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Cartwheels & Coffee gives parents a break

LOUIS LLOVIO/TIMES-DISPATCH COLUMNIST Sep 1, 2008

The key to making a business work is pretty simple. You find a niche, meet a need and then charge for it -- a lot, if you can.

Ask any parent with small children and they'll tell you there is a place in Carytown that meets two of the three requirements: Cartwheels & Coffee.

Located across from the Ben & Jerry's on West Cary Street, the shop mixes a play area for children with a coffee shop.

Parents and their kids can come in, pay a \$4 fee per child for the kids to head off into age-designated spaces. Toddlers to 6-year-olds play on a wooden jungle gym, while infants play with toys designed for them. Children 6 and older have tables where they sit and read or play games. A staff of about 10 looks after the kids.

All the while parents can sit back at one of several tables.

People without kids aren't allowed in.

The coffee shop opened in mid-August and is the brainchild of Chris Barras, pastor of Area 10 Faith Community.

The church owns Cartwheels & Coffee. Barras said it operates as a separate business.

The only item in the space that mentions the church is a pamphlet with the history of Cartwheels & Coffee. Even that contains no religious message.

Profits, Barras said, will go to the church as donations for missionary work and other projects.

Area 10 Faith Community, a Christian church, chose the space so parents could drop children off while they attended services.

But Barras, who has managed coffee shops in the past, said it seemed like a waste to use it only a few hours each week.

Plus, he said, Cartwheels & Coffee is providing a service.

"We wanted to create a place in the city where kids could come play and where parents could just hang back and talk to other parents. There was nothing else like it in the city."

A similar shop operates in Chesterfield County, The Chat & Play Café on Hull Street Road in the Woodlake Shopping Center.

Barras said the influx of customers to Cartwheels & Coffee has been steady since its opening, primarily in the mornings.

He expects to be busy on weekends and holidays when shoppers who converge on Carytown need a break.

Barras looked like he might just be a genius on a recent Saturday. Kids ran through the shop shrieking while relaxed parents took a break from the heat. And their kids.

New Peyton Hall home

Peyton Hall has closed its store in Carytown and moved to Stony Point Fashion Park.

Owner Simone Smith said the location, in space last occupied by April Cornell, is a better fit.

Smith said the clothing she carries caters to customers who shop at Saks Fifth Avenue and Anthropologie. At the mall, Peyton Hall sits about halfway between the two.

Smith said she left her Cary Street location, where she'd been about three years, because too few people came through the door.

The new store, which opened a week and a half ago, is about 300 square feet bigger than the old store. In the extra space, she'll carry gift items, leather goods and dog accessories.

James Limo to move

James Limousine Services will move from Staples Mill Road in Henrico County to 1207 N. Boulevard in Richmond.

The limo service will rent more than half of a 27,000-square-foot art deco building built in 1946 that has been vacant for several years. The site is south of Leigh Street.

Owner Randy Allen is moving the company he bought 18 months ago to accommodate its 21 vehicles. The facility has an area for detailing vehicles, plus office and meeting space and a two-story chauffeur lounge.

The firm moves in October.

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