



Inspired by the sight of growth, Deidre's own growth began when she opened her eyes in Jackson, Mississippi to her parents David and Debra Howard. Deidre attributes her passion and her drive to her southern roots. "My ability to overcome any challenging situation has everything to do with my southern upbringing," says Deidre. "I grew up around determined, resilient family and friends; people who were unbothered by adversity."

Deidre's first memorable test at growth took place at the age of 8, when her mother died days after giving birth to her sister. Her father, who lost his own mother at the age of 12, then moved the family to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she went from a 4th grade classroom filled with 23 other black students to being the sole black student in her classroom. It was in Oklahoma that she grew to learn what it meant to be different; the type of different one can't disguise. "I owe my courage to the state of Oklahoma. It's hard enough for most people to put themselves out there, let alone manage the uncertainty of race and gender's role. I'd never figured that part out before moving to Oklahoma, so I didn't bother starting. I instead committed to my church and my school and got involved in anything my parents would say yes to."

Deidre's involvement in organizational leadership, mock trial, youth court, and journalism led her to the Great State of Iowa in 2004. "Iowa made me a grown woman," says DeJear. "Iowa is where I learned what freedom looked like."

Deidre DeJear is a small business owner and voting rights advocate who is driven by her passion to create equitable, inclusive, and accessible opportunities for all.

A graduate of Drake University, she exceeded expectations, becoming Top Freshman, Top Sophomore, Top Junior, and Top Senior. Deidre started her business in 2008 during her senior year, with a mission of helping other businesses grow and thrive. It was the brink of the recession, and Iowans were out of work. As a result, many became entrepreneurs out of necessity. Deidre stepped in to help them market themselves and navigate the filing process through the Secretary of State's Office.

For over 15 years, Caleo Enterprises has helped over 1,000 small businesses and nonprofits in Iowa. Deidre has created products and programs to help grow small businesses while also improving the financial management skills of over 20,000 Iowans.

Deidre spearheaded the opening of Iowa's first Financial Empowerment Center, a collaborative that targets low-income individuals and families, provides access to mainstream financial systems and products and increases their financial management knowledge and skills.

Since 2015, Deidre has spent a considerable amount of time working on One Economy, a project dedicated to strengthening the financial capability and wealth attainment of African Americans in Iowa, and other financial empowerment efforts.

In the midst of the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic, Deidre brought a collective of community organizations together to raise private and public dollars in order to provide a level playing field for disadvantaged small business owners. In 2021, Deidre served as the Foundations Financial Coaching Certificate Program Lead which equipped trainees with credentials, training, tools, and resources needed to serve as professional financial coaches for individuals, families, and nonprofits nationwide.

The other side of Deidre's work leads her to enhance public participation in civic engagement. In 2018, Deidre ran as the Democratic Nominee for Iowa Secretary of State, making her the first African American in Iowa to be nominated by a major political party. She ran to restore Iowa's progressive voting laws and fought for fair access to the ballot box. In 2022, as the Democratic Nominee for Iowa Governor, Deidre traversed the state, advocating for high quality public education, access to mental healthcare, and a countless number of issues that matter to voters across the state.

Deidre founded Vision Leads and co-founded Back 2 School Iowa and LadyLike. She is also a member of the Des Moines Chapter of the Links, Inc., board chair of Count the Kicks, board member of The Directors Council, City of Des Moines Housing Services Board, and Interfaith Alliance.

Deidre lives in Des Moines with her husband Marvin, and her two dogs, Macy and Maurice.