

Alton's 'Living Room' Recognized With October Small Business Award

by Debbie Hagen
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GODFREY – The RiverBend Growth Association has selected its October 2023 Small Business of the Month award recipient as Post Commons, whose mission is to serve as the community's most welcoming living room and gathering place.

Located in the old post office structure at 300 Alby Street in Alton, Post Commons started with a mission of “simply creating a space for people in the community to use,” notes owner Hugh Halter. “It later developed into the idea of providing a space reminiscent of a living room for our city. That includes welcoming hospitality, an atmosphere that makes people feel at home, a place of connection and conversation.

“We’re lucky to steward a space that hosts a variety of experiences that will stay with people – whether that’s a wedding, a surprise birthday party, or making a random connection with someone while enjoying a coffee,” Halter adds. “The products we offer – coffee, food, pastries, event space – are built around this idea, and allow us to sustain the ‘living room.’”

Opening in 2018, Post Commons is housed in a structure first built in 1909 as the federal post office for the area. The building still bears the engraved title of “United States Post Office” above the pillars at its main entrance, and the interior décor still features much of its original design from its mail hub heydays. The current venue has added warm leather, dark wood furniture and era-like accessories that complement the structure’s design while also adding in the cozy, warm and welcoming feel that is synonymous with hosting a community living room atmosphere.

“There are other great coffee shops in our town,” Halter further shares, “but we believe the thing that sets us apart is our space. We’re fortunate to have an incredible building in a great location that can hold all the things we dream about. People come for the coffee and stay for the food, but it’s the space that people talk about.”

“We have consistently added and expanded for our customers and residents,” says Natalie McGee, the venue’s Event & Communications manager. “Besides our food and drink menus expanding over the years, we have added products from other small businesses to help promote their brand in our space. We have built out our own in-house roasting brand called Idle Roasting Co., and an in-house baking program.

“Post Commons has renovated the basement to make it accessible as a bridal suite, photo studio and office space,” McGee adds. “And we renovated our outdoor space to provide a patio for customers and events. Our day-to-day team has expanded as well, doubling in size over the past five years, and now includes event staffing consisting of an event coordinator, bartenders, and an awesome cleaning crew.”

Investing in their people is important to the Post Commons leadership too. Post Commons currently employs 12. “We have always tried to provide resources for our staff so they can grow and learn new skills. The way that we have expanded is largely based on our team and personnel. For example, one of our employees expressed an

interest in baking. At the time, we were offering great pastries from a local bakery, but we decided we had an opportunity to give her a chance to grow and create something special for herself too. Since then, all our pastries have been baked fresh and in-house, using her recipes,” McGee further notes.

Their roasting brand was also built in conjunction with an employee’s interest. Post Commons’ coffee manager had a desire to roast, and one of their baristas had a desire to create art and branding. And during COVID, the event bar manager discovered a love for making pizza, so the Post Commons helped him build out a pizza pop-up that ran out of the facility’s kitchen once a week.

“Our greatest opportunities have been partnerships within the Alton community that we have been able to form,” McGee points out further. “We love to help provide space for small businesses or start-ups to grow. We have worked with CJ’s Juicery, Louie’s Pizza, Foxes Boxes, and The Weathered Wildflower to provide space for them to sell their products and continue to grow. We have also partnered with Shift Agency, providing them with a brick-and-mortar space for their operations.”

Its unique space also draws opportunities for Post Commons to further give back. “It is not uncommon for us to donate our building for various nonprofit organizations to use, or for community events,” says McGee. “We have also adjusted our pricing in the past for organizations or families to help them work with any financial restrictions they are facing.”

Post Commons has partnered with the Girl Scouts, Youth Like You, YWCA, and River Bend Family Ministries, just to name a few, in providing free space for fundraising or other gatherings. “In addition, we have provided food, coffee, an address, and work for those in need. We are a partner to the Overnight Warming Center, providing a meeting space for its leaders and a drop-off place for community donations and other packages,” Halter says.

For more information, visit online at www.postcommons.com, call (618) 433-8871.

The RiverBend Growth Association is the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development organization for the 11 communities known as the Riverbend. For more information about the Growth Association, visit www.growthassociation.com or call (618) 467-2280.

RBGA’s Small Business of the Month Committee recognizes a different member business each month for its outstanding efforts and leadership in the community. Committee members include Brenda Eardley, Vickie Hopkins, Adrianna Lock, Amy Roady, Martha Schultz, and Amy Smith.

To learn more about membership in the RiverBend Growth Association and the Small Business of the Month recognition, visit the RBGA website or call their Godfrey office.