

Inside Business

The Hampton Roads Business Journal

RETAIL

Coffee seller brews up success in Selden Market

By Trevor Metcalfe
Staff writer
Oct 31, 2018



Trevor Metcalfe | Staff
Vessel Craft Coffee roaster and business partner J.T. Tworek pours beans into the new coffee roaster in the business' Selden Market location.



Trevor Metcalfe | Inside Business
Vessel Craft Coffee roaster and business partner J.T. Tworek looks over his notes before starting to roast a new batch of coffee beans.

Just one year after opening in Norfolk's Selden Market retail space, a Hampton Roads coffee seller is expanding its operations.

Vessel Craft Coffee, which operates a coffee bar in Selden, began roasting its coffee on-site in early October.

"It's given us a low-risk environment to develop a retail operation and put in place the infrastructure and processes that build an effective business," said Vessel business partner Karen Corrigan.

Past the sleek coffee bar and retail space in Selden, a huge yellow coffee roaster whirrs to life in the back of the business. Roaster and business partner J.T. Tworek gets to work pouring beans into the machine and starting up the heater. He began roasting coffee as a hobby around 18 months ago, and jumped at the opportunity to help out Vessel.

"It's just a lot of fun to do," Tworek added.

Sarah Cowherd founded Vessel in 2016. She was inspired by the community

focus of coffee farms she visited while doing missionary work in the southern hemisphere. The business made a commitment to supporting sustainable farming practices and fair pay. After selling their coffee online for a few months, Corrigan said Vessel submitted an application for Selden and became one of the first businesses in the retail incubator project in 2017.

Now, the roasting operation represents a major investment and sign of success for the company, Corrigan said.

“It gives us a chance to have more control over the coffee we process,” she said.

As part of Cowherd’s commitment to community, Vessel also donates 10 percent of its profits to community improvement projects around Hampton Roads. The business has partnered with groups like the Urban Renewal Center in Norfolk.

“At Vessel Craft Coffee, we believe it’s good business to care about our community and to be a responsible steward of the world’s resources,” Cowherd stated in a news release.

While doing missionary work, Cowherd saw firsthand how local farms would take care of the entire community, Corrigan said.

“We’re just extending that through the whole roasting, packaging, selling and retail process,” she added.

Corrigan said Selden, and its operators the Downtown Norfolk Council, also walked them through installing the coffee roaster in the space.

She praised how well the retail incubator has helped the business.

“It’s worked great,” she said.

Next year, Corrigan said Vessel hopes to expand to a second location, building on its success.

Vessel is located in Selden Market at 208 E. Main St., and is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.