

Female-Owned Businesses Get Ahead with the Vorys Initiative for Business Empowerment

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3.31.2022

In the fall of 2020, Vorys launched the Vorys Initiative for Business Empowerment (VIBE), which includes a team of over 30 Vorys lawyers and 10 business professionals. This innovative program is aimed at making legal services more accessible to small minority-owned businesses located in and around the locations where Vorys has offices. Since its launch, Vorys has provided free legal services to over 70 businesses. In particular, we have found there has been a high demand for intellectual property services, including trademark assistance. Securing a trademark registration and protecting brand equity is an important step for any business, but small businesses with lean budgets may not have the financial ability to hire an attorney to help guide them through the filing and prosecution process. Through VIBE, Vorys attorneys helped PWR WMN and Way Down Yonder Beignets & Coffee satisfy their trademark needs and continue to provide access to attorney resources for additional legal needs as they arise.

Located in Dallas, Texas, PWR WMN makes blazers with pockets that are described as both functional and feminine. PWR WMN was created by Kim Borges and Miriam McDonald, two best friends and coworkers who grew tired of the intentional exclusion of pockets in their workwear. Borges and McDonald wanted clothes that helped them portray themselves like the Power Women they are. According to Borges, “that something so simple [as pockets in women’s blazers] is a bold idea sheds light on the fact that, to date, attainable women’s workwear is an awkward emulation of men’s workwear. PWR WMN transcends the idea that business is masculine by taking the symbol of professional life, a blazer, and making it our own, strong and feminine.”

“VIBE has helped us tremendously,” continues Borges. “I can wholeheartedly say that without VIBE we would have not been able to afford legal counsel for many of our difficult to navigate events and contracts. [Vorys has] taken care of us in so many ways and we feel fully supported by their lawyers. VIBE is one of the most important pieces of our business and it lifts a huge load off our shoulders when we don’t have to worry about that [legal] aspect of business because [Vorys] has us covered.”

When asked if she felt if she and McDonald faced additional barriers that male business owners do not face, Borges said, “Yes, and especially as [women of color]. We don't run in the same circles as people who have access to capital and funding and legal advice. . . . We don't speak the lingo of the typical business man and we don't look like the typical business man but that hasn't stopped us from moving forward! People are opening up to different versions of business and it's exciting to be a part of that.”

Rickelle Viney and Yonder Miller are owners of a new Columbus, Ohio bakery and coffee spot, Way Down Yonder Beignets & Coffee. The bakery brings New Orleans cuisine to the City of Columbus with its very own twist. Their signature beignets are soft, fluffy pastries with a sweet center, sprinkled with powdered sugar and other delightful toppings. This sweet treat is nicely paired with the café's own signature coffee that has tasting notes of brown sugar, hazelnut and plum. Way Down Yonder Beignets are always cooked to order and served fresh and hot. The café also has a New Orleans-inspired breakfast menu, served daily from 8am-2pm. Guests can expect an upscale French style themed café, a cozy, friendly, and welcoming environment with drive thru service, and indoor and outdoor seating. The restaurant is named after owner Yonder Miller, who grew up in New Orleans.

Yonder and Rickelle heard about VIBE through the SCORE program, which is sponsored by the Small Business Administration. According to Rickelle, “VIBE has helped our business tremendously by covering a large portion of legal fees to complete important steps to protect our business. . . . We have put so much work into building our brand, so we wanted to ensure we protected it on every level.” On being a business owner, Rickelle says that “being a Business Owner is much like being a parent, who has the responsibility to train, develop, protect and help your child to grow. It's a huge responsibility that can be very rewarding, if done well.” On barriers, Rickelle says that “mentality has a lot to do with one's success, so we focus on the possibilities and not the barriers. We believe we can accomplish whatever we put our minds to and steer away from focusing on comparisons. This thought process has been quite beneficial to us.”

VIBE Founder and Vorys Partner, Janay Stevens, has the following to say about the importance of lifting up minority-owned businesses, and particularly those that are female-owned: “If successful, the VIBE program will be a hand-up to business owners in the communities where Vorys has offices. As women and/or diverse entrepreneurs grow, so too do the communities where we live and work.”

You can find PWR WMN on Instagram @pwr_wmn and you can shop blazers on their website at: <https://www.pwrwmn.shop/>.

Sample an authentic New Orleans beignet and support Way Down Yonder Beignets & Coffee at 386 East Main Street in Columbus, Ohio, open Monday through Saturday. View their menu on their website and make reservations at: <https://www.wdybeignets.com/>.

Learn more about VIBE here: <https://practices.vorys.com/vorys-initiative-for-business-empowerment>. Interested in applying for VIBE? Check back at the link above on April 4, 2022 when our new client intake questionnaire goes live!