

Celebrating a decade of **BLACK BUSINESSES** | **2015** | JA TURNS 83



Willie Grafton, Independent Taxi Driver, Jackson Taxi

Six years after the *Jackson Advocate* published an article on Jackson Taxi, we're happy to report that the company is on the mend from the onslaught of COVID and the increase in use of Uber and other transportation services by Jackson residents. General manager Jessica Knight credits customer care with their success. "We're not where we were when the article was written in 2015, but we're slowly getting there. I believe treating our customers like family is the reason we're still here. Many of our customers are every day riders. And although we don't have as many vehicles as we used to have, we make sure our customers ride comfortably and get to their destination timely," said Knight. "Things are starting to turn around and we anticipate adding more vehicles to our fleet." With such a positive outlook for the future, Jackson Taxi can easily incorporate President Biden's slogan — Let's "Build Back Better!"



Jessica Meredith Knight GM, Jackson Taxi

# Taylor's Candy Company proves dreaming is essential to business success

By Meredith C. McGee  
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The summer American Express launched its first credit card in 1958, Walter Lee Taylor, a native of Canton, Mississippi, began his career as a charming salesman.

During Jim Crow, Walter worked for his older cousin Henry Taylor, who had a distribution business on Bailey Avenue in Jackson, Mississippi. Henry was a master of his trade, and Walter was quick on his feet. He worked hard, and went beyond the call of duty.

In those days, money was turning over in the Black community hand to hand like it wasn't nobody's business, and the Taylors were key business suppliers.

"Back then I dreamed of becoming the biggest candy distributor in our state," Walter Lee Taylor said smiling. His big thinking paid off for him. "At our business peak we had nine trucks delivering products to schools, groups, organizations, mom and pop businesses, and stores as far as 100 miles away," Ozie Taylor noted.

Walter and Ozie met at Jackson State College (now Jackson State University), while pursuing teaching degrees, and married in 1962. After college, Walter taught math at McLaurin High School in Rankin County, and was a part-time salesman. Ozie taught English at Powell Junior High School on Livingston Road in Jackson.

"When Walter told me he wanted to give up teaching to start his own business, I supported him 100 percent," Ozie noted. "Mama's [Mary Gross] philosophy was, 'Believe in yourself. If you don't, who will?'" They saved money, and as hard as it was, they managed to get an SBA loan in 1967 to finance their first business site on Cox Street. Ozie kept her teaching job until 1972. Then, she went behind the counter with her husband, where she has been since.

By then, Taylor's Candy Company had full-time employees working inside their warehouse, and drivers transporting candy, confectionary, industrial supplies, and meats to stores in Jackson, Yazoo City (Ozie's hometown), and to other enterprises.

This amazing duo has blended together like salt and pepper in Ozie's delicious southern meals. Their



Walter Lee & Ozie Taylor, Taylor's Candy



marriage has lasted over 52 years, and this July will mark their 48<sup>th</sup> year in business.

The company name was displayed on a Coca Cola sign for decades. When the red background behind the white Coca Cola letters faded, they bought a new sign.

Ozie is genuine and humble, and Walter is straight forward and driven. "I met salesmen from all across the country," Ozie recalled. "I love people," she added.

Angela Sampson, a regular customer who buys wholesale products, said, "The Taylors offer the best prices in town. I've been driving across town to shop with them since 2010. The atmosphere here is warm. Their customer service is great." Willie Evans, who owns Quick Stop Grocery a few blocks over on Hill Street, buys products from the

Taylors, too.

Some of their customer base buys individual snacks. Kentarious Roash, a 10<sup>th</sup> grader at Jim Hill High School, walked in during our interview and purchased a Faygo drink and some snacks.

African American Business Pioneer Roy Dixon often delivers their lunch which is prepared at Maxine's Country Kitchen, a business he operates with his wife. Dixon noted, "I started selling Dixon Skins in April of 1974." The Dixons and Taylors know the significance of networking.

Taylor's Candy has downsized considerably over the years. "At one time, we were purchasing products from 32 companies. We buy from 10 companies today," Ozie said. "We don't have as much overhead as we once had," Walter noted. "We let all of the employees go," he added. Walter

Walter said confidently. Well, one thing is for sure, Taylor's Candy Company is well stocked. Nothing is out of place. Products are stacked neatly in each cubby. The entire building is spotless. Ozie referred to cleaning and maintaining the store in good order as "Exercise."

Walter offers a few words of advice to anyone desiring to go into business today, "You better know what you're doing." Ozie contended new business owners need to be patient, willing to persevere through highs and lows, able to hold onto money, and to keep a positive attitude."

Sure enough, every business has a bad day, or a bad season. That's the nature of business. Business owners are risk takers. "There were days when I looked at Walter and said, 'I'm ready to go home,'" Ozie admitted. But, Walter, who sold bags of grits during the Great Depression when he was a little boy, knows too well tomorrow will be better. "Ain't nothing at home," she once told him when she felt discouraged, indicating they would stay the course, and close the doors as usual at 5:30 pm.

Drive up Valley Street Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:30 pm, turn on Cox Street, to your right you're see a large sign: TAYLOR'S CANDY CO. Park in the gated parking area. Make no mistake about it, you'll find something tasty to buy, and you'll be mighty glad to have been served by Walter and Ozie Taylor.

The Taylors have served two generations of customers, and they are ready to supply products to your business, school, club, or group.

**UPDATE: Taylor's Candy is now in the capable hands of longtime grocer Greg Price, who worked with the previous owners for a year in 2020 before purchasing it. Because of Price's vast experience in the food industry, he came equipped with both the boat and paddle to stay afloat through the onslaught of COVID. "We put in all the safeguards — cleaning, sanitizing, face masks, social distancing, and encouraged shoppers to get the vaccine," said the former owner of Jackson Cash and Carry. Since taking over the "candy store that sticks with you," Price has added a number of items that were top sellers at his grocery store, such as bakery goods and restaurant supplies. And because the store is located in both a hub zone and food desert, fresh produce won't be far behind. His wife Pamela is sure to have her specialty goodie baskets ready for the holidays! Best wishes for the guy who strongly believes Black people should own supermarkets.**

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In 2020, IMMC was the winner of two top awards: IMMC won US Today's 2020 10 Best Readers' Choice Award. IMMC came in 4th among the top 10 winners in the category of religious museums, behind (1) Ark Encounter, Williamstown, KY (2016); (2) Creation Museum, Petersburg, KY (2007); and (3) Museum of the Bible, Washington, DC (2017). (4) International Museum of Muslim Cultures, Jackson, MS, established in 2001, was the first to be founded of all 10 winners. IMMC's second award of 2020 was StudioBasel's win of the Golden Award of Montreux (Switzerland) for design of IMMC's "Muslims with Christians and Jews: An Exhibition of Covenants & Coexistence" that premiered in Jackson in June 2019.