Mary Ekene graduated from the University of North Texas with a Bachelor's in Communications and a Master's in Public Relations. On campus she was greatly involved with the *NAACP*, *Student Government Association*, *African-Panhellenic Council* and other organizations that were involved with student affairs.

 After she graduated with her Master's in Public Relations, she moved to Austin, Texas where she began her acting career. Ms. Ekene was very active in the arts and went to school at the *The New York School for Film and Television* in 2007 in New York City. She continued to star in commercials for *Verizon*, *Taco Bueno*, *Fuddruckers* and television shows such as *Cheaters*, *Friday Night Lights* and *Prison Break*.

 In her path she moved to Orange, Texas and began to build platforms in her community. She ran for the *At-Large Position Six Seat* for the City Council against candidates Veronica Woodle and Larry Spears Jr. in 2017. She lost that seat to who is now Mayor Larry Spears Jr., but continued to be a positive asset in her community. After that election, she was invited to write for the city's local newspaper, *The Orange Leader* where she has written for the past four years. She used this platform to write about local affairs, black businesses, problems with the youth in the community and started a section of the paper called *Mother and Father of the Week* to acknowledge amazing parents in the community.

 She really put African- American businesses and families on the map by writing and highlighting the black community in the newspaper. She went on to help to do forums for the school board, city council, school drives, and other organizations in the community.

 Mary is an active member of *Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc*. where she takes tremendous pride with her sorority to become heavily active in the community. She volunteers her time to work with the schools, police force, and colleges to take part in active events. She is also active with the *NAACP Orange Chapter*, *Advisory Board with the City of Orange* and the *Salvation Army* and the local churches in the community.

 Mary started her business, *Livol LLC* in February 2018 where she was on a mission to start her health journey. She had gained a lot of weight after she had her second baby and did not want to lose weight the "unhealthy" way. She formulated a cleanse and it was at that moment the *Livol Liver Cleanse* was born. She went on to sell her cleanses from the trunk of her car that soon led to her first store front in Orange, Texas.

 A year later, she opened a second store in Beaumont, Texas and another store in Houston, Texas. Mary started formulating one product after another and now has a total of 76 products **SHE CREATES by herself**.

 She takes great pride in being an herbalist and someone who takes joy in making remedies to help people improve their health and wellness. She believes her business is her health ministry. She believes with God's grace, she can continue to be an example of someone who shows people that **HEALTH is WEALTH**.

**BBP: Who or what inspired you to become an entrepreneur?**

ME: My children inspired me to become an entrepreneur. I wanted my daughters to have something to call their OWN when they got older. To own your own business and to be successful is a milestone in anyone's life. Being a single mother of two, especially of two daughters is a challenge. I wanted to show them through hard work and keeping God first that anything is possible. I always try to be a positive role model for my children.

**BBP: What has been on your greatest challenge as an entrepreneur and how are you working to combat that?**

ME: My biggest challenge as an entrepreneur is learning to take out time for myself to rest. I find myself so often always on the go, which causes my body to become exhausted. I want to train myself to take out time to get rest and pamper myself occasionally. I want to remind myself daily that I am not an octopus and it is ok not to handle everything all at the same time.

**BBP: How has Covid 19 impacted your business and how are you adjusting to the new "normal"?**

ME: Covid 19 has affected by business for the better. Because my business is in health and wellness, it made people take their health seriously. They would shop for supplements to help with their immune system and with their overall health. There are so many reports about Covid 19 that by God's grace my business really helped with people's health and wellness. I am adjusting to the new "normal" in a positive way. I know my Lord and Savior is in control, so I do not let society incorporate fear in me.

**BBP: What advice do you have for someone who are considering becoming an entrepreneur?**

ME: My advice for anyone wanting to start a business is as follows:

*Pray about your vision.*

*Make sure you are ready to put in time, work, and money.*

*Be diligent and wise in your decisions.*

*Do not let DOUBT interfere with your DREAMS.*

*Know that you will have both good and challenging days.*

*You are as successful as much as you put into your business.*

*Take that leap of FAITH and TRUST it.*

**BBP: You have been actively involved in your community. Why do you think community service is so important?**

ME: Community service is so important because it truly shows the heart of an individual. What good is a person that cannot help uplift their community? As an entrepreneur, I believe it is my duty to help my community in any way. I genuinely love people and love helping others. My biggest joy is to give back in any way through my time, volunteering, donating, mentoring etc. It is so important to build up our communities and it takes all of us to do in a positive light.

**BBP: What is one thing you wished your community had?**

ME: I wished my community had an acting school for our youth. Acting is one of my first loves and is a great way for children to express themselves. I think it would be so amazing and beneficial to have an acting school in my community. It is so important to have programs in the community to keep children learning more about their gifts and using them.

**BBP: To date, what would you say your greatest accomplishment has been? Why?**

ME: I would say my greatest accomplishment is helping reverse my father's diabetes. I remember when the doctors would tell my father he would be a diabetic his whole life and I would pray to God to heal my father. I researched every day for different herbs and remedies that would help my father with his disease. Then I will never forget a phone call early this year when my mother shared with me my dad's diabetes was reversed. I cried such tears of joy because I knew I was a part of that healing process of my father. It was then I knew God gave me the vision for my business for this reason; TO TRULY HELP HEAL PEOPLE IN HEALTH AND WELLNESS.

**BBP: Would you change anything about your journey? Why or why not?**

ME: I would not change anything about my journey. I live by the words, everything in your life happens for a reason.

**BBP: What is your personal philosophy on life?**

ME: My general philosophy on life is ALWAYS STAY POSITIVE in everything you do. I strongly believe how you determine your life, through God's grace, starts with a positive frame of mind. When you think positive, positive outcomes will happen in your life for the better. Every morning I wake up with a positive outlook on life and such a great peace of mind.

**BBP: What is your favorite motivational quote? Why?**

My favorite motivational quote is, “Always look at life as half full and never half empty.” I believe when you look at life and learn from the challenges you go through it will make you stronger. I never look at life as though all hope is lost when I am faced with challenges. I pray, conquer them, and know that my life is only what I make out of it. I never let negativity and trials defeat me. I PUSH THROUGH!