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2015 NNPA Merit Awards: Best Feature Story By An Aspiring Journalist

A Heart For Cooking:

Local Entrepreneur Lets Her Passion Fuel Her Success

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story written by former Seattle Medium Intern Mariah Beverly won first place in the 2015 National Newspaper Publishers Association's Merit Awards Competition for Best Feature Story by an Aspiring Journalist.

By Mariah Beverly
The Seattle Medium

Maryruth Woods has overcome many obstacles to get to where she is today. An aspiring business owner and chef, Woods has very high standards for herself and has taken the initiative to make her dreams a reality.

When Woods was 9, her mother passed away suddenly from an epileptic seizure, leaving her, her younger brother Billy Woods, and her father, alone.

"My mom's death bothered me more than I let on," Woods admits. "And after she died, I was notorious for my bad attitude."

Woods was close to her mother and being so young when she passed she didn't really know how to handle her death. Her "bad attitude" sometimes caused tension between her and her father.

Despite the absence of her mother in her life, Woods graduated from Cleveland High School, and despite the doubts of most of the people around her, she went on to pursue a degree at Paine College in Augusta, GA.

"Everyone said I wasn't going to college, and for a while I believed them," said Woods. "I had made no plans for my future."

By the end of her senior year, Woods hadn't applied to any colleges or universities, and assumed she would be attending the local community college, although she hadn't applied to any. "She didn't know what she wanted to do when she finished high school, and hadn't taken any steps to plan for her future."

"Two weeks before my senior year was over, my biology teacher asked me if she got me into college would I go, and a few weeks later I was packing to leave," Woods says. "No one thought I could do it, so that made me work harder."

Woods believes if her biology teacher had never approached her, she would not have gone to college.

While in college, Woods says her biggest distraction was "paying attention and time management."

Woods admits that her high school experience did not fully prepare her for college. In high school, Woods found most of the work was easy, and she didn't retain much of the information.

"By the time I got to college, I didn't know anything," Woods recalled. "I had gotten by so easily in high school, that I didn't have the right work ethic for college."

At Paine, Woods switched majors several times before finally deciding to pursue a degree in Business Administration.

"In the beginning of my college career, I was doing what everyone else thought I should do, not what I wanted to do," said Woods. "I had to start making my own decisions, choosing things for myself."

After college, Woods returned to Seattle and realized that her life's passion was in cooking, and she began seeking opportunities in the food industry.

"I've always loved cooking," said Woods. "When my mom passed away, I



Maryruth Woods is turning her passion for cooking into a flourishing career. Staff Photo/Chris B. Bennett.

was put in charge of cooking for the house, I pretty much taught myself through trial and error."

After settling back in Seattle, Woods began working with catering companies, organizing her own business and enrolled at South Seattle Community College to pursue a degree in Culinary Arts. After attaining her Culinary Arts degree, Woods worked for multiple restaurants and catering companies including Endoline Jo's, Salty's, Island Soul, and Classic Catering. While working at the different restaurants, Woods learned valuable skills that eventually would help her start her own business. In addition, Woods also earned a degree in Confectionary Arts to help take her dessert and pastry skills to a whole new level.

Woods had also begun to build her own customer base by doing catering jobs for friends and family. As a member of First A.M.E Church in Seattle, she quickly built a name for herself by catering events that were held at the church, and for church members who needed a caterer for private events.

Now, Woods, who currently works as a cook at a private club in downtown Seattle, is following her passion and establishing the foundation to build her own empire from the ground up. Her first full-time venture will be called "Johnnie Lee's Fried Chicken," a catering/take out restaurant with gourmet fried chicken and flavorful side dishes.

Woods' menu will include Jerk Fried chicken, Smoked Fried chicken, Blue Cheese Potato salad, Macaroni and Cheese, and Peach Cobbler to name a few.

When asked what inspired her menu, Woods states: "I'm serving the food I grew up with, but adding my own twist to it."

Although beginning a business can be stressful, Woods believes her experience and drive will help her be successful. She also has the help of her husband, Richard Beverly, who is also a chef with a Culinary Arts degree.

"I only have one fear," says Woods, "Failing. I've put in a lot of work (towards this business) and I want people to be able to see that."

Woods believes that her past experiences have made her as headstrong and determined as she is today, and that her family and friends who continue to support

her are also responsible for her success.

Woods plans to have her business up and running in the near future.

Update: Woods was recently offered an opportunity to work with a renowned chef in the Greater Seattle Area, and has temporarily postponed her plans to open her own restaurant.

State Board For Community and Technical Colleges Elects Shaunta Hyde As First African-American Woman Chair

Olympia — The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges recently elected Shaunta Hyde of Lake Forest Park as its chair, making her the first African-American woman to lead the board.

Hyde, who works as the managing director of community relations at Alaska Airlines, joined the State Board in 2009. She served as the board's vice chair since June 2013 and chair pro-tem since April.

"I'm excited and honored to serve as chair of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and I am proud to be the first African-American woman to be in that role," Hyde said. "Our state is growing more diverse every day, and our 34 colleges serve students of all walks of life. It's important that the State Board reflects the rich diversity of the state and colleges so our mission and goals provide a solid educational foundation for our students."

The elections were held late June during the board's meeting at Walla Walla Community College. Hyde will serve in her roles until the next elections in June 2016. The board's nine members,



Shaunta Hyde

appointed by the governor and approved by the state Senate, provide general supervision and control over the state system of 34 community and technical colleges. This includes capital and operating budget allocations to the colleges, master planning for the college system, and setting minimum standards for college operation.

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