

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

HAYWOOD FAMOUS *Cuban Coffee*



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**Western Women's
Business Center**

A program of CAROLINA SMALL
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FUND



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Tell us about yourself.

My name is Eva Rodriguez-Cué, I am a first generation Cuban-American woman that owns a main street coffee shop with a community focus. The coffee shop is only open at night to start, but I dream of someday hosting a morning to night community space. I have worked in many coffee shops in the traditional model and timeframe: from around 7AM-1PM, and decided to use my experience to change the way American culture interacts with Cuban coffee culture...we don't just drink coffee in the morning as a means to wake up. Coffee for Cubans is a way to slow down and enjoy the company of those around you.

Describe your coffee shop.

We all have to write a tagline in business class...this one was mine: "*Haywood Famous is a coffee shop that supports its patrons through the exchange of art, music, and ideas.*" Lots of folks come to me, unsure what "Haywood Famous" even is. I always tell them that the name came from an inside joke and the idea came from a passion for helping my community. To be Haywood Famous can mean different things, but the most important among them is to be apart of the culture of venues, bars, shops, and cafes in Asheville where one can be known and accepted from the moment they walk in the door. So, essentially, what started as a phrase between friends to identify the who's-who in Asheville youth culture, has quickly become the heart of a new kind of space for sober community and nightlife that celebrates the "come as you are" attitude we all love in Asheville.

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Haywood Famous

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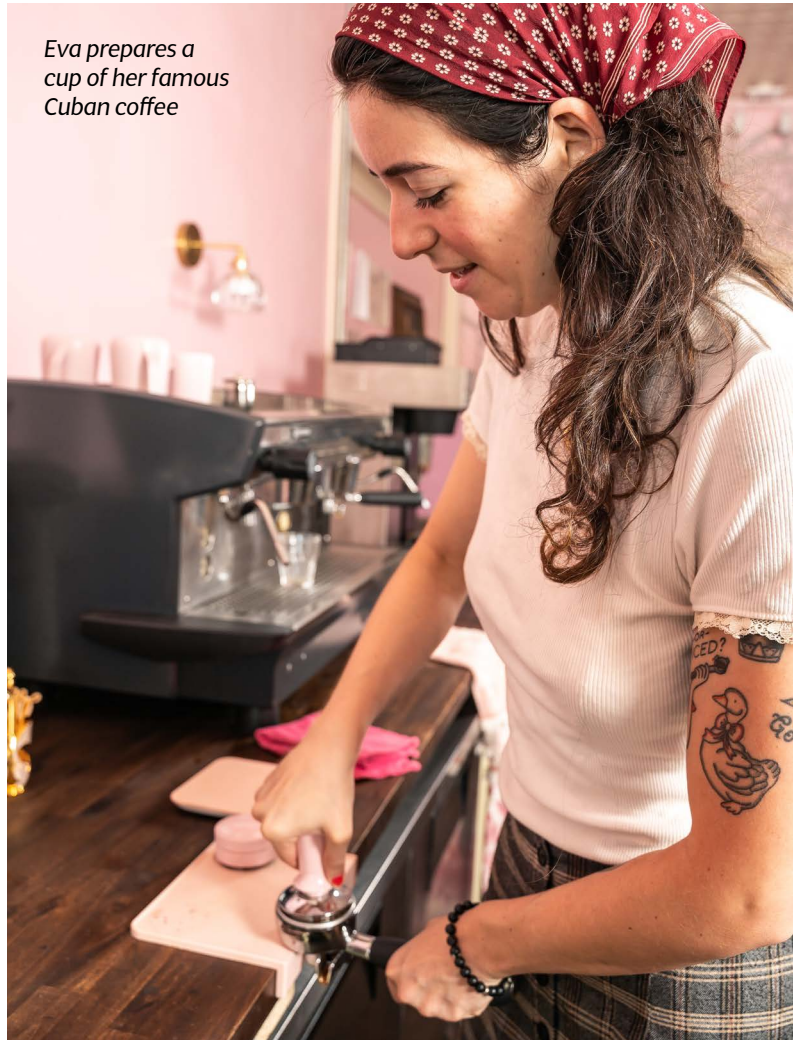
Who are your target customers?

I do what I do for the people that don't really fit in a neat box. Growing up, the world often made me feel like too much or not enough, so in this coffee shop, I wanted to make a place that would be an avenue for authentic and meaningful connections. No alcohol or loud music...you can enjoy that at a number of other amazing nightlife spots...in this space you fit in by getting curious about yourself and others, and talking about what's really on your mind. It has been truly amazing to see these intentions at work.

How long has Haywood Famous been in operation and what inspired you?

Since August, but I have been doing community work since I was a young teen. Growing up Cuban, I had a relationship with coffee that was celebratory, fun, and boisterous! Coffee meant conversation and breaking out a game of dominoes. So, when it came time to enjoy coffee with friends as a young teen, I noticed the way I interacted with these shops...work spaces to be enjoyed quietly and in solo-fashion. I wanted a place that felt like home. When I grew up and got sober, I longed for this place again, so I took my dreams and made them a reality, with Haywood Famous.

Eva prepares a cup of her famous Cuban coffee



What would you say makes you unique?

I approach many things in my own style. When I was working at old jobs that I loved, I often had this voice in my head like, "When you were a little girl, what did you wanna do when you grew up?" This would come up often, especially when I saw a way of doing something that made sense to me, and looked like it would do well in business, but it was not being done because "This is the way it's always been done." So, I think what makes my work unique is my approach from an angle of "Why not try it a different way? Perhaps this way would work better and more equitably for everyone?"

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Eva with her constant companion, Zoey.

Were you affected by Hurricane Helene, and if so, how did you adapt?

I had to close for Helene for quite a bit, but I got back fast with the help of my community. Having a young business is tough, because all the grants out there are for businesses one year or older, and I am paying off fresh low-interest SBA loans, so I cannot add more. But, through community support, I have found adaptability and resilience that is helping me along in so many fantastic ways.

Be it essential supplies, events centered around healing & resilience, different hours, and finding potable water each day, I adapted the shop to what the community needed. Having an adaptable and accessible space has always been an intention of mine, so in many ways, I felt ready to take on the changes that came post-Helene.

What were some unique activities you offered to help the community recover from Hurricane Helene?

Journaling nights, calming live music, and real conversations about the grief and weight of what happened during and after the storm.

What's your marketing strategy, and what has been the most effective?

I don't have a huge marketing budget, so it was important that I reached my audience by instilling a sense of identity and belonging with my brand to both stand out and give folks something they feel they could be apart of. Making friends and helping folks feel in community is something I love to do in this life, so it wasn't hard or strictly business. I did this through word of mouth, social media,

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Haywood Famous is filled with vintage decor reminiscent of shops in Cuba.

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For Eva and her customers, Haywood Famous is more than just a coffee shop; it's also a safe haven for conversations, quiet time, and relaxation.

tabling events, handing out stickers to cool people, setting up at markets where my audience would be, and of course, being kind and friendly.

What challenges did you face before Hurricane Helene, and now after?

Sales are down for everyone, including me. I had hoped to build my business from leaf-season sales, but now am having to adapt and get creative, finding new avenues to recover and get ready for the future of my business.

What do you enjoy most about your business?

I enjoy making friends and watching people make connections in my shop. I also feel very proud when I get a new regular! I even fell in love with someone who would come read books at my shop every night, which has been an unexpected and wonderful surprise!

What areas of business do you struggle with the most?

I struggle with asking for help, I feel like I can do everything, but constantly have to remind myself that my community has my back.

Do you feel your coffee shop is making a difference in the community?

I have seen and heard from my customers that they enjoy my coffee shop because everyone there is kind to them and they feel authentically seen. What I find myself telling folks when I get that inevitable, "How's the shop doing? How are sales?" question is, "Financially, we are still figuring it out. It's month three and there was a 1,000 year flood! But, socially, we have hit all the marks we hoped we would, and have already helped many people."

What advice do you have for others?

Ask for help and learn to accept advice! To that business owner resisting help from others, I know your business is your baby, but it is important to reach out and not be alone. When you open up, you allow serendipitous connections to happen and miracles to be made.

What is the best way for people to support your work or mission?

Come to the shop and make a friend! Also, I really appreciate when folks buy a coffee and a pastry, it helps more than you think. **TE**