

BUSTA'S PERSON OF THE WEEK

'I want to give back to the City of Winston-Salem, as they have given to me.'

BY BUSTA BROWN FOR THE CHRONICLE

Cassandra Brunson is the president of Design+ by Cassandra Michelle. Brunson's company gently guides their customers through the interior design process, which includes space planning, selection of building materials, textiles, finishes and furniture, for their home projects. "We have partnered with the leading contractors and service providers to provide an HGTV experience unlike any other design center in the region," she said.



Submitted photo
Cassandra Brunson, president of Design+ by Cassandra Michelle.

The word is out about the amazing work Design+ by Cassandra Michelle provides for her clients, but what's most inspiring is her gratitude to the Winston-Salem community. "The city leaders, organizations and the community have really been extremely supportive. They're the reason people like me, with no generational wealth, can live their dream. I didn't receive any SBA grants; everything that I received has been from the city and organizations in the city. The Bible says, 'To whom much is given, much is required,' so I want to give back to the City of Winston-Salem, as they have given to me," said Cassandra, as she smiled, beaming with a spirit of gratitude.

But her journey in becoming a business owner and president of her company came with a lot of disappointments. It all began during a visit from a family member who admired Cassandra's personal home décor. She suggested that Cassandra become an interior designer. Inspired by the suggestion, Brunson took advantage of her previous employer's tuition reimbursement program and enrolled in night classes in interior design at High Point University, where she received a good foundation in the field. After graduating in 2008, she enrolled in architectural design at UNCG. "I wanted to learn more of the technical side, so I could master my craft and become more valuable in the interior design industry." After graduating from UNCG, she found work in her field and her career was thriving. It took her from Los Angeles to Italy. Life was looking good for the Sumter, S.C. native. But her dreams of success and retirement in interior design came

crashing down. "I was laid off from the last job and as I looked for work, I received one rejection letter after another. At one point I was working out of my car. It was a struggle," said Brunson.

Brunson was the first college graduate in her family, so the expectations were high and failure was not an option. While working for an insurance company to make ends meet, her vision of owning an interior design company became even brighter. Rather than focus on what was lost, Cassandra focused on what she had gained. "All of those jobs and experiences were stairsteps to help me understand how to manage, own and operate the business I now own. In 2018 I applied for a revitalization loan with the City of Winston-Salem for \$100,000 dollars. I stayed up day and night and worked vigorously on a business plan that was a 200-page book. My hard work paid off and I was granted that loan. I credit the city and the community of Winston-Salem as well, and I'm truly grateful."

Design+ By Cassandra Michelle's mission is to give back to the community and be Winston-Salem's one stop shop for all of their interior design needs. "We know custom home marketing is a burden with visiting numerous locations to select home products, so we made that simple and easy, with curating a holistic interior design experience with three major segments of design in one location. We have a design studio with hi-tech digital capabilities to create 2D space plans and present 3D models and renderings, a material library and furniture show-

room," said Brunson.

Due to COVID-19, they have pivoted Design+ By Cassandra Michelle, "We offer online services on a more advanced level than what we were doing before we had just the store front. We've taken E-designed packages to another level, offering our customers design services without any contact. They will send images of their space and floor plans and we will do a virtual tour in their homes. But we do have customers that still want to come to the studio, so we have sanitizer dispensers, wipes, face masks, and everything to keep our customers safe. And they do feel safe coming to the store, so we have 50% virtual and 50% in-store customers."

Cassandra is an educator for the Habitat for Humanity first home buyer's program. She's also a partner with the Vocational Rehabilitation Center. "They had a young lady that was interested in interior design, so I took her under my wing and she works as an intern. I'll become an adjunct professor at Forsyth Tech in January, teaching interior design, and I was appointed by Mayor Allen Joines to sit on the Minority Owned Women Enterprise Board (MWEB). I love my community, Busta!" said Cassandra.

For more information or to contact our Business of the Month, call 336-546-7134 or visit design-plus-by-Cassandra-Michelle, on Facebook @ design-plus-by-Cassandra-Michelle and LinkedIn @ cbrunson. Design+ By Cassandra-Michelle is located in the Liberty Plaza Building, 102 W. Third Street, Suite UP200, in Winston-Salem.

Fraternity

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a bunch of organizations that care about what's best for others in society," Younger continued.

"Our organization, since the '30s, has been focused on voting and people having opportunities to vote. And although people were trying to keep them from voting, we tried to encourage them to vote, but also keep them protected. Throughout this county, we have been setting up shop and making sure people know that people are looking out for them."

Younger said the people they interacted with at the Forsyth Tech location have been in "pretty good spirits" and some have even stayed to converse with them about their voting experience.

Younger stated he will be watching the results of the election and is hopeful the nation stays peaceful, no matter the winner.

"I am definitely going to stay tuned in to see what the results are, and I want to see what the reactions to the results are," said

Younger. "There are some people that are going to be very happy and some people that are not going to be happy, but I hope everyone chooses to say, the person I voted for didn't win, but I still love America and I am going to make sure that it's the best it can be. That's what I hope people are going to do."

"Unfortunately, I won't be surprised if people act out their frustrations in various ways, so my hope is that no one gets hurt, nobody feels threatened, nobody feels like they can't do what they need to do next because of the outcome of the elections."

Another point of emphasis for the chapter was the importance of the local elections and how they impact those in the community firsthand. Younger says it's a great thing to have access to the local elected officials about any issue or concern he has.

"One of the things I think is really cool about Winston-Salem/Forsyth County is, if you want to, you have the opportunity to meet and interact with any local official, because

they make themselves available," he continued. "They want to know what people think and what are the challenges that aren't being addressed, or how we can address them differently, so I pay just as much, if not more, attention to the local elections than the federal elections."

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