



“I graduated high school when I was 16.

After I graduated I wanted to start working, so I applied for a seasonal job at Target. In January, they offered me a full-time position as a department manager and two years later I was given keys to the store.

I worked at Target for about 16 years before I decided I wanted to start looking into the vending world.

In 2014, I bought three vending machines, but I didn't know what to do with them. I sat on those machines for two years before a local business finally gave me the opportunity.

From there, I just kept reaching out to people to try and place vending machines in their businesses. I got up to about 83 vending machines and was running from Bennettsville to Bishopville to Florence, just filling vending machines.

Then it was in 2017 that I went to the Florence Regional Airport to pitch having a vending machine there. While I didn't get the vending contract, they did ask if I wanted to open a restaurant there. I never really cooked, I didn't know a lot about restaurants, but I wanted to try it.

And so on a whim, I said okay.

I put in my notice at Target and opened at the airport. But I really battled with that decision. I was asking myself if I should have tried to both, or not even do the restaurant at all. I was so established at Target, loved what I did, and now I'm about to take this huge risk. But in the end I just said to myself, 'What's the worst thing that could happen?' I knew I could always go back, but after I opened, I never wanted to go back.

I was at the airport for about three and half years before I had to close due to the pandemic. Luckily, the Downtown Development Office let me know about this location here, but I didn't know how I was going to do it.

I didn't really have income coming in because the vending machine business had slowed way down, but when I say everything just kind of worked out, from the equipment to the building to the grants I received. Everything fell into place and we opened in Downtown in January 2021.

Being at the airport was a good foundation for me, because it allowed me to learn a lot about the restaurant business. It didn't teach me everything, but it taught me enough where I can continue to push to the next level. In the next few weeks, we plan to offer fine dining here at night.

A customer of mine was the one to suggest offering fine dining and like I said, I'm such a risk taker. I'll try it and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

But I do see a bright future with this.”

- Andrena Mullins, owner of Liljazzi's Cafe