



Spanning Dreams, Crafting Realities

JAX CHAMBER **2024 SMALL BUSINESS** **LEADER OF THE YEAR**



www.mrpotatospread.com

www.lakitaspann.com

www.thegirlfriendsbrand.com

PART I: APPLICATION

Small Business Leader of the Year
Presentation Book and Interview Application



Part I:

1. Name: Lakita Spann Title: President
2. Company: Mr. Potato Spread Inc
3. Business Phone: 904 257-4548 Email: lakita@mrpotatospread.com
4. Business Address: 840 Nautica Dr, Suite #117, Jacksonville, FL 32218
5. Are you a member of the JAX Chamber? ☒ Yes ☐ No
6. Your business is a ☒ Corporation ☐ Partnership ☐ Proprietorship
7. Year company established: 2014
8. Percentage of the business which you own: 51%
9. Industry Type: ☐ Financial ☐ Manufacturing ☐ Real Estate ☐ Health Care Services
☐ Technology ☐ Retail ☒ Restaurant – Limited Service
10. Give a brief description of your company's products and/or services. Fast casual restaurant and food truck brand offering potato-based loaded menu items.
11. Number of outlets or offices: 4
12. Is the company headquartered in Jacksonville? ☒ Yes ☐ No
13. Gross annual revenue: ☐ less than \$1 million ☒ \$1-5 million
14. Number of employees: ☒ 1-25 ☐ 26-50 ☐ 51-100 ☐ more than 100
15. List Business/Trade/Professional and Civic/Service Associations and Positions held:
Member – Jax Chamber
Executive Board Member – The Empowered Kitchen
Member – Women's Food Alliance
Member – Jacksonville Women's Network
Co-Founder – The Girlfriend's Brand
Sponsor – Northwest Rotary Club
16. Honors/Awards Received:
2022 Minority Business Enterprise Firm of the Year – First Coast Business Alliance
2016 Jax Truckies Most Innovative Truck
2017 Jax Truckies Best Healthy Dish
2017 Jax Truckies Overall Champion

Small Business Leader of the Year

I have reviewed this application and confirm that all information given is correct:

Signature: Lakita Spann

Date: 12/03/23



PART II: HISTORY & PHILOSOPHY

My story begins in the shadow of adversity. Born to young parents and raised by my grandmothers, Alice and Mary, I faced the instability of a childhood marked by my mother's struggle with addiction. I honestly don't have many memories of my childhood, other than being left in a crackhouse. These early years were not just about survival; they were about finding a sense of normalcy amidst chaos. At the tender age of 8, my role transcended that of a sister; I became the protector for my little sister Stephanie. This bond, forged in adversity, ignited a fierce sense of responsibility within me. It was more than love; it was a vow to ensure her well-being and to strive for a life that was different from what we knew.

Securing my first job at 15 was more than a milestone; it was a declaration of independence and a step towards altering our family's narrative. My journey wasn't just about overcoming personal hurdles; it was about laying a foundation for a better future for Stephanie and myself. By the age of 19, I was on my own, taking care of my daughter Breanna and Stephanie.

The desire to change my family's trajectory became the guiding force in my life. It led me to balance the roles of a mother, student, and professional with unwavering determination. Every step, from motherhood to my career at a fortune 50 company, was a step towards redefining what was possible for us.

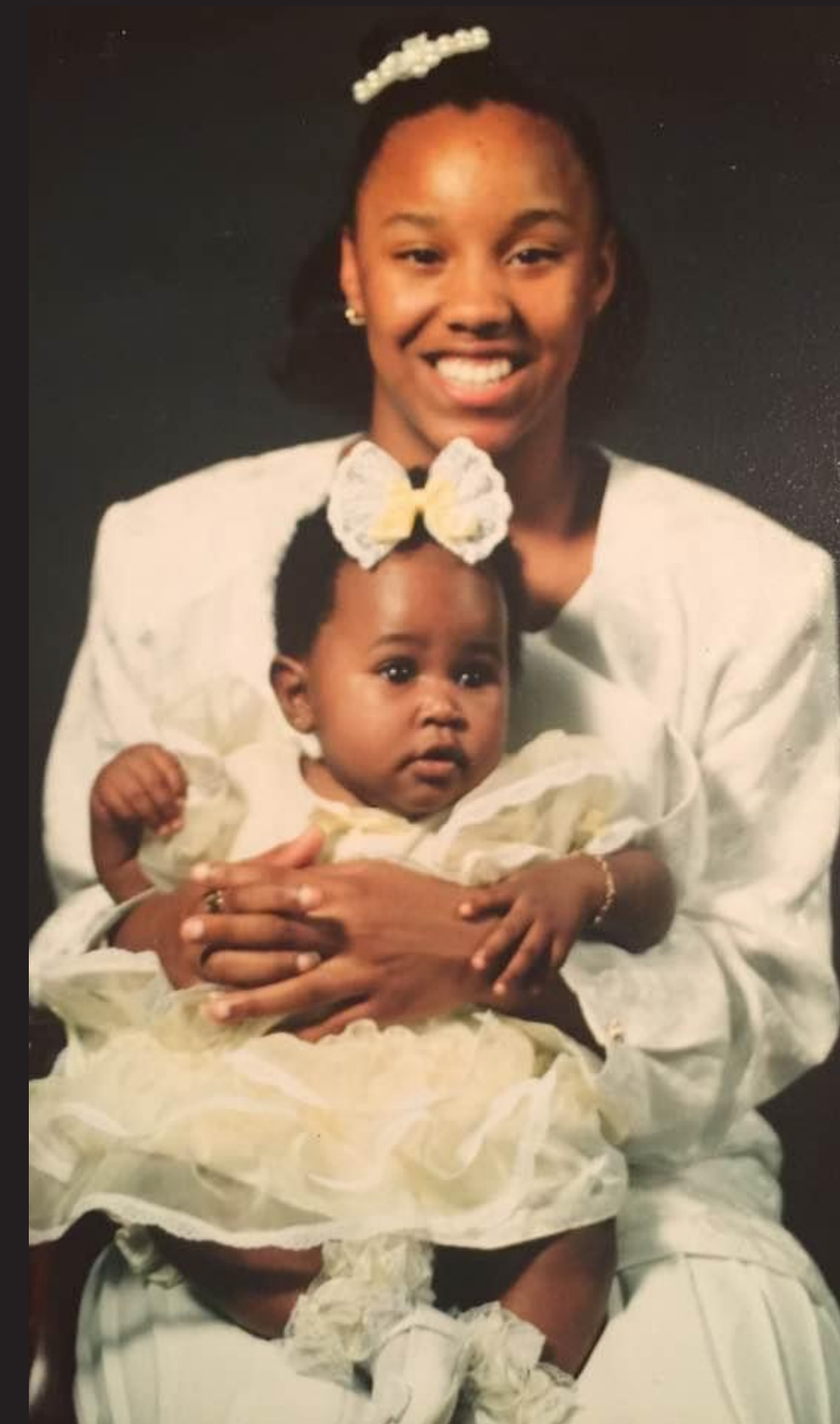
In founding Mr. Potato Spread with my husband Aaron in 2014, I embraced the spirit of entrepreneurship not just as a business venture, but as a beacon of hope and a testament to the power of resilience and hard work. It was a way to show that from the depths of uncertainty, one can rise to build something extraordinary.

In 2021, after several deaths in my family, we adopted my cousins, Allen and Alayah. It was an easy choice because it was a continuation of my commitment to change our family's narrative. It is a living testament to my philosophy: no matter where you start, with love, resilience, and determination, you can chart a new path and inspire others to do the same.

In my journey, I've learned that the greatest legacy one can leave is not just a thriving business, but a family empowered to break cycles and forge new destinies.



Lakita at 3 years old



Stephanie and Breanna



The Spann's



PART II: MANAGEMENT

Our journey at Mr. Potato Spread, which started in 2014 as a delivery-only catering company, was built on a foundation that challenges and transcends the typical fast-food industry norms. Rapid growth and the addition of five delivery drivers marked the beginning of a management style deeply rooted in servant leadership.

We are steadfast in our commitment to changing the stereotype about hourly employees in fast food. Rejecting the minimum wage standard, we've always strived to offer compensation that respects the dignity and hard work of our team. This philosophy isn't just about pay; it's about ensuring our employees can build full, prosperous lives. Our pride swells in knowing our team members have achieved significant life milestones, like purchasing homes and cars, and raising families, all while being part of our Mr. Potato Spread family.

As a leader, my approach has always been to serve first and lead second. Understanding and meeting the unique needs of each team member is not just my responsibility but my privilege. This servant leadership style is about elevating and empowering every individual in our team.

At Mr. Potato Spread, we view every employee as a potential leader. This culture encourages sharing ideas, fostering innovation, and implementing team members' suggestions. By doing so, we cultivate a sense of ownership and collective success among our staff.

Recognizing hard work is fundamental in our culture. Regular appreciation of our team's efforts goes beyond acknowledgment; it reinforces their value to our success. This practice has helped us build a cohesive, motivated team that shares our passion and commitment to excellence.

This management style has not only been a cornerstone of our success but also a reflection of our commitment to societal change. By prioritizing the needs and aspirations of our employees, we've created a thriving community within our workplace. It's a testament to the power of a leadership style that values, supports, and elevates every team member.

Our vision extends beyond business success; it's about nurturing a community where every member leads a fulfilling life, both within and outside our walls.

Mission Statement

At Mr. Potato Spread, our mission is to infuse passion into every aspect of our business. We are dedicated to crafting and serving the finest quality food, prepared with love and care, to delight our customers' taste buds. We commit ourselves to the well-being and growth of our employees, fostering a workplace where their passion can flourish. Furthermore, we passionately engage with our community, striving to make a positive impact in every way possible. With unwavering dedication to passion, we aim to create a world where delicious food, thriving employees, and a stronger community come together in perfect harmony."

Core Values

- We will conduct business in the highest and most ethical manner and comply with all laws, rules, and governing regulations;
- We will discover and develop the entrepreneurial spirit of individuals and families to make them personally, financially and professionally successful through owning, operating and expanding a thriving business;
- We will provide our guests an outstanding dining experience in a family-friendly atmosphere;
- We will provide team members with a friendly, safe, respectful, and professional work environment with a diverse culture;
- We will be a partner in education by promoting the restaurant industry as a viable and respected career choice;
- We will be a community partner, involved in supporting state, regional or city governments, as well as local businesses, schools, churches and organizations.



Lakita with an employee after her high school graduation

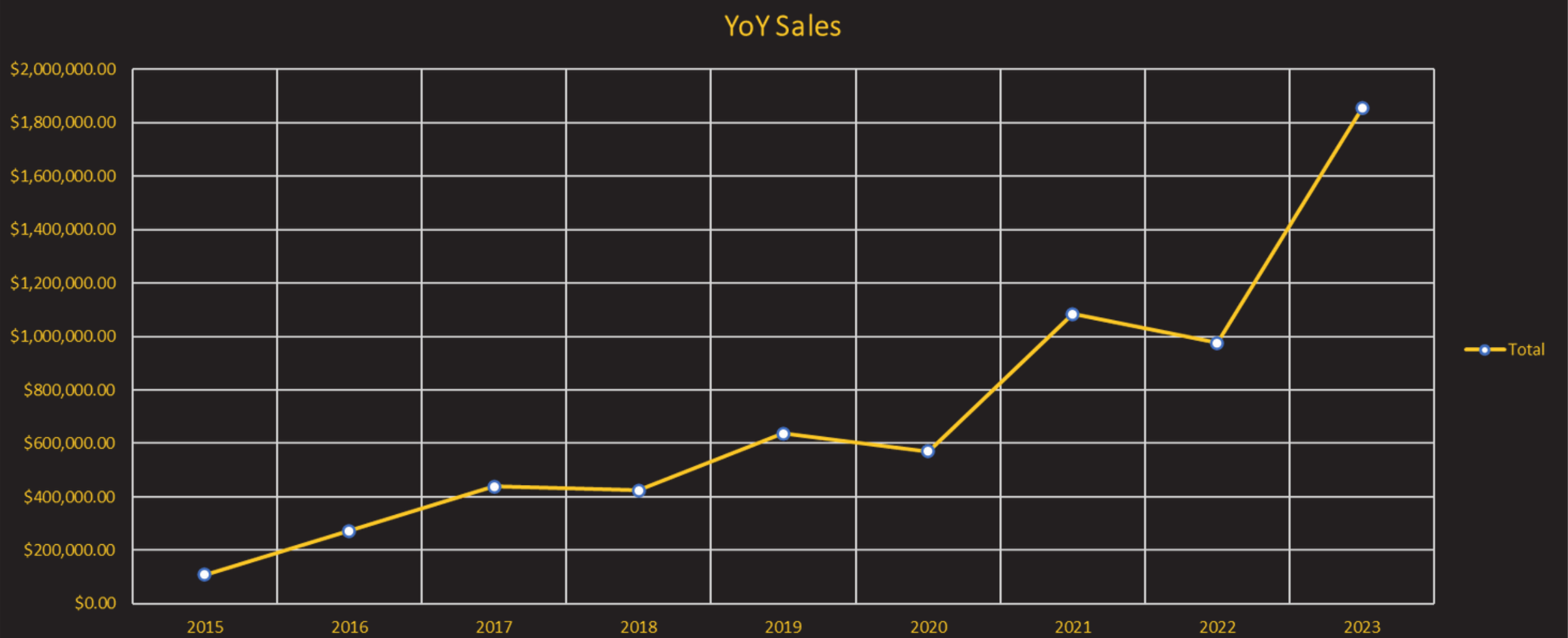


PART II: GROWTH

Mr. Potato Spread, since its inception at the end of 2014, has shown impressive growth in sales, as illustrated by the year-over-year figures. Testing our concept as a delivery only catering company from 2014 - 2016 allowed for the introduction of the food truck in 2016. We understood the importance of delivery with a concentration on businesses before there was an Ubereats or Doordash in Jacksonville.

We consistently expanded services, 2017 and 2018 and perfected our systems and processes for delivery and food truck operations. The opening of the first brick-and-mortar location in 2019 significantly increased sales that we were able to maintain in 2020 despite market challenges due to Covid-19. We were able to pivot quickly, changing our delivery model to homes and launch curbside delivery from our Regency Mall location. Additionally, the truck serviced neighborhoods in lieu of our previous business lunch truck model. Our employees were pivotal in assisting us with this pivot allowing us to keep them employed throughout the pandemic.

The year 2021 marked a substantial leap to \$1.1 million, coinciding with the opening of the Orange Park Mall location. Sales slightly dipped in 2022 with the introduction of a franchised location, but rebounded strongly to in 2023, following the relocation to the River City Market Place. This graph demonstrates the strategic growth and resilience of Mr. Potato Spread, showcasing the success of its expansion from a delivery-only service to a multi-location brand."



MPS Food Truck at a Food Truck Rally



MPS Food Truck at a Food Truck Rally



MPS Orange Park Grand Opening



MPS Philips Highway Grand Opening

PART II: INNOVATIVENESS AND RESPONSE TO ADVERSITY AND COMPETITION

Redefining the Potato At Mr. Potato Spread, we saw an opportunity to transform the humble potato from a side dish to a star. Our top-selling Crab Pot Potato, a creative spin on a low country boil, exemplifies our innovative approach. Seafood, corn, boiled egg, garlic butter, and Old Bay seasoning come together to redefine what a potato dish can be. With an array of unique toppings and combinations, we've turned the ordinary into extraordinary.

Our journey began with personal savings and a 401(k), a leap of faith underpinned by a clear vision. Balancing my corporate job between 2014-2016, I leveraged my experience to market our business through word-of-mouth, email, and social media. This dual focus allowed us to grow a robust following, ready and eager for our food truck launch.

We faced a competitive and at times unfriendly food truck environment head-on. Some competitors tried to limit our opportunities, but our professionalism and commitment to never canceling events, rain or shine, built our stellar reputation. Knowing our customer base intimately, we minimized risks and maximized profitability, even amidst industry challenges.

Adversity struck when a fire devastated our private kitchen, but we persevered, relying solely on our food truck. This challenging time was a testament to our resilience and ability to adapt. We continuously sought and incorporated customer feedback, both positive and critical, using it to refine our offerings and customer service.

Being a Model of Excellence in Service Professionalism and a commitment to quality have been our guiding principles. From our early delivery days covering Duval, Clay, and parts of St Johns counties to our food truck and restaurant, we've maintained a focus on excellence. Our systems and processes, honed through delivery services, were seamlessly adapted to our food truck, enhancing speed and customer service.

Our journey has been more than just serving food; it's about innovating and adapting, always with an eye towards the future. We continue to evolve, driven by our philosophy of reimagining possibilities and responding to challenges with creativity and determination.

Innovativeness isn't just about what you serve; it's about how you overcome, adapt, and thrive in the face of adversity.



Our famous Crab Pot Potato



Aaron and Lakita - Winners of Jax Truckies Contests



Aaron and Lakita - Winners of Jax Truckies Contests

PART II: LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

As a leader and business owner, my ethos is deeply rooted in community involvement and collaborative efforts. My passion for community, women, and business shapes not just our company culture at Mr. Potato Spread, but also our approach to business as a whole. The belief in the law of reaping and sowing - giving back to receive - is central to our philosophy.

- We are proud community partners with several impactful organizations:
- Daughter 2 Daughter: Donating meals to underprivileged youth in the Brentwood community, we help nourish bodies and minds.
 - Sustainable Events Network, Florida & Caribbean (SENEC): Aligning with SENE's mission, we contribute to initiatives focused on sustainability, food rescue, and best practices in conservation and CSR.
 - Northwest Rotary Club: Our partnership includes donating lunches for teacher appreciation events, highlighting our commitment to education and community support.
 - Highlands Elementary: Supporting their Communication and Social Skills Program for Autism Spectrum Disorder, we provide lunches for teachers, emphasizing our commitment to education and inclusivity.

We foster a culture where employees are encouraged to volunteer and participate in community initiatives. This not only enhances our community impact but also enriches our team's experience, strengthening our collective commitment to social responsibility.

My involvement extends beyond donations and partnerships. I actively engage with the Jax Chamber's Bridge 2 Business cohorts, sharing experiences and offering encouragement to aspiring entrepreneurs. We've also Sponsored Jax Chamber'sd The Longest Table for 5 years. I am also on The Board for The Empowerd Kitchen an organization that empowers and trains women In the food Industry. My work as the Co-Founder of The Girlfriends Brand also serves to empower women from all walks of life thru uplifting and educational events.

Looking ahead, my goal is to continue supporting and collaborating with organizations that align with our values. By giving back, we don't just contribute to the community; we fuel our own passion and drive for making a positive impact.
Our community contributions are a reflection of our belief that true success is measured not just in profits, but in the positive impact we have on the lives of others.

May 5, 2021

Dear Mr. Potato Spread-Founder-Owner,

On behalf of Daughter To Daughter Inc., it is with a warm heart that we would like to express our gratitude of THANKS for your generosity in providing over 50 nutritious meals. Your donation was valued in the amount of \$450.00. Without your generous donation, our Annual Holiday Party would not have been a success.

As you are aware, we are dedicated to creating and sustaining healthy communities that promote individual responsibility, economic growth, human dignity and hope for the future. Thank you for being a part of our mission to deliver services to the communities with integrity and mutual accountability.

Chuzanna M. Curtis, MHA
D2D President and Founder
904.497.3181
d2dier920@gmail.com

Daughter-To-Daughter Inc.,

Community Partner - Daughter to Daughter



Sustainable Events Network, Florida & Caribbean connected **WFA member, Lakita Spann and husband Aaron, entrepreneurial owners of Mr. Potato Spread** with the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa for a successful food rescue from the annual Florida Surveying & Mapping Society conference. Lakita utilized her Mr. Potato Spread Food Truck to pick-up and deliver the rescued food to the Jacksonville City Rescue Mission.

[READ THE FULL PRESS RELEASE](#)



Sustainable Events Network, Florida & Caribbean recently connected the Center for Nutrition and Food Security at University of North Florida Brooks College of Health with **Nancy Slatsky, Culinary Sales for Mr. Greens Produce** for a very successful partnership for food rescue. The result: **over 240 pounds of produce rescued weekly!**

[READ THE FULL PRESS RELEASE](#)

Community Partner - Sustainability Events Network



Community Partner NW Jax Rotary Club - Lunch Donation to Northwest Legends School

PART III: BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised right here in Jacksonville, Florida, I'm Lakita Spann, a true Jacksonville native with a passion for business and a commitment to making dreams come true. I'm not just a business owner; I'm a leader at the helm of Mr. Potato Spread, a culinary sensation with corporate restaurant locations, a thriving franchised outpost, and a beloved food truck that's taken the city by storm.

But my journey doesn't stop there. I'm also a driving force behind The Girlfriends Brand, where my dedication to business innovation knows no bounds. With a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix (2010) and the invaluable knowledge gained from completing The Bank of America Women in Entrepreneurship Program, Jax Chamber Jax Bridges Program, and the Jim Moran Institute Small Business Executive Program, I've honed my skills to lead with excellence.

My leadership style isn't just about titles; it's about guiding entrepreneurs to success. I've made it my mission to coach and mentor aspiring business owners in the art of strategy and industry respect. From understanding the intricacies of their chosen fields to crafting unique paths to success, I'm here to empower the next generation of entrepreneurs. Beyond business, I'm a proud parent to three amazing adult children—Breanna, Aaron, and Zahria—along with two more fantastic kids, Allen and Alayah. My journey is a testament to the power of dedication, hard work, and a commitment to giving back to the community that raised me.

Now, as I stand nominated for the Small Business Leader of the Year award by the Jax Chamber, I'm not just representing my own journey; I'm representing the spirit of entrepreneurship in Jacksonville. Join me on this remarkable journey of leadership, mentorship, and unwavering commitment to the business world, as we continue to write the success story of Mr. Potato Spread, The Girlfriends Brand, and countless entrepreneurs under my wing.



PART III: LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

To Whom It May Concern,

I wanted to prepare a letter on behalf of Lakita Spann, nominee for Small Business Leader of the Year, as a recipient of her unselfishness and true leadership persona. I too am a restauranter and co-owner of Two Sisters and A Deviled Crab; and when we first started, I had no clue where to begin, nor was I aware of a community of people that I could be a part of just for help in business matters. After conjuring up the courage, I reached out to the most prevalent and recognized restaurant owner that I was aware of here in Jacksonville. Immediately, Lakita wrote me back and said that she would love to help me with anything I needed assistance with. She gave me her personal number and told me to reach out at any time.

Within a year, we grew from being solely a food truck to having a brick and mortar. I reached out to Lakita every step of the way. I wanted her opinion on our initial thought of taking the leap of getting an actual location. Not only was she encouraging, but she always provided the good and bad that came along with each potential risk. In every interaction with her, I could tell that leadership just came to her naturally. She encouraged me to subscribe to newsletter and different written materials that cater to the restaurant industry so that I could stay informed about trends within the industry. She would tell me about different apps and resources available to businessowners to help with different aspects of their businesses. And although I knew she had her own very demanding business and employees to tend to, whenever she made/makes time for me, I never feel rushed or as if I am being a bother.

Furthermore, Lakita has been a woman of her word. No matter what I have asked her, she provides solid advice, based on her personal experience in business, as well as her leadership experience in corporate America. She has shared every contact that I have asked for, from a kitchen equipment seller/installer to a signage company. I tell her all the time, she is my self-proclaimed mentor, and I am so grateful for her. She is the epitome of a leader; collaboration over competition; as well as being stronger in numbers. Lakita genuinely wants to see people win and she exercises her leadership qualities to help ensure that; and that should be the main characteristic of true leader. Leaders will win regardless, but a true testament of a great leader is in the number of others they bring along with them to win. Lakita has countless examples of how she has helped others be successful, especially me.

There is no one else more deserving of the Small Business Leader of the Year award.

Thank you for your time and consideration,


Jo Neishia Johnson



December 4, 2023

To Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce:

I am pleased to provide a professional reference for Lakita Spann, co-founder of Mr. Potato Spread franchise, based on her remarkable achievements and leadership during her tenure at AT&T.

Lakita's rapid career progression, from an individual sales contributor to a technical sales consultant, and eventually to a Sales Leader, underscores her exceptional leadership abilities and dedication to fostering success in others. Her significant sales achievements include securing a \$1M contract as an individual contributor and leading her team to a \$3M deal as a Sales Leader. This demonstrates how her outstanding leadership, sales acumen, and ability to drive high-value contracts created mutually beneficial outcomes for the business and the customer.

Throughout her tenure, Lakita demonstrated strong leadership and teamwork skills and created a personal brand of leading by example. She consistently exceeded sales goals and collaborated with teammates to close deals. Her expertise in product integration, especially in merging different technology sales teams, reflects her adaptability and skill in integrating diverse product lines and teams. At the foundation of her success was Lakita's genuine investment in her team, partner organizations and customers.

Lakita's proficiency in consultative selling and relationship building was visible in her efforts to mentor retail store employees, a strictly voluntary initiative for her role. She exemplified a customer-centric approach and commitment to fostering growth within the company, no matter her role or title. Importantly, her experiences and training at AT&T laid a solid foundation for her entrepreneurial success, showcasing her ability to leverage corporate learning in a startup setting. There aren't many like Lakita who can successfully pivot from corporate intrapreneurship to successful entrepreneurship.

Lastly, Lakita's personal qualities of resilience, dedication, and consistency have played a significant role in her career journey, making her an asset in both corporate and entrepreneurial environments. She models for many what it takes to achieve success where you are planted.

Sincerely,

Marvy Moore

Marvy Moore, AT&T VP - Retired
Managing Partner
Verticality Concepts



December 1, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to wholeheartedly recommend Lakita Spann for her exceptional mentorship and consultancy skills. As the owner of NettaFurry Babies, I have had the distinct pleasure of working under Lakita's guidance for the past year, and the experience has been transformative for both me and my business.

Before meeting Lakita, NettaFurry Babies struggled with operational inefficiencies that hindered our growth and impacted our customer experience. Lakita's extensive background in business development and her innovative approach to problem-solving were evident from our very first interaction. She possesses a rare combination of technical expertise, business acumen, and interpersonal skills that make her an invaluable asset to any business, especially in the realm of small enterprises.

Lakita's mentorship went beyond mere business advice. She helped us implement practical systems and processes that revolutionized our internal operations. Her strategies were tailored to our specific needs, demonstrating her ability to understand and adapt to different business models and industry demands. The results were immediate and significant. We saw a marked improvement in our operational efficiency, which in turn positively impacted our customer satisfaction rates.

Perhaps most importantly, Lakita's mentorship fostered a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within our team. She encouraged us to think critically about every aspect of our business, from the daily operations to the broader strategic vision. Her guidance was always delivered with a perfect blend of professionalism and personal care, making every session with her both educational and enjoyable.

In summary, Lakita Spann is a remarkable mentor and business consultant. Her contributions to NettaFurry Babies have been invaluable, and I am confident that she will bring the same level of excellence and dedication to any endeavor she undertakes. I wholeheartedly recommend her without any reservations.

Sincerely,

Johnetta Wiggins

Johnetta Wiggins, Owner, NettaFurry Babies

ADDENDUM: STATEMENT OF MERIT

I am elated to be nominated as Small Business Leader of the Year 2024 by The Venture Services Division. If selected to represent the Jax Chamber Overall Small Business Leader of the Year 2024, it would be a remarkable milestone that not only acknowledges my journey but also shines a light on the vibrant entrepreneurial spirit of Jacksonville, Florida.

My path as a co-founder and co-owner of Mr. Potato Spread has been driven by a passion for the food industry and a commitment to community engagement. From launching a fast-casual restaurant brand and a food truck, to previously shaping small and medium-sized businesses during my 15 years at a Fortune 50 company, my focus has always been on innovation, efficiency, and profitability.

What sets my approach apart is a blend of comprehensive business acumen and an unwavering dedication to mentorship and community development. Transitioning from a successful corporate career to an entrepreneurial role, I have firsthand experience in navigating the complexities small businesses face. This has fueled my current venture as a business consultant and digital creator, where I assist other small businesses in the food industry and beyond to overcome operational challenges and evolve into respected brands.

Being part of the Jax Chamber has allowed me to connect with and learn from an incredible network of entrepreneurs and leaders. It has been a platform for not only sharing my expertise but also for gaining invaluable insights that have shaped my approach to business and leadership.

If honored with this title, I plan to leverage it to further advocate for small business growth and sustainability in Jacksonville. I envision creating more collaborative spaces and initiatives that foster innovation, provide educational resources, and enhance visibility for emerging businesses. It's about building a thriving ecosystem where small businesses don't just survive but flourish and contribute significantly to our local economy.

In conclusion, this nomination is not just a recognition of my individual journey but a testament to the collective strength and potential of our small business community in Jacksonville. Together, we are writing a new chapter of growth, resilience, and success.

Lakita Spann

ADDENDUM: IN THE NEWS

8:13

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POSITIVELY JAX | A Rotary alumni association used donated funds to purchase meals from two local Black-owned businesses: Taste Grace, a BBQ food truck, and Mr. Potato Spread, a restaurant and food truck that specializes in gourmet baked potatoes.



Local Rotary feeds health care workers while supporting Black-owned businesses
news4jax.com

Mr. Potato Spread

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No dud spud: Mr. Potato Spread wows customers at OP Mall





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ADDENDUM: IN THE NEWS

Mr. Potato Spread expanding its roots in Jacksonville to open its first standalone restaurant



A Jacksonville couple who started out making gourmet baked potatoes in their home are preparing to open their first stand-alone restaurant as the family-owned business expands its footprint in Northeast Florida.

Rooted in Lakita and Aaron Spann's home kitchen, [Mr. Potato Spread](#) began as a catering service, grew into a popular food truck then expanded to the food courts of two Jacksonville area shopping malls.

MENU

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Q

FOOD & LIFESTYLE

Regency Resurgence: why four food trucks are joining forces for a food hall in Regency Square Mall



By [Dahlia Ghabour](#)
Reporter, Jacksonville Business Journal
3 hours ago

New life is coming to Regency Square Mall – or at least, to its food court.

When Lakita Spann, owner of the Mr. Potato Spread food truck, announced she would be opening in the beleaguered mall's food court in March, several other food truck owners decided to join her.



JAX DAILY RECORD WEDNESDAY, JUN. 8, 2022 05:00 AM EST
Mr. Potato Spread fan takes the next step

SHARE f t e COMMENTS 0

Randall Coursey liked the food, so he bought a franchise, opening along Philips Highway near Butler Boulevard.

by: [Drew Dixon](#) | Drew Dixon, Contributing Writer

Food & Lifestyle

Mr. Potato Spread to open first stand-alone location

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Mr. Potato Spread announces franchising opportunities on First Coast
MR. POTATO SPREAD ANNOUNCES FRANCHISING OPPORTUNITIES ON FIRST COAST

By [Timothy Gibbons](#) – Editor in chief, Jacksonville Business Journal
Apr 4, 2022, 2:41pm EDT

IN THIS ARTICLE

Three years after opening its first brick-and-mortar store, popular food truck Mr. Potato Spread has signed a lease for its first stand-alone location.

The new store – its largest yet – will be at River City

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