

Business Babies

These young entrepreneurs are taking success to a whole new level. Each one started a business at an age when most of us were focused on playdates and homework. Get inspired by their advice for people of all ages. **BY BETHANY HEITMAN**



MIKAILA ULMER, 17

FOUNDER OF ME & THE BEES LEMONADE

Most kids have a lemonade stand at some point in life, but few turn it into a national beverage business like this Texas native did.

What made you want to start a business?

When I was 4½ years old, I was stung by two bees in one week. My parents encouraged me to learn more about bees instead of simply being terrified of them—which I was! After discovering the important role that bees play in our food chain and in the ecosystems of other species, I was determined to help them. Around that same time, I received my Great Granny Helen’s flaxseed lemonade recipe in the mail. So my solution to saving the bees was to set up a lemonade stand. I made honey-sweetened flaxseed lemonade and sold it at a children’s business fair in Austin. Things took off from there.

Tell us more about Me & the Bees.

Me & the Bees is a product that both tastes good and does good. We’ve grown from a single lemonade stand to a bottled product with five flavors, available in all 50 states. Our shelf-stable,



SIP ON THIS

Me & the Bees comes in a variety of flavors—including classic, mint, ginger, prickly pear, and the brand-new black cherry. Head to meandthebees.com to find a store near you that carries it.

THIS PAGE: COURTESY OF ME & THE BEES (2). OPPOSITE: DRICO LAMAR

all-natural lemonades contain no high-fructose corn syrup, no preservatives or additives, no artificial colors, and they’re made with premium ingredients including U.S. Grade A honey, real lemon juice, and flaxseed, which is rich in omega-3s and antioxidants.

Since the very beginning, my business’s mission has always been to help secure the food supply by saving the bees. In fact, we named our company Me & the Bees so that everyone can be a part of our work to save the bees. A portion of the profits from every bottle sold goes toward fulfilling this goal. Recently, I expanded our mission to include education on social entrepreneurship—inspiring youth to start businesses that do good.

What’s the most challenging part of running a business?

We are currently in a high-growth phase and are steadfast in our goal to be America’s favorite lemonade. With that growth comes supply-chain challenges. For example, we now purchase larger quantities of packaging and ingredients in advance, so the learning curve was a bit challenging. We’ve been challenged in securing our recyclable glass bottles because of the global glass shortage. In addition, the pandemic broke the honey supply chain. We took a step back and put a team together to reevaluate all the components of our supply chain to ensure we have options for honey that meet our quality standards. And personally, a constant challenge is striking the right balance between being a student and teenager and being a CEO. That takes daily discipline.

What advice would you give to a young, aspiring entrepreneur?

Simply put, “bee” fearless and dream like a kid! I believe in this advice so much that it’s the title of the book that I wrote to help inspire other kids who are passionate about starting a business. Some specific advice is to have a hive—start small and grow the best network for you.



MEET MY FRIEND!

This doll, created by Demetrius, is soft and huggable—and speaks positive affirmations to anyone who squeezes it (\$50; ourbrownboyjoy.com).

DEMETRIUS DAVIS JR., 9

FOUNDER OF OUR BROWN BOY JOY

In the wake of George Floyd’s murder, this little boy was inspired to create a doll and books that aim to celebrate and uplift Black boys.

Where did the idea for Our Brown Boy Joy come from?

When the George Floyd situation occurred, I didn’t understand why that happened. My mother started talking to me about different situations that have affected young boys, and I was really sad. I knew then that I wanted to help Brown and Black boys know that they are special.

Our company is dedicated to creating products that provide boys love, joy, and happiness. From our clothes to our signature My Friend Plush Doll, which is intentionally dressed to represent our culture and speaks five positive affirmations, our products speak to the very essence of our boys. Our goal is to change the narrative for Brown and Black boys.

What’s the part of running a business that’s the most fun?

What I enjoy the most is getting pictures from boys all over the world, sharing their joy over having a doll that looks like them! Reading letters from

parents sometimes make me and my mom cry—not a sad cry but a happy one, because it lets us know that what we are doing is really helping.

What do you find to be the most challenging?

The most challenging part is having to be in school, going to interviews, and helping with orders. Sometimes it’s a lot, but I still enjoy it—even if I’m tired.

You’ve already started your own business—so what do you want to be when you grow up?

I want to be an actor! I want to be on television shows, but I don’t want to wait till I’m older. I’m working on adding that to what I’m already doing.

Do you have any tips for other kids who want to start their own business?

Never give up! Even when business isn’t going as well as you want, keep going. That’s something I had to learn in the very beginning. It also doesn’t hurt to have a great mom, like mine.



COLLIN, RYAN, AND AUSTIN GILL, 16, 13, AND 11

FOUNDERS OF FRÈRES BRANCHIAUX CANDLE CO.

When they needed a little extra spending money, these three brothers launched a vegan candle company that gives back.

What inspired you to start your own business so young?

We all got an allowance, but we wanted a few extras toys and games. One day in October 2017, we asked our mom again for more money. Her answer was, “No more money—get a job or start a business.” So that’s how we started.

Tell us about Frères Branchiaux Candle Co.

We create beautifully scented veg-an candles for those who want self-

care that gives back—10 percent of our profits are donated to homeless shelters nationwide. Our candles help you relax and reconnect to the feeling of home. By the way, “Frères Branchiaux” means Gill Brothers in French. We learned French in a French-immersion school before we were homeschooled.

What’s the most fun part of running your business?

Working with one another! We have a lot of fun laughing and

joking when we work. We can sometimes have a little too much fun—and then our parents might have to step in and get us back on track. Getting to work together is the best job.

What’s the most challenging thing about it?

Learning so much in such a short amount of time. We grew really fast in our second year of business. We had to learn about hiring people, getting a warehouse, shipping to

stores... So many new things. As we learn more about being in business, it gets easier.

Most people don’t have a business until they’re older. Since you’ve already accomplished that, what do you each want to be when you grow up?

COLLIN: I want to be a professional football player in the NFL. I am currently a cornerback and safety on my varsity high-school football

FRAGRANCES FOR EVERYONE

Frères Branchiaux candles come in dozens of incredible scents (from \$25; freresbranchiaux.com).



team. After that, I want to continue to be a business owner.

RYAN: I want to be a professional baseball player in the MLB. I also want to be an architect and an entrepreneur. I want to own multiple businesses.

AUSTIN: I want to be a paleontologist.

What advice would you give to another young person who wants to start a business?

COLLIN: Learn how to balance being a kid and being an entrepreneur. Enjoy being a kid—business can make you grow up fast. But you can be both.

RYAN: Set goals and write them down—you will be more likely to reach them this way.

AUSTIN: Never give up. Keep going. And going. And going. It will be hard at times. You will feel like giving up. When you feel like that, take a break. Then keep going—but you need to rest when your mind and body tell you to rest.