

# COCOVAA: WHAT PEOPLE SAY

**MAY 2024**

*info@cocovaa.com*



**“You make history  
every day you stay in  
business.”**

— Milele Chikasa Anana



# MY STORY

Contrary to popular belief, my chocolate company isn't a "passion project." The real story is one of self-liberation from domestic abuse and economic dependence on systems that didn't welcome women like me. It includes getting fired from a federal job for insubordination, where, as an employee of the federal judiciary, I was exempt from any protections under the Civil Rights Act. It involved times when I feared for my life and a 24-year struggle for economic stability as a single mom.

The whole story is for another day, but the bottom line is that as a single mom, I never had the privilege of throwing all caution to the wind to pursue a dream. Instead, I've grown CocoVaa with intense focus, intention, sacrifice, and deliberateness. It was as much a means to an end as it was a pursuit of passion. It was an emancipation project that accidentally grew into an international award-winning chocolate company with a new purpose.

What once began as a refuge for my kids and I, has grown into a refuge for many others. I've come to appreciate CocoVaa as a transcendent force that will outlive me because our products and brand story have already touched thousands of people. The goal now is to multiply its impact, allow others to have a stake in the outcome through training and employment opportunities, and to build something lasting for my family.

Despite creating the illusion of ease, my journey has been anything but straightforward. And what it's taught me is that success isn't a clean linear path. It's messy and twisted. And while I wouldn't change anything about this journey that's given me the resilience to keep going, I hope that my efforts to break down barriers that lock many of us out, will help clear the path for the next generation of diverse entrepreneurs - especially other single moms.

*Syovata Edari*



# JACKIE SUMMERS



"Jack From Brooklyn": First Legal Black Distiller in America; Founder of Sorel Liqueur, the most awarded liqueur on the planet.

**“Vata, you are the first generation capable of doing what you do; not because our progenitors lacked talent; they lacked opportunity. You are the living extension of a conversation that predates you by centuries; the living expression of reversing dreams deferred.”**



To Whom it May Concern:

Syovata Edari is a generational talent.

I'm not speaking specifically about her status as a Master Chocolatier. The James Beard Foundation has acknowledged her as a 2024 finalist for "Outstanding Pastry Chef or Baker." Her company, CocoVaa, has won scores of international awards, including 29 awards from the London-based Academy of Chocolate Awards (AoC), the world's longest-running and most prestigious fine chocolate competition. Her accolades are many and vaunted.

Before becoming a Master Chocolatier, Ms. Edari had a successful career as a trial lawyer. As a single mother without a safety net, she left a career that fed her family while starving her soul, to pursue this calling to have a broader impact on humanity through food. Her deep connection to Indigenous and African traditions both ground her and fuel her creativity as a chef. Her expressions aren't just culinary delights; they're tiny, delicious mouthfuls of history.

Named an International Rising Star by the Academy of Chocolate in 2018, Ms. Edari is steadfast in her commitment to ethical sourcing. Her approach goes beyond sustainability; it actively supports communities historically exploited for their resources and labor. Her work isn't just delicious—it's profoundly impactful.

That she has been able to accomplish all of this, despite significant systemic barriers, speaks to the strength of her character, and the consistency of her integrity. As the first legal, licensed Black distiller in the US, I implicitly understand some (but not all) of the challenges she's faced. Ms. Edari has demonstrated world-class talent, genius-level marketing, and Olympic-level persistence.

She is deserving of serious financial consideration, both for her business and the boon this would bring to the local community.

In gratitude,

Jack

*Jack*  
**SOREL**

JACK FROM BROOKLYN





May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024

To Whom it May Concern:

I am pleased to write on behalf of Common Wealth Development, a stalwart in fostering economic growth and supporting community development within Madison and Dane County. Our mission to encourage entrepreneurial leadership, financial fluency, and the sustainability of local businesses aligns perfectly with the objectives of ventures like CocoVaa Chocolatier, owned and operated by Ms. Syovata Edari.

Ms. Edari, a trailblazer and Black woman entrepreneur, has impressively led CocoVaa through significant challenges, including the recent global pandemic. Her resilience and strategic insight have not only helped her business survive but expand, notably enhancing her e-commerce presence in response to shifting market dynamics. CocoVaa's commitment to quality and community has solidified a robust customer base and Ms. Edari's expansion plans promise to multiply local employment opportunities and maintain this valuable enterprise in our evolving city. Her product responds to a heightened demand for quality and inclusivity as her creations and space service a global diverse community - a quality about her brand that make her stand out from her competitors even on a national level. Madison is lucky to have CocoVaa.

Previously, Ms. Edari considered situating her business at our Main Street Industries site. Unfortunately, suitable space was unavailable at the time. Nonetheless, her vision and CocoVaa's potential align with our goals at Common Wealth Development, and we fully support her continued growth.

As one of the few Black woman-owned brick-and-mortar businesses in Madison and Dane County, CocoVaa represents an essential pillar in our diverse business community. We urge the City of Madison and its financial institutions to recognize the opportunity that CocoVaa presents not only as a business but as a cornerstone for broader community engagement and development.

Investing in CocoVaa is more than a financial decision; it is an investment in our community's future, ensuring that our economic landscape continues to diversify and thrive. We are excited to support Ms. Edari as she guides her business to new heights and further cements her role as a leader in our local business economy.

Thank you for considering this strong endorsement. We are enthusiastic about CocoVaa's future and the positive impact it will continue to have on our community.

Respectfully Submitted,

Justice Castañeda  
Executive Director  
Common Wealth Development, Inc.  
[justice@cwd.org](mailto:justice@cwd.org) | 608-620-7745



## “*Testimonial*”

Package received in perfect condition. I hope you understand what joy this brings to people. Shari had just worked the last few nights and I came home to a very tired, just woken up, and grumpy gal. Tried feeding her a cosmopolitan and didn't help, but opening that chocolate... She was all smiles and bouncing. Jesus what an effect! So wonderful! Thank you so much!

Cary C.  
Washington  
State



# MAJOR GEN. MARCIA ANDERSON



Major Gen. Marcia Anderson; First Black Woman  
Major General in the US Army

**“Syovata, you have transformed CocoVaa from a mere dream into a thriving reality through sheer determination and an unwavering belief that success comes to those who defy the odds, overcome obstacles, and ignore the naysayers. Continue the fight and pave the way for the next generation of entrepreneurs!”**





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May 21, 2024

To Whom it May Be of Interest:

I am writing to express my deep appreciation and admiration for Syovata Edari who owns and operates CocoVaa, the most superb chocolate making shop I have ever encountered. Vata has received numerous national and international awards and certainly deserves every one of them.

Significantly she has reached these levels of success as a single mother. I know well the hardships that face women who choose to be business owners and entrepreneurs as I have been for over 50 years. She has had the additional issues that face women of color, which I have not had to have as a concern.

In spite of these challenges, Vata has provided a place of welcome for the community that this City should be holding as a model for other business owners. Unfortunately, her landlord has not been at all willing to partner with her about issues that have been detrimental to her managing a thriving business.

Our greater area community needs to make certain that we do all we can to support such a gifted, hardworking artist. She has deployed most of her life savings into this enterprise, and as she seeks a better facility that she will control she needs the help of the banking community to give her that chance.

I know of few people who work as hard as she does, and I know of none who produce a finer product. We will be grateful that we helped her in the next steps towards regional, national and international renown.

Sincerely,

Betty Harris Custer

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# ALTHEA BERNSTEIN

I was at a point in my life where nothing could help me. I had just been assaulted. I was at the lowest point of my life and even contemplated ending it when I got a "get well soon" gift left at my front door. My mom and dad brought the gift to me as I lay curled up on the couch, shut off from the world. As much as I hated the world and wanted to be left alone, I took the gift from my mom. It was a beautiful brown bag with black tissue paper. The card informed me that the gift was from a family friend. I pulled a thin white box out of the bag with delicate silver writing on the front of the box.

"CocoVaa".

I had no idea at the time what brand this was so I opened the box. A little brown card said "chocolatier". I shut the box. Great, a box of chocolate. Our friend forgot that I was anaphylactic to Chocolate. I looked up at my parents and handed my dad the box. "Chocolates", I said. My dad opened the box and then removed the sheet covering the chocolates. He gasped. He handed the box back to me. I removed the sheet so I could see why my dad was so impressed. I gasped too. Orange, yellow, pink, green, white. The most beautiful color combinations I had ever seen. I had been grossly mistaken for writing this small box off so quickly. Since they were all white chocolates...I could eat them!

I looked at the small informational card again and identified a "Passionfruit Mango White Chocolate". I took a small bite and immediately the flavors hit my mouth. Sweet, tangy, creamy, delicate, one of the best things I had ever tried. Over the next few days I savored the remaining Bon Bons only having one a day. I would cut each one into thirds and my parents and I would sit down together and marvel over the experience of each unique Bon Bon. My mom told me I should look into CocoVaa and so I did. I found the website and read every single page I could find. "Black Owned, World Famous, Female, Mother, Chocolatier ". I fell in love with CocoVaa even further. I decided to leave a message for the owner on the website primarily to thank her for making white chocolates that I could eat. The next day I got a response, "I would love to meet you. Please come by my shop". I was ecstatic and was amazed that I even got a response! That weekend I met Vata at her shop. I walked into her shop and was hit with a sense of calm. The shop was stunning.

# ALTHEA BERNSTEIN, CONT.



Cases filled with edible masterpieces, a sweet smell wafting through the air, and a sitting area where Vata and I would spend the next few hours getting to know each other. We discussed my assault and life as a black woman. We discussed my love life and my academic goals. We talked about everything and anything. I realized this was the first day in weeks that I was enjoying. Sitting in Vata's shop made me feel like I was going to survive. As we wrapped up our tea time, I was already planning on when to come back. I knew that I wanted, needed, to spend more time at CocoVaa. Vata then offered for me to come help her in her shop and at that moment I had been saved.



I would come to her shop and spend hours talking with her while she would buzz around the kitchen making magic. I had found a safe place. I found a Sanctuary. I found Vata when I needed it the most. I had spent day after day planning on ending my life and a box of chocolates saved me. I know for a fact that I am not the only one to share this experience because I would frequently watch customers walk in and sit down to talk. Vata knew them all by name and always would offer the most caring hospitality. Vata quickly became one of my idols and always will be. She is smart, loving, kind, determined and strong. She has taught me how to fight for what I need and to love myself. CocoVaa helped to heal me. I always knew I was safe at her shop and I knew that protecting her sanctuary and everyone inside was a priority to her. Vata has become a pillar in the community and strives for maintaining a World Class Chocolate Shop.



# ALTHEA BERNSTEIN, CONT.

Cocovaa is more than a shop. It is an experience, a safe haven and a sanctuary. I still reach out to Vata from time to time when I need some of the CocoVaa spirit. The highly decorated walls of her shop covered in World Champion Chocolatier Awards speaks volumes about her skill, creations and devotion. However, If you really want to know what CocoVaa is about, go by on a Sunday afternoon. It is like walking into a fairytale. Be welcomed in by her brilliant loving son. Relax and breathe in the clean, sweet environment. Enjoy a cup of tea and a slice of cake. Enjoy the most divine edible luxuries made with the highest quality ingredients. Be at peace. You will never find a shop like CocoVaa anywhere else in the world. After-all, if a box of chocolates can save someone's life, then the person making them must be pretty damn talented.

*Althea Bernstein-Filipowicz*





“*Testimonial*”

Life is unbelievably short. Most of our investments are made for our survival. But your remarkable talent, skill, dedication, and product are what make life worth living. Your product is ephemeral. Tasting your chocolates is nothing less than experiencing life itself. It is why we strive.

I am a nurse, and I make my living bringing people back from the brink of death. I provide people hope, and so you are indirectly saving lives with your chocolate—it is that good! Rather than investing in property, our wealthy can invest in making life truly worth living.

Thank you so much for your work, Ms. Edari!

**Bill Caldwell  
Madison, WI**



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5/23/2024

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Scott MacGregor. I'm the Founder and CEO of SomethingNew LLC, the Founder of The Outlier Project, the Publisher & Editor-In-Chief of Outlier Magazine and a 4 time author but most importantly, I'm friends with Syovata Edari.

Syovata, or Vata to me, is one of the most remarkable people I've ever met. While her background was as a trial attorney she forged a new path into entrepreneurship where I truly believe she belongs because it unleashes her innovation and creativity.

I've seen audiences mesmerized as they hang on her every word in describing her passion for creating magical experiences. I've witnessed iconic chefs like Jacques Pepin, decorated legendary Navy SEAL's like Jason Redman, football and broadcasting greats like Merril Hoge and USWNT stars like Joanna Lohman all savor her creations with the same passion in which she makes them.

There is unfortunately only one Vata and she is a treasure. My hope is that her business expanded and thrives so that even more people can have the transformative delight of experiencing her artistry.

Best,

Scott MacGregor  
Founder & CEO, SomethingNew LLC & The Outlier Project

# MADELINE SALL

My name is Madeline Sall, and I have known Syovata Edari for the past four years, initially as a customer of her chocolate shop, CocoVaa, and now as a good friend. Syovata has built an internationally acclaimed chocolate business despite chronic underfunding and limited access to opportunities in Madison. Her chocolate is incredible, and she runs her business based on her values, even when it means losing customers.



Through observing how she operates her business and conducts herself within the Madison community and beyond, I can attest to her integrity. During the genocide in Palestine, she used her platform to share information, call people to action, and bring Palestinian products into her shop. Locally, she supported Sharon Irwin-Henry, Tony Robinson's grandmother, in preparing a petition to file criminal complaints against the officer who murdered Tony in 2015, offering her legal expertise pro bono. Syovata has also hosted multiple pop-ups for smaller Black-owned food businesses within her retail storefront, giving those entrepreneurs access to her customer base and a dedicated location for sales.

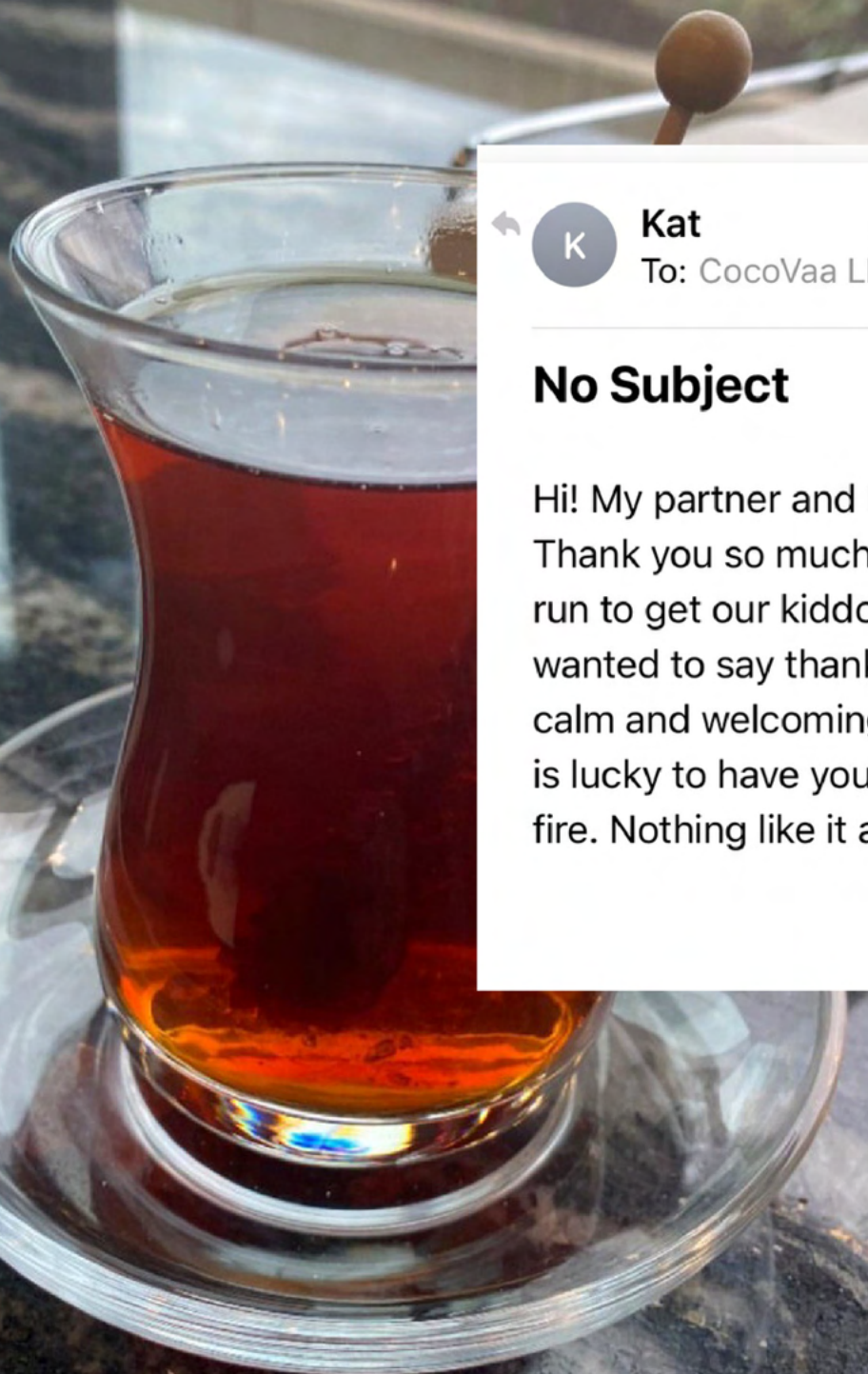
Everything Syovata gains is poured back into the community around her.

*Madeline Sall*



reemtarahy

Random offers of tea while shopping  
make me feel so at home 🥰



Kat

To: CocoVaa LLC >

5:05 PM

### No Subject

Hi! My partner and I were in earlier today. Thank you so much for the tea. We had to run to get our kiddo from school, but just wanted to say thank you for providing such a calm and welcoming environment. Madison is lucky to have you. The vegan chocolate is fire. Nothing like it around ❤️

Thank you,

@COCOvaa



# SHARON IRWIN

My name is Sharon Irwin. I'm the grandmother of Tony Robinson who was killed by Madison Police Officer Matt Kenny in 2015. I've been fighting for justice for almost 10 years and Syovata, or Vata as we call her, has been there every step of the way, even as she grows her own business.

I have known Vata on a professional and personal level for almost two decades. I watched her begin her chocolate business CocoVaa in the kitchen of her mother's home and take it to new and greater levels over the years, one step at a time, until now. I see her working to achieve a greater goal for herself and her community. She has spoken of her dreams to teach the youth of chocolate and life. I love to listen to her when she speaks of the building she will buy and the kids she will help. And I know she will because she always follows through with whatever she puts her mind to.

She took on the onus of writing a petition for my Grandson Tony Robinson's case to be heard before a criminal judge using Wisconsin Statute 968.02. Wi Stat. 968.02 is a little used statute that allows a citizen to bring charges against someone who has done harm and the DA refuses to prosecute. I fit that description with my grandson. We were swimming in waters that had not been swum much before, and not for cases of 2nd degree reckless homicide. The evidence showed a crime had been committed against my grandson, but I could not move forward in the courts, Year after year I went to the DA, giving evidence asking him to prosecute. He refused to prosecute saying to me yes there is probable cause, but he could not win this case, so he would not prosecute. I spent the next Eight years looking for a way around the DA. I feel the evidence must be heard in a court of law so all of Madison can judge for themselves whether My grandson's death was a justified killing or not.

Syovata mentioned the statute to me in 2020, but I could get no help from attorneys, No one wanted to wade through a process rarely used, plus do it for free. One day, in August, 2021, as I sat at Vata's chocolate shop looking sad and depressed because yet another lawyer turned me down to help pursue justice for Tony, "I will help you," she said. I did not understand what that would entail. She had an idea of what it would take.

# SHARON IRWIN CONT.

She had an idea of what it would take. She worked 60 hours a week doing chocolate and 20 more working on the petition. She did this for eight months, putting a petition together that would hold up against the scrutiny of the criminal courts. Vata would call at 2 am, asking me questions about the evidence, because I know more about my grandson's case than anyone else, except now Vata. There were 42 exhibits created with the evidence compiled from The DCI, Department of Criminal Investigation, Attorneys Lovey and Lovey, and Madison Police policies and procedures.

She wrote a petition that showed probable cause beyond a reasonable doubt, which got my grandson into the courts before a judge. She also enlisted the help of six lawyers to take it to trial. Without her, I would still be floundering.

I know she is destined to do great things and this opportunity is perfect. Great things come for people who step up and commit a lifetime to helping their community. Syovata has done that and so much more. It is an honor for me to write this letter on her behalf. I can not wait to be there when she breaks ground for this next step in her life and our community.

*Sharon Irwin*  
community activist, Army Veteran



# JAMES BAERWOLF

My name is James Baerwolf. Myself and family own Sassy Cow Creamery, a small scale farmstead dairy plant and farm. We supply milk and dairy products in the Madison and greater Wisconsin area. We have been selling heavy cream to CocoVaa for several years now. Vata has been an excellent customer and integral part in the success of businesses like ours.

The benefit of businesses such as CocoVaa to farmstead operations such as ourselves is that we cannot compete on price alone. We rely on the quality of what we produce and our local network of customers that seek out products that raise the quality of the products that they are creating, producing and selling to customers that seek that type of product and experience.

I have seen first hand the time and commitment that Vata puts into her business and product and recognize the dedication and passion she has for producing the highest quality chocolate and related creations. I hope to have her business as a dedicated growing partner for many years to come.

James Baerwolf

*James Baerwolf*  
Sassy Cow Creamery

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Columbus, WI 53925

Phone: (608) 837-7766





Ph: 702-614-9350  
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Las Vegas NV 89193  
USA

## Recommendation Letter of CocoVaa Chocolatier

To whom it may concern:

My name is Paul Edward, founder and owner of Chef Rubber. Chef Rubber is the world's leading producer of specialty products and custom tools for Chefs. Chef Rubber supplies some of the biggest chocolate companies in the world including M&M Mars Master Foods, to some of the smallest start ups in locations such as Rawanda. I have been in the industry for 50 years and have participated in and been instrumental as a company in providing new and innovative creations and solutions for the world's leading chefs.

As a major supplier of specialty items to some of the world's most esteemed chocolate companies, I've seen firsthand the passion, innovation, and tenacity it takes to flourish in this competitive yet rewarding industry. Vata, stands out as an emerging leader, with a truly groundbreaking company that has caught my attention, as well as that of others. From my testing of her product, she has mastered the foundational techniques to developing a unique style and creating signature products that are both aesthetically pleasing and gastronomically exceptional.

It isn't just her product line that impresses me, but Vata's deep understanding of the market, its challenges, and the vast opportunities that lie ahead. She has built a strong circle of industry experts to support her and she utilizes the resources in her network, including me and my team, to advise her as she grows. It is evident that her brand is not just in the business for short-term gains; they are building a legacy.

It makes perfect sense to me why Vata seeks to own her next building with expanded space at this stage of her company. As someone who has successfully scaled a chocolate company from its modest beginnings to a widely recognized brand, I intimately understand the challenges faced by businesses operating in limited spaces and the boundless potential that unfolds once those spatial constraints are alleviated. During the early stages of my own company's journey, we were confined to a space that, while adequate initially, soon began to restrict our growth. In a business where production intricacies, storage needs, and temperature sensitivities are paramount, space is not just a luxury—it is a necessity. Operating in a cramped environment directly affects not only production capacity but also

product quality and delivery options. It limits the scope for innovation, hampers efficient logistics, and impacts staff health - especially in the new COVID economic era where space to accommodate social distancing is likely a permanent fixture to keep manufacturing facilities running.

This industry, especially the luxury chocolate and confectionery sector, is ripe for scalable businesses. With global chocolate sales continuing to show consistent growth and consumers' unyielding demand for premium, artisanal products, the potential for a brand like CocoVaa is only limited by a lack of capitalization to grow. Boundless potential will unfold once CocoVaa's spatial constraints are alleviated. With its remarkable dedication to the craft and a clear vision for the future, CocoVaa has showcased the kind of potential that reminds me of my own company's nascent days. They have consistently delivered high-quality products, even within their current space constraints, and working successfully through a global pandemic - a testament to their skills, passion and resiliency. But like many ambitious entities, they are now at a crossroads where the size of their operational space could either curtail their aspirations or catapult them to new heights.

With the increased capacity, CocoVaa can tap into larger markets, diversify their product range, capture sales from the boom in demand for e-commerce and even venture into training and workshops, adding multiple revenue streams to their business.

I firmly believe that with the right support and financial backing, CocoVaa can transcend boundaries and establish itself as a leading name in the industry. Investing in them is not just funding a company, but backing an idea, a vision, and a future where quality and innovation reign supreme.

It's important to note that most large chocolate companies started like CocoVaa. This includes big names like See's Candy and even Mars Inc. whose founder, Frank, began in his grandmother's kitchen hand dipping chocolate. At some point they were capitalized and were able to grow. She deserves the same opportunity, and our industry is long overdue for the diversity she brings, something reflected in her product line.

To potential financiers, whether it be a bank or a private funder, I urge you to recognize the lucrateness of this industry and the scalability of businesses like CocoVaa. Herein lies an opportunity to be part of a brand that, I am confident, will shape the chocolate world in the years to come.

Warm regards,

Paul Edward  
Founder & Owner, Chef Rubber  
702-614-9350  
[www.ChefRubber.com](http://www.ChefRubber.com)

I've watched CocoVaa grow a loyal following since its beginnings in 2016. Vata is a highly skilled chocolatier who understands the fine balance between couvertures, flavorings and various ingredients that present a great tasting praline or truffle. The love Vata puts in her product not only results in a great tasting indulgence but has a unique flair of artistry. Vata is also extremely committed to giving back to the disenfranchised of her community.



Philippe Tytgat, Vice President of Sales for North America at Blommer Chocolates

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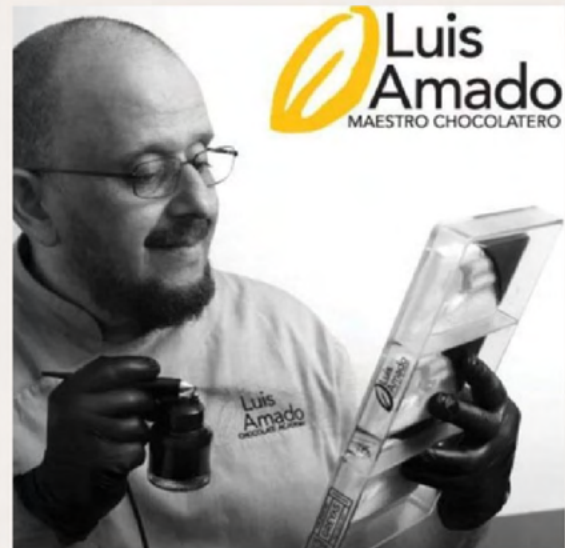
"There is top, average and sucks. You're in the top! I don't say that too often as I have been in the industry for almost 50 years now! So take the compliment as a milestone. Seriously, you're world class!."

***Paul Edward, owner/founder of Chef Rubber***

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"I've trained some of the best, including pastry chefs in France to compete for the MOF title. In my career which is long, I have met few chefs who can master technique, presentation AND flavor. Edari is one of them. Her work is marvelous. I recently tested one of her collections and it was confirmed to me why she has received so many international awards."

***Master Chocolatier Luis Amado***



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"WONDERFUL!

Hello Syovata:

My father Jacques Pepin and I were recently gifted your chocolates by Scott MacGregor and they were absolutely delicious! Thank you! I Hope to be able to order more. Congratulations on a wonderful and delicious adventure!

***Kindly- Claudine"***





11 November 2022

**Ms Vata Edari**  
**Founder/Director**  
**Cocovaa Chocolatier**

1815 East Washington Avenue  
Madison, WI 53704  
USA

Dear Ms Vata Edari

### **LETTER OF APPRECIATION**

On behalf of Their Majesties, The Oloni and Yeyeluwa Olori of Eti-Oni, Friends of Eti-Oni and members of International Cocoa Diplomacy, I will like to acknowledge and express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for your presence and participation as one of our special guests and speaker at the 2022 edition of Royal Cocoa Soiree of Arts and Culture held on Thursday 27 October 2022 at the Royal Over-Seas League House, Six Park Place, St James's, London SW1A 1LR.

Without your presence and contributions, our testimony of the huge success of the event will be incomplete and for this, we are grateful and say a big "Thank You" for your believe in our cause which was displayed in your support of our message of the need to bridge the gap between cocoa producing regions and chocolate consumption nations to achieve shared value towards wealth creation that can transform cocoa communities across the globe. I must also mention your thoughtful act of sharing your experiences and challenges in the highly competitive space of commercial chocolate making and ideas of how to overcome them which forms part of the mission of International Cocoa Diplomacy.

We will continue to update you as we move ahead working to achieve our vision of building that bridge between cocoa production and consumption through true friendship and partnership and trust with it, the world will be a better place and look forward to you joining us at Eti-Oni for the annual editions of The Cocoa Festival.

Finally, we will like to seize this opportunity to remind you as Oba Dokun Thompson said during his remarks, that the inaugural edition of the International Chocolate Festival London will take place between Wednesday 18 Oct to Sunday 22 Oct, 2023 to celebrate chocolate

**28 FOUNES DRIVE**  
**CHAFFORD HUNDRED, GRAYS**  
**ESSEX RM16 6DU**

Tel: +447956614224, Email: [foeo@cocoafestival.org](mailto:foeo@cocoafestival.org)

[www.cocoafestival.org](http://www.cocoafestival.org)



from, as well as the culture of, cocoa producing regions in a manner that will bring cocoa closer to chocolate consumers for value proposition and trust you and your team will participate and take a prominent role in this history making event.

Please be assured of my esteemed regards always and as the year 2022 slowly comes to a close, we want to wish you in advance, a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year 2023. Yours sincerely,

For: FRIENDS OF ETI-ONI



**YEMISI JENKINS MBE**

*Global Coordinator*



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## Testimonial

I've been a fan of CocoVaa for a little while now. It's so amazing to think about the impact you have on people's life: you make something from your imagination, experience, expertise and sensibility that we could never dream of. The pleasure to be invited in your generous and vibrant world is priceless. I'm grateful for you. A little bit of Madison's soul and of the best Madison has to offer will be with me through your creations. I'm so excited to share your little gems with my friends on Valentine's day this year! Thank you for all you do!

**Addie**



# AMY THRONDSSEN

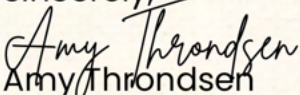
To whom it may concern,

Having grown up in an entrepreneurial family that eventually sold a thriving business to a Canadian corporation, I understand intimately the critical role financing plays in scaling a business. My parents experienced both the lows of bankruptcy and the highs of groundbreaking innovation in the agricultural sector before their eventual success. This personal history informs my strong support for Ms. Edari's financing request.

I've had the pleasure of working closely with Ms. Edari, assisting her with logistical challenges like preparing shipments for significant sales events. This firsthand experience gave me insights into the operational constraints imposed by her current facilities. During one such event, the tight confines of her workspace starkly highlighted how spatial limitations can hamper efficiency, causing delays and potential financial losses. Currently, Ms. Edari's business is constrained by its physical environment, unable to expand or streamline operations effectively. She has a strategic vision for enhancing her workspace not only to increase production capacity but also to elevate her profitability.

Visiting Ms. Edari's store, you immediately sense the community she has built around her brand. Her storefront is more than just a place to buy chocolates; it's an immersive experience where luxury meets artistry. Her attention to detail—from the innovative lighting down to the unique flooring—complements the exquisite craftsmanship of her chocolates, compelling customers to spend generously on what might seem mere indulgences. Yet, these are testaments to her skills and commitment to her craft. Ms. Edari is not just a chocolatier; she is an integral part of our community, a celebrated artist in her field, and a dedicated entrepreneur. Supporting her business means investing in our local economy and nurturing a homegrown talent who embodies the spirit of Madison.

I urge you to consider her application favorably and to invest in the future growth of her business, which promises to be an asset not only to her family but to the entire community.

Sincerely,  
  
Amy Throndsen

Advanced Comfort Technology, Inc. | DCC Waterbeds  
Owner, Managing Partner (Former, sold in August 2023)

# ERIC RUPERT



My name is Eric Rupert and I have been a chef in Madison for over 40 years. I worked my way through kitchens as a pastry chef and line cook, to working alongside Odessa Piper, to a lengthy career as the executive chef at EPIC. For the last 7 years I have been the owner of Fortune Favors, formerly known as Nutcrack, where we produce and distribute to over 800 stores across the country very lightly candied pecans. We also operate a retail location as well as robust online sales. With essentially one product, we have grown the business, almost doubling our sales each year. We recently were the recipients of the Wisconsin Small Business Administration's Business Persons of the Year and were considered for the same award on the national level. I have been a part of Madison's food community since 1978, watching it grow and mature, over time being nationally recognized as a food destination.

In 2022 we purchased a 19000 square foot production facility that has allowed us to expand and operate far more efficiently. We went from a 240 square foot kitchen tied to our retail location to a 4000 square foot kitchen that is a part of this 19000 square foot facility. The efficiencies gained in the move have dramatically increased our production capabilities while decreasing our cost of goods and labor. We can now purchase and store much larger quantities of ingredients, packaging and finished goods. The savings we have gained from these lowered costs are integral to our ability to grow at the pace that we have.

I met Syovata Edari about 5 years ago. In short, she makes the finest chocolate I have ever had, period. As a fellow chef, I have marveled at her insight, vision, technical skills and creativity. Add to that, her tenacity, drive, passion, resilience and persistence. What we are so very fortunate to have in our community is quite literally a world class chocolatier in our midst, producing extraordinary, memorable products.

Over the years, I have been lucky enough to get to know her and to call her Vata. During our busiest of times we find each other for mutual support, for validation, for commiseration and celebration of what we do. Vata is a fighter who will always tell me like it is. She sometimes challenges my assumptions about food, craft, community and societal issues and I always walk away grateful with plenty to ponder.

I will admit to being biased. I've met many talented chefs over the years, but Vata stands above them all with her ability to weave her technical abilities with her vision for chocolate (and life). Very few people I have met can do this to the degree she can. As a mostly one woman show, I have always expressed my concerns to her about the long-term sustainability of her business model. However I also understand it. She doesn't want to pay workers in a skilled trade anything less than a living wage, until she can build the capacity to scale enough to justify investing resources into hiring and training.

In my estimation, she needs far more production space so that it makes sense to invest in staff that she can train to her exacting standards. I am also of the opinion that her plan to develop lines of chocolates that are as exquisite as her bonbons, but require less labor, greater shelf life for wider distribution will grow her sales to millions within a few years. Every indicator has shown us at Fortune Favors that consumers are willing to pay more for extraordinary experiences rather than things. Add to that Vata's very compelling life story and I am confident that given more space, she will be able to grow her business on local, regional and national levels.

At Fortune Favors I've been privileged to see what capitalization can do for growth. I believe it's time for the powers that be to really back CocoVaa so it can remain in our community and thrive.



Eric Rupert  
Founder/Chef  
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# COCO VAA

*chocolatier*

