

December 2025 – Op-Ed Page Article

Investing in Local Entrepreneurship Matters

By: Lekita Range

Fifteen years ago, I was a college student in Orlando with a vision that many people dismissed as a hobby. I planned small events between classes, studied at night, and poured every spare dollar into building something I couldn't yet name, but deeply believed in.

What I didn't know then was that my entrepreneurial path would eventually lead me back home to South Florida, the place that would not only shape my business but make it possible.

My journey began while I was completing my bachelor's degree at the University of Central Florida and later my master's at Webster University. But the moment I moved back to Palm Beach and intentionally rebranded myself for this community, everything shifted. South Florida didn't just give me clients; it gave me momentum. The luxury event culture aligned with my vision, and the people here embraced my work in a way that changed the entire trajectory of my life.

Local venues trusted me. Families welcomed me into their most important celebrations. Fellow creatives collaborated with me and helped me elevate my craft. That level of support transformed Live N Lavish from a young woman's dream into a respected luxury event brand with deep Palm Beach roots.

But business ownership isn't defined only by the celebrations. There were pivotal moments that forced me to grow. Hitting my first six-figure year taught me to stop playing small. Investing more than \$100,000 in my education and development taught me that confidence is built, not inherited. And launching the Lavish Branding Academy taught me that my purpose extended far beyond designing weddings; it included helping others create sustainable, profitable businesses of their own.

One wedding in particular still reminds me why I do this work. A couple hired me to transform a plain, unadorned venue into something breathtaking. We wrapped the room in lush florals, draped the walls, layered the lighting, and designed a custom ceremony aisle. When the couple saw the final reveal, they held each other and cried. They told me it felt like "a luxury destination wedding without leaving Palm Beach." That moment wasn't just about décor; it was about trust, excellence, and the power of vision.

Those same values: excellence, elegance, authenticity, legacy, and empowerment, now guide everything I do, including my coaching. Over the years, I've mentored young creatives, provided internships, donated services to nonprofits, and offered free training for new wedding

professionals. Because if a community helps you rise, you have a responsibility to lift others with you.

South Florida's small-business ecosystem thrives when entrepreneurs are resourced, supported, and encouraged. The creative economy here, planners, designers, photographers, stylists, and caterers, is a major contributor to local revenue and tourism. Yet too often, creative entrepreneurs, especially women and minorities, are expected to "figure it out alone." That mindset limits growth not just for individuals, but for our entire region.

As I celebrate 15 years in business and launch my book *Beyond the Aisle*, my mission is to change that. Over the next five years, I aim to help 1,000 wedding and event professionals build profitable, high-standard brands rooted in strategy, not survival. When entrepreneurs have tools, mentorship, and community, they don't just expand their businesses, they expand their confidence, wealth, and generational impact.

If I could go back to my first year, I'd tell myself this: trust your instincts, invest in yourself, and never shrink your standards. Everything you dream of is on the other side of courage.

South Florida helped me step into that courage. Now, I'm determined to help others do the same.

About the Author:

Lekita Range is the founder and CEO of Live N Lavish Events LLC and the Lavish Branding Academy, helping clients and creative entrepreneurs build unforgettable experiences and sustainable luxury brands. A South Florida native, she has spent 15 years designing high-end events and mentoring hundreds of professionals to scale their businesses with purpose, strategy, and excellence.