



As Pictured: Jaqi (left) and Nikki (right)

The Furlough Cheesecake was born during the longest federal government shutdown in history, which began days before Christmas 2018. Biological sisters Nikki Thompson Howard and Jaqi Thompson Wright are **Prince George's County, MD natives**, who found themselves along with over 800,000 federal employees and contractors without a paycheck during the holidays.

One act of kindness by Nikki to donate homemade **Sweet Potato Cheesecakes** for a New Year's Eve church service, allowed Jaqi to enjoy and share it with their mother on New Year's Day 2019. After being completely overwhelmed by this amazing cheesecake, it was their mother's suggestion to sell it. This new business immediately turned into a family effort with Nikki's daughters launching social media campaigns, along with their chef brother, parents, and a host of family and friends helping in the kitchen.

Nikki and Jaqi, known as **The Cheesecake Sisters**, did their very first live social media post during the first week of January 2019, and word began to spread among family and friends. But it was after sending an email to a local news station that they quickly gained media attention on local news and radio programs around the Washington, DC area.

Within days, The Cheesecake Sisters were invited to **CNN** to share how the government shutdown was impacting their lives and how they decided to make lemonade out of lemons. Their inspiring story also caught the attention of celebrities like **Ellen DeGeneres** and **OWN's Mind Your Business television show host Mahisha Dellinger**. In fact, **DeGeneres**, in partnership with Cheerios, gifted Nikki and Jaqi with \$20,000 to support their new business on the **January 18, 2019** episode of **The Ellen DeGeneres Show**.

Since their inception, The Furlough Cheesecake has **sold over 6,000 cheesecakes** to customers all over the country and hit the shelves of almost 100 regional **Walmart** stores in the Washington DC region in September 2019. They also had the privilege of partnering with Pop singer **Usher** and his non-profit youth organization **Usher's New Look** to raise money for future leaders in June 2019.

Beyond providing the **MOST** delicious and high-quality cheesecakes to households all over the world, The Furlough Cheesecake is dedicated to building the community. From utilizing local farmers and manufacturers to supporting youth-focused initiatives to women empowerment to small business support to mental health wellness and more, The Cheesecake Sisters are committed to using their platform to enrich the lives of others.

Now, with startup growing pains and their first year of business behind them, coupled with an abundance of lessons learned, The Cheesecake Sisters are looking forward to a sweet future with The Furlough Cheesecake.