

the scoop

Madame Bagnabit: Inspired by nature, art, giving back

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On the Main Street of Ashland rests a small shop connecting people to nature and magic, it smells faintly of incense and tea, while crystals, dreamcatchers and jewelry cover all of the counter surfaces. Madame Bagnabit started as an online-only store in 2008 and spiralled into a business with a storefront a year later — roots planted by mother and daughter duo, Kathy and Amanda Rusynyk. “At the beginning we mostly had just purses and jewelry,” Amanda Rusynyk said. “Selling bags is why we named it ‘Bagnabit’. Since selling just those two things, the store has evolved so much.”

The two store owners were led to the business concept after the recession limited job opportunities for Amanda, who was between work, and Kathy Rusynyk, who at the time was doing freelance illustration work.

Kathy grew up in Strongsville and moved to Ashland 30 years ago, and Amanda was then born-and-raised in the city of Ashland, attending the local high school and graduating in 2004.

After four different tries, the two think that the current location of the store is where they are meant to be — 105 W. Main St.

The community of businesses on Main Street are all very social and the store has been able to connect with other businesses for events and support, Kathy said.



Photos by Avaerie Fitzgerald

Madame Bagnabit is open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays.

One of the specialties that Madame Bagnabit offers is a chance for customers to communicate the items they want with the owners, who will order it and test the products compatibility with the store. Most of the products are associ-

ated with nature in one form or another, which follows the store’s slogan, “Embrace Your Natural Tendencies.” Everyone should be able to be themselves and embrace their natural side, Amanda said.

The store has over 100 different rocks and crystals that each offer some unique traits. Written by each rock is an explanation card describing the characteristics and supposed power. Aside from that, the store offers different sages that people use to perform ceremonial rituals, like house cleansing. They also have dozens of different scents of incense and a cabinet full of handmade soap, crafted by Kathy. Soap-making was a skill that Kathy picked up along the way, she saw an opportunity to sell delicious smelling soaps and took it. One of the scents comes from Uniontown Brewery’s beer, one of the store’s next-door neighbors. Amanda, found a new skill as well — designing and printing t-shirts. One of the t-shirts reads, “It’s a great day to be alive,” which Amanda said is her personal motto

and the name of her clothing line. “Not everyday is a great day, but everyday is still a great day to be alive,” Amanda said. “That’s how I get through things, so I created the line based on that thought.” A portion of the t-shirt sales from those shirts goes to Appleseed Community Mental Health Center. Another way the store reaches the community is through yearly events. One of the prized events that takes place each year in the store is the Fall Equinox, which was on Sept. 22. The store has a big turnout of guests and releases new designs special to that day. Due to the coronavirus, the event was cancelled this year, but is set to return next year depending on circumstances.

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MURAL cont’d front



Photos by Chante Rutherford

Anna Slade, 16, protesting in downtown Ashland with her handmade sign.

McDonnell is one of the few minority families that began their lives in Ashland. With much consideration, her nephew turned down the offer. “He was like, ‘there’s not enough money in the world that would make me go to that school. There is too much racism over there.’” McDonnell said. “He refused it just because of the amount of racism.” From young child to grandmother, McDonnell has witnessed the evolution of the city. Her family has played a big part in it. Her mother, Delaine McGhee, was the first African American teacher in Ashland city. The AU alumna taught at Edison Elementary School for 35 years, teaching third through sixth-grade.



The freshly painted wall covering the murals was done a day after the city council meeting.

From community to campus AU religion professor, Dr. Peter Slade, joined in the protest and has made a continuous effort to show his support for the movement. “I thought it was my moral responsibility to answer that call. As a professor, as a resident of Ashland and as a citizen of the United States... as a human being,” Slade said. The term, ‘racial indifference’ is being recognized by young high school students in the community as well. 16-year-old Anna Slade, daughter of the religion professor, shared her thoughts regarding the Ashland community. “I used to go to Mansfield City Schools and now I go to Ashland High School and there’s obviously a racial difference; a difference in attitudes, ideologies, politics... It’s really different,” Anna Slade said. “I think Ashland is not as accepting of a place as it definitely should be.”

As racial injustice continues to have an effect on African Americans across the country, many students believe that AU needs to build a better response to what is happening throughout America. Keon Singleton, an AU student athlete from Baltimore, Maryland, organized the protests in downtown Ashland and outlined a few ideas on what the community can do to make the living situation better. “Let’s make it mandatory for all Freshman students to take diversity classes,” Singleton said. “A lot of people in Ashland come from small-towns—white-towns, and a lot of people are not used to being in the company of African Americans. So, they need to learn about how to handle situations and how to talk to them because we, Black Americans, are humans as well.”

A guide to Ashland’s best study spots



Gracie Wilson

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Students enjoy the quad on campus, whether in a hammock, at a table or in the grass.

In almost any college movie, students are shown studying in the library, hanging out on the quad or walking around their campus on a sunny day. This is exactly the case when it comes to Ashland University and its students, and perhaps even more so now that the coronavirus has caused a change in the way campus operations run. With social distancing guidelines in place, the outdoor spaces around AU and even the Ashland community can be found with a heavier population of students studying, practicing their sports or music and spending time with one another from a safe distance. The pandemic has helped more people leave the four walls of their room and explore the spaces in their second home; whether this be a new coffee shop, a local park or even a new spot to sit on the quad. “The best thing about Ashland’s outdoor study spaces is that they’re very peaceful,” senior Emma Fredle said. She feels that with everything going on with COVID restrictions, it is nice to still get out and enjoy these spaces. Adjustments have been made to the outdoor spaces to accommodate for social distancing and more people so that students can get out and enjoy. These changes include moving some of the picnic tables

to different locations so that there is more available seating in places such as outside the library, outside of Patterson and on the edge of the quad. Sophomore Emily Troyer said there is a good variety of places to go for studying around campus. “They have picnic tables set up all over [and] the quad in general [has] room where you can sit in the grass or at one of the tables.” The quad at most colleges is a hub for student activity and while students are socially distanced, this is still the case. The vast area allows students to spread out but also enjoy the campus’ largest outdoor space. “I like sitting on the quad because it’s easy-going out there and you still see people, but everyone is doing their own thing,” junior nursing student Autumn Fox said. “It’s relaxing [because] you’re alone but you don’t feel alone.” Whether students stay on or off campus, and whether they study or just take in the scenery, many find that being outside is a nice change of pace. “I just like studying outside in general,” sophomore and public relations major Alexis Yoder said. The picnic tables right outside of Clark and Kil in between there, I just put my work out on a picnic

table because there’s not usually a lot of people around.” The outdoors can provide a sense of peace and tranquility to put students at ease while they work, and this in turn has the potential to boost their productivity. “I just get a lot of stuff done being outside,” Yoder said. While a lot of students utilize the quad, some also enjoy going a bit off campus to places such as Freer Field. This space is versatile as it is used for hiking, walking, jogging or just sitting in the grass and enjoying the weather. “It’s a great way to get into the woods and into nature while staying close to campus,” Rhyann Opel, a junior majoring in Integrated Social Studies, said. “With all the stress of school and life I love taking time during my week to unplug, rewind and spend time in God’s glorious creation.” Spending time in nature, whether productive for schoolwork or just spending time outside is a way for students to decompress no matter what is going on in their lives. “We were meant to enjoy the natural world and be still, so whether it’s on campus or nearby, time in nature is something that I dedicate time to each week,” Opel said.