



BITOY'S SWEET TREATS

A CHICAGO ORIGINAL

Bitoy's Sweet Treats, Inc.

It's generational wealth happening in real time for my business, my brand, and my family.

Ten years ago, Layla Bitoy-Dillon traded in her high-flying career as a top-tier management consultant for something far sweeter and much closer to home. After years of "wheels up, wheels down" travel for some of the world's most prestigious firms, she realized the joy had faded. She wanted more peace, more purpose... and a lot more sugar.

"I come from a family of entrepreneurs," Layla says. "We had BBQ restaurants, liquor stores, and mom-and-pop shops. I ran from that path at first but in a full-circle moment, I came back to my roots."

Those roots were steeped in food, family, and community. "Growing up, the moments that mattered most always centered around food. I've always been a sugar baby with sugar fingers," she laughs. "Baking gave me peace and I realized I could build something that blended family, fun, and food."

Layla also grew up with a front-row seat to the grit it takes to run a business. "My father was the cornerstone of hard work, dedication, and perseverance. He showed me not only how to build something, but how to share it with the community. My grandmother was just as influential, she was deeply involved in social impact and community development. Together, they set the tone for me: hard work, community, and resilience."

In 2015, Layla founded Bitoy's Sweet Treats in the heart of Chicago to honor her father and grandmother, who had been in business for over 50 years. Her manufacturing facility opened in the historic West Side Austin neighborhood, just a block from where her father launched his first business. She offered high-end gelato inspired by her time in Italy, gourmet confections, and warm, inviting lighting to a space where such luxuries were rare, deliberately redefining what a high-value business could look like in an underserved community.

Today, Bitoy's employs eight people most from the neighborhood providing jobs, training, and a sense of pride in a community on the rise.

"Chicago is a food mecca competitive, political, and fast-paced," Layla says. "To survive here for ten years, you've got to be doing something right. For us, it's simple: consistency, commitment to quality, and treating our employees like the heartbeat of the business."

With products already delighting travelers in Chicago's Midway and O'Hare airports and tempting audiences on the Home Shopping Network, Bitoy's Sweet Treats was primed for its next big opportunity.

Through her membership in the Airport Minority Advisory Council (AMAC) Chicago Chapter, Layla learned about a Shark Tank-style supplier pitch competition at St. Louis Lambert International Airport (STL). She had just two weeks to prepare and a newborn baby in tow.

"I look back now and laugh," she says. "I packed up the baby, my husband, and a car full of products, and we hit the road to St. Louis. That trip changed everything."

Her pitch took first place, earning her a spot in the national pitch competition at the 40th Annual AMAC Airport Business Conference in New Orleans. There, she excelled, standing before C-suite executives from across the airport concessions and travel retail industry and delivering a crystal-clear vision of her brand.

The result? Multiple national distribution offers and a network of buyers eager to work with her.

"This was life-changing," Layla says. "It's generational wealth happening in real time for my business, my brand, and my family."

Her winning pitches in St. Louis and New Orleans showcased Bitoy's signature product line:

- Popcorn: "Not just any popcorn we source the highest quality kernels, using different varieties for different flavors, and pop them in coconut oil. Every batch is gluten-free, non-GMO, and uniquely flavored. We have the classic cheese and caramel known as the Chicago mix, plus spicy cheese, vegan options, and our signature sweet-cheese-caramel blend on one kernel."
- Brownies: "Decadent, semi-sweet chocolate, the perfect balance of cakey and fudgy. They come plain, with nuts, or oozing with caramel—amazing with ice cream. They're a Home Shopping Network favorite."
- Cupcake Cookies: "Crispy edges like a cookie, softness like a tea cake or cupcake. Individually wrapped, with flavors from lemon and red velvet to peach cobbler and summer blueberry."
- Chocolate Confections: "Old-school, hand-dipped turtles, cheesecake jars, gourmet dipped apples all made from scratch with fresh, natural, and organic ingredients."

From neighborhood favorite to national brand, Layla has turned her love for sweets into a force for good creating jobs, mentoring through organizations like the Chicago Urban League and the Chicago Blackhawks Foundation, and proving that businesses in underserved areas can set a new standard for excellence.

"Once you get into these high-profile organizations and airports, you have to work just as hard to stay there," she says. "It's all about keeping that shelf space, maintaining quality, and honoring your customers' trust."

With new airport partnerships, national distribution on the horizon, and a growing fan base from Chicago to coast-to-coast, Bitoy's Sweet Treats is just getting started.

"Ten years in, I'm grateful," Layla says. "We've worked hard to be here, and we deserve it. This is proof that when you lead with love, quality, and community, sweet success will always follow."

In July 2024, The Wall Street Journal highlighted Layla Bitoy-Dillon's journey as a female entrepreneur, small business innovator, and leader in the gourmet food industry.