

Southern Marin fire hopes to launch daylong academies for young women

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The Southern Marin Fire Protection District is seeking to launch a weekend academy for young women and girls interested in careers in fire service, part of a larger districtwide effort to increase diversity, equity and inclusion.

The district, whose jurisdiction includes northern Tiburon and Strawberry, is in the early stages of developing and finding training sites for the program, working with Bay Area nonprofit NorCal Women in Fire Service, which puts on camps for high schoolers, and leaders behind the San Rafael-based Fire Foundry, a nonprofit job-training and career-pathway program for underserved communities in Marin and surrounding counties.

The introductory academy, planned for local girls ages 13-20, is expected to launch next year. It's a component of a three-tier initiative approved by the fire-district board in March to implement hiring and recruitment strategies that address systemic lack of diversity within

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CORRECTIONS

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Strawberry girl's small business serves up homemade dog treats



Inspired by her love of baking and her dog, Buddy, Jasmine Thomas-Gainey started Doggy Dog Treats by Jazzy.

ELLIOT KARLAN / FOR THE ARK

By EMILY LAVIN
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When she was 9 years old, Jasmine Thomas-Gainey approached her parents and told them she wanted to start a business making and selling dog treats — an idea inspired by her love of baking and her love of dogs, particularly the family's Chihuahua mix, Buddy.

Her moms, LaRae Gainey and Schmian Evans, were supportive — but they both work in education and know how quickly kids' interests can change, Gainey says. When Jasmine continued to press the idea, they issued her a challenge: Come up with a business plan and some recipes.

Jasmine got to work and did just that, persuading her parents to invest. For her 10th birthday, she received a food dehydrator, a bag sealer and some of the other supplies she'd need to get the business off the ground.

"They were just things to start her out and see, 'Where do you go with this?'"

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Belvedere man combines musicianship, engineering to build innovative guitars

By DEIRDRE McCROHAN
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No matter what else they do with their lives, music people always seem to go back to the music.

For Andy Bloch, once a recording engineer and producer for everyone "from McCartney to Meatloaf," his music career detoured for more than two decades to one of the world's

top business and tech consulting firms before he found his way back — making self-amplified electric guitars.

The 70-year-old Bloch, who splits his time between his longtime home in Belvedere and Los Angeles, joined friend and guitar designer Joe Floyd to co-found Electro-Phonic Innovations in Inglewood, which has attracted international attention for its speaker-outfitted guitars with a built-in amp

and effects controls, offering the portability of an acoustic.

"You turn it on and you're ready to go," Bloch says. "Everything you need is built in."

He adds that while it's ideally suited for smaller venues, owners can plug the two models — the standard Model One and the travel-reinforced Guitarmadillo — into any

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Yoga in Downtown Tiburon

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Gainey says.

Now 12 and a rising seventh-grader at Mill Valley Middle School, Jasmine has turned her idea into a full-fledged business operation, Doggy Dog Treats by Jazzy. The Strawberry resident sells the handmade packaged treats online through her Etsy shop, which she opened in March 2020, and at farmers markets and craft fairs on weekends. She has a California business license and seller's permit and is working toward obtaining a pet-food license in hopes of one day selling the products in stores.

Her brand's main flavors are "Jasmine's Peanut Butter Biscuits," which come in varieties made with either coconut or wheat flours paired with rolled oats, flaxseed, natural peanut butter, coconut oil and eggs, and "Buddy's Pumpkin Bites," which in addition to coconut or wheat flour contain rolled oats, coconut oil, eggs, organic pumpkin, apple-sauce and cinnamon.

The peanut butter biscuits are also available online with a substitution of sunflower-seed butter, Jasmine says, and she recently debuted a new peanut butter and banana flavor treat that contains barley flour.

When she first began brainstorming recipes, she started by Googling what dogs could eat and what the animals were typically allergic to.

"I looked at what was common, but I really wanted them to be somewhat different," she says.

The treats are 100-percent human grade, she notes.

"The only thing different about dog and pet food is that they have no sugars and

sweeteners," she says. "Everything else in them is stuff that could be in a pastry."

She started out baking the treats in the family's home kitchen, taking extra precautions to ensure cleanliness standards. However, the single-oven setup made it difficult to produce the treats in the quantity she needed as orders began stacking up, so she's now started baking out of a commercial kitchen in Oakland.

Over time, she says, she's worked to perfect the recipes and the process, learning, for instance, that decreasing the amount of flour makes the dough less sticky and easier to manage.

And at first, she was using a cookie cutter to cut the dough into shapes. Not only was that time consuming, she says, but sometimes the treats would be too thick, requiring too much time in the dehydrator. She's since switched to using silicone molds.

"It was definitely a lot of fails, but the ones we have now, they work really well," she says. "We've kind of gotten into a groove right now where we don't make too many mistakes."

The treats have also earned rave reviews from the most important critic — Buddy, who can be a little picky and isn't always a fan of store-bought treats.

"Buddy is our ultimate taste tester, and he takes to the job very well," Jasmine says.

While Jasmine's moms help her with some of the kitchen tasks and tracking spreadsheets, Jasmine is at the helm of the operation, from making and baking the dough to packaging up the treats and affixing them with the business's logo, a drawing of Jasmine and Buddy. Jasmine says someone reached out to her on Instagram after she started the business and asked if they could create the logo for her.

more info

Jasmine's handmade dog treats are available for purchase via [etsy.com/shop/DoggyDogTreatsByJazzy](https://www.etsy.com/shop/DoggyDogTreatsByJazzy).

"It turned out really good," she says.

The business has grown through family and friend support, social media and word of mouth at the different outdoor markets she's been attending all summer.

At first, Jasmine says, it was a bit daunting to transition from just operating the Etsy shop to hawking her product in person.

"But once I got into the swing of it, it just started to come easier," she says, and now she enjoys talking to people and explaining the business — and that she's in charge of it.

"When they realize it's my business and not a family business, to see the shock on their face, that's one of my favorite parts," she says.

But that's not the only perk of the experience.

"Seeing all the dogs and being able to give them treats, that's super fun," Jasmine says.

Gainey says that once she and her wife realized Jasmine was serious about her business, the choice to support her was a "no-brainer."

"I know my wife and I feel like in life, she'll hear enough 'no's,' and so why should that start at home?" Gainey says of their attitude. "We don't want her first 'no' to be from us."

Gainey says she's been impressed with the way Jasmine approaches the business and balances it with her school and extra-curricular commitments, which include serving on student council and dance.

Gainey notes Jasmine isn't just learning about business, she's learning how to run an

ethical business — "not cheating people, but also her worth and not cheating herself."

"Producing a quality product that she cares about and that she created herself, that's the cool thing," she says.

Gainey says that while both parents encourage Jasmine, they make it a point to remain in the background at markets, available to hand Jasmine treats or run the register but directing customers with questions to her. They're happy to keep supporting her.

"As long as she wants to keep it going, we will keep pushing that, 'You've got it,'" Gainey says.

Jasmine notes the business is profitable, and while most of the money goes right back into operations, she does set aside 10 percent or so to occasionally buy a new video game or get her nails done.

"It's one of my favorite things about the business itself," she says. "Some of my friends, they have to ask their parents for money, and that's something I don't have to do. Usually, I have my own money."

She says in addition to getting her product in stores, she'd like the business to become profitable enough to allow her to pay her parents for their efforts and to add a couple of employees to help her out, as well.

She says she's not only proud to be a 12-year-old who operates her own business, but a young Black entrepreneur. She doesn't plan on stopping any time soon, noting she can't wait until she's 18 and can tell people she's already been in business for eight years.

"A lot of the fun of it is people's reactions to what I'm doing," she says.

Reach Emily Lavin at 415-944-3841.

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