

# New shop offers coffee, art exhibitions, bands and room for community interaction

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Athens NEWS Campus Reporters

Donkey Coffee and Espresso, scheduled to open this week, will offer patrons more than gourmet coffee.

Next to Union Printing on West Washington Street, the shop appears small from the outside, but has three rooms behind the storefront. Inside, the owners will host art exhibitions and local bands, provide information about humanitarian groups, and hope to host a space where Athens community members and OU students can interact.

"I love the idea of building community," said Ohio University alum Chris Pyle, who owns the shop along with Matt Moore and their wives, Angie and Jessica. "That's what excites me about the place — college students and community people talking about ideas."

Through such conversation, Pyle said he hopes students will realize what a positive force they can be.

"When I was in college, I didn't even realize that this was one of the poorest and most repressed areas in the country," Pyle said. "I guess it's something on my heart that I'm really concerned about, the lack of care for the poor around us."

A "social justice table" will serve as a bulletin board for local groups such as Atco, an employment and training center for people with disabilities, and Athens' emergency homeless shelter, Good Works, Inc.

The idea is to challenge people "to basically make good on their lives and give back to the community, especially the poor," he



April Oates (right) and Devon Morrill chat with friends at the invitation only party last Thursday at Donkey Coffee and Espresso, which is set to open this week. Paintings by local artists Lindy Kehoe and Adam Mitchell are shown in the background. Photo by Chris Evans.

said.

Mara Giglio of the Appalachian Peace and Justice Network, a non-profit group featured on the table, said she supported the idea of a socially responsible, community-oriented coffee shop.

"I think (Moore and Pyle) are making a really smart move, connecting the local community and students," Giglio said. "It could be a collaboration Mecca."

There's presently a division between students and the Athens community, Giglio said. Hopefully, said Pyle, patrons won't be

intimidated by the opportunities the shop and its table present.

"We debated whether we should even put it out," he said. "Most people don't serve the community, and I think if you don't see it, you don't have to deal with it."

At Donkey Coffee and Espresso, the coffee itself will embody social justice principals, Pyle and Moore said. Growers often make next to nothing while large companies and middlemen reap the profits from their beans, Pyle said.

"Normally, there would be six different

stops (in coffee trade)," Pyle said. "We can pay our growers more and keep the prices competitive because we have only one middleman."

Donkey coffee comes from fair trade certified roaster Dean's Beans in New Salem, Mass. TransFair, an international monitoring group, certifies that the coffee's growers receive no less than \$1.26 per pound.

Collapsed coffee prices have brought economic crises to some Latin American and African countries. World supply of coffee beans exceeds demand, and the price has plummeted two-thirds since 1997 to just under 50 cents per pound. Adjusted for inflation, the price is at its lowest point in a century, according to reports from the World Bank and other development agencies.

Fair trade helps farmers afford improved health care and housing, and keeps their children in school instead of working in the fields, according to Transfair USA. Revenues from Fair Trade coffee also support community projects.

Several area businesses already sell fair trade coffee. Casa Nueva and the Pharmacy have offered it for years. The Blue Gator, Ali Baba's Buggy, Lamborn's Studio, Seaman's and Bob's IGA all sell organic, environmentally-sound fair trade coffee from local marketers Dawn Chorus.

Pyle and Moore plan to display pictures from each of the countries they get coffee from, including Ethiopia, East Timor, Indonesia and Costa Rica.

"If we buy coffee from Ethiopia and we have pictures from our farmers, we know who picks the beans," Pyle said.

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Music and art also loom large in the plan to mingle students and community members.

“We want to embrace the local scene,” Pyle said. “And we want to be able to challenge people with music. My feeling is that at a coffee shop in a college town, you ought to be able to hear something that’s less mainstream.”

Pyle said they will play some of “older stuff” but also less well-known music from popular bands, U2’s music from “The Million Dollar Hotel” soundtrack, for example. Local bands will play in “more of an unplugged sort of atmosphere,” Pyle said, where they can “tone it down and just play their songs.”

The first art exhibition, which will last for two months, features local artists Adam Mitchell and Lindy Kehoe. Athens’ artist community is working to bring art closer to people, Kehoe said.

“We all have similar ideas about community and tearing down walls that separate art from people,” she said. “I could never leave (Athens).”

Kehoe, now showing oils and watercolors in her third show since graduating from Ohio University, said that her art is about human experience and emotion. “(People) can look at my art and conjure up their own story,” she said.

Awaiting their final city inspections early this week, the owners are eager to open their new business. After spending several years teaching English in Japan, Matt and Jessica Moore jumped at a chance to come back to Athens when Pyle suggested opening a coffee shop.