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Coffee Bar and Social Club Opening in Claremont

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Claremont — Let's have a conversation.

That's the simple idea behind Remix, a new nonprofit coffee bar and social club on Pleasant Street, scheduled to open on Friday.

"Remix is a meeting place for anyone and everyone ... from all backgrounds," said Jim Neilsen, of Claremont, who came up with the idea with his wife, Kate.

"We don't care where you are in life," Neilsen said over the din of music and conversation among invited guests at Friday's launch party. "We welcome people from all socioeconomic backgrounds, the rich, the poor or in between, the LGBT community, the women, the men, the white collar, the blue collar. Our doors are open to everyone."

Neilsen said the idea is to "just serve up a good cup of coffee that doesn't cost you six bucks." The business model is donation-based: "You give what you can," he said.

To that end, a large sign near the coffee bar, where Neilsen's brother, Will, was the evening's barista, explained the philosophy: "You pay what you can, when you can. If today isn't your day, this one is on us. If you can help cover that extra cup, we thank you."

The 1,500-square-foot storefront in the Union Block was most recently part of Everything Bridal and Everything Tuxedo. Extensive renovations include polished hardwood floors, tin ceilings painted a rich brown, soft lighting, a coffee bar with stools and a small stage. Around the club are tables and chairs, couches and three flat screen TVs, giving the feel of entering a friend's well-appointed living room.

Appearing periodically on the TVs was the club's philosophy: "Our goal is to foster a relaxed atmosphere with upbeat music and interactive events in order to engage the community and build relationships."

The entire expense of renovations and furnishings, about \$100,000, was paid for with donations of money, material and labor, Neilsen said.

The Jack and Dorothy Bryne Foundation donated \$17,000 and several area businesses gave money, as well.

Operating expenses, such as rent and electric, are also being covered by donors. The staff of 20 to 30 is all-volunteer.

Neilsen said there are several roles for volunteers: barista; a point-of-sale person who takes donations, sound and light operators; and, by the door, the security "Kreep."

"It stands for 'Keeping a Respectable Enjoyable Environment Period,'" Neilsen said with a laugh. "Our rules are no swearing, no smoking, no drinking and have fun."

Neilsen, an associate pastor at the Life Fellowship FourSquare Church in Charlestown who works at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, said the idea for Remix — a term for changing the lyrics and beat and rhythm to a song to create something new — came to him last year while he was at a convention in Hawaii with his wife.

"I saw the sign on side of building of a store," said Neilsen, who at one time worked as a DJ and did remixing. "Like a song changes, people can change. I see it as a renewal process."

As a Claremont native, Neilsen is well-acquainted with the city's reputation when it comes to poverty and other social ills. Although he said he doesn't believe that reputation is deserved, he wants to help change the perception through Remix.

"You can't change a community's external identity, until individual people change."

Neilsen said Remix is a faith-based club, and they don't hide from that. At Friday's party, Olympic gold medal diver David Boudia, who came from Indiana, spoke of the change in his life when he focused on building his faith.

Even so, Neilsen said, "we are not promoting an agenda and no one will be preaching." The club is inclusive, not exclusive, he said. "We want all walks of life."

Neilsen emphasized that Remix is not only for the down and out. but for those “on cloud nine” as well who want to share their story. “Secondary to that, we want to be a resource for the community,” he said.

“My volunteers are told to do less talking and more listening. Let them talk.”

Mayor Charlene Lovett was one of the guests at Friday’s party.

“I am just amazed,” Lovett said. “The space is beautiful. It will be a place for young people to go to socialize with a club environment and not think they have to drink.”

Even though the club’s website and promotional materials indicate Remix is for those 18 and older, Neilsen said 16- and 17-year-olds are welcome, as well.

Remix will be open the first and third Fridays of every month, from 7-10 p.m., with additional hours for events including Memorial Day, Alumni Day, New Year’s Eve and Super Bowl Sunday. There also will be special programs at other times, including those geared toward teens.

For more information, visit the Remix website at Livethatremixedlife.org or call 603-826-3979.

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