

## InnovateHER story: LaTonya Hopson, Top Notch Sports & Fitness



Northeast Florida's representative in the 2016 InnovateHER competition sponsored by the U.S. Small Business Administration aims to grow her company as a physical and spiritual community resource. Although LaTonya Hopson, CEO of Top Notch Sports & Fitness, is not among the 10 finalists to compete in March in Washington, D.C., she considers her selection a "wonderful honor."

A holistic life and strength coach, Hopson describes her business on Jacksonville's westside as a "holistic temple trending ministry, a faith and wellness-based operation." Services include providing college mentoring for student athletes and community awareness programs for people interested in learning more about health, nutrition and wellness.

"It's not a one-size-fits-all organization," she said. "We specialize in holistic wellness and programming for all body types and ages. Whether you are an athlete, non-athlete, male or female, we have programs for everyone."

The Jacksonville Women's Business Center partnered with the SBA's North Florida District Office and the Microsoft Store at St. Johns Town Center to host the Northeast Florida Regional Challenge, according to Pat Blanchard, JWBC director.

The prize competition produced by the SBA's Office of Women's Business Ownership and Microsoft provides an opportunity for entrepreneurs throughout the U.S. to showcase products and services that have a measurable impact on the lives of women and families, have the potential for commercialization and fill a need in the marketplace.

At the local competition held Nov. 3 at CoLabJax Maker Space in downtown Jacksonville, participants pitched their products and services based on that criteria. Hopson presented an engineering device designed to help people who can't afford a personal trainer or are uncomfortable working out in public.

"LaTonya had a lot of passion for her product and kept that energy throughout her presentation," said judge, Frances Fisher, SCORE business counselor and intra-continental serial entrepreneur. Fisher said the judges liked that the product would concentrate on workouts and eating behaviors and encourage women to make better and healthier choices, which, in turn, would encourage the whole family to make the same wiser choices.

Hopson's professional experience included marketing, customer service and sales before she followed her heart to fitness and health. Born and raised in Jacksonville, she graduated from First Coast Christian School in 2007 and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in communications arts, minoring in marketing, from Warner University and a master's degree in sports administration from St. Thomas University.

"I furthered my education because I realized I wanted to provide services to others through physical recreation and wellness," she said.

In college at Warner, she worked in the gym where she trained student athletes, alumni and faculty. At St. Thomas, she was head strength coach for women's and men's basketball, women's volleyball and boys' junior varsity basketball.

She returned to Jacksonville in 2012 and opened Top Notch Sports & Fitness in 2014. "I have been blessed to learn a lot about serving people from my mother who is an educator and specializes in special needs learning and about operating a business from my father who is the CEO of White Glove Janitorial and Carpeting Cleaning," she said. "My life experiences have prepared me most for this. I have researched and studied, which I believe helps anyone become better at their craft."

Along the way, Hopson said she was her own biggest hurdle. "At this point, any obstacle I face I realize is to prepare me to be a better leader for my organization and community," she said. "Top Notch Sports & Fitness offers workshops and we are always looking for more community service opportunities."

Hopson's community involvement includes volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, Big Brother Big Sisters, Salvation Army and Building Powerful Minds, a local mentee program for young men.

She believes JWBC is a valuable resource for area women because it provides awareness and opportunities, particularly through its educational workshops and seminars.

"The whole idea and the way InnovateHER is structured under the Small Business Administration is a great process," said Blanchard. "It's the type of thing that JWBC would continue to play a supportive role in. It gives women in the region the chance to learn more about JWBC and to network and collaborate with other women business owners based on the criteria of the InnovateHER concept."

In addition to Fisher, regional judges were Heather Carolan, founder of Shop Small Jax and a member of the board of Woman Business Owners of North Florida, and Chris Lavan, co-founder of CoLabJax, a non-profit that provides a place for innovators to refine their vision, design and prototype before taking it to market.

SBA's national competition will be part of its InnovateHER: Innovating for Women Business Summit on March 17 during Women's History Month. The 10 finalists will compete for up to \$70,000 in prize money provided by Microsoft.