

Moneris  <sup>®/MD</sup>

+

*SugarKane*  
Caribbean & Cajun Cuisine

PAY PARKING ENFORCED  
MON - SAT  
8:00AM - 9:00PM  
SUN  
1:00PM - 9:00PM  
← PLACE PURCHASED TICKET ON DASH



### SugarKane Restaurant

- **Website:** <https://www.sugarkanerestaurant.ca/>
- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/SugarKanerestaurant/>
- **Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/sugarkanerestaurant/>
- **Tiktok:** <https://www.tiktok.com/@sugarkanerestaurant>

**Line of business:** Restaurant

### Products used:

- IWL220

“

**My sisters and I always wanted to be entrepreneurs and we always wanted to have a restaurant. We grew up learning how to cook from our parents and feeding our friends and family. To us, SugarKane is all about doing what we love, for the people we love.**

”

- Donna Charles, Co-founder and Co-owner of SugarKane Restaurant



# Background

For co-owners and sisters Donna, Renée and Nicky, SugarKane Restaurant is an homage to their childhood. Growing up alongside four other sisters in a West-Indian household, the Charles family was big on homecooked meals. The girls learned from their parents how to cook Caribbean dishes, influenced by Trinidadian and Grenadian culture. In the 1970s, the Charles family moved to Canada and settled into the Toronto neighbourhood of Scarborough – just east of the city.

As young girls, Donna and her sisters liked to pretend they operated their own restaurant. “We would hand out flyers, with the help of our father, and even set up chairs and tables in our basement so our friends and family could sit down and eat. People actually came and bought food.” From Jerk chicken to curry chicken, rice and peas to split pea soup, the girls would grow up making these dishes for friends and family until one day, they decided it was time to take their home cooking to the next level.

On their journey to opening a restaurant, the three sisters started a catering company called Spiked Punch, which they operated successfully for seven years. They catered a wide array of events including baby showers, funerals, birthdays, and weddings. In that time, they perfected their recipes, built up a strong and loyal clientele, and met with a few potential restaurant investors. In June 2019, SugarKane opened its doors to the Danforth area of Toronto.

The restaurant offers a Caribbean inspired menu with some southern influences, such as the Cajun flavours of Louisiana, courtesy of Nicky's American husband. The name of the restaurant was inspired by their late father. "We thought of our dad, and my sister said Sugar Kane. She said dad used to give us sugar cane all the time. It's known all over the world. We changed the 'C' to 'K' to urbanize it a little, and that was it."

Currently, the sisters are focused on growing their brand and making up for lost time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like most restaurants, SugarKane was forced to lay off staff and focus solely on delivery services to continue their business – which wasn't a feasible, long-term solution. Donna and her sisters were concerned over the future of their restaurant. "It was scary because we didn't know if we were going to get our staff back. We didn't know how long this was going to be and no one predicted how long it actually was."

During this time, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was growing around the world, creating a surge of support for black-owned businesses. Online, the Danforth Facebook group was encouraging its members to support SugarKane and other black-owned businesses in the area, which helped Donna and her sisters immensely. "One day we walked in, and the ordering machine was dinging, dinging, dinging. People were lined up outside the door. On that day, we made a weeks-worth of food. The Danforth community showed up for us and was so open, warm and supportive."

# Purpose

Family is deeply rooted in the foundation of SugarKane, from its menu to its staff and patrons. For Donna and her sisters, family is incredibly important. “Although it’s the three of us that run the business, everyone from our other sisters, family and friends are really the backbone that helped build the restaurant and keep it running. Even our client base from the catering company – they’ve come with us to SugarKane.”

The sisters want people to experience a little slice of their Caribbean upbringing when they walk into their restaurant. They want people to feel at home. “We offer Caribbean cuisine. When we say Caribbean, we mean that our parents are of Trinidadian and Grenadian backgrounds. That’s the kind of Caribbean influences we grew up on and the kind of food we ate. We have a lot of those flavours and recipes on our menu, like oxtail, rice and peas, curry goat, jerk chicken and shrimp.”

The Danforth community has also been, in many ways, an extension of the Charles’ family. Neighbours and fellow restaurant owners in the community have supported the sisters for many years. Additionally, the Danforth’s Business Improvement Area (BIA) representative has been instrumental in keeping the sisters up to date on all community-related news. “She’s very close to us, and even feels like another sister. She makes sure we’re aware of what’s going on in the community, reminds us to check our emails. If something is happening on the Danforth, she makes sure that we know that’s coming, such as the patios, curb lanes and all that stuff.”





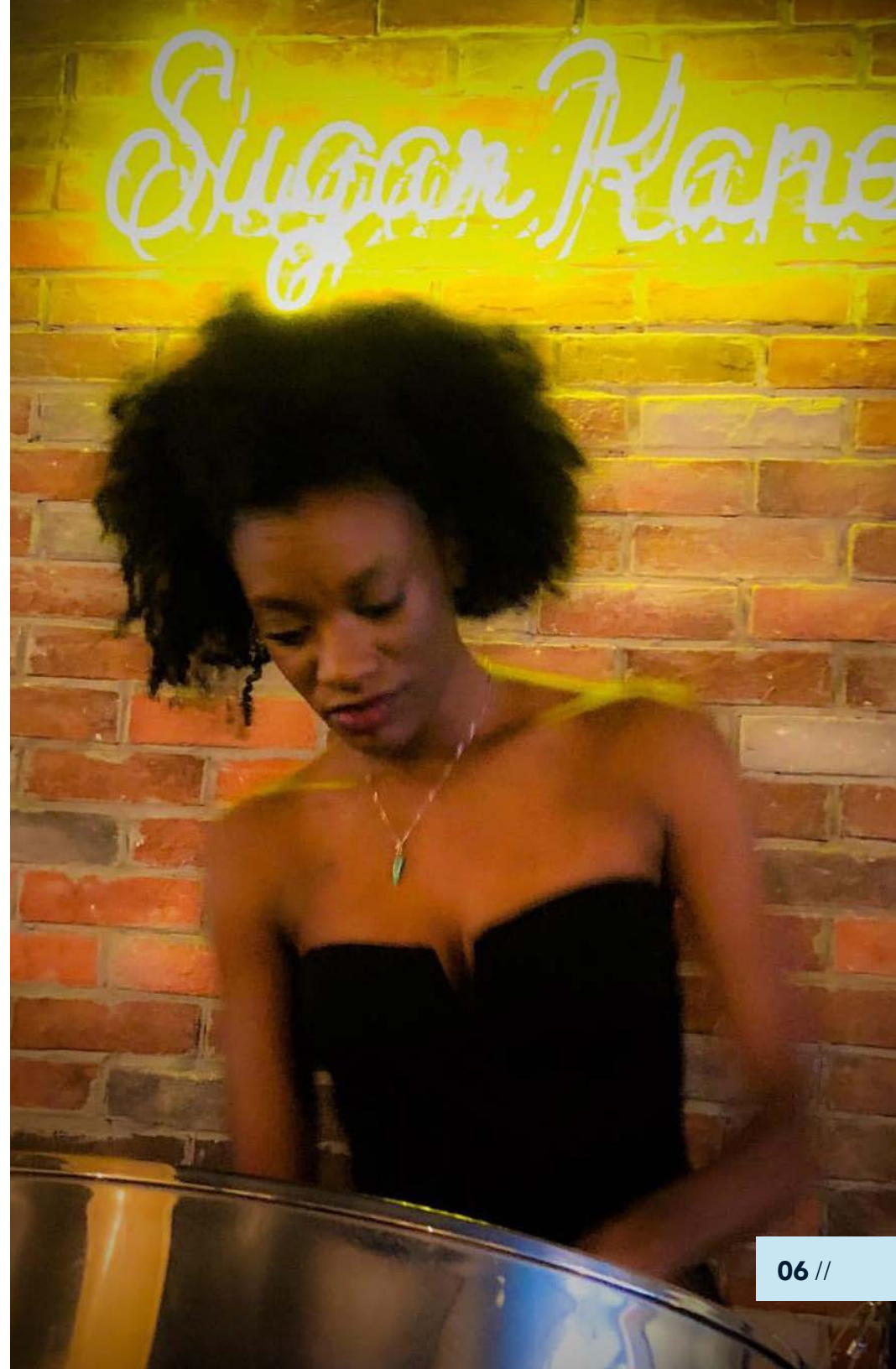
# Challenges

For the Charles sisters, finding a location for their restaurant was no easy task. “Being black women and getting people, the banks in particular, to take us seriously was the hardest thing.” At some points during their search, they were completely ignored. But whether things started on a good note or not, the sisters persevered and opened their restaurant in June 2019.

Getting the restaurant ready was a family affair. All hands were on deck to clean up and decorate before their grand opening. And when they finally did open their doors to the public it was a great success – until the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The pandemic forced the sisters to rely on delivery apps and services to continue their business, which did okay for a while. However, they knew it wouldn’t be feasible to keep the restaurant open just for delivery. The sisters shut their doors temporarily, making the difficult decision to lay off staff until dine-in could resume. “My sisters and I are very close to our staff. They’re like family and we treat them as such. It hurt to let them go or to see them leave. It was hard and a big disappointment.”

With the uncertainty of allowing their customers to dine-in, the sisters took one more chance with delivery services, this time doing it themselves. At the time, the Black Lives Matter movement was spreading globally, and support for black-owned businesses gave Donna and her sisters the momentum they needed. "There was a callout to support black businesses in our neighbourhood, and it really helped us out. Some people would even come in, order just one item and leave a generous tip, so we had so much support during that time."

Today, as things return to 'normal,' the sisters are still working around the clock to catch up on two years' worth of fluctuating business. They've also started to experience staff shortages, and really opened their eyes to the reality of operating a small business. "Staff shortages have been a big challenge everywhere. What we know now is that you really have to be in the business. You really have to know every aspect of it, no matter what your position is because sometimes you have to step in as head chef, janitor, bartender, server, everything."





# Why Moneris?

“When we started the restaurant, we just knew Moneris was the way to go. Even when a competitor approached us, we declined because we know that Moneris is reliable and we’re really happy with their service. We wanted to stick with them.”

The Charles sisters have had a long history with Moneris®. In their early entrepreneurial years, the sisters started a small business and needed a way to take card payments. “We used to run an essay writing company about 15-20 years ago. We needed a way to process payments and chose Moneris as our payment solution.” Their experience left a lasting impression. “We knew how it was back then, and that was a long time ago, so when we started the restaurant we just knew to use Moneris. We had no issues with them. They had awesome service years ago, so for our restaurant it was a no brainer.”

Using Moneris made business easier and much more efficient for the sisters. Donna recalled that even when they would run into technical errors with their machines, customer service would be available right away and the issue resolved. “There were times when something would happen and we couldn’t do anything, and we got [Moneris] right away through the helpline.”



# Looking forward

While Donna and her sisters hope to one day expand and open another location, they're happy with how far they've come. "We're still here, we're still in business, and it's been so busy to the point that we sometimes have to turn people away because we're at capacity. We appreciate that so much because we know a lot of restaurants can't say that or didn't make it [through the pandemic]." They're also incredibly grateful to their community for helping them keep their business going.



**With all the different cultures that come into the restaurant, and all the positive feedback we've gotten, we're still so happy and surprised by the kind comments we receive. That feeling will never go away.**



- Donna and her sisters, Co-founder & Co-owner of SugarKane Restaurant





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