



Real Men Cook Chicago co-founder Yvette Moyo Gillard talks about Father's Day and Chicago community

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For the past 20 years in Chicago, Father's Day has gotten the recognition it deserves thanks to events like [Real Men Cook](#). [Captivate Marketing Group](#) will host the 21st year of Real Men Cook, and management has changed hands. But it was the founders who created and celebrated this cooking, health and united tradition of bringing fathers together for the past two decades. One-half of the founders, Yvette Moyo Gillard, talked with [Shamontiel](#), the [Chicago News & Events Examiner](#), about the creation of the event with her former husband and business partner, Kofi Moyo, and those who made Real Men Cook what it is today.

Shamontiel: Tell me about how the event started. I know it started in 1990 on Father's Day, but who was the mastermind behind the brand?

Yvette Moyo Gillard: I'm the marketer behind the brand. I had a history of doing major events for the magazine I had worked for, which was [Dollars & Sense magazine](#). We always did major events with that, and when I left the company, we created an event marketing company. We did a lot of work for major corporations until like the 10th year. We just couldn't handle both our marketing and PR activity for other companies and [Real Men Cook](#) so we made the choice to forward Real Men Cook and to actually change the way Father's Day was celebrated in this country.

S: How did Real Men Cook come along?

YMG: We heard about an event in New York a woman named Lana Turner had created to raise money for her son to attend art school. It featured men cooking, and it was actually [Michael Scott](#), who was recently killed, that gave us the information that something like this was going on in New York. He thought it would be perfect for us considering my event marketing background. I investigated and asked Lana if we could do a similar event in Chicago, and she said so many people had taken the idea without contacting her. She gave us her blessings. I shared with her that I was going to change it from an evening, single women's event to a Father's Day event where men could be celebrated for their contributions.

S: What made you want to celebrate fathers?

YMG: It was a joke on the calendar. It was probably the most forgotten special day on the calendar 20 years ago. Father's Day made 100 years old last year when we were 20 years old. Eighty years later it was still not celebrated the way I thought it should be, and I had a huge family. I knew that my child's father and the father of my oldest children were very committed dads. Just because they weren't in the home didn't mean they weren't committed fathers. That was the story in our community that more families were becoming blended and fathers were not necessarily the head of the household. I didn't want kids to feel undervalued on Father's Day.

S: I know you all have [Real Men Cook](#) locations all over the place, but the hometown was Chicago, right?

YMG: The 10th anniversary was when we decided to expand to other cities, and that was a planned, calculated expansion because we could see that this was a message that was universal. Fathers needed to have something of meaning on Father's Day.

S: What made you all decide on Real Men Cook as opposed to Real Men Build or Real Man Paint, or whatever. What made you decide on cooking?



Photo courtesy of Yvette Moyo Gillard



YMG: [Kofi], my husband at the time (pictured left with Gillard), was an excellent cook. That was what attracted me to Lana's event because it was about real men cooking. When we heard about Lana's event, it resonated because we knew men that cooked well. When my father cooked at home, it was like an event. When women cook, it's sort of like a job. When men cook, it's a celebration, and we thought it wouldn't be like your average event that might die down. People would never lose interest in men cooking for a cause.

S: In 1990, did you expect the event to grow this big?

YMG: We didn't expect, but we hoped that we could make a difference that would impact people all over the world—not just this country but all over the world because a lot of men don't talk about what they feel and what they think and their love, particularly African-American men. We thought this would be a way to demonstrate the voices of men, to have people hear and see and feel when men get involved in the community to make a difference.

S: Past Real Men Cook sessions included free health sessions. How did that come about?

YMG: That came about in the eighth year. We were actually working with a guy named [Joe Harrington](#) who is now a leader at the Illinois

Department of Public Health. Joe came onboard to do some free health screenings with us. All of our cities where [Real Men Cook](#) take place have health and wellness provisions.

S: I know you expected to get your everyday dad and people you knew. Were you surprised when you started seeing more notable faces in the crowd?

YMG: No, we weren't surprised. That was calculated. The marketing strategy included my friends that were well-connected women to go out and recruit 10 men each to cook. There were women like [Merri Dee](#) that used to be at Channel 9 [WGN]; Robin Robinson of [FOX News Chicago](#); Deborah Crable, who at that time was host of "[Ebony/JET Showcase](#)"; and a host of women. Some of the men that were included in the first year were [Bill Campbell](#) from Channel 7 [ABC], [Monroe Anderson](#) who was on Channel 2, [Eugene Sawyer](#), [Eugene Morris](#), [Dr. Carl Bell](#) from the [Community Mental Health Council](#). The celebrity types were in the first Real Men Cook, but reaching out further into the community—we didn't want to make it a celebrity event where just the Who's Who came out—this was really an effort to include a broader community. After the first year, we lost some of the upscale nature of the event, but we knew that we were making a difference in the community. Some of them still participate like Emil Jones and his son [Emil Jones Jr.](#), who's now a senator. It's sort of a right of passage for men who are involved in the community.

S: I see you have photos of now [President Barack Obama](#) (pictured on the right). At the time that he was involved, was he a senator, a community activist or what was his role?



YMG: He participated before he was a senator and as U.S. Senator he actually came in one day and served for a few hours. It was between 2002 and 2004. [The picture on the site] is when he was a senator. I asked him to come up and speak, and he was like, "No, I'm just enjoying the day with my kids and I'm going to help out a little bit and serve." In fact, [Obama](#) did the foreword to our book published by Simon & Schuster called "[Real Men Cook](#)."

S: I want to make sure that I understand the connection between the Real Men Cook brand and the Captivate Marketing Group brand specifically because CMG is now over the Chicago event. Are you no longer associated with Real Men Cook Chicago at all?

YMG: I still own the brand. The brand is still in the same hands with the founder. Captivate has all rights to manage the event. We're just not the organizers of the [Chicago] event this year. There's the management of the event, and then there's the spirit of the event, which I created and continued to own. The brand is still being run by the originators, by me basically because I own the company. Kofi retired from the company about five years ago. After 22 years, you know, I need a break. I'm looking for a new infusion of energy and use into the brand. I don't have anything to do with this year's event other than coming there and having a

great time.

S: Although you're no longer affiliated with the Chicago event, what do you want people's impression to be of the **Real Men Cook** brand?

YMG: That Real Men Cook means community service, community involvement, male responsibility and that families work no matter what the configuration. This is about the family. It's not about the biological father. If there's not a biological father involved, then there is a real man somewhere in the community that can be the father figure and the real man in the lives of our children.

Additional Notes:

All photos are published with permission from Yvette Moyo Gillard and Kofi Moyo of Real Men Cook.

Captivate Marketing Group, the organizers and new management team for this year's Real Men Cook event in Chicago, declined an interview request.

For more info:

"Accepting a daddy's girl, the relationship between a daughter and father"

"Captivate Marketing Group acquires Chicago rights to Real Men Cook event"

"Co-founder Kofi Moyo and other Real Men talk about 20 years of Real Men Cook in Chicago"

"Father's Day cologne ideas, Davidoff's Hot Water and cologne test"

Real Men Cook

Simon & Schuster "Real Men Cook: More Than 100 Easy Recipes Celebrating Tradition and Family" by K. Kofi Moyo

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