



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For additional information, please contact:

Lori Anne Oliwa, lorianne@weareifel.org
(973) 353-0611x125

PANDEMIC PERSEVERANCE - BOLD IS GOLD FOR FIVE FOUNDERS WHO FORGED AHEAD

The Institute For Entrepreneurial Leadership Highlights Innovative Entrepreneurs During National Small Business Week Who Prove Success Is Possible Despite The Pandemic

Newark, NJ, September 9, 2021 — While stories of disappointment, devastation and disruption to the business community continue to surface, there are also untold narratives of perseverance, resilience and triumph. National Small Business Week is the perfect time to recognize five founders who forged ahead through uncertain times, proving that a little creativity, adaptability and patience yield positive results.

“I decided to push ahead, to keep preparing, and to wait for the right time. It was tough, but turned out to be the right decision,” stated Eder Charles, owner of [Evolve Therapy LLC](#), Newark, NJ, a physical and occupational therapy practice. Charles had solid plans to open with a partner, but COVID-19 hit. Instead of rushing into another partnership - he wasn't even sure he wanted a partner - he waited, remaining resolute while continuing to network. The patience paid off. Charles procured space in a fitness facility and saved the expense of equipment purchases, opening in May of this year. “I took the time to pause and to decide what I really wanted to do and why I was doing it. That extra time helped me to focus and to be in the right place, at the right time, with the right people,” Charles stated.

Coffee entrepreneur Glen Locus, owner of [Coffee Express](#) in Newark, NJ, struggled with many tough breaks but remained steadfast in his vision to bring CupAKona coffee to the masses. “I didn't really want to close at all during the pandemic, but 2020 was just so bad financially,” he noted. The Hawaiian brand of coffee he created in 2009 by mixing multiple blends and adding a secret ingredient is something that only he offers. Locus explained that a flood in 2019 destroyed one of his locations, and then COVID-19 hit and financially devastated his Newark location. He moved ahead despite the setbacks and will be re-opening his Newark location shortly. Additionally, he is planning a location in the Bronx and considering Los Angeles, Hawaii, Tokyo and London for expansion.

The world that Iya Sokoya Karade knew was completely devastated when COVID-19 hit. An executive order from the government deemed her business, [Athletic Arts Academy](#), Orange, NJ, as a non-essential business. While her existing licensed summer camp expedited the re-opening process, concerns about future shutdowns forced Karade to find additional ways to protect the academy while also helping families in her community. "Even though building this business from the ground up has taken a toll on me, fighting my way back from COVID-19 has made me focus and become more determined," she stated. Karade applied for and won a grant from the State of New Jersey, allowing her to procure an official childcare license and to upgrade her facility and programs to encourage more families with children to enroll. Programs at the academy also nurture children's emotional and spiritual development and provide safe, affordable and dependable childcare for low-income working families in the community. "The past year has put a terrible strain on working families in surrounding, predominantly African-American, Latin, and immigrant communities, where family members often work multiple jobs. Receiving this grant has enabled the academy to offer parents much-needed financial relief," Karade stated. Child care enrollment is open for families by visiting, <https://bit.ly/3BmKFOj>.

For Darcel Dillard-Suite, M.S., co-founder of [Full Circle Health](#) along with her husband, Derek H. Suite, M.D., the pandemic provided an opportunity to expand an already successful Manhattan & Bronx-based company. The powerhouse couple decided to build an innovative virtual model for workplace wellness and performance, making a healthy and productive workforce top priority. "COVID-19 was a real game-changer. Everyone has staff who are struggling now and remote personnel who are transitioning back to the office. Amidst all the political confusion and hysteria over resistance to vaccines, we must educate people to do what is best for themselves and for their own health," stated Dillard-Suite. The Full Circle Workforce Wellness Platform is a highly individualized coaching and counseling resource that addresses five dimensions of wellness - physical, emotional, social, occupational and spiritual - with the goal of professional and personal peak performance. Clients have private access to coaches & counselors through the click of a button, through video chat or through text, whenever and wherever the client needs a consultation. While the platform is growing and evolving, Dillard-Suite has advice for entrepreneurs navigating their own journeys toward success. "In the quest for perfection, we miss a lot of opportunities. Something will always go wrong. Done is better than perfect," she stated.

Mykel Dicus, creator of [Flow and Flair](#), has literally persevered through movement, in more ways than one. With a background in dance, theater and fitness/kinesiology, his unique physical fitness program, Flow and Flair, extends physical mobility and inspires creativity and physical expression for senior and disabled populations. The program has been in existence since 2011, but was impacted when lockdowns prevented in-person visitations at health care facilities. Dicus embodies the meaning of the phrase, 'pandemic pivot,' and adapted by developing online classes for Flow and Flair as well as forming a

business which sells masks and bags, www.lilolebagsnyc.com. Formerly of New York City, Dicus has moved twice since the pandemic struck. He is enrolled in school for certification as a full stack web developer. To maintain income flow after losing his living situation, Dicus became a hospitality manager for a home that hosted traveling nurses while continuing to grow his online sales. His mantra for staying resilient and for staying in motion is, "Freak out and fall forward."

While the pandemic continues to throw obstacles in the way of small business, none of these entrepreneurs were alone in their journeys and cited the assistance they received at the [Institute For Entrepreneurial Leadership](#). For Darcel Dillard-Suite, being part of the [Women Of Color Connecting](#) initiative and the 'Success Circle' model that makes the program so effective is inspirational. "It's powerful when female entrepreneurs help each other to succeed," Dillard-Suite said.

IFEL CEO Jill Johnson stated, "National Small Business Week is a great time to honor and applaud these entrepreneurs for staying the course. They are a testament to the strength and tenacity of small businesses and our team, including our volunteers, is happy to do whatever it takes to help them move forward faster. While each business is unique, the force uniting all of them is their desire to make a difference in the communities they serve."

For more information on IFEL programs, visit www.weareifel.org.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

Founded in 2002, the [Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership](#) (IFEL) is an independent, not-for-profit organization that supports economic development through entrepreneurship. We are experts in creating and implementing small business programming in support of larger economic development objectives. Our mission is to eradicate the systemic barriers that prevent entrepreneurs of color from being able to access the knowledge, networks, and capital required for business success. Visit us at <https://www.weareifel.org>

###