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Intentionalist Celebrates Three Years of Spending Like it Matters

Kali Herbst Minino, Staff Reporter

An online directory for small businesses, Intentionalist, celebrated its third anniversary virtually including an intersectional four-course meal with food from Salare, Frelard Tamales, Terra Plata and Hood Famous Cafe + Bar. The owners of the four local businesses participated in a panel discussion led by Laura Clise, the CEO and founder of Intentionalist. The night ended with an interview between Clise and Seattle University professional in residence at the communication department, Ruchika Tulshyan.

Intentionalist was created when Clise wanted to eat at Black-owned restaurants with her wife during Black History Month, but finding restaurants proved to be challenging. Information regarding the owners of the restaurants in her community was not readily available, which was surprising to Clise.

Clise moved away from Seattle for 20 years and noticed that a lot changed when she came back.

"I quickly became aware of an underlying tension between rapid growth, development and change and questions about who still had a physical place and who still felt a sense of belonging," Clise said. "As I started to think about that, and then think about what my role and responsibility ought to be, I kept coming back to small businesses and the incredible impact that they have on the social, cultural, and economic fabric."

Tulshyan was excited about interviewing Clise because she felt Clise was more reflective of her.

"It's really nice to be in a space where I feel like I can be a lot more vulnerable too. As a younger journalist, and a journalist of color and woman of color, I would sometimes walk into these interviews and be really nervous and feel 'oh my gosh can I ask the questions I want to?' So, I'm excited that I get to be more myself," Tulshyan said.

Since growing from a list of small businesses that Clise wanted to support, Intentionalist is now a comprehensive directory of brick-and-mortar businesses owned by women, people of color, indigenous people, members of the LGBTQ+ community, veterans, families and people with disabilities. On Instagram, their community has grown to over 16,000 people.

The number of businesses listed on their website has also grown alongside help for the community, as Haley Witt, the marketing and communications coordinator at Intentionalist, explained.

"A lot of the way our database has grown is via social media and by the site itself from user-submitted businesses of people in their communities that they're really excited about. Particularly, outside the greater Seattle area, we have a lot of awesome users who have submitted businesses in their own cities and communities which really helps us to grow," Witt said.



Kennedi Finnes

Witt emphasized that Intentionalist does more than act as a directory. The Intentionalist has a gift certificate marketplace where businesses who usually only sell physical gift certificates can sell online. They also have a blog that helps provide other resources to people looking to be intentional with their spending.

These resources include gift guides and blogs for different heritage months. Witt put together a guide of businesses around Seattle U including the owner's names for each business listed and if they are women-owned, Black-owned, LGBTQ+ owned, etc.

With an abundance of growth happening, Clise shared her vision for the future of Intentionalist. She talked about the possibility of a national and then global directory that allows a user to pay on the same platform.

"What I envision is a world where I have a resource at my fingertips, wherever it is that I am, that allows me to be intentional about who benefits from where I choose to spend my money," Clise said.

Clise added encouragement to shift a bit of personal monthly spending to small businesses.

"A lot of a little is a lot. What that means is, the power to shift our consumer culture doesn't take a lot of dollars from any one individual. If you think about the 100 (plus) million people who participated in Small Business Saturday last year, if we can help just those people shift \$10 a month in their spending to diverse, local businesses, the aggregate impact is tens of billions of dollars," Clise said.

While the third anniversary has passed by, Intentionalist continues to move forward with both consistent growth and strong hopes for the future.