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Finding Community Through Diversification

Naja Johnson, News Editor

The Seattle University Albers School of Business began its partnership with Intentionalist at the beginning of fall quarter. This effort is the latest work of the Supplier Diversification Program, which began in 2021 after Seattle U received a \$750,000 grant from the JP Morgan Chase Foundation.

Companies like Intentionalist help the university work towards supplier diversification. Intentionalist's app recognizes a wide variety of minority-owned businesses and works to connect the community with small storefronts to engage and foster connections. Intentionalist's main mission is to help students and people in their communities find local businesses off campus to connect with and shape communities.

Amelia Marckworth is an alumna of Seattle U and Director of Community for Albers. Mackworth manages the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center at Seattle U and believes that efforts to emphasize diversity and inclusion around campus benefits student enrichment.

"The vast majority of businesses in the U.S. are small businesses like the ones near campus," Marckworth said. "Those businesses are community members in the way bigger businesses and corporations are not. When you can go to the businesses nearby, and meet the owner it helps engage the community and along with the business."

After Intentionalist partnered with local businesses, many diverse companies began to receive recognition and an influx of new customers that shaped their communities. Dough Joy, a donut shop on Pike St. that opened in May 2021, is one of those businesses. The shop is LGBTQ+ owned and operated by Sean Willis and his partner, Christopher Ballard. Willis is grateful to Intentionalist for getting information about his business to the public.



Adeline Ong

Coca Cola truck on lower mall.

“Intentionalist has positively contributed to helping spread the word about Dough Joy, since we’re so new. Working with them and participating in their initiatives to help bring more customers into minority-owned businesses is always gratifying and something that our customers rally behind as well,” Willis said.

Willis also noted that diversity in business allows customers to find their communities.

“Diversity and inclusion benefits not just small local businesses like ours, but business across the board,” Willis said. “Creating a welcoming space focused on inclusivity, for both our employees and customers, has always been at the core of Dough Joy.”

While efforts to recognize diversity off campus and around the community have been recently introduced, the Suppliers Diversification Program has also made efforts to enact change on campus. Redhawk Dining is one area that has been significantly impacted by the changes.

Andrew Gaynor, the Resident District Manager for Redhawk Dining at Seattle U, believes that campus food represents a unique opportunity to engage culturally with students.

“We believe strongly in harnessing the power of diversity by showcasing the power of inclusion through event features, menus and highlighting the diversity of the Redhawk Dining Team,” Gaynor said.

Gaynor and his team work towards this goal in a number of different ways. Diverse partnerships with local businesses such as Boon Boona Coffee and Better Bites give students a taste of the community around them. Additionally, Redhawk Dining’s chefs led an activity last year called Chef Tables where each chef was presented with an opportunity to highlight a particular meal from their culture.

“Some of those meals, Chef Roman Cea’s Pupusas from El Salvador and Chef Ruth Garcia’s Torta Milanese from Mexico were the customer favorites,” Gaynor recalled.

Student dining is planning to begin Chef Tables and other cultural series in upcoming months. Gaynor highlighted other dining opportunities students can attend.

“We do special programming throughout the year such as having local Black-owned businesses do station take-overs during Black History Month and partnering with different cultural clubs on campus to celebrate AAPI Heritage Month, just to name a few,” Gaynor said.

During Homecoming Week, the Diversification of Suppliers Program is sponsoring an additional promotion, where \$2 will be discounted off every order at 10 minority-owned locations near campus.

The newly introduced efforts of inclusion and diversity across campus and in the Capitol Hill community have given recognition to local businesses and cultures that have been overlooked in the past. A partnership with Intentionalist, and work by Redhawk Dining has put Seattle U in a position to be a part of this change. With these resources, students are presented with options to engage with new cultures, without even stepping off campus. Whether these resources will lead to systemic changes throughout the neighborhood will depend upon the consumption choices of students, staff and faculty.