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By:

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Above: Nike Berry of Blue Owl (right) serves coffee from the Blue Owl bike cart ^[2] to customer Rich Lucas in Sept. 2017.

Back in September of 2018, ELi broke the news ^[3] on popular REO Town business Blue Owl Coffee's plans to open a coffee shop in East Lansing. Tomorrow, March 1, marks the soft-opening of Blue Owl Coffee just east of Fieldhouse and Hopcat on Albert Avenue in downtown East Lansing.

There will be a free jazz jam open to anyone with an instrument from on Friday night. Doors will open at 6 p.m. and the jam will run from 7:30 pm. to 9:30 p.m. Saturday, the location will be open

regular business hours (7 a.m. to 10 p.m.) with a live music and entertainment event by Outside In at 7:30 p.m.

Blue Owl Coffee originally began as a mobile coffee cart in downtown Lansing, founded by owners Nick Berry, Rich Whitman, and Adam Klein. Berry jokes that their long-awaited second storefront location is like Christmas in March, having initially been scheduled to open in December 2018.

Converting the East Lansing retail space from one business space into two separate spaces resulted in brand new electrical, a HVAC system, and plumbing, and plenty of anxiety, according to Berry.



Blue Owl's new digs include a roll-up garage door in front ? giving access to the outdoor seating and nearby public patio and stage. The space has a cold prep kitchen, a stage area, and a conference room available for a rental fee, with provision of coffee service.

The Blue Owl team is working with All of the Above Hip Hop for their weekly open mic night to feature middle and high school students. They're also planning to have a readers' night with Curious Book Shop, featuring author talks and book signings. Future plans for the store also include collaboration with the East Lansing Summer Solstice Jazz and Arts Festivals.

Berry describes the aesthetic of the new shop as a mix of an early '20s French tea house, combined with a train station.

"It's the place where adventure starts," he said.

Speakers are artfully placed in vintage suitcases, Michigan Imagery-constructed metal work and chandeliers hang from rafters and archways. Curbstalker created unique tables, a green wall

installation, and a rail station-inspired bar face for the space.

With the specific locale of the new shop, Berry realizes the full-circle moment, having worked at a local Starbucks, when he used to dream of owning his own shop.

"It's one of those things where you don't actually think it's happening," Berry said.

But it is happening; and there's plenty of interest in the message behind the Blue Owl unofficial tagline: "our coffee, your story." Encouraging customers to start new projects, write those novels, and work together is all of what Blue Owl stands for.

"We want to be everybody's friends. We want to make sure everyone feels welcome," Berry said. "I think one of the key things is that we know we're not perfect, and we're not afraid to apologize when we screw it up."

Recently, a customer notified owners that one of their drinks was named after an offensive racial slur. Berry and the team had no idea it was an offensive term, did their research, realized their mistake — and told the public they screwed up.

"It was a good moment for us to realize honesty is the best way to handle this," Berry said. "We aren't the best at everything, but we want to make sure everyone knows they're welcome when they walk through the door."

Berry appreciates the way the customer handled the situation, in a non-threatening way, "which to me, said they had a belief that we could be better than we were — which says a lot."

Berry says it's people who believe in the mission behind Blue Owl Coffee Co. that make all the stress and frustration worth it for Whitman, Klein, and himself.

"To know that there's a group of people just genuinely excited about us opening — that's over-the-moon amazing," Berry said.

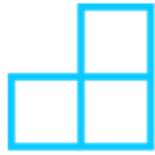
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