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## MONEY

# Runnin' Buzz Bartending: Owner's sickness on cruise was harbinger of things to come

*Runnin' Buzz is a certified woman and minority-owned business*

**Sarah Mueller** Special to the Tallahassee Democrat

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Lanisha Thornton was looking forward to some fun in the sun during a five-day cruise to the Bahamas at the end of January 2020.

She had just launched Runnin' Buzz Bartending, a mobile bartending and beverage catering business, in October 2019. Shortly before the cruise, Thornton incorporated it.

The cruise, which left Port Canaveral Jan. 30, was a chance for Thornton to celebrate with her sister and friends. But on the second day, she came down with chills, fevers and body aches, forcing her to isolate in her room.

"A lot of other passengers were nervous to be around me," Thornton said.

At that time, most of the concern about COVID-19 focused on visitors to China and specifically the city of Wuhan. She said she didn't think that it could really be COVID-19 until she went to the gift shop to buy some medicine.

"The gift shop was completely out of medicine, so when I saw that, I freaked out," Thornton said.

It turned out several people on the cruise were also sick. Four other friends besides Thornton and her sister also became ill. She later tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies.

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Thornton was sick for a total of two weeks, growing worse after the cruise ended. She worried how the spreading COVID-19 outbreak would affect her company's ability to secure bookings.

Runnin' Buzz Bartending is a side business for Thornton, who works as a full-time legal assistant at a law firm. She wants to grow it to the point that it becomes a full-time business. But while bookings in 2021 have picked up, 2020 didn't go as planned.

The first event she managed to book was a wedding scheduled for February. But the clients postponed it to July because of the pandemic. "I didn't think I was going to get anymore (business) after that," Thornton said.

Thornton said they got another booking for a class reunion in July and then a birthday in November. That was it for physical events for 2020, but five virtual events also helped generate revenue. Still, they would have to book 4-5 events a month to make it into a full-time business, Thornton said.

Meanwhile Thornton's law firm had moved to working remotely in March 2020. She said it was difficult working from home and helping her youngest daughter Leylah with virtual learning.

Runnin' Buzz, which is a certified woman and minority-owned business, is family operated. Cornelious, her husband of three years, is also a bartender. Lanisha has

four children and Leylah often pours 'mocktails,' non-alcoholic drinks, at children's parties.

Leylah's virtual classes required students to keep logging in and out throughout the school day, which became frustrating, Thornton said. She feels the constant logging in and out interfered with her daughter's ability to focus and her grades suffered.

"She came to me and told me she's just not disciplined enough," she said.

Thornton had to start reporting back to the office in June of last year, but her daughter continued virtual learning at home until November 2020. She said she continued to assist her daughter in school through video on her desk phone at work, a source of tension between her and her supervisor.

"I was not given an opportunity to continue to work from home," she said. "It almost became a problem because I didn't know for sure if I was going to be able to continue that employment because of my child still being at home and me doing these things, trying to juggle everything while I was at work."

Leylah went back to school in-person last November, but then her biological father died a month later of a condition unrelated to COVID. Thornton struggled to help her daughter through her grief, while concentrating on her job and growing her business.

Leylah's grades have since improved, but she's continued to face emotional challenges from dealing with her father's death, Thornton said. At times she wondered if Runnin' Buzz Bartending would make it because 2020 was so slow. But already having a full-time job took a lot of the pressure off.

"I just stayed educated, I learned more drinks, played in what I call my lab," Thornton said. "Read a lot of books, took some business classes in accounting."

Thornton said her business has picked up in 2021, in part because she's marketing herself more. Her first event this year was a wedding in February and then she did a couple of teacher appreciation events.

They've also been doing pop-up shops where customers can try the mocktail versions of their cocktails.

Thornton said Runnin' Buzz is overall making more money than it did last year: "A lot of people are aware of Runnin' Buzz now," she said.

She said she wasn't concerned about the delta variant when Florida became a hot spot again this past summer because of the steep rise in new cases.

"We have a whole lot of things that were already in place back then," Thornton said. "So if we have to continue to go back to those original guidelines just to keep everyone safe, then so be it."

## **About this project**

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