

SIENNA WINGS Continued from Front Page



Tyla-Simone Crayton, founder and CEO of Sienna Wings, holds a bottle of Sienna Sauce, the retail product line that grew from her original wing recipes.

Trying to conduct an interview during normal business hours at Sienna Wings in Missouri City is difficult. Not because people continuously walk in to pick up orders. That’s expected in a restaurant. What wasn’t expected was how often the interview had to stop as people came in asking questions that had nothing to do with the menu.

Questions like “What’s the status?”, “Are they going to let you get a sign?”, or statements like “I can’t believe they’re doing this” and “this isn’t right” were repeatedly directed at Tyla-Simone Crayton. Each time, she paused the interview to greet customers and check on employees pulling fresh wings and fries from the grease, balancing the rhythm of a working kitchen with a situation that has drawn the attention of the entire community.

The concern is not about the food but about visibility. Despite operating in a busy corridor, Sienna Wings does not have a sign displaying its name. Customers who already know the brand find their way in, but everyone else drives past without realizing it is there.

“They’re not saying we can’t have a sign,” Crayton said. “They’re saying we can’t have our name on the sign.”

The conflict centers around the use of the word “Sienna,” which is tied to the surrounding community developed by Johnson Development. In order to display signage with the name Sienna Wings, Crayton has been told she must enter into a licensing or coexistence agreement. What began as a routine step in opening a location quickly turned into a negotiation over ownership, control, and the future of her brand.

“We have our trademark,” she said. “So why are we licensing something that you guys don’t own in our category?”

According to her, the original agreement required acknowledgment that the developer owned the word “Sienna” and placed limits on how the brand could grow. A revised version, framed as a coexistence agreement, still included provisions that raised concern with her legal team.

“If we wanted to expand outside of the U.S., we’d have to ask for permission,” she said. “If we wanted to have investors or sell the company, we’d have to ask for permission.”

Those terms, she explained, went beyond a simple agreement. They introduced a level of oversight that could shape how the business grows, who it partners with, and where it can go next. For a brand built from the ground up, that kind of control was not something she was willing to give up.

“That’s not coexistence,” she said to *Forward Times*. “That’s control.”

Until an agreement is reached, the result remains the same. No sign. No visibility from the street. No spontaneous customers. The absence removes an entire layer of business that most restaurants depend on — the people who stop in without planning to, the ones who discover a place simply by seeing it.

“We’re only getting intentional customers,” she said. “We’re not getting that person driving home from work who just sees us and decides to stop.”

Inside, the business continues to move. Orders come in. Fries drop. Wings are tossed in sauces that have taken years to refine. Outside, the absence of a sign continues to shape how the business operates day to day. Still, leaving has never seriously been



Sienna Sauce, developed from Tyla-Simone Crayton’s original wing recipes, is now sold in multiple flavors as the retail extension of the Sienna Wings brand.

part of the plan.

“I grew up here,” she said. “Some of these people have been supporting me since I was in middle school. I don’t want to just leave after everything we built.”

That connection to the community is part of what has sustained Sienna Wings since its earliest days. What started inside her home in Sienna in 2017 has grown into a brand that now includes both a restaurant and a retail product line. Sienna Sauce, developed from the original wing recipes, is now sold in stores while the restaurant continues to serve as the foundation of the brand.

Crayton’s entrepreneurial journey also gained national attention when she appeared on *Shark Tank* at age 16 after launching Sienna Sauce during a period of homelessness. The idea for the brand was inspired by watching the show. Although a \$100,000 deal with guest shark Kendra Scott ultimately did not materialize, Crayton continued building the brand independently. The company has since surpassed \$1 million in lifetime sales, expanded into retail, and landed shelf space in major retailers including Target and H-E-B.

She also made history as the youngest Black woman to have a culinary residency with Pepsi Dig In in Las Vegas, further cementing the brand’s national visibility.

Despite that growth and national recognition, the current dispute has created an unexpected hurdle for the business at the local level.

Even with the current challenges, the space has not closed itself off.

On the same day as the interview, Sienna Wings was hosting a pop-up with Los Angeles-based entrepreneur Dr. Shica Little of Dr. Shica’s Bakery, another Black woman-owned business navigating its own path through the food industry.

“I like to follow entrepreneurs,” Little said. “When I read her story, it sounded a lot like mine. Being a go-getter and being so young, I really applaud that, because the food business is really hard.”

The collaboration started with a simple message on Instagram — one founder reaching out after recognizing something familiar in the other’s story. From there, it did not take much. Just a decision to show up and build something together for the day.

That willingness to connect has remained consistent, regardless of the challenges outside. Growth has never relied on visibility alone. Without signage in previous locations, the brand expanded through word of mouth, social media, and direct engagement with customers and other businesses.

“All of our growth has been organic,” she said. “We’ve had to build everything ourselves.”

That has meant relying on social media, word of mouth, and pop-ups across the city rather than traditional visibility.

That same approach continues now. While the sign outside remains unresolved, the work inside has not slowed. Partnerships are still forming. Customers are still showing up. The focus remains on building something that extends beyond a single location.

Sienna Sauce is designed as what she calls a “wing sauce for everything,” but behind that simplicity is a process built on precision. After her mother experienced a stroke, Crayton made the decision to reformulate the sauce with more health-conscious considerations, including reducing sodium while preserving flavor. Ingredients were reconsidered. Alternatives were tested. Flavor had to be preserved while changing the foundation of what went into it.

“I had the option to keep it closer to the original or closer to the flavor,” she said. “I chose the flavor.”

That process led to multiple iterations, testing each version at different temperatures and stages before settling on the final product. What began as a homemade recipe evolved into a manufactured product without losing its identity.

The original version still exists in the restaurant as what they now call the “dirty sauce,” a reminder of where it all started and a connection to customers who have followed the brand since its earliest days.

Attention to detail is not a side note in this business. It is the business.

“I don’t put anything on the menu that I can’t vouch for,” she said.

Everything offered has been tested, adjusted, and refined through her own process, making sure it meets the same standard she would expect as a customer. That same level of care is what her mother, Monique Crayton, has watched develop over the years, from selling wings out of their home to building something that now reaches far beyond it.

“She amazes me, just to see how she’s so driven to grow this brand and this company,” said Monique as she looked at her daughter greeting even more customers and making sure the pop-up in front of the building had everything they needed. “I’m just excited to see her grow in this journey. This is a very strenuous business, and it’s not easy, and entrepreneurship is not easy. But even her working to make sure this pop-up goes right is a reflection of her being a good person in this world. I just want to support her, and I can’t ask for anything more.”

That pride sits alongside a different emotion as well, one that comes with watching your child navigate a situation that feels bigger than it should be.

Back at the counter, the work does not stop. Orders are called out. Customers walk in — some for the first time, others already familiar — many still asking the same question about the sign. Crayton moves between the kitchen and the register, answering them, checking on her staff, making sure everything leaving the window meets her standard.

The situation outside has not changed. There is still no sign on the building, but hopefully soon that will change. In the meantime, Crayton continues to work and stays optimistic.

Support, she said, has been both practical and personal. “Right now, just signing the petition... just so that we can stay connected with people,” she said, pointing to an effort that has already drawn thousands of signatures from across the country, with supporters far beyond Missouri City adding their names. But just as important is showing up in person. “Just come and patronize the business,” she added. That consistency has made a real difference. “Just coming in and being consistent and continuing to patronize... that has helped me be able to sleep at night.”

Supporters can visit Sienna Wings at 4340 Sienna Pkwy., Suite 104, Missouri City, TX 77459.



Tyla-Simone Crayton prepares wings at Sienna Wings.

CLASSIFIEDS

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Enterprise Solutions – HGACBuy/Cooperative Purchasing Program – Grounds & Turf Equipment – GR07-26

H-GAC is soliciting responses for selecting qualified manufacturers, dealers and distributors of Grounds and Turf Equipment and to make these types of products available to Customers of the HGACBuy Cooperative Purchasing Program under blanket type contracts.

To view the solicitation documents, visit <https://www.h-gac.com/procurement> or [ESBD \(txsmartbuy.com\)](https://www.esbd.com)

Response Deadline: May 14, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT

LEGAL NOTICE

Choice Partners (CP), a division of Harris County Department of Education (HCDE), is a national cooperative that will be accepting proposals in response to the following Request for Proposals (RFP). Interested proposers may go to www.choicepartners.org and register to download the solicitation or call 877-696-2122.

• RFP 26/024MF for Facility Management & Maintenance Software are due by Thursday, May 7th 2026 @ 2:00 PM CT

All proposals must be submitted via the HCDE online eBid System at the following link: <https://hcdeebid.ionwave.net>.

Proposals will be opened via Zoom; Information regarding dates, times, and a link to join the meeting is located within the eBid System under the “Activities” tab specific to the solicitation.

PROPOSAL NOTICE

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD will be accepting proposals for the following: Courier Services: Mail, and Pharmaceuticals RFP

Specifications may be secured from The Harris Center website www.theharriscenter.org beginning Tuesday, April 14, 2026. The Harris Center utilizes Bonfire for their solicitations <https://theharriscenter.bonfirehub.com/portal/?tab=openOpportunities>. A non-mandatory vendor conference meeting will be held via Lifesize at 2:00 p.m., on Monday, April 20, 2026. Deadline for prospective vendors to submit questions to this RFP is Wednesday, April 22, 2026. Proposals must be submitted by 11:00 a.m., Wednesday, May 6, 2026. The Harris Center reserves all rights to reject any and/or all proposals, to waive formalities and reasonable irregularities in submitted documents as it deems to be in its best interests and is not obligated to accept the lowest proposal.