GORGE LOCAL: IN BUSINESS

Hood River's newest bottle shop and lounge has something for everyone

■ By Janet Cook

ITH THE OPENing of Hood River Common House at the end of May, the Kitts family added another business to their corner of town. The new bottle shop and lounge, located beneath the Ruddy Duck, is the third business for the Mike Kitts and Tassie Mack family at Oak and Fifth streets, joining the clothing boutique and Mike's Ice Cream. This one, though, is a venture dreamed up and carried out by the family's second-generation siblings: McKinley Kitts, Josh Kitts and Cecily Kitts Diffin.

'We've had the ice cream shop since 1986 and the Ruddy Duck for 15 years," McKinley said. "My siblings and I had a conversation and decided, maybe it's time to close the loop." The Common House is in the space previously occupied by the restaurant Kin.

When the pandemic hit last spring, McKinley was touring with his band, Flor. After a show in Aspen in mid-March, the tour was abruptly halted and he returned home to Hood River. His fellow band members figured they'd resume the tour after a few months, but McKinley was doubtful. "I got a weird feeling that it was going to be more long term," he said.

He threw himself into helping with the family businesses — something he'd been unable to do over the years as his music career flourished. "I wanted to step up and help out," he said. As the pandemic year wore on, there was some brainstorming among the siblings about what they could do with the remaining space in the historic building, which was once home to Tum-A-Lum Lumber, Josh, who lives in Portland near an eclectic bottle shop and bar, floated the idea for something similar.

The rest, as they say, is history.

The space required renovating, which they did over the winter and spring remodeling and updating extensively, including the kitchen. There's currently no formal food service at the bottle shop, but McKinley said they wanted to prepare it for the future. "We put in everything a nice restaurant kitchen would have," he said.

McKinley credits Josh with seeing the project through "from concept to opening," although all three siblings were involved every step of the way. "We all had the opportunity to be shoulder to shoulder," McKinley said. "It was chaos, and also really

good bonding."
The lounge has seating areas and tables with plenty of space between. "We didn't





An outdoor seating area is arranged around the exterior brick fireplace at Hood River Common House. At right, a guest laughs in the indoor seating area. **Photos courtesy Pickles Photographey**

want to build the business around COVID, but the flow is important to us," McKinley said. In addition to the inside space, the outside of the building facing Fifth Street has been reconfigured into an additional seating area.

A dedicated wine section is filled with a selection of local and regional wines, as well as some from farther afield. Bottles are available to purchase for take-away, or to drink onsite with a small corkage fee.

Being a bottle shop, there is, of course, a large drink cooler. And there's a story behind it. The lounge is relatively small, and the wall where the cooler sits is visible from everywhere. "We didn't want people to have to look at an ugly, industrial cooler," McKinley said. They came across an old cooler for sale at a market in Kelso, Wash. The price was right for anyone who would come and remove it immediately.

McKinley and Josh, along with a couple of friends, drove to Kelso with a trailer and extricated the cooler from the space it had occupied since sometime in the middle of last century. Once they got it home, Josh spent countless hours getting it in working order, including crafting narrow custom wood strips to make the doors slide open and

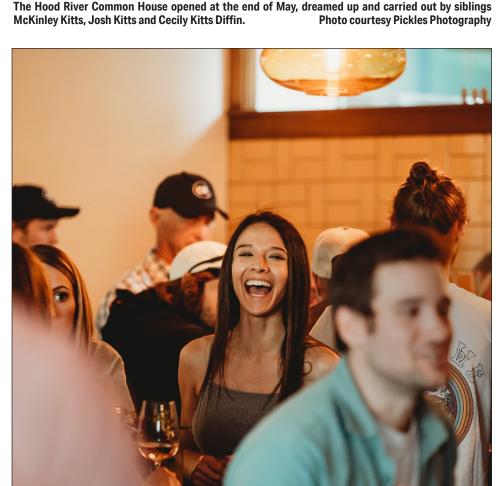
closed and refitting it with new lighting. But the effort paid off and the cooler fits right in with the aesthetic of the lounge. And, McKinley points out, it literally fits perfectly along the length of the one wall where it needed to go. "It was meant to be," he said.

The cooler is stocked with a varied selection of mostly regional beer and cider. At the bar, six taps offer a rotating selection of beer, cider and, eventually, hard kombucha.

Although there are light snacks available, visitors to the lounge and bottle shop are invited to bring food in with them — preferably from one of the nearby food trucks or take-out eateries. "We want to encourage people to patronize all the businesses around us," McKinley said.

One of the bottle shop's final touches came together shortly before opening: The hand-painted signs on the outside. "They're kind of throwback," McKinley said. "The building is from the 1920s. We thought, let's restore some of that vintage

The signs add the finishing touch to Hood River's newest gathering spot. "It's all in the name," McKinley said. "There's something here for evervone."



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A mandatory prebid conference will be held on June 2021, at 3:00 onsite at the intersection of 7th St. and Prospect Ave. (621 Prospect Ave.), Hood River, Oregon 97031 Statements made by Owner or Ov representati the conferen the Owner d confirmed by

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