

This year we introduced a brand new, on-course culinary experience to the [Meijer LPGA Classic for *Simply Give*](#). J. Brewer's – named after the financier who once owned the land where Blythefield Country Club's course was laid out nearly a century ago – featured a variety of local diverse-owned restaurants as well as Meijer meat and seafood delicacies curated by our chefs.

One local restaurant was The Candied Yam, a popular Grand Rapids eatery that specializes in southern cuisine and rustic soul food. Owner Jessica Ann Tyson and her team served up collard greens, black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes and fried chicken from the golf course all weekend long.

But the cuisine itself is only part of what the 50-year-old bubbly and energetic multi-business entrepreneur busily served up. There was a smile with each plate, as well as a zesty dash of genuine love and appreciation for the joy she gets to deliver. The food Jessica Ann prepares for others goes beyond sustenance. It represents comfort, safety, and perseverance, and so many other things as she gives back to the Grand Rapids community she's called home for 20-plus years.

Being able to serve others is a special part of her busy life. "I'm blessed," she said, smiling.

Jessica Ann viewed J. Brewer's as a victory for all. People could come out to support great golf – she loves the sport – and sample some terrific local cuisine, supporting small businesses along the way that have endured challenging times through COVID-19. For The Candied Yam, it was a great spot to meet new customers.

"There's more than just small restaurants," Jessica Ann said. "There's breweries, there's cakemakers, just a variety of people that they brought to the table. Not only diverse in the type and size of the businesses, but the colors, LGBTQ+ ... we've all been brought together. That's what they (Meijer) do in their stores."

Jessica Ann kept The Candied Yam open throughout the pandemic, mostly because it allowed her to follow a mission she started when she opened the restaurant five years ago. Being a restaurateur allows her to feed as many people as she wishes to – a calling that's close to her heart.

In a quieter moment, Jessica Ann described that she endured a difficult childhood. She and her equally entrepreneurial twin sister – "She's my ride or die," Jessica Ann said – spent their younger days bouncing through foster homes. She said that their next meal was not always guaranteed. Luckily, the sisters always stayed together – separated only once – and at the age of 8, found their forever home as a package deal.

The sisters were adopted by a preacher and a teacher in Lansing. Their adoptive parents kept a garden of fresh greens, tomatoes and carrots, and taught their daughters their love of food, the drive of entrepreneurship, and the compassion to take care of their neighbors.

When asked to serve at this year's tournament, Jessica Ann was thrilled to be involved because of the shared mission of feeding people.

"When we were asked to be a part of this, it just resonated so loud with my background and upbringing," she said. "We're so glad to be here. It fits with our message: Be humble. Be kind. Love your neighbor."

This year's Meijer LPGA Classic aimed to raise \$1.2 million for [Simply Give](#), our hunger relief program that stocks the shelves of food pantries across the Midwest. Thanks to the support of the community, the tournament surpassed its goal and raised \$1.25 million.

"Coming through COVID, I see a deeper level of appreciation at the restaurant from people who are realizing that life is short, and life is precious. I may have had a hard childhood, but now I can feed all the people that I want to."

We're pleased to support local businesses and business-owners like Jessica Ann through our tournament and appreciate her partnership as we worked together to feed families in need through this year's event.

Additional assets available online: _____(1)

<https://meijercommunity.com/Local-Restaurant-Owner-Brings-Good-Eats-and-Energy-to-J-Brewers-at-the-Meijer-LPGA-Classi>