



Chris Lively added 8 new photos — with Amanda Vermillion at
The Tea Mistress, LLC.

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Check out Amanda Vermillion 's awesome Tea establishment!

DESCRIBE YOUR BUSINESS

The Tea Mistress, LLC is both a retail store and event-planning business. We sell specialty teas, herbs, tea accessories and teaware in our Clear Lake shop and we also travel all over Texas to vendor markets, farmers' markets, fairs and festivals as well as private parties. In addition to tea, we also sell herbs, gourmet coffee, chocolate, baking mixes, local honey, jams and jellies, flavored sugars, tea jewelry, books and gifts.

I am a Certified Tea Master who is available for public speaking engagements, talks, presentations, lectures, tea and food pairings, tea tastings, and classes.

I also offer consulting services for businesses. If you have a food, beverage or health-based business, have you thought about incorporating tea into your existing business model or taking your existing tea service up a notch? I can provide training classes for your staff and I can help you choose the best teas to sell and serve at your venue.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO OPEN THIS BUSINESS?

I've always had an interest in teas and herbs, and I'd been planning events on a volunteer basis for various social groups, such as my Tea and Conversation with Friends Meetup group. I was working in Banking and Securities Compliance, but lost my job in 2010 during the mortgage crisis. Because of the recession, I was having trouble finding work in that industry, and I was debating whether to stick with what I had been doing or go back to school or find something new that I could be passionate about.

In December 2012, I had made plans to take my tea meetup group to The Path of Tea in Houston, a tea shop owned by Thia McKann, the first ATMA-Certified Tea Master in the state of Texas. Very sadly, Thia passed away on Christmas Day 2012. Believe it or not, it was from reading Thia's obituary that I learned about the American Tea Masters Association where Thia had earned her Tea Master Certification. I instantly knew in my heart that this was something I wanted to do! As fate would have it, there was a Tea Master certification class starting in January 2013! After I earned my Tea Master certification, I went on to take a tea blending class, and I started my business in the summer of 2013.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED?

Exciting yet scary! I had always worked for other people and was nervous about taking the big leap, but at the same time, I felt passionate about what I was doing, and I knew I would regret not taking the opportunity to see if I had what it takes to run a successful business. When I started The Tea Mistress, LLC in 2013, I focused on event planning, talks, classes and presentations. My first two events were tea tastings, and both times I had attendees asking where they could buy the teas I served. I quickly realized that I could increase my income by selling tea.

For the first couple of years, I had one foot in the business and the other foot back in the financial industry. I would pick up the occasional AML Compliance contract job to pay the bills, which also meant that I was only working on the business part-time. Finally in the summer of 2015, I decided to be a full-time business owner. I am very lucky to have a supportive husband who is gainfully employed, because otherwise I would not have had the resources to pursue this dream.

WHAT HAS SURPRISED YOU MOST WHEN OWNING A BUSINESS?

Just how loyal and helpful your friends, clients, and even strangers can be! There are many people who have really gone out of their way to support my business by purchasing my products, using my services, giving me referrals, giving me discounts or bartering for services, giving me advice and encouragement, and providing a sounding board and sympathetic ear. I have had friends and even casual acquaintances stop by and leave me little

gifts of tea sets, teas, artwork and fixtures that they thought I could use in the shop or for parties!

WHAT WOULD YOUR CUSTOMERS SAY THEY LOVE MOST ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?

My retail customers would say that they love the variety and quality of my products and the personalized attention and tea knowledge we provide. The people who have attended my events would say that I'm an entertaining and knowledgeable public speaker and a creative and efficient event planner.

WHAT'S THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD WORKING WITH A CUSTOMER?

Off the top of my head I am thinking of the 4 or 5 times I've been stopped in a parking lot by a stranger who saw my magnetic signs on my car and asked me for a business card. One of those parking lot encounters even led to a speaking engagement at a mother-daughter tea!

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR?

After more than 30 years of working for someone else, I admit it's nice to be my own boss. I enjoy the freedom to build my business according to my vision. There's nobody micromanaging me and breathing down my neck! If well-meaning people give me advice, it's ultimately up to me whether or not I want to take that advice and implement it.

WHAT IS SOMETHING MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE BUSINESS?

The Tea Mistress is not just tea! We are one of very few places in the Houston area that sells 100% Hawaiian Kona coffee!

And if you think you don't like tea, think again! Tea is an extremely versatile beverage with many different flavor profiles. I truly believe that there is a tea out there for everyone! And even if tea is "not your cup of tea", we also have a variety of herbal teas, gourmet coffees, baking mixes, organic chocolate, local honey and preserves, flavored sugars, and cookies!

DO YOU HAVE ANY EXCITING PLANS FOR THE FUTURE THAT YOU WANT CUSTOMERS TO KNOW ABOUT?

Why, yes! Thanks for asking! We have outgrown our current location and will be moving our shop to the inside of Teahouse Under the Oaks in Historic League City soon. Last day of operations in Clear Lake is Sunday, August 13th. The new Grand-ReOpening date is Tuesday, August 15th. This is a spacious tea room that has excellent food, a nice atmosphere, and a steady clientele of both regular customers and special event bookings. I'll have more floor space to showcase my wares, and I've already ordered several beautiful teapots and tea sets. I'm looking forward to introducing my regular customers to this wonderful tea room and I'm also looking forward to reaching a new audience of tea room customers. This is going to be a great symbiotic relationship, because customers will be able to order tea or coffee with their lunch and then buy a bag of it to take home! And when I do special events and tastings, I'll be able to serve their freshly made food!

ANYTHING EXCITING GOING ON THAT CUSTOMERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

This month (July) we have some special events in our Clear Lake shop: Wednesdays we have one-on-one intuitive astrology readings with Ginger McCord, publisher of Indigo Sun Magazine, by appointment. These have been very popular so far.

On Sunday, July 16, we have a "Fit to be Thai" dinner and "7 Ways to Kick the Sugar Habit" talk by wellness coach Oralia Acosta. She's preparing delicious organic Thai food and I'm preparing Thai iced tea and a lovely blue herbal tea.

On Sunday, July 23, I am hosting a tea tasting benefit for my non-profit organization, Lone Star Houston Tea Festival, featuring Gosh, That's Good brand of refreshing and tasty matcha lattes and chocolate frappes.

We are also planning to launch our mail-order/online sales in the next couple of months, since we have had many inquiries from people in other cities and states.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE THAT YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH OTHER ENTREPRENEURS?

Be prepared to spend a lot of money and effort in building your business! There will be expenses and setbacks you did not anticipate. But don't give up! YOU CAN DO IT!

And lastly, never underestimate the power of "word of mouth" referrals!

WHERE ARE YOUR FAVORITE PLACES TO GO When you are in Pearland?

I love to visit my colleague/competitor Adrian Hernandez's place, The Drink Station! They have great bubble tea, smoothies, coffees, and special tea tasting events!

Four Friends Tea Room is another place I like. I wish I could go there more often, but it's difficult now that I'm working the same hours they are. The owners are really sweet and so are the desserts!

Can I also mention an Alvin business? I love going strawberry picking at Froberg Farm in the spring!

WHY DO YOU THINK IT'S IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO SHOP LOCAL?
Shopping local builds community spirit, trust, and friendship. It keeps money and jobs within the community, and it also saves gas and wear and tear on your vehicle!

