



HEADER: 'WE ARE THE BLUEPRINT': SLIM PICKINS OUTFITTERS IS REDEFINING AND DIVERSIFYING THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY

TEASER TEXT: *The first Black-owned, woman-run outdoor gear shop in the nation is bringing its values and unique style to Public Lands stores and beyond.*

FIRST LINE OF STORY: *"Just because something fails doesn't mean it doesn't work."*

That's what Jahmicah and Heather Dawes, founders of [Slim Pickins Outfitters](#) (SPO), often tell one another when running a business gets tough. As founders and operators of the country's first Black-owned and woman-run outdoor gear shop, currently coming of age in the middle of a global pandemic, the married couple and parents of two children (and the friendly basset hound, B!ll Mvrray), know a thing or two about grit.

DICK'S Sporting Goods and Public Lands recognize and respect the importance of SPO's role in the outdoor retail industry. When this pioneering outfitter needed a lift during the pandemic, we were there for each other.



BLAZING A NEW TRAIL

SPO was established in the heart of Stephenville, Tex., in 2014. For Jahmicah, the seed for SPO was planted after seeing a Black man fly fishing in an advertisement. He was inspired to venture into the business of the outdoors -- despite very little representation or precedent for people of color doing so.

SPO was established to connect customers with outdoor experiences and outdoor gear that is well made, functional and attractive. The pair is driven by their vision to make the outdoors more accessible and diverse.

But in a rural and predominantly white college town just a few hours outside of Dallas, Jahmicah and Heather initially struggled to feel connected and welcome.

"It's funny, because we badly wanted to leave Stephenville," recalled Heather. "We told ourselves that if this business idea didn't work out, we were moving away to start over somewhere new where we felt more welcome. And of course, it worked out!"

Local residents started stopping into SPO for coffee roasting nights, live music and camaraderie with other community members -- often coming for the conversation rather than anything outdoor-related. Once these connections began to grow, Heather and Jahmicah encouraged their customers to take their experiences outside with outdoor yoga classes and running clubs.

"We realized that lots of people felt marginalized and othered," said Heather. "We encountered a lot of people like us who didn't feel like they fit in, so we decided to give them a place where they would fit."

The year 2020 was poised to be SPO's best. The brand was on track to become profitable for the first time. Jahmicah and Heather were finding innovative and creative ways to continue to connect people of color to the outdoors, and Heather was pregnant with their second child.

GETTING KNOCKED DOWN

Then, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began, and things took a turn for the worse.

Heather and Jahmicah had to immediately shut down, converting their business to curbside pickup only. However, the efforts were not enough to bail out a young retail business facing a global pandemic, and SPO was forced to reduce staff hours and sell store fixtures just to stay afloat.

"It was such a crazy time," remembered Jahmicah. "We were the first Black-owned outdoor gear shop in the U.S., and we were about to be extinct. We were supposed to mean something. We kept asking ourselves 'Will anyone ever know we existed? Will it all matter if no one knows what we tried to do? What if we're the first and also the first to fail?'"

Despite the odds, the pair persevered. In the months that followed the initial onset of the pandemic came a few bright spots of promotion and recognition. A [feature film](#) by Wondercamp and a corresponding GoFundMe fundraising effort helped SPO remain in business. After the film's premiere, the GoFundMe exceeded its initial goal of \$132,000 in just three days and went on to raise over \$172,000 for the store. SPO also sold over \$10,000 in merchandise in just one day after the film's premiere.

SPO's media coverage and the resulting surge in business kept their doors open but revealed the true cost of not being able to invest in the growth of a young business during a pandemic. Things were turning around, but the scrappy SPO team wasn't out of the woods just yet.

"That GoFundMe money helped us get back to zero on our debts, but people don't realize that it wasn't profit or money to help us continue operating or growing our business," said Jahmicah. "We were still just one year out from the start of the pandemic and struggling to get back on our feet."

RISING UP

That's when Heather and Jahmicah got a phone call with a surprising request – the DICK'S Sporting Goods and Public Lands teams had heard their story and wanted to help. Would they be willing to meet?

"When you're going through a rough time and have experienced partnerships or collaborations that haven't worked out, there is some hesitation with something like this," said Jahmicah. "We always respected the DICK'S Sporting Goods business, but we had no idea what to expect when we got that call."

Nevertheless, a meeting was set, and a new collaboration officially began. The DICK'S and Public Lands teams got to work initiating conversations with vendors, providing advice and counsel with the SPO eCommerce platform and offering overall direction and counsel on SPO's business plan, all with the intention of removing barriers and keeping SPO in business so they could scale and bring their vision to life.

"From the very beginning, the DICK'S and Public Lands teams were always willing to help and go the extra mile," recalled Heather. "They told us 'If you ever need anything, don't wait, just call us.' It was so genuine and honest, and it made us feel really good about everything. We've learned so much from them."

For Chad Haring, Vice President General Merchandising Manager at Public Lands, the SPO story felt like a familiar iteration of success in the making.

"DICK'S Sporting Goods started off as a small family business in 1948," reflected Haring. "We know what it takes to grow a business from the ground up, and all of the brands partnering on this effort care deeply about making outdoor spaces accessible for all. We knew we could help, and we are incredibly humbled and honored to be part of the SPO story."

It's no secret that brands that lead with authenticity and values are right at home [at Public Lands stores](#). That's why Public Lands was proud to take the next step in this collaboration and sell SPO apparel as the first SPO wholesale partner.

"We are passionate about supporting small community businesses like SPO, that have a deep connection with their customers," said Haring. "We're helping their brand do some of the most important work being done in our country today."



For Heather and Jahmicah, the future is beginning to look up again.

They are determined to use their story and personal experiences to make the outdoor space a place where their children and people who look like them are always welcome.

“Our vision is to always be community-driven and connected,” said Jahmicah. “We want to remain connected to our customers while driving a new narrative about Black ownership in the outdoor retail space.”

“And to make this success story repeatable for other brands like ours,” added Heather. “Everyone loves a story of survival and courage.”

“There wasn’t a blueprint for us,” said Jahmicah. “Now, we are the blueprint.”

SPO apparel can be found on PublicLands.com and in Public Lands stores. For more information on SPO, visit <https://slimpickinsoutfitters.com/>.