

Letter from the Publisher and Editor

With February being Black History Month, we think that this is an especially appropriate time to share stories of area Black-owned businesses.

For the entire month, the **San Diego Business Journal** is dedicating a special section in each issue to tell these inspiring stories. In each issue we will feature stories of businesses in various local industries. This week we begin with stories about Black-owned businesses in the media, real estate, restaurant, consulting, beverage, nonprofit, technology and education sectors.

Black business owners will be celebrated on Feb. 25, in association with the **Central San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce**, as we host a virtual panel and awards event. The panel will be moderated by **Mitch Mitchell**, VP, state government affairs & external affairs, **Sempra Energy**. The panel will also feature **Mike Fasulo**, CEO, **Sony Electronics**; **Mark Stuart**, CEO, **San Diego Foundation**; **Caroline Winn**, CEO, **San Diego Gas & Electric**; and **Doug Winter**, CEO, **Seismic**.

We hope these stories will not only inform, but build an increasing awareness of Black-owned businesses in our community.



Barb Chodos
President and Publisher



Jay Harn
Editor-in-Chief

CELEBRATING
BLACK BUSINESS
OWNERS

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL


Virtual Event
**February 25, 2021
2 pm - 3:30 pm**

 Preview Publication: **February 22, 2021**

 Event Recap: **March 8, 2021**

In Association With



In celebration of Black History Month, we are honoring the achievements of Black Owned Businesses in our community. We will be hosting a CEO panel discussion that will share best practices in inclusive leadership and how companies can support Black-Owned Businesses.

Nominations Now Open
Register Today!

This event is generously brought to you by our sponsors. Registration is required.

www.sdbj.com/bizevents/

For more information and sponsorships, please contact Shelley Barry, 858-277-6359 or email sbarry@sdbj.com



Photo Courtesy of Tracy Morris.

Group photo of Blue Heart Foundation students at the college signing day event to celebrate their accomplishments

CREATING WELL-ROUNDED STUDENTS

NONPROFIT: Foundation Gives Young Men Tools to Succeed

■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

Ke'Aun Dent is working towards his pilot's license, while also exploring acting and pursuing a small business called Ke's Kitchen, where he sells homemade cakes made from his family's recipes.

Dent is finishing up his senior year at **San Diego High School**, online, and in the fall, he is headed to **Morehouse College** to pursue a degree in international business. From his budding business to his college prospects, he said his preparedness is in no small part thanks to **The Blue Heart Foundation**.

"I just want to do business and I want to ultimately like get in a position of power where I can



Tracy Morris
Founder & Executive
Director
Blue Heart
Foundation

create jobs and job opportunities for people who look like me," Dent said.

He explained that he always knew he wanted to be an entrepreneur and study business in college, but it was his involvement with the **The Blue Heart Foundation**, where he is the Student President, that has given him the tools to make it happen.

Tracy Morris founded **The Blue Heart Foundation** in 2013 alongside his wife, April Ray, to provide underserved youth various experiences and encourage them to understand that they are greater than their current circumstances.

Morris, who grew up in South East San Diego, started the foundation with the intention of giving young men in his community a swiss-army knife of life skills to succeed in the future. Students can join the program in 7th grade and benefit from the program through high school.

"Everything that I do and God puts in my head, I mean, I've always looked at doing the best with what I've had, and then go further with it," Morris said.



Jasmine Sadler
Founder
The STEAM
Collaborative

Tools for Success Through STEAM

Jasmine Sadler, founder of **The STEAM Collaborative**, worked with Dent during a **STEM** pitch competition in 2019 through the **Blue Heart Foundation**. Sadler prepared the teams for a friendly competition that challenged them to conceptualize and pitch an app that addressed an unmet need in their community.

Just a few weeks back, she ran into Dent at a farmer's market where he was selling his carrot cake and afterwards, she encouraged him to create a pitch deck for his cake company, a practice she introduced to the **Blue Heart** boys for the competition.

"Now, it is very normal for him to have a business and for me to tell him you know, you should create a pitch deck on that and he's like, okay, and he knows what that means," Sadler said. "It normalizes entrepreneurship for these boys."

One of the goals of the competition,



Photo courtesy of Jasmine Sadler.

STEM small business mentors at the Blue Heart Foundation monthly meeting on the UCSD Campus.

Sadler explained, was to show these high school age boys that they don't have to wait to become an entrepreneur.

Sadler, who started her small business in 2014, has impacted roughly 8,000 students through the **STEAM Collab**. While she was growing up in Detroit, Mich. Sadler said she learned a lot from informal education spaces and now she aims her services at collaborations with museums and after-school programs.

What started with Sadler tutoring students in math outside of her full-time engineering job, turned into a business venture that has received local recognition and a spot in the business accelerator **Program Connect All** at the **Jacobs Center**.

Using her degree in Aerospace Engineering, her MBA and her skills as a dancer, Sadler's work is centered on elevating equity in education through Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (**STEAM**) curriculum which encourage students to creatively solve problems.

"That's all we're trying to do in everything that we do; can we get them to see two, three, four different answers to a solution," Morris said. "So, the **STEM** piece is critical."

Blue Heart partners with local organizations such as **The STEAM Collab** to give its students the opportunity to explore careers in **STEM** through monthly projects. Over the past few months of the pandemic, Morris

said they've adapted their curriculum to toggle between live and virtual offerings.

This year, with support from **Black Tech Inc.** the upcoming project challenges students to build and program an interactive, exercise mirror — similar products retail for over \$1,000 — that they can keep after the project.

Multitude of Opportunities

Morris explained that a few weeks out of each month are dedicated to **STEM**, because it offers his guys common sense, critical thinking skills and confidence. He added that "boys get bored" so he tries to offer a mul-

titude of opportunities that will appeal to his students and create well-rounded people.

Additionally, each week includes other activities such as virtual, "culinary therapy" that teaches students the importance of mindfulness through cooking. The 28 boys in the program can also participate in Step practice and reconnect with an assigned mentor who checks in on each young man's well-being.

For **Blue Heart** students like Dent, he's taken to heart the lessons he's learned in the program and Morris' mentality to "hunt" and take every opportunity that comes your way.

"I like to not limit myself to like certain things, I just want to explore everything," Dent said. "And that's when you really find what you love to do when you explore a little bit more." ■



Ke'Aun Dent
Student President
Blue Heart
Foundation

The Blue Heart Foundation

FOUNDED: 2013

FOUNDER: Tracy Morris, April Ray

HEADQUARTERS: Mira Mesa

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION: The Blue Heart Foundation is a non-profit organization that focuses on under-served youth ages 13-19 in the greater San Diego County community.

NOTABLE: The Blue Heart Foundation offers "culinary therapy" as a program to help the students practice mindfulness through food.

CONTACT: 619-410-7944, theblueheartfoundation@gmail.com

The STEAM Collaborative

FOUNDED: 2014

CEO: Jasmine L. Sadler, MBA

HEADQUARTERS: Mission Valley

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION: The STEAM Collaborative increases the number of diverse children — of all genders and cultures — pursuing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, alongside artistic endeavors.

NOTABLE: Jasmine Sadler is both a trained ballerina and a rocket-scientist by trade.

IMPACT: Since the STEAM Collab's founding, about 8,000 students have been impacted by this program

CONTACT: jasmine@STEAMcollab.com, 619-512-3676, @theSTEAMcollab

THRIVING IN I.T.

TECH: Co. Aided by Participating in Federal Program

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

Clement Johnson got some welcome news about his future recently.

His company, Carlsbad-based **ClemTech LLC**, does business with the U.S. government, providing information technology. In one sense, Johnson's \$1.7 million business is like a lot of other companies, including firms that are much bigger and nationally known.

Johnson, however, has an ace in the hole. The U.S. government has a goal of awarding at least 5% of all federal contracting dollars to small, disadvantaged businesses.

ClemTech — and other companies like it — are able to receive such set-aside



Photo courtesy of ClemTech LLC

Clement Johnson in his office at ClemTech LLC. The bookcase behind him includes memorabilia from his 24 years in the U.S. Marine Corps

ClemTech LLC

FOUNDED: 2013

CEO: Clement Johnson

HEADQUARTERS: Carlsbad

BUSINESS: Knowledge management and information management

REVENUE: \$1.7 million in 2019

EMPLOYEES: Five

WEBSITE: www.ClemTechLLC.com

NOTABLE: As a Marine, Johnson founded an artillery training school in the Las Pulgas area of Camp Pendleton, which stands today

CONTACT: (855) 816-5558 or services@ClemTechLLC.com

business by participating in a **U.S. Small Business Administration** program for

businesses owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

The initiative is called the 8(a) Business ➔ *ClemTech page 17*

DETERMINATION, FAITH AND GRIT

REAL ESTATE: Carla Farley First Black Woman to Head Realtor's Association

■ By RAY HUARD

Carla Farley formed her own real estate company — **Corban Realty Group** — in 1994 after working as an agent for **Century 21**.

"I thought well, you have a broker's license, just be your own brokerage," Farley said.

She has also become a key voice for the real estate professionals in San Diego as president of the **Greater San Diego Association of Realtors** — the first black woman to head the organization.

Active in the **New Creation Church** of San Diego, Farley also is a deeply religious person as evidenced by the name of her real estate business.

"Corban means a gift consecrated to God. For me, that was my mantra, that everything that happened would be contracted to God," Farley said. "God always sees about me, he definitely sees about me."

She also is a board member of the **National Association of Realtors**, a board member of the **California Association of Realtors**, and a member of the state organization's fair housing task force and president of **Smart Coast** a nonprofit established in 2019 "to promote and advocate for private property rights and smart land use policies in coastal regions," according to the group's website.

If that wasn't enough, Farley is a board member of **Rebuilding Together San Diego**, chair of the **Ambassadors Foundation** — a charitable foundation established by the Greater San Diego Association of Realtors; a member of the Land Advisory Group of the **San Diego Housing Commission**, and a member of the Government and Finance Committee of the **San Diego**

County Taxpayers Association.

Because of all those activities, Farley has scaled back her real estate business for now to a staff of two — herself and an assistant.

Since becoming president of the local Realtor's association, Farley said she sells from eight to 10 homes a year.

At her peak with as many as six employees, she said she was selling 18 to 22 homes annually.

"I stayed small on purpose. I'm not trying to get into growing this big office," Farley said. "I always want to sell."

Mentors

Farley was born and raised in San Diego, living at various times in Southeast San Diego, City Heights and Barrio Logan.

"Before it was Barrio Logan, it was just Logan," Farley said.

A graduate of **Lincoln High School** and **San Diego City College**, Farley worked in accounting and as a licensed vocational nurse and a medical clerk before getting into real estate.

She credits several mentors for her success — **Margaret Miller** of **Century 21 Teamwork** and **Ulysses and Donna Shiepe**, brokers and owners of **Foster Hamilton Real Estate** in Bonita.

"We all started at Century 21 Teamwork in the day," Farley said.

The mother of three sons, Farley said she became a real estate broker in 1989 because it was a job where she could work and still spend time with her children.



Carla Farley
Founder
Corban Realty Group

Her husband, Michael, is a Navy veteran.

"It was having three kids and figuring out how could you work and be there for the kids. They were little," Farley said.

Grit

In becoming president of the Association of Realtors, Farley hopes to serve as a role model for others.

"That's huge, with all things going on now, here you have a Black female from Lincoln High School has risen and become president of the association," Farley said. "It definitely is a business that I think Black people have a tremendous role in. I think they become leaders in helping the communities in home ownership. Home ownership invigorates communities."

As a Black woman, it hasn't always been easy for Farley.

"Unfortunately, I have to give 100%, 120% to match somebody else's 90%," Farley said. "It takes money in this business to get started, so you have that roadblock in addition to being a Black female."

Farley said she has encountered discrimination in her career, not always overt — "just in how you're treated, the unspoken rules, how you're referred to."

"It's unfair, but what are you going to do? You can either wait for many, many years down the line for it to change or you can go ahead and show them," Farley said. "I don't buy into (being) the victim."

Farley's advice to Black men and

women who want to get into real estate is "You have to have some tough skin."

"I think all Realtors have to have tough skin but when you're dealing with these other things, you really have to have tough skin, tough skin and some grit. Your grit has to be a little bit more."

Satisfaction

Farley handles all sides of real estate deals and property management, but she specializes in probate sales — handling property that goes through probate court.

"It's a very unique little niche," Farley said. "I sat down and tried to figure out what is the one thing that you can really do well. That one kept showing up."

Despite the challenges she has faced, Farley said real estate has been a rewarding career.

"The one thing that says why you do this is when you hand the keys to that family or that person and you see you played a role in changing that person's life, especially if it's their first home, you become part of their life," Farley said. ■

Corban Realty Group

FOUNDED: 1994

OWNER: Carla Farley

HEADQUARTERS: downtown

BUSINESS: real estate broker

EMPLOYEES: 2

WEBSITE: www.corbanrealty.net

NOTABLE: Farley is the first black woman to become president of the Greater San Diego Association of Realtors

CONTACT: carla@corbanrealty.net

GROWING DURING LOCKDOWN

RESTAURANTS: Coop's West Texas BBQ Increases Revenue as Owner Adapts

■ By MARIEL CONCEPCION

Last March, just days after the global coronavirus crisis hit, **Coop's West Texas BBQ Inc.**, the Lemon Grove comfort food mainstay, was ready to shutter its doors.

"It was the Friday after the first case was announced and we let all our employees go – we were getting ready to close," said **Brad "Coop" Cooper**, owner and CEO. "But something kept tugging at me over the weekend: my main three people have been with me since I opened up and I know they depend on this money to feed their families. My daughter depends on it. I depend on it. Something just told me, 'if you close, you won't be able to open back up again.' On Sunday, I asked God to give me a solution and let me know what to do. And on Monday, I told my daughter, 'how about you and I go in there on Tuesday and see what happens?' We went in that day and it was the busiest we'd been since Christmas."

Within hours, Cooper had called his employees back to work. And, since then, Coop's BBQ has been reopened for pick-up and delivery through third-party services like **UberEats**, **DoorDash** and **Post-Mates**. As a result, its revenue is projected to increase from \$1.3 million in 2019 to \$1.5 million in 2021.

How it All Started

Cooper, who grew up between San Diego and Texas, launched Coop's West Texas BBQ in 2007. He was subconsciously inspired by both his mother and father, who ran separate food businesses while he was growing up. In the 1990s, Cooper had his first foray in running his own food place, when he and his sister opened



Photo Courtesy of Coop's West Texas BBQ Inc.

Coop's West Texas BBQ Inc., located in Lemon Grove, is projecting \$1.5 million in revenue in 2021.



Photo Courtesy of Coop's West Texas BBQ Inc.
Coop's West Texas BBQ Inc., founded in 2007, has eight employees and offers seven different meats on its menu.

a restaurant in North Park. But that was short-lived for Cooper, who moved back to Texas shortly after it opened due to the passing of his first wife.

At that time, his father was running a small BBQ restaurant in Texas. That's when Cooper developed an affinity for the style of food.

For over a year, Cooper stayed in Texas, learning the craft from his father that would later, unbeknownst to him, become his own livelihood.

When he returned to San Diego, he enrolled in nursing school and launched his medical career at **Kaiser Permanente** hospital. That, Cooper said, is when he began honing his BBQ skills and testing his own recipes among his work friends.

"What I used to do is I used to smoke meats and vacuum seal it and freeze it and I would sell it to my coworkers," he said. "I used to call it BBQ in a bag. I used to also drive to beauty shops and barber-shops over the weekends and sell BBQ food plates."

It wasn't until a few years later that he was approached by a local woman who was opening a co-op food location in Lemon Grove, Cooper said. Not interested in running his own restaurant – or so he thought – Cooper agreed to take the lunch hours, sharing the 1,300 square foot space with two other alternating operators. When that woman wasn't able to keep her part of the bargain, Cooper decided to negotiate the lease and open Coop's as a standalone operation.

He first won the landlord over with a plate of BBQ brisket and ribs, collard greens and yams, he said.

Local Black Community

Today, Cooper is one of the most respected BBQ men in town and Coop's BBQ is a fixture not only within the local Black community, but all of San Diego County. In 2016, Coop's made Yelp's "Top 100 Places to Eat in the Nation" list. He said people drive from places like Poway, Orange County and Eastlake to have a taste of his West Texas flavor.

Inspired by his success, Cooper opened a second concept, **Da Chicken Coop**, in 2014 (it remained opened for a year and then reopened in 2018 as a chicken and waffles spot). That location is also doing well, he said.

Tara Leigh Cooper, general manager at Coop's and daughter to Cooper, said it is consistency that makes Coop's stand out among other BBQ operators in town.

"Consistency is major in the restaurant industry as it keeps our loyal customers coming back," she said, adding that since the beginning of 2020, Coop's hours have been modified to 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. "Reconstructing our business for take-out and



Tara Leigh Cooper
General Manager
Coop's West Texas
BBQ Inc.

delivery only has changed the game for us completely. It allows us to focus on our products and customer service. The fact that we have customers trying their best to make it within the five hours we are open is impressive. It shows me we have the support of

the community and beyond, since we have customers drive from L.A. I always tell the staff: you serve one great meal along with some great customer service, it will return tenfold."

Later this year, Cooper hopes to launch the first Coop's West Texas BBQ online store, through which he will sell packaged, fully cooked meats. He also plans to broaden the Coop's brand by developing a franchising model by Q4. ■



Brad Cooper
Owner/CEO
Coop's West Texas BBQ Inc.

Coop's West Texas BBQ Inc.

FOUNDED: 2007
OWNER/CEO: Brad Cooper
HEADQUARTERS: Lemon Grove
BUSINESS: BBQ restaurant.
PROJECTED REVENUE: \$1.3M in 2019; projected to reach \$1.5M in 2021
EMPLOYEES: eight
WEBSITE: www.coopsbbq.com
NOTABLE: Early 2020, Coop's changed its hours of operation from 10am to 3pm.
CONTACT: 619-588-0478

DIVERSIFYING TECH TALENT

EDUCATION: Co. Has Coached More Than 100 Students

■ By FRED GRIER

Mike Roberts, founder and chief apprenticeship officer at **San Diego Code School**, has a passion for helping under-represented people break into the technology industry.

To support this mission, he launched a Black-owned code school in 2018, focused primarily on helping companies build high-performance engineering teams and bringing together individuals who are often overlooked during the job process.



Mike Roberts
Founder
San Diego Code School

San Diego Code School



FOUNDED: 2018

CEO: Mike Roberts

HEADQUARTERS: Escondido and Chula Vista

BUSINESS: Provides software apprenticeships

EMPLOYEES: 12

WEBSITE: www.sdcs.io

NOTABLE: Roberts operates the only Black-owned Code School in the region.

CONTACT: (619) 320-8378



Photo Courtesy of San Diego Code School

San Diego Code School helps its graduates land high-paying tech careers.

Coding Bootcamp

During its first year of operation, it offered a 16-week bootcamp and low-cost alternative to earning a lengthy computer science degree similar to other coding

schools in the region.

It taught students in-demand software development languages, honing in on the most essential skills to get a job in the current market.

Its curriculum offered learning about full-stack web development using JavaScript with popular front-end and back-end web technologies.

➔ *Code School page 17*

ENCOURAGEMENT CHANGES LIVES

LAW: Janice Brown Helps Build Business, Strives for Diversity

■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

Janice Brown said the encouragement of one federal judge changed her life and it gave her the confidence to eventually found her own firm, **Brown Law Group**.

Now, she tries to do the same for others in her current role as a principal at **Meyers Nave**.

As a leader she humbly recognizes that she does not know everything, but takes everything as an opportunity to learn.

Early in her career, Brown worked at a firm where the leadership wasn't as flexible and one day after court, a federal judge called Brown back to her chamber. The judge went out of her way to acknowledge Brown's talent and she encouraged her to find other opportunities that would foster her growth, rather than stifle it.

"That was a big risk on her part, because she doesn't know me," Brown said. "She took a risk that I would take the advice legitimately and still to this day I thank her, and I stay connected to her because she had confidence in me. When someone like a federal judge has confidence in you, that changes how you perceive yourself. So, I try to do that to other



Janice Brown
Principal
Meyers Nave

people because I understood what it meant when she did that for me."

While at the U.S. Justice Department, where she started her career, she was awarded "Outstanding Trial Attorney" and "Trial Lawyer of the Year" awards in under three years.

She founded her San Diego firm, Brown Law Group in 1999 and has served local corporations and Fortune 50 companies headquartered throughout the U.S. for over 20 years.

Merger with purpose

Back in October, Brown Law Group merged with Meyers Nave, a firm that serves businesses, public entities, nonprofits and P3s throughout California. The merger not only expanded Meyers Nave's reach to San Diego, but it also builds on its commitment to fostering diversity in its overall practice.

At Meyers Nave, Brown is a principal in the firm's Labor and Employment Practice, Workplace Investigations Practice and Commercial Litigation Practice, a rapidly growing field of law in California.

"Janice and her team bring exceptional experience and depth in high-impact employment litigation, both in Southern California and statewide," said **David Skinner**, managing principal at Meyers Nave. "By joining forces, Meyers Nave and Janice's team are uniquely qualified to meet the increasing demand for high quality labor and employment services on challenging and complex matters in the private and

public sector."

With more than 35 years of experience in trial, arbitration and appellate experience in state and federal courts Brown was drawn to the complex and people-oriented practice of employment law. She primarily represents companies with a pro-active and relationship focused approach that ensures employers are educated on the ever-changing labor laws.

Brown said the decision to join Meyers Nave was one of the best choices she's made. She knew she wanted to sell her firm eventually, but what really attracted her to Meyers Nave was the diverse leadership.

"It felt like a place that I could be myself in," Brown said. "What I've come to realize is the more yourself you are, the more...almost like magnetic, you are, because you're comfortable in your own skin. So I knew I needed to go someplace where I was comfortable in my own skin."

Skinner proudly shared that 60% of the firm's attorneys are comprised of women and minority attorneys and eight of the firm's practice group leaders are women and/or minority attorneys.

"What works for us at Meyers Nave is "hard-wiring" diversity and inclusion into every aspect of our business," Skinner said. "This is not just a core value. It is a key part of our strategic planning, business development training, recruiting and retention — including our summer diversity fellowship."

Building Business

Brown said another benefit to joining Meyers Nave was that it allowed her to continue working on her business venture called Beyond Law.

She helps lawyers not only build their own book of business, but understand how to manage a network of clients that will grow their career and ultimately their confidence. Also, with this understanding she said that her experience founding a minority, woman-owned business has been a strength in her career in more ways than one.

"To be an entrepreneur, to have a business you need to be resilient," Brown said. "Because you're gonna have people say no. And so, if people say no. You have to be comfortable with overcoming it." ■

Brown Law Group

(Merged with Meyers Nave)



FOUNDED: 1999 (Merged in Oct. 2020)

PRINCIPAL: Janice Brown

HEADQUARTERS: Downtown San Diego

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION: Meyers Nave attorneys provide regulatory, transaction and litigation legal services in California for businesses, public entities, non-profit organizations and P3s.

NOTABLE: Janice Brown is the immediate past Chair of the San Diego Economic Development Corporation, wherein she championed economic inclusion.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: Meyers Nave has six attorneys and four professional staff members in San Diego

WEBSITE: meyersnave.com

CONTACT: 800-464-3559 or jbrown@meyersnave.com

BRINGING CRAFT BEER TO THE SOUTH BAY

BEVERAGES: Chula Vista Brewery Only Black-Owned Brewhouse in San Diego County

■ By MARIEL CONCEPCION

Chula Vista Brewery is the only Black-owned brewhouse in all of San Diego County.

For owner **Timothy Parker**, launching the brew business was not only about representing for the African American culture, but bringing craft beer to the underserved area of South Bay.



Timothy Parker
Owner
Chula Vista Brewery

"I always loved beer," said the Chicago-native, who opened the 2,700 Chula Vista location in 2017 following a 20-year career in the **United States Navy**. "I was traveling the world and drinking beer all over the world. I was also a home brewer, and I saw a gap in craft beer in the Chula Vista area. When I retired, I wanted to do something I would love and enjoy. I always joke the craft beer industry found me."

Opening a Second Location

Inspired by the success of Chula Vista Brewery, which makes roughly \$1 million in revenue and 500 barrels a year on a five-barrel system, Parker is opening a second location in March – this time a brewpub in Eastlake, a neighborhood in Chula Vista.

At about 7,000 square feet, **Chula Vista Brewery of Eastlake** will not only serve all the craft creations Chula Vista

Brewery is known for (including the Humble, an IPA, and Guerita, a blonde ale), it will also have a full kitchen serving Texas-style BBQ. Additionally, the indoor/outdoor venue will increase the company's brewing capacity to 1,500 barrels thanks to the addition of a 10-barrel system, said Parker, as well as its overall profit.

Culture and Diversity

"What makes our brewery stand out is it is filled with culture and diversity," said **Dali Parker**, wife of Timothy Parker and co-owner of Chula Vista Brewery. "Our brewery is minutes away from the Mexico border and our focus is to bring quality beer to our neighborhood and community. We are the only Black-owned (and Brown-owned) brewery in San Diego out of 150+.



Photo Courtesy of Chula Vista Brewery
Guerita, a blonde ale, is one of Chula Vista Brewery's best sellers, according to the company.

Chula Vista in itself is a community that is widely diverse, rich and full of culture, and so is our brewery."

Timothy Parker couldn't agree more.

He said, in order to represent both his Black culture and his wife's Mexican culture, Chula Vista Brewery is full of décor that draws inspiration from both their heritages. This includes a lot of military memorabilia, he said, down to the hip-hop and reggaeton music that blares through the speaker system.

"People walk in here and they feel right at home," he said.

Other New Developments

The upcoming food and beverage place is not the only new development for Chula Vista Brewery.

In response to COVID-19, Timothy Parker said the company completely

switched over to a canning system last year. It purchased a crawling machine as well as a canning machine, both of which are stationed at the original location, he said.

The company typically cans a whole tank of its liquid production and, through a self-distribution model, sells product to about 30 locations, mostly within the Chula Vista area. This includes local grocery stores and liquor stores, said Parker, a move that has allowed the company to grow and expand its footprint.

Additionally, Chula Vista Brewery recently partnered with **Brooklyn Brewery**, also a Black-owned brewhouse out of New York City, to fund technical education and career advancement for black, indigenous and people of color in the brewing and distilling industries. Proceeds from **The Michael James Jackson Foundation**, named after a renowned beer and whiskey writer, will go toward eight scholarships, said Parker. ■

Chula Vista Brewery

FOUNDED: 2017

OWNER: Timothy Parker

HEADQUARTERS: Chula Vista

BUSINESS: Brewery

REVENUE: roughly \$1 million in 2019

EMPLOYEES: six

WEBSITE: www.chulavistabrewery.com

NOTABLE: Timothy Parker served in the military for 20 years and six days.

CONTACT: 619-616-8806

CREATING A RESOURCE

MEDIA: Company Figures They Are on the Cusp of Something Big

■ By RAY HUARD

Virgen Barnet and **Daniel Christian** figure they're on the cusp of something big.

About a year ago, the two cofounded an informal social networking business that slowly evolved into a more formal organization that they have branded as **Come Through Media**.

In January 2021, the two took Come Through Media to the next level, turning it into what Barnet said will be "a full-fledged media company."

"It's a work in progress," Barnet said, but among other things, she said the company will be a resource for companies who need stock images and video of Black families, workers and individuals to use in advertising campaigns and other presentations.

Although it sounds simple enough, Barnet and Christian said finding stock photos of Black persons is a challenge for companies who want to project an image of diversity because most of the images available to advertising agencies and others don't include them. It's a niche with little competition, she said.

"We want to create a resource library that reflected people of color a little more," Barnet said. "It's really tough to find B-roll (video) of people of color doing normal things."

With a background in advertising and website design and a bachelor's degree in art, digital media and design from the **University of California Santa Barbara**, Barnet is the creative director and brand manager of the fledgling company.

Before founding Come Through Media with Christian, Barnet said she was a designer for an advertising agency based in Hillcrest.

Christian, a videographer with a background in music production and video editing and job experience in sales and

property management, is the company's co-founder and production lead.

As it grows, the company will continue with its original social networking business, but Barnet doesn't like using that phrase to describe the company.

"Our focus is really bringing together this whole community, this web based community," Christian said.

"The common denominator is people who are working on something they care about and they want to be better," Barnet said. "They

come to us because they want to have these conversations in a place that feels safe to do so."

Although the primary purpose when Barnet and Christian started was to bring together people with similar interests, "We don't like to call ourselves a networking group because we hope we help people create," Barnet said.

"We just found opportunities to gather folks together and see where there was overlap, where they could collaborate with each other," Barnet said. "Peer to peer mentorship" is how she describes it.



Virgen Barnet
Co-founder
Come Through Media



Daniel Christian
Co-founder
Come Through Media

Come Through Media

FOUNDED: 2021

CO-FOUNDERS: Virgen Barnet and Daniel Christian

HEADQUARTERS: Normal Heights

BUSINESS:

EMPLOYEES: 2

WEBSITE: joincomethrough.com

NOTABLE: Come Through originated as a small mastermind group for creatives, newly pressed entrepreneurs and community organizers.

CONTACT: Via their website: <https://joincomethrough.com>

"We had people who were writers looking for someone to design a book cover, illustrators looking to tell their story through memes," Barnet said.

San Diego is particularly suitable for their kind of enterprise because "San Diego is a city where a lot of people come from out of town and they don't necessarily have these connections to pull from," Christian said.

"When we first started in January (2020), we came with the idea that we were going to be a group that set up events, events that people could actually go to just to be together, bounce ideas off of each other," Christian said. "COVID kind of forced us to, I don't want to say just necessarily pivot, but it forced us to think out of the box."

The result was that Come Through Media took its events online.

"We've been doing a lot of webinars," Christian said. "It really turns into a community of people who can help consult with each other."

For instance, COVID led some people to try going it alone as entrepreneurs with their own business.

In response, Come Through Media put together a session on financial literacy for business owners.

Come Through Media also has been helping people in branding their business, Christian said. ■

FINDING SOLUTIONS

TECH: CommSafe One of Few Venture-Backed Black-Owned Startups

■ By FRED GRIER

After retiring from the **United States Navy**, **Ty Smith** founded **CommSafe**, a Black-owned technology company that specializes in conflict and violence prevention.

CEO and co-founder at CommSafe Ty Smith said he got the idea for the company after realizing there was no leading solution that provides a systematic way to become aware of violent-related issues in real time.

"I founded CommSafe because there were no systematic way to identify these issues as they arise in real time," said



Ty Smith
CEO and Co-Founder
CommSafe

CommSafe AI

FOUNDED: 2015
CEO: Ty Smith
HEADQUARTERS: La Jolla
BUSINESS: tech company specializes in conflict and violence prevention.
EMPLOYEES: 10
WEBSITE: www.commsafe.ai
NOTABLE: Co. is participating in Evonexus, San Diego's largest tech startup incubator.
CONTACT: ty@commsafe.ai



The CommSafe AI Solution

Scan, Analyze, and Notify

CommSafe AI predicts and identifies workplace violence and toxic communication in real-time. Immediate intervention results in a safe space for employees.



Scanning Protocols are easy to configure.



Algorithms analyze communications for instances of conflict and violence.



Real-time notifications let key personnel get in front of issues prior to someone coming to work with a gun.



Photo courtesy of CommSafe.

To date, CommSafe has partnered with more than 45 leading companies including **UCLA Medical Center**, **Westfield Group**, **Clorox**, **Dexcom**, **Illumina**, and **Walt Disney**.

Smith. "Toxic organizational communication, has a very detrimental impact on employees as well as organizations. This communication can lead to patterns of bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, aggression, escalated

conflict, threats, discrimination, and violence."

To date, CommSafe has partnered with more than 45 leading companies and organizations across the US. Notable clients include **UCLA Medical Center**, **Westfield**

Group, **Clorox**, **Dexcom**, **Illumina**, and **Walt Disney**, among others.

The company reported that it is raking in eight-figure revenues annually and experienced 300% revenue growth in less than five years.

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STRONG FOUNDATIONS

CONSULTING: Crystal Sargent Taps Skills Honed in the Banking World

■ By BRAD GRAVES

Crystal Sargent recalled being out with a girlfriend about five years ago, at a little neighborhood bar and grill in Bay Park. The two got to talking about how they might start their own company, and Sargent left the restaurant with an idea in her head. "I put it on the back shelf," she said.

Sargent, who had worked in the banking world for more than two decades, had two life-changing events that convinced her the time to act was now.

First, her career with her longtime corporate employer came to an end. She then spent time in Greece and France. She was in Nice on the French Riviera when a terrorist in a truck drove through a crowd, taking the lives of many people near her.

Grateful to be back on U.S. soil again, Sargent got to thinking about what she might do with her time.

A New Start

The result is **Invested Advisors Inc.**, which she founded in 2016. The firm offers a variety of business consulting services, including marketing and communications. Invested Advisors also provides event marketing support and advice for financial institutions, government agencies and privately held business.

Market research, management consulting, marketing strategy, brand consulting, leadership development and digital marketing are among its specialties.

"We feel like we can come to the table with more solutions than a creative firm, and we're more entrepreneurial than some of the larger consulting firms," Sargent said. Instead of being a firm that pops in and out of a client's operations, Invested Advisors wants to grow with its clients and be a partner.

Almost five years into her business, Sargent can look back on a number of successful projects.

She has won 10 contracts with the **California Army National Guard** and has done work for the **Bureau of Ocean Energy Management** in Louisiana. The latter is a federal agency that shares information on the health of the environment in the Gulf Coast to parties as diverse as the environmental community and the oil and gas industry.

Another client has been the city of Oceanside, which promoted workforce training classes available through **MiraCosta College**.

A Varied Market

Sargent spent 25 years leading marketing and sales departments at commercial and private banks. "Banks attract business and consumers from all walks of life," she said, so she had to be strategic in how to attract a wide variety of clients.



Crystal Sargent
Founder and CEO
Invested Advisors

She is originally from Chicago and went to college in Madison, Wisconsin. She spent the early part of her career in the Upper Midwest. Sargent was recruited to come to California when a local bank needed help with marketing and regulatory affairs.

Sargent's business is certified as a disadvantaged business enterprise, or a DBE, by the **U.S. Department of Transportation**. DBEs are for-profit small businesses where socially and economically disadvantaged individuals own at least a 51% interest and manage the business. African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific and Subcontinent Asian Americans are presumed to be socially and economically disadvantaged, according to the department.

The department specifies that such businesses must have annual revenue of less than \$23 million.

Such certification is nice to have, but it is "not a guarantee you will win any contracts," Sargent said.

Federal and state government agencies have similar set-aside programs for women owned businesses and veteran owned businesses.

A misconception about work in the public sector is that it is price driven. "It really is about proven performance," Sargent said.

Staying Nimble in a Changing Market

Invested Advisors had a separate division dealing with corporate travel. That work abruptly came to an end when the world started dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

Sargent compared her situation to being in a twin-engine jet, and having one engine fail in flight. She was able to keep going with the strength of the other engine.

"We have managed through a global pandemic and grown the operation, despite losing the meetings and events side," she said.

Today, Sargent can look back with a sense of satisfaction.

"We've been in business for four years," Sargent said. "Most businesses don't make it through five." ■

Invested Advisors Inc.


FOUNDED: 2016
CEO: Crystal Sargent
HEADQUARTERS: Carlsbad
BUSINESS: Business consulting, including marketing and communications
EMPLOYEES: No direct employees, partnerships with three team members
WEBSITE: www.investedadvisors.com
NOTABLE: Sargent serves on a number of boards in San Diego region, and was part of the Old Globe Theatre board for a decade
CONTACT: (858) 472-3682 or hello@investedadvisors.com

ClemTech

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Development Program.

The news that Johnson got was that the government had extended his 8(a) certification. He will be able to use that status until at least 2025.

According to the SBA, the government limits competition for certain contracts under the 8(a) program. Businesses certified as 8(a) businesses are able to compete for set-aside and sole-source contracts. The government also provides resources for participating businesses, such as financial education and opportunities to join forces with other businesses.

The 8(a) program is “a definite advantage,” Johnson said.

ClemTech is also certified as a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business, which provides certain advantages of its own.

From Marine to Federal Contractor

ClemTech is a knowledge management and information management business. Johnson founded it in 2013 after a career in the U.S. Marine Corps and subsequent

work with several defense contractors.

The Carlsbad-based business deals in enterprise computing and networks, including cloud computing. It had \$1.7 million in revenue in 2019 and has five employees (two in San Diego County and three in Northern California).

Clients have included the **Marine Corps Systems Command**, **NASA**, the **Department of Homeland Security**, **Naval Surface Warfare Center Philadelphia** and the **Bureau of Reclamation**.

ClemTech’s main products integrate **Microsoft** with **Cisco** networking technology, the company’s proprietary hardware and the ClemNet data center. The business operates in data centers in Nevada, Illinois and New Jersey.

An ability to solve technical issues makes ClemTech a success, Johnson said. The company’s key value proposition, he said, is integrating knowledge management as well as information management into its solutions architecture.

Johnson does not want ClemNet to be merely a value added reseller, or just a company that passes on personnel to the government. While the business does both, it also does so with an eye toward making the client’s organization better.

Johnson also insists that his employees speak the same language as the business or military leaders they meet, and not make the discussion any more complicated than it has to be.

He Might Have Been a Sailor

Johnson got on a familiar basis with computers during his 24-year career in the United States Marine Corps.

His teen years had been hard. He was born in Compton and his family situation put him on the streets at age 15. Johnson traveled with family members and spent many nights in Los Angeles without a roof over his head.

He told a story of meeting a U.S. Navy recruiter and taking an aptitude test. He scored well. He scheduled a follow-up meeting, but the Navy recruiter never showed up. After waiting for four hours, a Marine Corps recruiter took notice of him.

“What? Are you still here,” Johnson recalled the recruiter saying. “What are you waiting on? You know, we’re the Marine Corps. We’re the partner of the Navy. Would you like to see what we could do for you?”

Soon Johnson was standing on the yellow footprints at Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. It was a defining moment for him.

“I was so scared out of my wits, but I was happy to have three square meals a day, a place to sleep and something to do that could possibly better my life,” Johnson said. “It was a relief.”

Johnson did well in the Marines. In fact, he excelled. He served in Kuwait and Iraq. In all, he spent 24 years in the service. After retiring from the Marines as a master sergeant, Johnson worked for several defense contractors. That part of his life included a period at Marine Corps Central Command in Bahrain.

The information technology skills he picked up formed the foundation for a college degree. In 2017, Johnson received a master of science in information and knowledge strategy from **Columbia University** in New York City. He also holds a master of science in management and project management from **Colorado Technical University**.

Today, Johnson serves military and commercial clients, and pays it forward.

Potential business owners call his company all the time, interested in learning what the Small Business Administration can do for them.

“We’re definitely open to help individuals get started in business,” Johnson said. ■

Code School

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Finding early success, 92% of its students obtained employment within 6 months of completing the program.

For example, one of the school’s first graduates was hired by **RedHat**, a multi-billion dollar software company, within three weeks of graduating.

Transitioning to Apprenticeships

When the pandemic hit, Roberts quickly pivoted the company as an apprenticeship-based software development program.

Roberts said it now helps identify talent for companies and serves as a key facilitator for junior and entry-level talent.

The Code School works with companies that provide a minimum 12 months of experience to its students to develop their talent using their platforms.

In particular, apprenticeships receive 2,000 hours employment with San Diego Code School, 14 weeks of classroom training, 38 weeks of hands-on experience as a member of a development

“It’s more important than ever to have code schools around to build up San Diego’s tech talent, considering that tech giants are moving in. The markets will tighten up more and more, and senior engineers will get more valuable.”

MIKE ROBERTS

team, Salaried employment opportunities with its clients, and on-going training and mentoring.

To date, it has partnered with several technology companies including **ServiceNow**, **NewRocket**, and **Kizen** to help more non-technical people land a career in coding. The company offers hourly wages for apprentices up to \$20/hour.

“It’s more important than ever to have code schools around to build up San Diego’s tech talent, considering that tech

giants are moving in. The markets will tighten up more and more, and senior engineers will get more valuable,” said Roberts. “Post-COVID, We’re going to see a rapid expansion of opportunities. We have to just focus on the fundamentals.”

Helped More Than 100 Students

Prior to San Diego Code School, Robert held positions from software engineer to chief executive officer. Roberts previously worked at **Origin**, a locally

known coding camp where he built out the company’s curriculum as chief academic officer. Origin shutdown two years ago, leading him to create his own software school.

A full stack JavaScript practitioner with more than 30 years of experience coding, he has helped launch more than 100 student land high-paying careers at **Apple**, **Walmart Labs**, **Sony**, and **Amazon Web Services**, among others.

Roberts said the big picture goal for the company is to continue to help companies diversify its talent pipeline. Looking ahead, the company plans to serve more than 100 students this year, with San Diego continuing to be its primary hub.

It generates revenue through its employer model and plans to be funded by federal and state sources in the near future.

“People that are looking for a solution, it’s super easy, just pick up the phone and I’m more than happy to help even if it’s not our solution,” said Roberts. “If you’re looking to get more women or more diverse candidates, there are solutions out there. They just need to pick up the phone, we’re here to help.” ■

CommSafe

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Preventing Threats and Violence

Formerly called Vigilance Risk Solutions, CommSafe has introduced first-to-market Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) tool that allows organizations to get ahead of threats and violence in the workplace before they happen.

Its technology works by analyzing communication in real-time and flags toxic messages—similar to the algorithm of an email spam filter—that would threaten the integrity of a safe communication space or violate shared company values.

In particular, it uses algorithms that can “track tone of voice,” and can pick up when a message is insulting, according to Smith.

In addition to alerting management of an issue, it also provides “next step” recommendations. For example, the system would suggest customized coaching for well-meaning employees to help them increase their communication awareness and sensitivity.

“Deterring or capturing toxic interactions early before they further escalate or deepen their harm allows organizations to focus on building a positive, inclusive culture while protecting employees,” said Smith.

“There is an enormous hunger for this type of tool, whether employees are in the office or continue to work virtually,” he added.

\$53B Market Opportunity

The physical security market in the U.S. is valued at roughly \$53 billion. A high growth market, it’s projected to grow at 9% year-over-year up till 2025.

Before the pandemic, Commsafe provided its clients primarily with web-based training courses and has since pivoted its business to become 100% SaaS company.

Focused on developing its CommSafe AI software, it plans to release its beta solution to several customers in Q1 2021, with the full version slated to be released to the market in Q2 2021.

More Than \$1 Million Raised

To date, the company has raised over \$1 million in pre-seed funding from investors. In addition, CommSafe was accepted into the La Jolla-based **EvoNexus**, the region’s biggest tech startup incubator to help scale its software.

“Raising money as an African-American founder, is hard, doing it in San Diego is like almost mission impossible,” said Smith. “The fact that we’ve raised over 1 million in investor funding

is something I rarely pat myself on the back on.”

“At times it’s been disheartening and frustrating, but when it comes down to it — I remember I’ve done hard things before and keep going,” he added.

Since founding CommSafe, Smith has assembled an executive team that includes top military and law enforcement veterans, as well as experts in conflict and violence prevention.

Smith’s service to the nation spanned 20 years of honorable service to include six combat tours to Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, and Afghanistan.

He earned a Master of Business for Veterans from the **University of Southern California**, **Marshall School of Business**, where he currently serves as a member of the Marshall Business School Board of Counselors. Headquartered in La Jolla, the company currently employs 10. ■

In honor of Black History Month,
The Community of Business celebrates

