



Features

Coffeeshop Workshop: 826 Comes to Beezy's

PATRICK DUNN | WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2013



826MICHIGAN DROP-IN TUTORING AT BEEZY'S CAFE - DOUG COOMBE

RELATED IMAGES



ENLARGE



ENLARGE



ENLARGE

The closing of Ypsilanti Middle School left [826michigan](#) without a home for its Ypsilanti tutoring program, but it also provided the nonprofit an opportunity to significantly expand its operations in an unusual new space.

826, which offers writing classes and programs for kids ages 6-18, had offered after-school tutoring for students at the middle school for five years. But 826 director Amanda Uhle says it was time for a change.

"We were hearing stories all the time of fourth-graders in Ypsilanti who didn't have access to that kind of tutoring," Uhle says. "We heard from parents and teachers of seventh- and eighth-graders who were preparing to go on to high school and saying 'Oh, it's too bad that they won't have access to tutoring anymore.'"

Uhle and her colleagues began plotting an evening tutoring program for Ypsilanti in a location with close proximity to bus routes. They found the perfect site in [Beezy's cafe](#), situated just off Michigan Avenue's main drag and only open until 4pm daily. Beezy's owner Bee Roll, who hosts an annual charity brunch for 826's [Mittenfest](#) concert, says she "immediately" said yes when Uhle approached her about using the cafe space after hours.

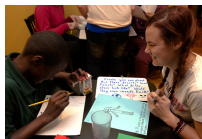
"I have a teenage daughter, I'm passionate about writing and so is she," Roll says. "It's an organization that I've had an affinity towards since I opened my business. Being able to provide space, for me, is just the right thing to do."

826 program coordinator D'Real Graham has been


[ENLARGE](#)

[ENLARGE](#)

[ENLARGE](#)

[ENLARGE](#)

[ENLARGE](#)

[ENLARGE](#)

[ENLARGE](#)

[ENLARGE](#)

leading the Beezy's program since it got underway in October. Tutoring is offered Monday through Thursday, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., for ages 8 to 18. Graham says the Ypsilanti program is now much more similar to that offered at 826's downtown [Ann Arbor headquarters](#).

"We are able to cast a wider net," Graham says. "We're not handicapped by serving just a particular demographic of students."

Graham says 826 has added 60 new students to its rolls since tutoring at Beezy's began. Eight to ten students attend tutoring per night, matched by about the same number of volunteer tutors. Most nights tutors can offer one-on-one sessions to students, but occasionally they must rotate through multiple students. That may change soon, though, as Graham is seeking to recruit more tutors.

"This has been a dream come true," Graham says. "We're kind of overwhelmed by the success we've had. I never thought that by week six we'd have ten students utilizing us as a resource daily. I thought that would take till January."

826 currently pays Beezy's \$120 a month to cover utilities and other incidentals. Uhle says that while monetary donations are generally the most useful contribution a business can make to a nonprofit, Roll's gift of space is "wholly unique."

"In this case there isn't any amount of money that would be more important to us than this," Uhle says. "It's making a difference for us in a way that having the funds to rent another space just wouldn't."

Roll says her business may be a unique case because of the convenient intersection of her business hours and 826's. But she says that for any business, it's just a matter of thinking about how to use existing structure to help others in the community.

"Anyone who has the space and energy to think creatively can make lots of positive things happen," she says. "If I have this space that I use for breakfast and lunch, it seems silly not to use it for something else if I can."

Patrick Dunn is an Ann Arbor-based freelance writer and regular contributor to Metromode and Concentrate.

All photos by [Doug Coombe](#)

Hey! Like this story? Then you should "LIKE" Concentrate on our Facebook page. Click [here](#) to show us a little like and... we'll like you back.



[ENLARGE](#)

RELATED TAGS

[COMMUNITY](#)
[ENGAGEMENT, DINING /](#)
[FOOD, EDUCATION, NON](#)
[PROFIT](#)

[YPSILANTI](#)