

Lawrenceville Market House showcases local businesses, community

By Alyssa Machi, For The Pitt News

People shopped, ate and drank while bright jazz filled the former Mellon Bank on Butler Street. But 4112 Butler St. isn't a bank anymore — it's the location for the Lawrenceville Market House, a newly established retail space.

Brian Mendelssohn founded the Lawrenceville Market House, located on one of the neighborhood's busiest streets, with his brother Irwin. The Mendelssohns celebrated its grand opening last Thursday, from 4 p.m. to 7p.m.

Market House is anchored by Oliver's Donuts, owned by the Mendelssohns, and surrounded by Black Cherry Design, Fat Cat Chocolates, Storehouse Neutral, Shop Emily M and Authentically African by Moa, with room for future vendors.

Mendelssohn described the space in many different ways.

Sometimes it's a retail hub, sometimes a mall. Mendelssohn said his idea was to combine coworking and retail spaces, and then market that towards small businesses in the area.

"So the idea is to take the coworking model, apply it to retail and remove all the barriers of entry that a small retailer would have to open up a retail store, especially in a prime location," Mendelssohn said. "You know, all the things that a real estate developer has to do. They [Mendelssohn's retailers] just want to do their business."

The building is an example of midcentury modern architecture in Pittsburgh, which Mendelssohn said is what originally drew him to the property.

"We have very little midcentury architecture, especially really good midcentury architecture in the City here. So getting my hands on one of them was really spectacular and it was great restoring it," Mendelssohn said. "They built it to be the center of the neighborhood, to make it feel like people could come in and out, with the big glass, and the way it was kind of structured was meant to be a hub. And you don't want to fight that."

At the Market House's grand opening Thursday, seven out of nine of the retail spaces were filled with small businesses. This was accomplished all without the large-scale marketing the Mendelssohns planned for — Brian Mendelssohn said they never got around to it.

"We put the neon up that just said 'Market House' and we were so busy through the pandemic and getting this project together and running all of our other projects that we have ongoing, and we just never got around to all the marketing that we intended to do," Mendelssohn said.

But he also said the lack of marketing was only beneficial in creating intrigue around the space.

"I think that actually created intrigue, it just says 'Market House' and it looks cool, and I think that was enough for people to inquire, saying, 'Well, what is this?' and then we explain it to them, and they're like, 'Alright, sign me up,'" Mendelssohn said.

Erin Smrekar of Storehouse Neutral, a home decor store, said the opportunity to have a physical location has always been a dream for her, so she tries to embody the spirit of the Market House when curating her products.



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Lawrenceville Market House on Butler Street in Lawrenceville.

"This has always been my dream, to have my own thing on a really small level, and to be able to know the people that are shopping," Smrekar said. "Everything is kind of sourced from all over, but I try and really keep things small. That way you're supporting another small business in another city, while you're supporting your own city too."

Smrekar was born and raised in Pittsburgh, and said she never left. She said she's been watching Lawrenceville grow the whole time.

"I've been in Pittsburgh my whole life, and I just feel like I've watched Lawrenceville grow," Smrekar said. "You could tell there was something happening in Lawrenceville and I kind of always wanted to be here, just knowing the foot traffic drives itself."

Emi Driscoll, Black Cherry Design's design studio and retail manager, said Black Cherry Design had a retail space in the past, but the market house was such a special opportunity they couldn't pass it up.

"There's so much art, there's so much going on and I love living down here, walking to work," Driscoll said. "We found out about this opportunity and thought it would be awesome to have a little retail space."

Driscoll said her personal goals for Black Cherry Design's physical location in Lawrenceville was to highlight Pittsburgh artists and makers in a casual way.

"We really emphasize local makers and local artists, and that's kind of the point of the store. We want to put out a community and make these connections in the community," Driscoll said. "Emphasizing local Pittsburgh artists, 'cause I'm an artist myself, and I just think it's really important to give these people a space to share their work in a casual way."

For Mendelssohn, he said it all comes back to improving and growing with the neighborhood.

"Understanding the community's needs and what we can do to make it better has really become a passion over the last 20 years," Mendelssohn said.