

# COFFEE RETURNS CULTURE

THEO'S OFFERS EUGENE  
A NEW CULTURAL SPACE.

by Nika Carlson

Step through the towering wooden doors at 199 W. 8th St. and you are transported into a cavernous new world, a world where coffee, music, food and people mesh in an ancient forest brought indoors.

Soft brown, tree-like pillars flank the door and light streams in through 10-foot-high windows. The ceiling soars above a concrete floor through which a blue tile river will soon flow. Groups of tables, chairs and couches sprout from the concrete and old men play chess and nap in the clouds in a mural on the back wall. Slow jazz fills the air. This is The Strand.

At 5,500 sq. ft., The Strand is overwhelming in size and is home to a bevy of local concerns. "It's trying to offer some sort of counterpart to the Wal-Marting of America," said Jon Stock, part-owner of The Strand and owner of Theo's.

Formerly quarters of Anderson's Sporting Goods, the newly remodeled building showed its public face in March after nearly \$200,000 in remodeling. Theo's coffeehouse sits in the main room, where Cozmic Pizza will open a new restaurant this summer. In addition to bringing in food and drinks, Cozmic will book the entertainment: low-key bands and poetry readings. Windows Booksellers, a specialty shop for used and rare books on religion and philosophy, resides in the basement. Upstairs houses Wipf and Stock Publishers. The Strand owners are hoping to find several more small, independent businesses to move in within the next few months.

"It'd be great if it was a place people could buy some interesting literature, hear some interesting music, have some good conversation and of course some good coffee," Stock says.

Stock, friendly and prone to laughter, is the center around which The Strand's web is spun. It's with friends Doug and Paul Randels that he owns The Strand and with John Wipf he owns Wipf and Stock. He is the main shareholder in the Theo's/Windows Booksellers corporation.

He is also a member of the Church of the Servant King, an intentional community that Stock defines as "miscellaneous Mennonites" living out their faith in part through communal living. He wants to foster the same sense of community in his business that flourishes in his own home.

Stock shares a home and resources with two other families that he sees as an "incredibly hospitable people open to the strange ones in society."

Liam Arnold is one of those "strange ones". A patron of Theo's since it opened in 1999, his black boots and wild hair create an

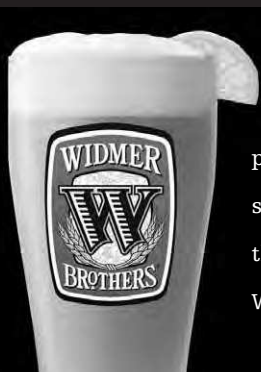
image in sharp contrast to the yuppies sipping lattes who share the space. "I really like the people," says Arnold. "They've always been really good to me." He is but one of the mixed brood that populates The Strand; also assembled here are aging chess players and punk rockers, teens and businesspeople.

Stock's original coffeehouse, Theo's, was formerly based on Broadway. He and the Randels bought the Anderson building in July for \$700,000 and began moving in December after \$200,000 in renovations. Once an atrocious black and silver, a left-over decor from the failed nightclub Platinum Fridays, it is now a cool and calm oasis.

"It's expansive. It's beautiful," says Brian Logan, an employee of Theo's coffeehouse. "People really respond to it. It's a luxury to be in a space where you don't feel crammed onto someone's lap." **EW**



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