



Yes, She Can!

*After losing their jobs due to COVID-19,
these local women launched new
businesses of their very own*

by Jenny Rose Spaudio

It's a running joke that 2020 was a terrible year for many reasons, with COVID-19 being the biggest culprit. Yet the pandemic's financially devastating effects were no laughing matter as millions lost their jobs – and research shows women have borne the brunt of this economic crisis.

Past recessions have affected mainly men since they hit male-dominated industries the hardest. But an April 2020 study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research revealed that more women than men have lost their jobs during the COVID-19 recession. After all, the lockdowns closed businesses where a higher concentration of women work, such as restaurants, childcare centers, retail shops, healthcare facilities, and hospitality venues.

Many women, though, turned their challenge into an opportunity by using sudden unemployment as a chance to start their own business from home. Let's meet three of these entrepreneurial women in the Lake Mary/Sanford area and find out how they made the very best of a bad situation:

DAWN SIPLEY Siplely the Best

At the height of the pandemic, Sanford's Dawn Siplely lost her job and the six-figure salary that came with it. The local staffing company where she had worked for 12 years – moving up from part-time employee to minority owner – let her go in September 2020.

Suddenly, Dawn joined the 12.6 million Americans who were unemployed in the wake of COVID-19, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

As the main breadwinner of her family, Dawn was naturally concerned. Her knee-jerk reaction was to find a new job, but after several interviews, she realized traditional office life was no longer for her.

"I am too loud for a cubicle," she quips. "You can't do that to me!"

That's when Dawn's inner entrepreneur came calling. With her experience in staffing, Dawn knew she could help businesses and job seekers during the pandemic as a human resources consultant and career coach.

Launching her company, Siplely the Best, wasn't as grueling as Dawn expected. Before she even had a chance to set systems in place, people began asking for her services. It took under a month to surpass her previous income.

Yet even with so many clients, Dawn is enjoying the new flexibility in her schedule and the increased time with her family. She can now pick her daughter up from school – something she could rarely do at her former job. And while she knows entrepreneurship isn't for everyone, she encourages women to let go of self-doubt if launching a business is their dream.

"A lot of women doubt their true ability to be autonomous," Dawn says. "Many women enjoy the societal network of employment, but you can really build your own tribe. You don't have to have that structure to have a tribe."



After losing a high-profile job and a six-figure income, Dawn Siplely started her own business as a human resources consultant and career coach.



HOLLY BAKER LAMIE Holly on Fitness

When nonessential businesses shut down in March 2020, Holly Baker LaMie of Lake Forest found herself in a predicament. The gym where she taught fitness classes and the preschool where she sometimes worked both closed, leaving her with no income. Thankfully, her husband didn't lose his job, but the family still had to scale back on activities for the kids and other extras.

But the income decrease wasn't the hardest part for Holly.

"I was probably going through some type of depression," she says. "Even though I was able to help my kids – my oldest was in middle school and my youngest was in second grade at the time, so they were pretty self-sufficient – I was kind of waking up without a purpose."

When Holly found a Facebook group that taught fitness instructors how to make money online, she decided to give the method a shot. She transformed a room in her house so she could livestream her workouts and started receiving money for her virtual Holly on Fitness subscription in September.



Online fitness coach Holly Baker LaMie is now making more money than she did teaching in-person classes, but she says the freedom and self-confidence of being an entrepreneur is the most valuable reward.

It didn't take long for Holly to make more money teaching online than she made while teaching in-person classes. But for her, launching her own business meant more than money. Holly said pursuing virtual teaching – something she never thought she would do – was a leap of faith. And with that faith came personal growth.

"I'm a happier mom now," Holly says. "I hope I can be a great role model, especially for my oldest daughter, to see her mom making things work. Things can be tough, but if you work hard enough, there's a solution."

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ANITA KOS

The Real Jerk Seasoning by Anita

As an airline pilot at the Orlando Sanford International Airport, Anita Kos was discouraged when all her flights stopped during the April 2020 lockdowns. The drastic dip in her salary meant Anita didn't have enough money to buy groceries, let alone pay her bills.

But instead of dwelling on the panic she felt, Anita researched how she could earn extra cash until flights resumed. That's when the idea struck her – what if she sold jerk seasoning?

"I've always loved to cook," says the Sanford resident. "I've volunteered for years through the homeless coalitions or by cooking through my church, providing food for benefits, fundraisers, or the weekly service. And one of the products that I knew I was good at was my jerk seasoning."

Born in Canada and raised in the Caribbean, Anita has been perfecting her jerk seasoning recipe since she was 14 years old. The only question was whether people would buy it. So in April, with only \$100 to her name, she began researching the market and creating her first batch of The Real Jerk Seasoning to sell.

But Anita wasn't prepared for how popular her seasoning would be. Friends and neighbors started raving about her product, and one restaurant after another began ordering in bulk. By October, she was researching deals with distributors.



In April 2020, after her work as an airline pilot dried up, Anita Kos whipped up her first batch of jerk seasoning to sell with only \$100 to her name.

Anita knows her business has far to go, but she's grateful for the extra income and the faith it has given her to keep moving forward.

"A lot of women don't think about how strong they really are, that we as women are leaders among ourselves," she says.

"And if we don't listen to the outside negativity and just focus on what we know our talents are and what God gave us as our own personal talents, women can do anything."



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