

## Vernetta Borden Success Story



As a successful caterer and personal chef, Vernetta Borden has made quite a name for herself doing major corporate and nonprofit functions in Northeast Florida. Yet she was surprised when asked to chair the 2016-2017 American Heart Association's Go Red For Women Open Your Heart initiative based on her website and reputation. For that, she credits the Jacksonville Women's Business Center (JWBC) and JAX Bridges, a program of the JAX Chamber.

Owner of A Cook for You Services and a chamber trustee, Borden is using her passion for healthy food and lifestyles to help the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association raise funds and awareness to combat heart disease and strokes.

"With so many bigger caterers in town, I'm honored that they took a chance on me, a small business, to join their team," said Borden, who has a history of stroke and high blood pressure in her family.

"Go Red For Women is a grassroots movement created to empower females to take charge of their cardiovascular health," said Lorie Strange-Paylor, senior director, American Heart Association's Go Red For Women Heart and Stroke Ball. "Vernetta Borden has a passion for our mission and is dedicated to sharing her nutritional expertise in order to build a healthier community. Her leadership, especially as a small business owner, makes her a remarkable Open Your Heart chair with the ability to reach many and save the lives of women across the First Coast."

"From the first time that Vernetta and I spoke on the phone, it was clear that she has a tremendous passion for teaching others about heart healthy eating and the importance of reducing salt in our foods without having to sacrifice flavor," said Amy W. Pollak, M.D., cardiologist at Mayo Clinic where she directs the Women's Heart Clinic and chair of Go Red For Women on the First Coast for 2016-2017. "Lorie and I asked Vernetta to be part of our Executive Leadership Team for Go Red For Women and are incredibly impressed with her enthusiasm, creativity and dedication. I also know first-hand how delicious her home chef meal offerings are, as I've ordered dinners for my family!"

In her role as Open Your Heart chair, Borden is greatly involved in organizing the First Coast Go Red Luncheon next May when survivors will share touching stories relating where donations are actually going. As part of the leadership team she uses her culinary skills to coordinate events leading up to the big spring fundraiser, such as girlfriend days when women support each other over healthy meals. She prepared heart healthy meatballs using organic chicken and turkey for a Harley-Davidson 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, which benefitted the heart association.

As a child, Borden learned to cook from a master, her mother, Rosetta Borden, who worked as a chef. When she graduated from culinary school eight years ago she wanted to be a personal chef, not a caterer. But the more she prepared tasty food for family events, demand for her services increased. Next thing she knew she was catering a wedding for 300 people for which she charged only \$400. Her mother joked that she wasn't going to work for her if she couldn't even earn enough to get a pedicure.

After working in food services at such prestigious places as the Amelia Island Plantation and Bolles School, Borden started her own business, catering such events as corporate lunches and benefit golf tournaments and preparing meals for people in their homes. She serves as a caring chef for the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Jacksonville.

Although she knew her way around the kitchen, she admits that when she started out she was lost when it came to running a business. At the recommendation of Pat Blanchard, JWBC director, she took the

Marketing Matters course, which she said helped her “see my business as a business, something I was working hard for.” Her mentors helped her develop a branding, tagline and logo to market herself. “I had no social media. Through Marketing Matters I learned that is the cheapest marketing tool you can use, so I started using Instagram and redid my logo,” she said. “Everyone at JWBC is very inspiring.” She looks forward to taking Leadership Matters next.

Through JAX Bridges, a program of the chamber’s Entrepreneurial Growth Division that connects small businesses with leading businesses in the community, Borden developed her first business plan and learned the importance of having an effective “elevator speech” that clearly communicates your message in 30 seconds.

Borden said JWBC is a valuable resource because of the information it provides and the programs and support it offers women. “A lot of organizations want you to join and network, but you also need education. They provide the education and the resources,” she said.