

FREE

DETROIT NATIVE SUN

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UNITING & ENLIGHTENING THE COMMUNITY

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Introducing MOTOR CITY®



By Valerie D. Lockhart
SUN EXECUTIVE EDITOR

It started as a nickname and emerged into a registered trademark for athletic apparel.

When one thinks of the Motor City, Detroit's automotive and music industries come to mind. But, on the University of Alabama's campus, "Motor City" is synonymous with Katarina Brown.

"I was given the nickname, when I was a cheerleader and played basketball at the University of Alabama. People would ask me where I was from and I would say, 'Detroit Motor City,'" Brown explained. "Whenever someone saw me, they would call me Motor City."

Brown accomplished something that no one was able to do. She took steps to register the nickname and received a federal trademark certificate for "Motor City".

"I started a clothing line to display Motor City on jerseys, t-shirts, and athletic apparel," she said.

The trademark prevents others from using the nickname "Motor City" on any athletic apparel without her written permission.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office say, "A trademark can be any word, phrase, symbol, design, or a combination of these things that identifies your goods or services. It's how customers recognize you in the marketplace and distinguish you from your competitors. You become a trademark owner as soon as you start using your trademark with your goods or services. You establish rights in your trademark by using it, but those rights are limited, and they only apply to the geographic area in which you're providing your goods or services. If you want stronger, nationwide rights, you'll need to apply to register your trademark with us."

Six years ago, Brown received confirmation that she is the registered owner of the "Motor City" trademark.

"Once you register your trademark with us, use an ® with the trademark. You may use the registration symbol anywhere around the trademark, although most trademark owners use the symbol in a superscript or subscript manner to the right of the trademark. You may only use the registration symbol with the trademark for the goods or services listed in the federal trademark registration," the trademark office noted.

Friends and family have commended Brown for her spirit of entrepreneurship and innovative thinking.

"Trina has always had a keen business mind, even as a child," her mother Rosie Brown-Robinson said. "Only she could come up with a way to profit off of an old nickname. She'll go down in history as the one who took a nickname to the next level. Now, sports teams will have to share their profits on apparel using the Motor City moniker with Trina."

Attorney Aaron Hall, a business attorney, said that those who violate trademark laws can receive a letter to cease and desist up to facing criminal charges.

"Trademark infringement can result in severe civil and criminal penalties. Civil consequences include injunctions, monetary damages, profits disgorgement, and statutory damages. These remedies serve to compensate trademark owners and deter future violations. Criminal penalties for serious infringement, such as counterfeiting, may include hefty fines and imprisonment," Hall said. "Compliance with trademark laws is essential for brand protection and market integrity. Understanding these penalties emphasizes the importance of proactive trademark management and vigilant enforcement of rights."

As Brown continues to expand her "Motor City" brand with new athletic clothing items, she hopes her innovation and drive will inspire others.

"Don't take things for granted. Do your research and take the appropriate steps to register your idea or name," she said. "Motor City isn't only about cars and music. It's about being driven to succeed. So, don't let obstacles stop you from reaching your goal. Go around them or take an alternative route. Get gritty with Motor City."

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