



Alton is for lovers: An Op-Ed on the Broadway Corrdior

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ALTON – Alton is for lovers.

I mean, it's for single people and soul mates and families and everyone in between, but last night, I saw Alton – specifically the Broadway Corridor – open its heart to the birth of a new chapter in young love. My friend Toby Warner, who you may know from the sales staff at Ted's Motorcycle World, asked his girlfriend, Natalie Rea, to marry him. She said yes. It sounds like a simple step full of nerves and tingles at the beginning of every marriage, but last night was something special.

Toby had asked me to plan something for him to do a surprise proposal, so I said I'd do it. We were going to stage an open mic night and we needed a place to do it. For some reason, my first thought was checking out Broadway (and not just because it's walking distance from my house). Sure enough, both Germania Brew Haus and It's Raining Zen were open to hosting this sham open mic night for a surprise proposal.

Natalie and Toby had gone on a date to Mineral Springs Mall when they first dated a decade ago (they took a very long break in between then and now before giving it another try). The location hosted local bands like Harvey and Bear Hug Jersey, and it was popular then, as it is now, due to the remarkable view of the riverfront from the historic ballroom.

But, the Crystal Room was booked that evening. Co-owner of It's Raining Zen, Dave Nunnally, said the room has been especially popular lately for groups doing events and paranormal investigation. In fact, he said the entire building has seen a revival – as has the Broadway Corridor.

Somehow, Natalie had put the wrong date in her planner, and the event was moved to a week later (last night), so we were able to get the Crystal Room at a very short notice. Because of that, I had a hard time convincing enough people to come out on a Tuesday night. Then again, I had to tell them it was an impromptu open mic night instead of a marriage proposal, so the surprise remained intact. Dave, his wife and fellow co-owner, Donna, and their staff, Karly Zini and Jan Buttry, did an amazing job preparing the room and helping us out.

This lack of guests was remedied by Natalie's roommates who went into Broadway and sought some strangers. They entered Gentlin's – a fine eatery established on Broadway before it was cool again – and convinced a lovely couple to come join in our charade. They did the same thing to the newly-established Brown Bag Bistro, and got us an entire table of lovely folks hoping to watch love blossom.

That's when it hit me – Broadway is perfect for young love. What was once a great concern for the city less than a decade ago has renewed itself. Looking down the street, you can find all sorts of places within walking distance perfect for a first date, a date

night away from kids, a lunch to get to know someone, a simple cup of coffee and even a late-night, few-drinks-to-take-the-edge-off foray.

Places like Gentlin's would be great to meet the family of a significant other for the first time and make a great impression. Brown Bag Bistro would be fantastic for a lunch date. If it goes well, you can get candy next door from the 1904 General Store.

Germania is great for a coffee date with a new acquaintance. The Bottle and Barrel is a perfect place to play Uno with a nightcap.

That's not even mentioning the several antique stores, which can provide a great Sunday Funday for couples looking to do something classy and traditional, or Bluff City Grill, which has become such an anchor for the corridor. In fact, it was there that we celebrated the accepted proposal, and I cannot think of a better place.

Even still, there is Grand Piasa Body Art and Salon, where someone could get ready for a big date or get a fresh look to impress their partner, or just get themselves a new do for their own confidence. There's the Jacoby Art Center, which would be a great way to spend a Saturday or Sunday surrounded by art. There's also the Night Market Alton Main Street is hosting every Thursday evening in the pocket park next to Jacoby, which is a great spot to have a picnic.

Personally, I think the growth of Broadway is leading to an overall growth of Altonians. When people see the world and community around them improving, it gives them a drive to improve themselves. When a community improves through the growth of businesses, it also gives people economic opportunities to better their lives.

And the man who helped me put the sham open mic together with an actual open mic, Biff K'narly, has recorded music down the street at Lighthouse Sounds, which is finishing its move from Market to Broadway, and extending its services to create a retail outlet. I'm sure we'll see a lot more of that when their episode of *The Small Business Revolution* airs this fall. You can find those recordings of Biff K'narly and the Reptilians on [Facebook](#) and [Bandcamp](#) as well.

So, yeah, that's why I believe a simple accepted proposal on a Tuesday night is indicative of a growing community fostering such opportunity. But this is coming from a perpetually single 29-year-old man, so take it as you will.