

Carmen's Jamaican Authentic Cuisine Food Truck Revamps Menu And Goals For 2023

Jen Holden, Peninsula Chronicle

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Photo courtesy of Carmen's Jamaican Authentic Cuisine.

YORK-Carmen Blair is celebrating her fifth year in business as the owner of Carmen's Jamaican Authentic Cuisine food truck. The food truck is popular for its traditionally made Jamaican favorites, and Blair has created a loyal following within the Hampton Roads area through selling homemade dishes inspired by family recipes that she's been making since she was a child.

Carmen's Jamaican Authentic Cuisine specializes in jerk and curry chicken, oxtail dishes, brown stew chicken, peppered steak, pork and beef ribs, and escovitch made with snapper, among other fan favorites.

A native of Kingston, Jamaica, Blair landed in Williamsburg after coming to the area in November 1993.

"I come from a large family," said Blair. "My mom has six girls and two boys, and I spent a lot of time by her side, watching her and my sisters cook for the family. My father's mother was a great cook too, so I've taken the recipes that I enjoyed making during my childhood and kind of made them my own by customizing them along the way."

Soon after moving to the United States, Blair and her husband at the time, a Marine with the U.S. military, found out they were going to be first-time parents, and she began vigorously planning for the future.

“I was happy to be moving to the land of opportunity,” said Blair. “I knew I needed to go to school for an education, buy a home, and someday, run a business.”

The entrepreneur obtained U.S. citizenship and received an associate degree in business from Thomas Nelson Community College, (now known as Virginia Peninsula Community College) and a bachelor’s degree in human services from Old Dominion University.

Soon after acquiring her second degree, Blair began working at a local mental health facility that proved to be a stepping stone toward owning her own business.

“At the time, I was bringing food in for myself for lunch that I had cooked at home and people just gravitated to it,” said Blair. “I began selling numerous plates of food through word of mouth.”

The businesswoman said she could feel a transition being born and evaluated what her next move would be.

“I meditated on it and decided that while I didn’t have enough money to open a restaurant, operating a food truck was possible, so I put in my two weeks’ notice and bought a food truck from Joe The Cart Guy in Richmond for about \$13,000,” said Blair.

Carmen’s Jamaican Authentic Cuisine began to make a name for itself in the early years by setting up shop during events outside of The Virginia Beer Company, Alewerks Brewing Company, and Billsburg Brewery in Williamsburg; Tradition Brewing Company in Newport News; and St. George Brewing Company in Hampton.

Blair’s widened the food truck’s footprint and travels to events and venues outside of the Peninsula in addition to the local mainstays.

“While I’m currently in the process of having a professional website designed and hopefully up and running soon, I tend to advertise where I’ll be on the food truck’s Facebook page,” said Blair. “When I’m not working at a scheduled event, customers can find the food truck in the Williamsburg Automotive parking lot across from the

new [Hibachi 2 Go!](#) restaurant on Merrimac Trail between the hours of 1:30pm and 6pm.”

Food choices change on a daily basis and she’s in the process of revamping the menu.

“With the economy going crazy, we’re adding choices that are more affordable, including smaller bowls of food,” said Blair. “For example, oxtail can be really expensive. So instead of paying \$21 for a meal, customers can choose an oxtail bowl for about \$14.”

In addition to adding more food options, Blair will be implementing more homemade beverage choices as well.

“In addition to the Jamaican sodas I sell, this year I’ll be introducing my own juices such as a carrot, pineapple, ginger, and lemon juice and a cucumber drink with ginger and lemon,” said Blair.

The small-business owner said she continues to assist people who are struggling within the community when she can.

“I see a lot of people while operating a food truck, and you’d be surprised at the number of residents who don’t realize what services are available to them,” said Blair. “While I may not be sitting behind a desk anymore, I’m still going to using my degree to help people within the community, just in a different way than before. I’m currently putting together a list of services that are available to people in the community that I’ll make accessible at the food truck. I’m confident that this is God’s purpose for me.”

Blair employs the assistance of her biological son, Andre Francis, to run the day-to-day operations of Carmen’s Jamaican Authentic Cuisine when she’s in need of a helping hand.

“In addition to Andre, I also have three adopted sons,” said Blair. “I’m committed to building a business that I can pass on to my kids in the future.”

To keep an eye on the comings and goings of Carmen’s Jamaican Authentic Cuisine, visit its Facebook [page](#) or call 757-870-6022.