about philanthropy."

Learn more about the book online at www.JacksonvilleFromAtoZ.com. □



(Left to right) Peyton, Heather and Jamie Surface.

"Jacksonville is quite a town, there's lots to do and see. We thought we'd share ideas with you, we'll go from A to Z."