

COVID shutdown a boon for new catering company

By LINCOLN DEPRADINE

The COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the loss of many lives and which also negatively impacted the commercial sector, also offered unexpected positive opportunities for some businesses.

Michelle Rochester, a young Jamaican Canadian entrepreneur, opened her own food business, MNR Catering, in 2019, just

months before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic forcing businesses to shutter and millions of people to be confined to their homes, with government-mandated restrictions on group activities including dining and partying.

"After COVID hit, I just started growing rapidly. The catering orders started getting bigger and I couldn't manage to do every-



MICHELLE ROCHESTER

"good salary".

She was also inspired to push herself to succeed following the death of her grandfather. It was out of these circumstances that Rochester launched the Eto-bicoke-based MNR Catering. The "N" in MNR, she said, stands for "Nicole", which is her middle name.

In the four years since establishing MNR, Rochester has catered for a variety of events, including weddings, funerals, corporate and lifestyle events, birthday and retirement parties.

She says she has a range of clients across Ontario.

"The quality that we offer, that is what brings our clients back," said Rochester.

She also has emphasized the importance of branding, such as the professional use of email and her website.

"Navigational systems that big corporations use, I adapted that into my business and then I started seeing growth," Rochester said.

Rochester's plans for 2023 include hosting MNR's annual "Easter Bun Campaign" sale, and also an "All-you-can-eat Gala" in September.

"We did the gala last year; it was our first one and it was a huge success. However, with everything in life, you learn. I've learned so much from the event, I'm going to make it even better this year," Rochester said. "You come to the event and you get to eat anything you want. This is Caribbean food and we do it nice and fancy."

Rochester wants to offer advice to others that are considering an entrepreneurial career path.

"I would tell an entrepreneur, who is

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thing by myself," Rochester told *Share*.

She now runs a company with 12 employees.

Rochester wasn't always a professional chef, nor was catering the career on which she initially had embarked.

She was born in Canada to Jamaican parents. Her introduction to cooking, she said, was being in the kitchen with her grandmother, "watching her, helping her and sampling the food. It's there I developed a love of cooking".

However, after high school, Rochester decided to pursue a career in law. During her law studies, she became pregnant with her now nine-year-old son with whose father she is engaged to be married.

After her pregnancy, Rochester switched to a shorter law clerk program, graduated and turned to finding immediate gainful employment that would pay a

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