



Muffin Mam's Simply Southern muffin flavors from left to right: Lemon Crunch, Blueberry Streusel, Banana Nut, Apple Cinnamon, and Chocolate Chip

## WOMEN OWNED BACKSTORY

# CONTINUING A FAMILY LEGACY WITH MUFFIN MAM

WHEN MUFFIN MAM PRESIDENT JADE LAFRENIERE'S MOTHER PASSED AWAY IN 2014, SHE LEFT HER CAREER TO

TAKE ON THE FAMILY'S MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR BUSINESS. IT WAS A BIG JUMP FROM THE WORLD OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS TO CAKES AND MUFFINS. LAFRENIERE'S MOTHER, STEPHANIE CROLEY, STARTED THE MUFFIN MAM AS A SMALL BAKERY IN GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA WITH A LOAN IN 1990.

**“M**y mom had two small kids and another on the way,” says LaFreniere. “She didn’t have a high school diploma or a college education, but she had a lot of tenacity. She knew she needed to make money and she knew she liked to bake.”

After expanding into local grocery stores, Muffin Mam quickly grew from a small local bakery, to a 23,000 square foot building in 1994, and then to a

55,000 square-foot building in 1998. The success has only continued. “The building seems tiny now, but we have learned a lot about lean manufacturing. I believe we produce more per square foot than anyone else in our category of wholesale bakery,” says LaFreniere.

Muffin Mam is one of the first bakeries in the nation to produce a traditionally shelf stable clean label product line, free of 155 unwanted additives and

preservatives for the private label fresh bakery category. Taking on the Muffin Mam product development and the company's employees was challenging for LaFreniere in 2014, she admits she was completely new to the world of manufacturing.

"The only way I know how to learn as a leader is to start from the bottom and work my way up, so I heaved the oven racks; I scrubbed with the sanitation team, mixed the bowls, did all the positions within the company, and spent my time just learning the operations," says LaFreniere.

As LaFreniere grew as a leader, so did her involvement with WBENC. Although her mother had sought WBENC Certification, the transfer in leadership had caused the company's certification status to lapse. LaFreniere made it a priority to get recertified by June 2015 and attend functions with the local RPO, Greater Women's Business Council (GWBC).

Because of LaFreniere's resolve, GWBC President Roz Lewis became invested in her leadership development, and the local RPO sponsored LaFreniere's attendance at the 2015 WBENC's National Conference & Business Fair in Austin, Texas and helped her get into a mentorship program ran by GWBC. LaFreniere also completed the Tuck-WBENC Executive Program in 2015, all while restructuring Muffin Mam.

"For me the most impactful thing that WBENC has offered is the mentorship and the community," says LaFreniere. "When I came in I was really shaky and not confident at all. After going through the Tuck-WBENC Executive Program, I learned that my intuition isn't wrong, I just have to have the courage to stand up and say it even when it's not popular. That was really tough."



Jade LaFreniere, President of Muffin Mam

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LaFreniere attributes part of Muffin Mam's success to her involvement in WBENC and the Women Owned logo program. She is excited to display her pride on the website and hopes to integrate the Woman Owned logo into some of her labels for private brands. She also plans on further developing her relationships within the WBENC network.

"I think that there's a lot to be lost by approaching your certification as 'How do you get business from this certification?' and while it's certainly an objective, it's something that comes a lot more naturally if you pursue people and relationships," says LaFreniere.

In 2016 Muffin Mam's sales grew 14% over the previous year. It was so successful that Muffin Mam was featured in *Food and Drink Magazine* and recognized at the Top Women in Grocery Gala held last November. The company was also recognized in the *2016 Bakery Redbook* by Sosland Publishing.

Yet LaFreniere is not content to sit on her laurels. After such a successful year, LaFreniere plans to continue to grow Muffin Mam in 2017, including expanding her operations while pitching her own clean label product line to potential customers.

"Being Women Owned and meeting WBEs who really took me under their wing and helped me have a strong voice when I really didn't feel like I had earned it—WBENC is part of what made 2016 our best year yet. I can't wait to see what comes next," says LaFreniere.

 [muffinmam.com](http://muffinmam.com)