



May 31, 2015

Dear 2015 Women of Influence Committee Members,

It is with great enthusiasm, and gratitude that I compose this letter. I am writing to recommend Jessica Dunker as a 2015 Woman of Influence. I first met Jessica through the Iowa Restaurant Association. As a once local resident, and restaurateur I quickly realized Jessica's impact in our industry. As the President of the IRA, Jessica's influence over the past 5 years took a small association and created a statewide network for the restaurant industry. Her council, leadership, and experience has created an association that now promotes local growth, protects the investments & concerns of our industry, and helps us cultivate a new generation of culinary talent in the state of Iowa. Under Jessica's leadership, the Iowa Restaurant Association created an Education Foundation to help build the needed support for new culinary education, and ensure leadership & curriculum for rural areas to expand their home economic programs. She saw a need and pushed for creating a separate board, dedicating a full time staff to the purpose, and advising community relations on the growth of the project. Now the Educational Foundation of the IRA, and Pro-Start program in Iowa sees over 25 participating schools state-wide. No doubt offering young students a chance at a life time career in the culinary arts that once was not possible. In addition, her vision for the Iowa Restaurant Association has developed Iowa into a flourishing network that has seen record breaking member attendance and achievements in our industry. Jessica is a woman who promotes women. Pamela Patton is a perfect example. Jessica recently nominated and fought to see Pamela, an Iowa Restaurateur, recognized as a national recipient for Women Entrepreneurs in our industry.

However, Jessica's tenacity, drive, and leadership does not end with the restaurant industry. Jessica also spends every countless hour outside of helping restaurateurs, volunteering with an adopted Refugee Camp through Zion. I stand corrected; "volunteer" does not do her justice. She practically raises these children and adopts these families. I cannot count the times I witnessed her loading her car with supplies, or the emails asking for assistance as she helped them adapt to life in America. Through the STAR program, Jessica has taught these children (many young girls) fundamentals like tying your shoes, proper hygiene to educational skills such as reading and writing. She raised her family with their families – teaching them the traditions of Christmas, and American holidays. Her families photos are not just filled with milestones of her own three daughters but that of every refugee child she helped graduate high school, get a driver's license, and the memories are endless.

Jessica operates her life with conviction. She is driven to speak for those who have no voice, to give heed to those in need, and to live her life with integrity & passion. Women like Jessica pave a path for women like me to dream. She has inspired me to never give up, to believe in the woman by my side, to embrace diversity, and to train a younger generation as she has done.

I feel this letter doesn't quite do her justice, but in some way being recognized on that stage as a 2015 Woman of Influence will shed light on the impact that this one woman has had in the greater Des Moines area. The lives she has touched might never be known in number – but I count as one that will always be grateful for her leadership, light, and vision in my life.

At Your Service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Chrystal Tammillo".

Chrystal Tammillo

Operating Partner

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