

Biography of Jimmy John Liataud



Jimmy John Liataud

Restaurant IPOs were the talk of the town in 2014, and Jimmy was considering going public with his company.



In the cold town of Arlington Heights, Illinois, a tenacious individual named Jimmy John Liataud was born on a brisk January day in 1964. The second of four children, he was brought up by his resilient mother, Gina, a Lithuanian immigrant who worked relentlessly as an elementary school teacher. He often refers to his mother as a true survivor, having witnessed the atrocities of war during her childhood and emerged stronger. Her steadfast resolve and hard work were rewarded when she secured her bachelor's degree in the U.S.

His father, Big Jim, was a man of multiple talents - an innovator, businessperson, and educator. His professional journey began with selling encyclopedias before entering the plastic molding industry. The family frequently experienced the ups and downs associated with his business ventures. With his father often away for work and his mother engrossed in her demanding job, he assumed extra responsibilities from a young age.

A turning point came in his first year when his family's financial situation took a turn for the better. He joined Elgin Academy School - a renowned prep school that ushered in new possibilities for him. However, adapting to the affluent environment of his classmates was a challenge for young Liataud.

Despite enduring adversity during his formative years, he always focused on his aspirations. He weathered the storm and eventually established his Gourmet Sandwiches. It was a hugely successful sandwich chain with over 2,800 branches nationwide.



Jimmy John Liataud

Liataud Family Foundation's charitable activities are broad. It has extended financial support to many organizations, including but not limited to the Mayo Clinic, Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, the American Heart Association, Frances Nelson SmileHealthy dental clinic.

The Early Stages of his

Jimmy John Liataud is an exemplary figure in the world of entrepreneurship. Born into a family that valued discipline and hard work, he graduated second to last in his class at Elgin Academy School in 1982. He had a burning desire to start his own business despite his academic struggles. His father, although initially pushing for a military career, eventually agreed to lend him \$25,000 to start his venture, under the condition that if it failed, he would join the Army.

Initially, he planned to open a Chicago-style hotdog stand inspired by establishments like Portillo's. However, after realizing that the initial investment for equipment alone would exceed his budget, he pivoted towards a more straightforward concept: a sandwich shop. This idea was

sparked during a visit to Southern Illinois University, where he noticed a small, successful sandwich shop operating with minimal equipment.

Over the summer of 1982, he developed a menu of six sandwiches and invited his family to taste and vote on the best ones. The top four became his first menu. In January 1983, his Gourmet Sandwiches was established in Charleston, Illinois, strategically located close to university bars to cater to students seeking late-night meals.



Jimmy John Liautaud

Roark Capital, known for acquiring 64 franchise/multi-unit brands, including Arby's, Corner Bakery, and Cinnabon, had extensive experience in the food and beverage sector.

Despite a slow start, Jimmy John's resilience led him to take sandwich samples to neighboring businesses, earning him his first customers. He also printed business cards with the menu on the back to distribute around university dorms and local bars. Within weeks, the business was breaking even.

In its first year, he generated \$154,000 in sales and a \$40,000 profit. This was split with his father, who owned 48% of the company. Over the next few years, the business thrived, allowing him to buy out his father's share in 1986 by repaying the initial loan with interest. From that point onwards, he became his sole shareholder, marking the start of a remarkable entrepreneurial journey.

Charitable Acts

He is the entrepreneurial mind behind his Gourmet Sandwiches and is equally recognized for his philanthropic endeavors. His wife Leslie and their children established the Liautaud Family Foundation in 2017.

The Foundation's charitable activities are broad. It has extended financial support to many organizations, including but not limited to the Mayo Clinic, Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, the American Heart Association, Frances Nelson SmileHealthy dental clinic, Crisis Nursery, Camp Southern Ground, and Champaign County Youth Assessment Center.



Jimmy John Liautaud

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Establishment of Roark

Restaurant IPOs were the talk of the town in 2014, and he was considering going public with his company. However, this decision took work for him, as he constantly wavered due to the intense scrutiny he faced. He craved more tranquility and privacy. He was deeply involved in every aspect of his company, keenly focusing on every minute detail. He preferred autonomy, especially from shareholders. In 2007, when his sandwich business made \$300 million, he collaborated with an investor, Weston Presidio. This partnership helped boost the company's sales to \$2.5 billion. By 2014, they were contemplating an exit.

Rumors of Jimmy John's founder weighing his options began circulating, leading to offers coming his way. He started investigating these options, meeting with several reputable private equity firms. Neil Aronson, Managing Director at Roark Capital, was a long-time acquaintance. When Roark Capital placed a bid, he felt it was the right match. Roark Capital, known for acquiring 64 franchise/multi-unit brands, including Arby's, Corner Bakery, and Cinnabon, had extensive experience in the food and beverage sector. They promised to assist in formulating both micro and macro strategies, allowing him to retain his identity.



Jimmy John Liataud

'Jimmy John Liataud, the entrepreneurial mind behind Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches, is equally recognized for his philanthropic endeavors.

Over two years, he familiarized himself with the Roark team. In 2016, he sold most of his company shares to Roark Capital, holding onto 35% and remaining the Chairman and the largest individual shareholder. The management structure remained unchanged, with James North becoming the CEO and President. In 2019, he integrated his remaining stake in his with Inspire Brands. Although he still holds shares in Inspire Brands, his focus has shifted towards his Foundation's charitable work and family investment company.