

Maria Kemp is an award-winning French-trained Pastry Chef specializing in DEI&B (diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging) baking demonstrations, virtual and on-site baking experiences, speaking engagements, and continuing education. Her love of baking remained a hobby while learning the ropes of corporate America as an Information Technology Consultant for Fortune 100 companies. She left her 20-year IT career in 2007 to enroll full-time at the prestigious French Pastry School's L'Art de la Patisserie program in Chicago. After graduating, she immediately took a leap of faith and opened her first brick & mortar bakery. But two years into her venture, her aging mother needed care. Maria prioritized family and made the difficult decision to close her bakery.

By 2014, she refocused on entrepreneurship and launched Beyond Decadence, Inc. in Illinois. Maria relocated the company to Cornelius, North Carolina in 2017, becoming the first and only artisan pop-up bakery specializing in handcrafted gourmet desserts. She secured certifications as a small/minority-owned business with the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, NC Department of Transportation, Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUB), Carolinas-Virginia Minority Supplier Development Council (CVMSDC), Small Women and Minority-Owned (SWaM), and Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).

Local retail sales and corporate catering kept her busy, but everything changed when the pandemic hit and her aging father also needed care. Tapping into her resilience, she transitioned Beyond Decadence from selling desserts with nationwide shipping to launching interactive baking experiences for corporate team-building. This strategic pivot also allowed her to relocate her father to a nearby retirement community. She spent his final 14-months by his side. Her virtual and on-site baking experiences improved morale at Lowe's Home Improvement, American Tire Distributors (ATD), CVMSDC, and IDEO-U. Adding DEI&B training to the baking demonstrations and experiences allowed her to service additional corporate clients at AmeriHealth Caritas, Children's Theater of Charlotte, Flagstar Bank, ITW Hartness, Kimberly-Clark, and Launch CLT.

She has received awards from the City of Charlotte, a \$10,000 website redesign courtesy of Marcus Lemonis, and a \$5,000 ATD scholarship for the University of Richmond's MBE Executive Management Program. Maria has been featured on the NBC TODAY show, in live TV cooking demos, an ATD video, radio segments, podcasts, small business seminars, and digital/print magazine covers. She spoke at the 2022 NMSDC conference, presented "DEI&B Powered by Dessert" at the 2023 BMW Supplier Diversity Xchange, and teaches continuing education for various community colleges.

Maria is an extreme extrovert with an endless passion for diversity and inclusion in business. She's a born-again Christian who enjoys travel, wine, Netflix, strength-training, and Pilates. Maria lives in Huntersville, North Carolina and frequently visits her adult daughter (and grand-furchild) in Atlanta.

ACDBE, DBE, HUB, MBE, MWSBE, SBE, SWaM, WBE certified