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ISSUE 027, PITCH COOL JAMAICA, 2022.

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ALICIA LYTTLE

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HELLEN AKIROR FRENCH
AND AVERELL FRENCH

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LISA AND CHRIS BINNS

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**FREE JAMAICA
AND FREE THE WORLD,
CREATIVELY.
AND SAVE THE PLANET.**

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PITCH OUR STORIES LET'S CREATE OUR FUTURES.

COOL

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Pitch Cool Jamaica is our special edition celebrating superstar founders in Jamaica who are doing good on our island.

They are:

Alicia Lyttle, Founder, Coach, International Speaker, and Trainer.

Hellen Akiror French and Averell French, Founders of Mount Pleasant Farm Chocolatiers.

Joel Nomdarkham, Journalist, Marketer, and Social Impact Creator.

Kee Farms, ocean farm and community network.

Lisa and Chris Binns, Co-Founders of Stush in the Bush.

Lomorra Dillon, otherwise known as Hope the Maroon Princess, Lead Singer, Drummer, and Youth Ambassador for the Grandy Nanny Cultural Group.

Matthew Rodney, Hotel Activist.

Mrs Michelle Chong, CEO of Honey Bun Limited, and Founder and Board Chairperson of The Honey Bun Foundation.

Neil Curtis, Founder and CEO of Farm Up Jamaica.

Sandra Walter Glasgow, Co-Founder of FirstAngelsJA, and RevUP Jamaica.

Read their stories and let's celebrate them.



EDITOR'S NOTE

OUR INCLUSIVE FUTURE

It's been a long journey, thirty years.

At age 13, in 1992, after leaving the island of my birth, Jamaica, and moving to America, then on to England, I decided to learn how the world works.

Over the years I set out my real mission, to find super people who would return home with me to **Free Jamaica and free the world**, creatively.

And save the planet.

Pitch Cool Jamaica, our first edition, featuring founders who are doing good on our island, opens our creative corridor with Jamaica, so that we can collaborate and create our inclusive future.

Let's create change together.

Best wishes,

Sherry Collins (her / us)

Jamaican Freedom Fighter

Alicia Lyttle

FOUNDER, COACH, INTERNATIONAL SPEAKER, AND TRAINER.

With over twenty years' experience, entrepreneur and international speaker, Alicia Lyttle, is coaching future marketing talent in Jamaica and around the world. Having worked at organisations including The White House, The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), and in the City of New Orleans Mayor's Office. Alicia has crafted a successful marketing career, and is giving back to Jamaica, while she continues to grow her brands, including her digital marketing agency, Pow Social.

You were born in America to a Jamaican father, who was born in Kingston and grew up in May Pen, and a Guyanese mother. Tell us about your love of Jamaica and your early years visiting the island.

Growing up, we had an amazing experience with Jamaica because we would visit the island every summer. We would stay at resorts, but we would also visit my grandfather who lived on a farm, where he had cows, goats, chickens, and plenty of fresh food. Our grandfather was also a business owner, so I learned a lot about entrepreneurship from him.

I love the fact that you are training future Jamaican marketers to realise their potential and to leverage the internet to build their brands. Tell us how these sessions came about?

I launched my business in Jamaica in 2010. My sister and I were invited to speak at Jamaica's first ever internet marketing conference. We realised that the people of Jamaica really needed what we were teaching, how to start an online business, and how to be your own boss. So, we came back, hosted more events, and invited people to come and learn from us.

You've said that "It's your responsibility to take yourself to the next level", which I agree with. How do you measure success?

First, I make sure that I'm thinking big, and I never share my big goals with small minds. That's what I teach people all the time. And in measuring success, I look at the goal that I've set and how I've reached the goal, then I take that goal and that achievement, and I set another goal that's even higher than the last one. One

of the most important things I've found on the journey to success, is celebrating when you do reach your goals.

What are your thoughts on collaborations?

Collaborations are the easiest way to achieve the goals that you desire. One of my goals is to teach one hundred thousand Jamaicans how to create and launch their own online business and be financially free as an entrepreneur. To achieve my goal, I've been collaborating with other business partners, including Heart Trust, and The NCB Foundation.

You've lived between America and Jamaica and have travelled the world to places such as Singapore, China, Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and South Africa. What have you learned from each of these countries that has guided your career?

I have deep respect for different countries and cultures. I have the opportunity of being able to teach people anywhere in the world. Travelling enables me to have a different level of understanding of people.

Every year, thousands of Jamaicans leave the island seeking better opportunities. How can Jamaica retain its creative talent so that the island can benefit from The Orange (creative) Economy, worth trillions to the world and is the fourth largest growing economy?

We need to get the word out into the communities. All of us need to tell the Jamaican people about the many opportunities out there. Working in the global creative economy is open to all through the internet.

As you grow your brands, what do you hope for the future talent of Jamaica?

My hope for the youth of Jamaica is that they embrace new technology and learn how to monetize it. Instead of spending their time scrolling through TikTok, they should look at how they can start a business and utilize it. Also, to embrace online learning to keep updated on what's happening in the world.

Are there any new projects you would like to share?

There's always a new project in my life. I'm working on a new course right now and I'm getting ready to go speak at another event.





Hellen Akiror French and Averell French

FOUNDERS OF MOUNT PLEASANT FARM CHOCOLATIERS

Hellen Akiror French and Averell French are partners in life, and in business. And that partnership is made all the sweeter because said business is bean-to-bar chocolate making in the heart of Jamaica's Blue Mountains. Although Mount Pleasant Farm Chocolatiers officially launched back in 2013, their story begins far before then, with a family history of chocolate making as rich as Jamaica's fertile soil.

Which partnership came first? Marriage or Mount Pleasant?

Life came first. I met Averell while researching Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee. We had similar interests in a lot of areas, I suppose things started there.

So, this all started with coffee, but how did you end up creating chocolate?

Well, I am a chocolatier, and passionate chocolate consumer, just like my father. Growing up I enjoyed both. Like many, Blue Mountain coffee fascinated me, but I quickly took note of the Jamaican cocoa bean. I love working with cocoa and the smiles it puts on people's faces. My husband is a chocoholic too. We found ourselves being more absorbed in the chocolate making process, and it grew with friends and family asking for more and more.

Was it always your goal to follow in your family's chocolate making footsteps?

Yes and no. I have always worn several hats and wanted to spend time as a social entrepreneur and marketer. Averell was into architecture in the UK and was balancing that with running his cocoa and coffee farms in Jamaica. I suppose deep down, the interest was there, and it was something we were passionate about.

What sets your chocolates apart from competitors?

We take the product from the farm to the table, controlling all aspects of the process to guarantee quality and sustainability. In our cocoa farms we have

Criollo and Trinitario trees, from which we create a unique blend. The cool mountains give our products a fruity, mild, non-acidic taste that's creamier than most 70% dark chocolate bars.

Also, our beans have grown in the Blue Mountains on the family farm for over a hundred years.

Before you started your business, was there a significant gap in the market?

Yes, that was certainly the case. We were the first bean-to-bar chocolate company in Jamaica. And first to produce a non-blended single origin cocoa bean bar.

You've collected a fair few awards since you started. Talk us through your trophy cabinet?

We have been honored with several awards; we take each with a great sense of appreciation. Among them is the Great Taste Awards gold star, by Guild of Fine Food, for our coffee and dark chocolate plain bars, and the Sir Arthur Social Entrepreneur Award.

What does it mean for a business to be "Fairtrade"?

Fairtrade means that the entire supply chain benefits by practicing and implementing policies so that everyone is rewarded for their input. As a result, traceability is critical for success of the model. Farmers benefit directly by receiving a fair price for their produce, and a ready market, and it offers a degree of certainty and creates a level of trust and motivation too. This in turn leads to a fair quality of life in a holistic way.

If you're a small business, it's easy to achieve this because you can directly connect with your supply chain and filter the ideology quicker.

Joel Nomdarkham

JOURNALIST, MARKETER, AND SOCIAL IMPACT CREATOR

Jamaican journalist, marketer, and social impact creator, Joel Nomdarkham is on a mission to make the creative industry more colourful, more inclusive, and more joyful. A self-proclaimed “Corporate Eccentric”, you might have seen his online work using his position to educate and amplify, whether that’s on Twitter, LinkedIn, or his various social good initiatives including Black Kings Rising, and Project Mic. Below, he talks role models, passion projects, and how it all started.

So, why “Corporate Eccentric”?

My friends actually coined that. Eccentric, to me, means standing out, not conforming. I’m corporate but I don’t fit that blueprint. I want to challenge people and the industry.

It’s all part of my personal brand, like a signature. Even something small like wearing my patterned pants helps me stand out. It’s about telling a story and how you express yourself.

Were you creative from a young age?

I started doing public speaking aged nine, on stage in front of hundreds of people. So, I was never afraid to take on leadership roles, always planning, organising. That’s when I realised I have an interest in events and creating. Some people prefer to be creative and aren’t much of a talker. I found a perfect balance because I have both sides.

You always hear “Doctor, nurse, teacher”, but when I was 12, I heard about journalism and researched that. I became a presenter for my university’s video series, then after I graduated, I got my first TV gig. I loved the strategic part and that’s where marketing came in.

Tell us more about BKR Collective?

Black Kings Rising (BKR Collective) started as a local response to the murder of George Floyd. Whether you’re in the USA, Africa, or the Caribbean, news like that sends a shockwave. The group wanted to show Black

men in a positive light and people really responded. We photographed about 24 men; some had never had their photos taken. The energy was electrifying, and we got a lot of traction.

We all just wanted to do something to show our support, but then brands started to see the importance of it and wanted to partner with us. Since then, we’ve done branded campaigns for International Men’s Day and Father’s Day. We love spreading joy and positivity and are excited to see how it grows.

Your other initiative is called Project Mic?

It’s my super passion. It’s all about amplifying and educating the next generation of marketers, creators. I didn’t have a lot of guidance or a lot of role models. And being from Jamaica it’s hard to break into the international marketing space. But as the first Jamaican writer for three international publications, including Adweek, I became a role model to a lot of younger marketers, and I wanted to support them.

I was able to bring a few industry experts together for a video series and we did our first event back in August, bringing together 100 marketers and creators in the same room as younger marketers and students. Right in front of my eyes, connections were being made. That’s really the aim. Not profit, just building community.

What would be your dream project to work on?

My dream project would be something that brings the Caribbean marketers and creatives together from tech. My dream collaboration would be with Bozoma Saint John, former chief marketing officer at Netflix. Randomly I had this interaction with her the other day, after I tweeted her. I thought she’d never see it, but then she actually responded! It became a whole Twitter conversation of her giving advice. She posted it on her LinkedIn, and I shared it too. That mentorship moment between two benefited 1,000s. It just goes to show what you get if you ask.





Kee Farms

NICHOLAS KEE, CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, AND DEAN MORRIS, CO-FOUNDER, AND OPERATIONS MANAGER, AND TEAM



Kee Farms is an ocean farm and community network based in Jamaica focusing on carbon removal through seaweed, oyster cultivation, and ocean habitat restoration. Nicholas Kee, Co-Founder and CEO, and Dean Morris, Co-Founder, and Operations Manager, share their story and their brand vision.

Tell us why you launched Kee Farms?

Dean: Each member of the team has various motivations for starting this endeavour. For the founders, we believe that sustainable entrepreneurship can be done by partnering with the community and key environmental stakeholders to improve lives, create sustainable livelihoods, and regenerate life underwater.

Why are seaweed, oyster cultivation, and ocean habitat restoration needed in Jamaica?

Nicholas: In addition to providing structural habitat and food supplies, shellfish and seaweed favourably influence habitat and contribute to ecosystem services due to their biological activities. Oysters are great filter feeders because they can take nitrogen from the water and use it to build their shells and tissues.

By sequestering greenhouse gases, restoring marine ecosystems, producing biofuel and renewable plastics, and yielding marine protein, seaweed can make a major contribution to the battle against climate change.

How will you bring local fishermen and the rest of the community on board?

Dean: We're working with Alligator Head Foundation (AHF), a marine sanctuary in Portland Jamaica, and other marine sanctuaries across the island. Marine sanctuaries like AHF have a very tight relationship with the local community because of their community-first approach. AHF is also a sponsor for this project and believed in us to accomplish this heavy mandate by investing and providing a location for us to create the infrastructure and try to pilot the project.

How do you plan on reaching the younger generation coming up?

Nicholas: We'll start at the source with students. Part of our mission is to make our model easily replicable and then create training programs for universities like the College of Agriculture Science and Education (CASE), that can eventually integrate our methodology into their curriculum.

You have been growing your team since launching, tell us about them?

Dean: We're blessed to have met some like-minded individuals locally, that have been motivated by the mandate we have. We have Shauna-Gaye Pusey, our chief of staff. She is the rock of the team, and she is probably the one that solves the major problems we have.

Chelsi-Rae Buckley is the sweetheart of the company and is quietly one of the hardest-working members of our team. Her background is in marine biology, and she is our resident seaweed expert.

We also have Geasean Johnson who is the chief scientist for our team and gives the team a strong scientific grounding with a bit of flair. Aprille Ferguson is our oyster expert, and she is the person that brings smiles and energy with her jokes to the team. Matthew-Pierre Rogers is a marine biologist, newly certified PADI diver, and the newest member of our team who brings youthful energy and a strong love for the ocean.

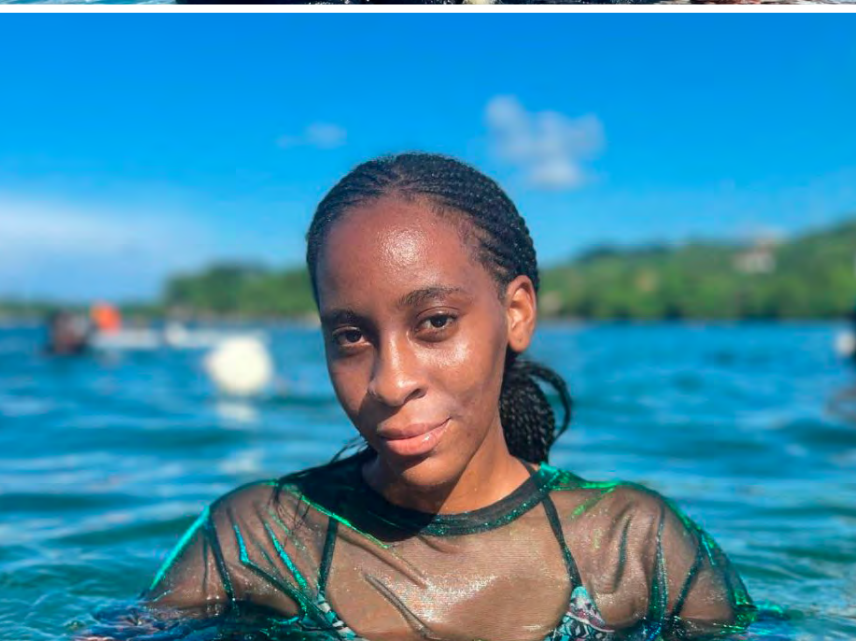
What are your hopes for the future of Kee Farms, and the future of Jamaica?

Dean: We're hoping that Kee Farms makes an impact on the blue economy in the Caribbean, by creating the ocean farming blueprint for the area and carving a path for the region to follow suit. For Jamaica specifically, we want to create a thriving network of fisherfolk with the each-one-teach-one mindset that allows them to earn an income while furthering the initiative of profitable climate action.

What do you say to those who think climate change isn't real?

Dean: As a citizen of a small island developing state, I have absolutely nothing to say to a climate change denier. The rising temperatures and increased frequency of extreme weather conditions speak for themselves.

Nicholas: Climate change is pretty much an undeniable fact right now, and as Dean says we don't need to be engaging with someone on this topic. You can't deny reality, the cognitive dissonance will catch up eventually.



Lisa and Chris Binns

CO-FOUNDERS OF STUSH IN THE BUSH

When you think of Jamaican cuisine, what comes to mind? Jerk chicken served with a side of reggae in bustling Kingston, or lobster on the palm-fringed beaches of Montego Bay? Off the tourist trail, 2,000 feet above sea level in the village of Free Hill, there's something unexpected being cooked up. There, in a regenerative ital garden, lush with coconut trees, pineapples, avocado, citrus trees, and herbs, husband-and-wife team Lisa and Chris Binns have been cultivating a creative culinary experience rooted in ital – the natural, plant-based diet of the Rastafari Livity.

An immersive, farm-to-table dining experience that spans eight courses of thoughtfully curated “plant magic”, Stush in the Bush is much more than a restaurant, says Lisa. “It’s about our connection to food, where we live and our lifestyle. It’s dining, but it is also walking in the garden with Chris. It’s conversations. It’s food inspiration.” From the ingredients to the dinnerware, placemats and art hanging on the walls of the dining area, Stush in the Bush celebrates all things local and seasonal.

The brand name reflects the couple’s backstory: two months after meeting Rastafari farmer Chris, former educator Lisa uprooted herself from New York City life (“stush” Jamaican slang for fancy) to move to Chris’ farm in the Free Hill community, passed down through generations. While living off the land, Lisa began creating vinaigrettes, jams, and pepper sauces from the farm’s bounty of fruits and vegetables – and Stush in the Bush was born. When people started asking to visit and taste the products in situ, “It was a very natural progression to a farm to table dining experience,” says Lisa.

Initially, the business operated on the concept of a studio apartment. “It was, and still is, our home first,” says Lisa. They never dreamed that it would organically transform from serving “sip” [vegetable soup] alongside freshly baked bread to clientele wanting to experience a Jamaican farm, to what it is now. Guests can enjoy a plant-based, eight-course meal made from scratch, including plantain chips, sweet potato and pineapple croquettes, gourmet greens, plant-based cheeses, and Lisa’s perennially popular “Blow Fyah” - a scotch bonnet pepper paste. “We craft the menu based on what we’re growing in our garden and also what’s in season on the island,” explains Chris, recalling the traditional “regenerative” farming methods of his childhood.

Since 2014, Stush in the Bush has grown to encompass a wellness brunch offering Pilates and yoga classes, and with one guest cabin complete, there are plans to expand the accommodation. A processing centre for their product line is also in development. But at the heart of the business remains self-sustainability, a commitment to the earth and of course love and affection, the first two ingredients on every jar and bottle.

The Binns call themselves locavores, and that commitment extends beyond food, into community. All their staff are local, including young mothers whom they’ve taken under their wing and trained. “It’s always wonderful to see young people flourish,” says Lisa. “Our goal has always been ‘lift as you climb’, and the more growth we experience, the more, we hope, that [our community] is able to do as well.”





Lomorra Dillon

LEAD SINGER, DRUMMER, AND YOUTH AMBASSADOR FOR THE GRANDY NANNY CULTURAL GROUP

Lomorra Dillon, otherwise known as Hope the Maroon Princess, is a young Maroon with over 10 years' experience as a Cultural Ambassador, which includes her current role as lead singer, drummer, and Youth Ambassador for the Grandy Nanny Cultural Group. Lomorra has toured the United States of America on a cultural exchange bringing international awareness to her culture. She is part of a social enterprise in her community, with a group of Maroon women, called Katawud Natural Products, which produces Maroon faith-based products and services. She is also campaigning for a permanent statue of Nanny of the Maroons in Port Antonio, Jamaica.

You are a descendent of Nanny of the Maroons, a fearless leader of the Maroon people. How has her life influenced your leadership today?

My elders always told me that no matter how hard things got, Nanny never ran away from her people, and never ran away from the war. That is why we call her our mother. I became lead singer of the Grandy Nanny Cultural Group at the age of nine and had to be fearless, singing our sacred songs in front of large crowds, sometimes hundreds of people. No matter what, I couldn't abandon my group, because that is not something Nanny would have done.

Tell us about where you are from, the Rio Grande Valley, Portland, Jamaica, and the people there.

The Rio Grande Valley has the largest river in Jamaica, the Rio Grande, which runs through our territory, with beautiful waterfalls and springs. Our people living there have many unique skills, including hunting. Our hunters have extensive knowledge of our rainforest, medicinal plants, and a strong understanding of the spiritual side of their culture.

You recently campaigned to become Chieftainess for the Rio Grande Valley. What is your vision for your community?

The first thing that I would like to see is a proper system of governance in place, with regular democratic elections, that offers young people in the community something to aspire to. My other major vision is to see the Rio Grande Valley become an economic hub in which traditional cultural expression can generate income for young people, so that they stay in their communities and preserve their culture, and won't have to migrate to look for work.

There is mining in your territory currently, which some argue is destroying the natural resources for profit. What can be done to support the people living there?

The most obvious way to support the people in the area and our natural environment would be to put a stop to mining. Right now, the most prevalent form of mining is the mining of sand and stone from the Rio Grande. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that destroying the largest river on our island will have negative effects, especially with climate change.

You run a small women-led social enterprise called Katawud Natural Products. Tell us about the brand and why you came together.

Our enterprise is a team effort. We did not start it simply for money, but to keep our culture alive. We sell soaps and products made from indigenous herbs. Our goal is to develop the brand to create a viable source of income for people throughout the Rio Grande Valley, especially young women. I want to show the world how powerful our traditions are, so our people can have a sense of pride, and I have faith that it will happen.

What is your hope for the people of Rio Grande Valley and wider Jamaica in the coming years?

That the people of the Rio Grande Valley and wider Jamaica learn to be proud of who they are, their history, and the sacrifice of their ancestors. And that they all learn how to work together to build a nation based on who we are as a people and our experiences.

Matthew Rodney

HOTEL ACTIVIST

Back in June, Matthew Rodney made waves in the hospitality industry after posting a video of his alleged unfair dismissal online. It was an echo that was felt all over Jamaica at a time when conditions for hospitality workers are so poor, despite it being one of the largest sources of income for the country. Here, Matthew talks about simmering frustrations both inside and out of the industry, as well as his initiative, Make a Change.

Have you always been interested in social justice?

I've always worked in hospitality. I have a passion for customer service and meeting new people. But from the very first resort I worked in there were a lot of frustrations.

Back then I was talking to my co-workers, and I said "Hey, how can we go on strike?" Even in my small circle I was trying to work out how I could make my voice heard. You know, try to inform people on social issues. I'm always happy to be an activist, but it doesn't pay.

Can you tell us more about these frustrations?

A lot of bad treatment: low pay; no benefit; no pension; no overtime. No tips. If I accepted tips, they would fire me. Everywhere has three-month contracts so there's no stability and hundreds of other unemployed people are after your position. We're trapped because if we strike or join a union, that's it.

If you work at a resort, you can't even get a loan for a car. It's the largest source of income for the country, yet we are poor while working in it. It's a broken system.

Is this something that other people talk about?

Lots of people are talking about the bad treatment, but they do nothing. Most people in Jamaica are going through the same. That's why it blew up.

Can you tell us about the dismissal?

The person who ran the hotel had a bad reputation in

the hotel sector, but I hadn't done my research. Even their HR person had resigned. I worked as bartender and was serving drinks to two American ladies, and he accused me of flirting. He was like, "You don't belong here. Go work at another resort, just leave."

I was shocked as I didn't do anything wrong, which is why I recorded him at the time when he was firing me. I later put my recording up on social media and called him out. This got a lot of attention from the local media and thousands of people got in touch to say they've been through the same thing. People said they've experienced racism and were treated unfairly in the hotel industry.

And then you started Make a Change?

When I put the video online a lot of people started saying, "We need a change." I felt I've got to do something about it, so, I organised a peaceful protest, in July, calling out the hotel industry's unpaid overtime, racism, classism, sexual harassment, unfair conditions, poor pay, and lack of benefits.

I would like hotel workers to come together and form a union, so that no one else has to go through the same experience just to get their voice heard.

What's next for you?

I'm now focusing on myself. Going back to school to learn massage therapy, which I hope will bring me new opportunities.

But my goal is to leave Jamaica to get out there and get my voice heard internationally and Make a Change from there. If more Jamaicans like me decide to leave and there's no one left, the government will have to do something about it.





Mrs Michelle Chong

CEO OF HONEY BUN LIMITED, AND FOUNDER AND BOARD CHAIRPERSON OF THE HONEY BUN FOUNDATION

With over four decades in the baking industry, Business Woman of the Year and Best CEO, Mrs Michelle Chong, CEO of Honey Bun Limited, the much-loved Jamaican wholesale bakery listed on the Jamaica Junior Stock Exchange, shares her story. Mrs Chong is also the proud Founder and Board Chairperson of The Honey Bun Foundation, which is focused on building powerful business models for enterprises and creatives to grow, thrive, and transform Jamaica's economy.

What inspires and motivates you as a businesswoman and brand leader?

I love to see progress in how things get done and to watch people developing and growing. I love perfection, so if I can attain continuous improvement then I'm constantly being motivated.

Honey Bun is the first bakery to be listed on the Jamaica Stock Exchange. How did you achieve this and how has it allowed you to grow?

Honey Bun's auditor encouraged us to join the stock exchange because we were already doing all the things that a publicly traded company was required to do. We started out by keeping sound accounting records, then we practiced international standards for food safety and the discipline of these things allowed us to learn and grow. Being public meant we needed a board of directors and a mentor, and this process has allowed us to grow significantly by practicing and maintaining even greater standards for our company.

You started Honey Bun with 12 employees back in 1982. In building the brand what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of The Honey Bun Foundation because it contributes to the growth of Jamaica by developing strong business models for SMEs and those in the creative industries to grow and thrive. When these small companies grow, the effect is far-reaching in providing employment and changing people's lives.

You started the Honey Bun Foundation to support small and medium sized businesses, and the creative industries, in transforming Jamaica's economy. What are some of the key ways you are driving change?

By the foundation acting independently, we have been able to develop rather quickly by implementing models

that support companies without any bureaucracy whatsoever. Others recognise the value of these models and have come on board to support us in many ways. Our directors are dedicated to the cause, and our many advisors for our advisory committee model are strong within their areas of expertise and willing to support the cause. We call them our Nation Builders, as that is what they are doing in helping these SMEs grow.

We have two other models - our GAPP App which is a business diagnostic tool which shows companies what the gaps are in their business and where to go to fill those gaps; and the first model we created, our National Training Calendar, which shows SMEs the training available, to upskill their employees in a 12-month calendar.

What is the best thing about your job? After so much success what are you looking forward to?

I'm looking forward to doing more for the foundation. I believe that a company's and a nation's greatest assets are its people. One of the best things about my job is that I am able to impact the lives of our people, our extraordinary employees who make Honey Bun what it is today. I want to do more for them, and I want to find ways to continue to develop them.

How do you hope the creative industries will drive change in Jamaica?

Wow, this is a great question!!! I know that the creative industries are Jamaica's most competitive advantage. Then there is our strong African background of music, and the diversity of our people. These things have in themselves created a rich foundation for the creative arts, and I am no expert but would bet my life on it.

We cannot compete in manufacturing like China, or in IT like Silicon Valley, but we CAN compete in our music, our dance, our art, and our creative craft! I believe that if we could formalize this industry and develop them as strong businesses, then we could change our nation's future!

Neil Curtis

FOUNDER AND CEO OF FARM UP JAMAICA

Neil Curtis, Founder and CEO of Farm Up Jamaica, considers farming a significant part of his heritage. "In the days my parents were living in Jamaica back in the 1940s, agriculture was the backbone of the island. It was a way of life. A lifestyle that yielded more than crops, the family farm was a space for children to grow. The profits from the land funded education and eventually enabled our relocation to the US," he says.

"The world is relentlessly taking from the land and making what is being produced seem insignificant. What is naturally grown strengthens economies and sustains life." After inheriting a 60-acre cacao farm in 2013, Neil faced a challenge. He discovered that despite 90% of the island being farmland, most produce was imported. Acres of cropland were uncultivated due to a lack of government support. The dangerous combination of outdated farming techniques and climate change weather conditions worsened the situation.

After attending the Jamaica Diaspora Conference in Jamaica, in the same year, Neil took inspiration from like-minded diasporans passionate about agriculture, and founded Farm Up Jamaica. He was resolved to find a solution that would unlock the potential of the nation. "At Farm Up, we have a heartfelt interest in identifying the problems and the solutions to help farmers," he says. "It's not just about money. It's about putting the resources and, most importantly, the people in place to stamp out poverty and get people working in an entrepreneurial way."

The how has taken nearly a decade to develop and focused on two key areas; a cultural shift in attitude and technical innovations in organic farming, which the organisation shortens to RCSA (regenerative climate-smart agriculture).

"One of the biggest blockers to progress is the legacy of the colonial mindset. It divides rather than brings people together." Neil says. Starting out, he spent time asking young people what they would want as the next

generation of "Agri-Entrepreneurs". "Gen Z are the new farmers. They are the ones that care enough to take things to the new level," he continues.

Neil and his team have worked since then to rebrand what it means to be a farmer in Jamaica today. Transforming it to a profession that can pay a premium, and holds the respect and honour of accomplishment.

The results speak for themselves. Farm Up has taught over 650 students sustainable techniques that reduce carbon and, in some cases, water usage by two-thirds. "RCSA didn't come overnight, in my experience. It takes lots of trial and error to create new technology." Using only sunlight and water, during a trial that placed old techniques against RCSA, farmers grew a crop of sweet peppers in 24 days instead of 60.

"Our model is based on proven technology. It can be used globally, and we want to share it with the world. Conversations about climate change shouldn't outweigh the actions we take. We've been catapulted into the climate change conundrum and we are facing it head on."

With Dr. Julius Garvey, youngest son of Pan-African leader, and Jamaica's first National Hero, The Right Excellent Marcus Garvey, as a key strategic member of their team, Farm Up has gained access to the rich history of ideas and techniques for the cultural transformation needed at home and to connect with agricultural communities' needs, and ideas globally.

Neil aspires to work with more scientists to scale Farm Up's impressive metrics for wider use. "Agri-Entrepreneurship is the exit strategy for a population in need. Jamaica is more than a tourist destination," he says. There is so much warmth and potential in the people."





Sandra Walter Glasgow

CO-FOUNDER OF FIRSTANGELSJA, AND REVUP CARIBBEAN

"I'm sure the whole world knows that Jamaicans are super creative people. As we like to say, 'We likkle but we tallawah'." With minimal effort, we could namecheck the Jamaican artists, athletes, and public figures who have contributed to popular culture and the creative industries globally for decades. Sandra Walter Glasgow lets us know that innovation in Jamaica is not limited to these spaces. Despite limited financial resources, people are innovating in various sectors. Founders are using local raw materials for manufacturing and exporting goods, coders are building apps, and inventors are finding creative solutions for everyday problems.

People may not know how highly Jamaica rates in various global indexes for its number of entrepreneurs. Named an Eisenhower Fellow in 2000, Sandra visited and learned all about incubators and angel networks in the USA.

As a founding member of FirstAngelsJA, the country's first and only functioning angel investor network, Sandra works to maximise the success rate of the start-ups and small businesses she and the network believe can transform the nation's economic future.

Since establishing the network in 2014 with two business partners, including the former president of The Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica, Joseph M. Matalon, FirstAngelsJA members have invested almost \$3 million US dollars across 12 companies. The growing and diverse portfolio spans agribusiness, media, education, and even confectionery. What makes FirstAngelsJA integral to expanding the island's business landscape, is the wealth of expertise and guidance businesses under their umbrella can access. In under a decade, the number of investors has grown to 27, with nearly half of these "Angels" being women.

Having studied Applied Zoology and Botany as an undergraduate, Sandra's link to business might not be clear. What seems to connect the worlds of business and biology is a fascination with ecosystems, specifically,

the processes and structures that things need to thrive. After further studies in business administration and certifications in corporate governance, Sandra's interests in the entrepreneurial ecosystem have evolved with mentorship, amongst other skills, as one of her great superpowers.

Sandra's dedication to business development endures. In 2020, Sandra was named a Senator in the prestigious World Business Angels Investment Forum (WBAF), representing Jamaica. In 2021, influenced by the impact of COVID-19 on SMEs, Sandra established RevUP Caribbean, a charity organisation offering a virtual incubation programme for start-ups and scale-ups. Now successfully in its second year, RevUP's new cohort is halfway through the five-month programme. "Connecting to the Angel Network and supporting start-ups through our incubation programmes is an investment in the future generation of Jamaican business leaders," Sandra says.

Sandra is as passionate and forward-thinking as the initiatives she supports. With a career spanning 40 years, with positions on several boards including Jamaica's largest financial conglomerate, the NCBFG Group, one wonders what she does to relax. Sandra is big on family. Most of her spare time is spent with her female-dominated clan of two daughters and four granddaughters. Along with her husband of 46 years, they make the most of everything the island has to offer.

"Jamaica is my paradise. In a few hours, we can be in a rustic restaurant on the Blue Mountains, in a villa overlooking Kingston 3,000 ft above sea level, or on a white sand beach on the north coast," she says.

Unsurprisingly, given her background in botany, Sandra is also an avid gardener and orchid enthusiast. "The sound of water keeps me sane! My garden has a little river and a Koi Pond with fish almost 20 years old! Where else in the world could you step out of the boardroom and into your own private paradise?"

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