

The Couple Behind LaMay's Catering Shares Their Story

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - When Jason and Kayla Harrison’s daughters came home from school hungry after refusing to eat the school lunches, again, the couple realized something had to change.

[LaMay's Catering](#), named for their daughters, was their solution. Now in daycares and schools across the Metro East, LaMay's is a customizable catering service that aims to please the most difficult customers: kids. The service offers nutritional meals that kids enjoy. But LaMay's was only the beginning for Jason and Kayla, and they're excited to watch the company continue to grow alongside their food truck Food Revival and restaurant Café 111.

"It just came together," Jason said. "Opportunities come, we seize the moment, and it's like it just fits hand-in-hand. It's just phenomenal just to see how it unfolds...Our initial goal was just get children to eat, and then as we got into it more we thought, 'What if we could get them to eat and get them nutritional food?'"

This goal hasn't always been easy to achieve. Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative centered on nutritional requirements in school lunches, but the federal government only reimbursed a few dollars for every meal. With the cost of healthy foods on the rise, the Harrisons were faced with new challenges as they tried to participate in the initiative, create meals that kids would enjoy, and pay for it.

But they soon proved they were up to the task. Unlike other food providers and catering services, LaMay's wanted feedback from even their youngest customers. This made them successful.

"You got to let the kids talk. They'll tell you what they like and what they don't like," Kayla explained. "We get a lot of feedback from our kids and their friends, and I'm constantly saying, 'What'd you have for lunch? Did you like it?' because you got to hear from the kids. It's what they want."

If a meal was unsuccessful at a daycare or school, they scrapped it and found a different meal to replace it in the future. Soon, kids weren't only eating; they were eating, enjoying their meals and getting the nutritional food they needed.

It was a natural next step for the Harrisons to expand. Along with their 21-year-old son, they opened [Food Revival](#), a food truck that serves fish and barbeque. The truck is regularly on campus at Lewis and Clark Community College, but Jason said they hope to grow.

"We've been local, but now we're really about to expand out there and go full force," he added. "It has its challenges, because younger, and he gives a total youthful spin to it and we're living more seasoned. This is our money on the line here, our reputation, as well as trying to build him a reputation. So we have had these clashes, to say the least. However, the thing I like about it is he didn't quit. And I am big on that. I cannot deal with quitters."

Jason and Kayla have adopted this mindset through all of their business ventures, including their most recent addition to the Riverbend. [Café 111](#), located at 111 E. 4th Street in Alton, serves coffee, specialty drinks, sandwiches and pastries. Kayla warns the fresh pastries are “dangerously good,” and they also have weekly deals, like Taco Tuesdays and Wing Wednesdays, that are popular with people who work in the building.

While it’s not always easy to work with a spouse, the Harrisons have shown it can be a great experience. Kayla noted that they try to avoid business talk during date nights and it’s difficult to complain about her boss to her husband, but she likes that she can always get a hug if she’s having a rough day. Jason joked he has made an HR complaint about that, but he loves working with his wife and being a positive example for their children and grandchildren.

“I have friends that are very successful that have built beautiful companies, outstanding things without their spouse, and then when they get back from building — you come back, you’re a public success and kind of like a private failure. I never wanted that. So my journey is a little slower. I haven’t gotten to where I want to go because I still leave to pick up our children from school,” Jason explained. “It’s important to me that they get to see us working and they talk about entrepreneurship and what they want to do and our children talk about what they want to do. To me, that’s just so important.

For more information about LaMay’s Catering, visit their [official website at LaMaysCatering.com](#).