



Jovita Harper, A Success Story

To have the opportunity to take a childhood passion and turn it into a business is quite possibly everyone's dream. Jovita Harper has been creating since birth from writing poetry and calligraphy to drawing on her clothes or surfaces such as wallpaper. In more recent years, she discovered a desire to extend her creativity to sewing. This desire turned into a necessity after she was laid off from the mortgage industry almost three years ago. Jovita says, "I studied to become a master seamstress here in Jacksonville and Palm Coast. My daughter, Kamelonu and I would travel consistently to maintain my courses. The power of the sewing machine was exciting and I wanted to learn every aspect of this new form of creativity. I always believed the work of your hands is an empowering force."

As Jovita navigated various obstacles in her life, sewing provided her with a sense of peace. Obtaining consistent financing to back her business aspirations was challenging. "There were intermittent periods where I had to stop working on my business to focus solely on my secular career and there were times I wanted to give up. Thankfully, with the support of my community, education and encouragement through community resources, I was able to focus on expressing my individuality and maintaining my family's legacy.", says Jovita.

Fascinated with African culture and the vibrant, color-intoxicating fabrics, she learned everything about the fabrics' varying qualities, origins and versatility which helped her create the perfect design niche. Jovita says, "It was the genuine love, sentiments of encouragement and self-sacrificing support that afforded me the confidence to continue on my path." And so, in November 2015, she launched Conscious Designz which provided unique custom clothing for the modern fashionista. Using primarily African fabrics in her design approach, she tailors her apparel to each client. Jovita strongly believes that progress is built in stages. "It is my desire to continue to inspire, encourage and uplift my community while representing what beauty is born from my heritage. Like pieces to a puzzle, without every element - the frustrations of trials and errors, the enrichment and support, the growth and teaching - I would not have made it to where I am today. I am a Designer and Consciously I Design.", Jovita says proudly.

Jovita also wanted to give back to the community and teach her craft of sewing. She partnered with the local non-profit, the Women's Health Center and launched the 'POP' (Power of a Pillow) in October 2016. Her students developed a fundamental life skill while discussing the challenges of economic inequities. "It is truly enriching to recirculate my buying power within my local community.", says Jovita.

Her first fashion show was Jacksonville Fashion Magazine's The Color Project in 2016. The response from that event gave her the confidence and desire to create a marketable business front for Jacksonville. She continued designing for several fashion shows including St. Augustine Fashion Week, the Annual Rep Yo Brand Fashion show in which her daughter walked the stage with her – an exhilarating moment indeed! From the KESHA exhibit to an appearance on the daytime TV series, "The Chat", she made her way onto the show, "River City Live". When Jovita won the Rising Star award from Northeast Florida Fashion Group International, being honored for her fashion design inspired her even more. "With each venture, my confidence grows and I always end up surprising myself. Life has allowed me to cross paths with some wonderful people and being around fellow artists inspires me to keep building on

every element of my artistic expression.”, says Jovita. With her collective experience, she is currently designing for the third year in a row in Jacksonville Magazine’s Fashion Project.

Participating in programs at the Jacksonville Women’s Business Center has helped Jovita develop an extended family of local professional women. Jovita shares, “I have learned business strategies, the do’s and don’ts of business finances and how to create a marketing presence so that my business moves towards viability. Learning to strengthen partnerships, connect with mentors and foster life-long friendships has helped me build my brand.”