

One last time: Local business owners call on community for support

Rocket Bicycle, (n + 1) café and lounge crowdfund to save business following pandemic challenges

BY MADDIE BERGSTROM
Staff reporter

Peter Oyen and Jessica Laufenberg – owners of Rocket Bicycle Studio and (n + 1) café and lounge – designed their new space on Bruce Street for the local community.

“For the mom who wants to get out of the house because her kids are driving her nuts or (the) dad who needs to plug-in and do work (somewhere) besides his home,” Oyen said. “People meet (to) grab coffee and they haven’t seen each other in a couple years. It’s been an amazing space for that.”

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, however, Oyen and Laufenberg have been struggling to maintain the community oasis they never got to finish. Only 10 months after adding (n + 1) to the bike shop, the pandemic hit. Supply chain shortages, uncertainty and debt ensued – forcing the local businesses to take a pause in January 2023.

“Things (have) finally upswung, but it’s too late,” Laufenberg said. “It got to the point (where) we literally could not buy coffee for the next week – because he and I need(ed) to have a house over our heads and food.”

“We were just so tired,” she added. “We were just pale – we were so exhausted – and we just had to stop.”

As a last effort to keep their businesses open, Laufenberg and Oyen are calling on the community for support through a crowdfunding campaign – something that will determine whether or not Rocket Bicycle Studio and (n + 1) café and lounge will remain open following the summer.

More than a decade of service in Verona

Laufenberg has been in Verona since 2005, initially opening SBR Coaching on South Main Street – a multi-sport coaching business for swimmers, bikers, runners and triathletes. In 2009, Laufenberg partnered with Oyen to add a bike shop at a new location on Venture Court.

In 2010, they started eyeing up 507 Bruce Street – one of the oldest buildings in Verona – as a new location for their businesses. After an attempt to purchase the property in 2014 didn’t work out, fate led Laufenberg and Oyen to their dream location on Bruce Street in 2017.

Maps with pins in the shop demonstrate the wide range of people who visit Rocket Bicycle from all over the world. Having such a big draw led Oyen and Laufenberg to find additional ways to support



Photo submitted

Jessica Laufenberg and Peter Oyen, co-owners of Rocket Bicycle Studio and (n + 1) café and lounge on Bruce Street.

the community – making the decision to add (n + 1) café and lounge over a couple bourbon Manhattans.

“Before we moved here, I’d always have a pot of coffee on,” Laufenberg said. “But then if you got done biking, you’d run up to Miller’s and go get a six-pack. I’m like, ‘Why don’t we sell it here?’”

Adding (n + 1) café and lounge brought a space for the community to relax over a cup of coffee, beer or cocktail. Laufenberg said the goal was to make sure anyone – not just bikers – felt welcome in the building.

“We didn’t want people to think they had to be a biker or triathlete to come,” she said. “I want to say at least 70% of our clientele are people that just want to come hang out, have an event or something like that.”

Oyen and Laufenberg’s location has proven a popular spot for events – having hosted graduation parties, wedding receptions, birthday parties and baby showers. They utilize local

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If You Go

What: “Calling On Our Community” Fundraiser

When: 6-9 p.m., Thursday, July 27

Where: Rocket Bicycle Studio and (n + 1) café and lounge, 507 Bruce St.

Info: Details to come on social media and business sites

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Crowdfunding: An opportunity to finish what was started on Bruce Street

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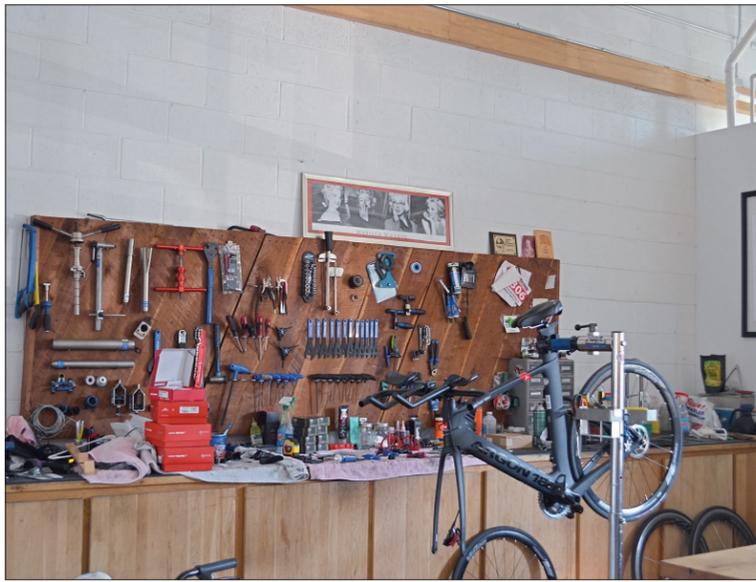


Photo submitted

A view of Rocket Bicycle Studio and (n + 1) café and lounge, located in the historic brick building at 507 Bruce Street.

Photo by Maddie Bergstrom

Rocket Bicycle Shop and (n + 1) café and lounge provides a space for the community to relax, learn, train, enjoy positive experiences and create relationships.



businesses for baked goods, coffee and food.

“If you are going to have an event here, we’re going to hook you up with a local food truck or a caterer – there’s a bunch of different people we’ve gotten to know over the past few years,” Laufenberg said. “We really tried to make it super easy and simple.”

The past two years, Laufenberg hosted a Christ-kindlsmarkt in the parking lot featuring local makers and a beer release. Last year’s event saw an attendance of around 1,500 people, she said.

‘A last-ditch effort’

When the pandemic began, Oyen and Laufenberg recalled telling themselves that “it will get better.” They survived, Oyen said, relying on pandemic grants and the support of family.

“But then doing that for two and a half years – we hit a wall,” he said.

In 2023, they were left with maxed out credit cards and the aftermath of supply chain issues and a loss of sales.

Laufenberg said they have been told since

Just The Facts

The community has raised over \$30,000 to help Oyen and Laufenberg relaunch their business by the end of the summer. They will refund all donations if the goal is not met.

For more information about Rocket Bicycle Studio and (n + 1) café and lounge, visit rocketbicyclestudio.com and npluseonecafe.com.

January to try crowdfunding for their businesses, though they always felt like they’d figure it out on their own.

“When you’re falling in bed so tired and they tell you that, you’re like, ‘I don’t know what to do,’” she said.

With the help of a team – including marketers and business owners in town – Laufenberg and Oyen crafted a message and began a crowdfunding campaign. Part of the process, they noted, has been getting people to understand the aftermath of the pandemic.

For a while, Laufenberg said herself and Oyen had to fake a smile for customers but were struggling on the inside.

“It’s so exhausting to cover it up,” she said.

After closing in January 2023, they spent a few months mediating and healing from the aftermath of the pandemic – wanting to return to work as their authentic selves.

“Once I started coming down to (the businesses) in March, it was overwhelming,” Oyen said. “I was like, ‘Oh my god – I got all

this stuff to do,’ But then it felt good. I’m like, ‘This is right. This feels good. This is where I belong. I do want to bring this back to life, but we don’t have any money to do it.’

As of this article, the community has raised \$32,792 of Oyen and Laufenberg’s \$150,000 goal. If the goal is not met, donations will be refunded. Those interested can donate to the GoFundMe by visiting rocketbicyclestudio.com or npluseonecafe.com.

A “Calling On Our Community” Fundraiser is scheduled for 6-9 p.m. Thursday, July 27 at Rocket Bicycle Studio and (n + 1) café and lounge. More information will be provided throughout the week on the business websites and social media.

“We just want one opportunity to finish what we started – we never got a chance,” Laufenberg said. “If (the community) helps us get the opportunity, we can do so much for them – if we have the chance.”

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