

Local Entrepreneurs use Crowd Sourcing to Fund New Coffee Shop in Alton

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When Joel and Meredith Elliott purchased The Milton Schoolhouse in 2009, their goal was to create spaces for artists and businesses to thrive. But as they became connected with entrepreneurs around the Alton community, they noticed something was missing from what the city had to offer.

“Coming from Springfield, IL, it surprised me that a town of this size didn’t have a good place for people to meet- to come together with their neighbors. We have restaurants and bars here- but there isn’t a single coffee shop, not even a commercial one, in Alton.” says Meredith Elliott, co-owner of The Milton Schoolhouse. “We’ve collected materials and done a lot of research. What convinced us to go for it was the overwhelmingly excited reaction of our neighbors and other local business owners. We really do think this is something Alton needs.”

In spite of their four years of successful debt-free renovation at The Milton Schoolhouse, Joel and Meredith decided to seek an alternative method of funding their latest venture. Looking outside of traditional banking options, Joel and Meredith have

joined the likes of thousands of entrepreneurs across the country in seeking funding through Kickstarter.com- a crowd sourcing website that has successfully funded over 48,000 projects and businesses since 2009.

“Kickstarter allows you to showcase your project, and collect pledges from people who want to see it come to life. If you reach your fundraising goal, those who contribute to your campaign are rewarded with amazing perks by helping you get your business off of the ground. Our campaign will have different levels of rewards for those who help us out- everything from coffee and food, gorgeous original artwork from local artists, to pre-purchasing a private event at the shop with entertainment included.” Meredith states they chose this route over traditional funding methods because it allows everyone to be involved in the building of the coffee shop- and circumvents the problems of securing a loan in an economically unstable market. “We are a perfect candidate for Kickstarter. We’ve already invested our own funds in building the shop- we just need a little extra push to purchase an espresso machine and grinder.”

Getting a crowd-sourcing campaign together isn’t an easy task. The Elliotts collaborated with nine artists- ranging from in-house video editor Edward Scott to Goshen Coffee in Edwardsville- to craft their campaign. Over 100 hours were spent creating a video to spotlight their unique business concept, complete with original music and videography from around the riverbend area. They then put together a list of incentives to offer those who pledged their support, commissioning pieces specific to their project from artisans such as Mississippi Mud Pottery and Jon Norris Music & Arts.

Joel and Meredith will be running their 30 day Kickstarter campaign from Oct. 12th through Nov. 11th. Their gypsy inspired shop will be opened under the name of Maeva’s Coffee in June 2014. It will feature a variety of delicious coffee drinks brewed from locally roasted organic coffee as well as pastries made by Marie the Cheesecake Lady (a commercial bakery housed inside The Milton Schoolhouse).

Follow the progress of The Milton Schoolhouse at www.facebook.com/themiltonschoolhouse, or learn more about the businesses hosted at Milton at www.themiltonschoolhouse.com.