

Arts and Culture



Arts and Culture Fort Collins Life

'Small hinges swing big doors': Supporting Black-owned businesses

By Paige Moorhead | June 10, 2020

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As we take to the streets to protest and post to social media to denounce racism and police brutality, we must also remember as consumers, where we spend our money matters. One of the ways to join the movement for equity is supporting local Black-owned businesses in our community.

I FEEL LIKE, BECAUSE I CAN INTERACT WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE ON A BUSINESS LEVEL, ... I CAN SEND MORE COMPASSIONATE HUMANS OUT INTO THE WORLD.

-Dezel Shallenberg, owner, Black Lotus Healing Arts

Dezel Shallenberg is a local reiki teacher, massage therapist and also teaches self-defense classes. She is the owner of Black Lotus Healing Arts.

"Loving an individual Black person, it gives you a chance to have more empathy," Shallenberg said. "If you don't have Black friends in your circle, doing business with Black people is another way to expand your circle and learn about us."

Shallenberg said one of the most valuable parts about supporting Black-owned businesses is simply the human side of it.

"All of my work is interacting with humans," Shallenberg said. "I feel like, because I can interact with so many different people on a business level, ... I can send more compassionate humans out into the world."

Gina Michelle is a local licensed massage therapist and owner of Malama Massage & Bodywork. Michelle said it is important for community support but it must be for the right reasons, and you must discover the reasoning behind your desire to support.

"Is it because what Black-owned businesses have to offer you believe is essential and valuable to your community?" Michelle said. "Is it because you've had a deeper awakening that people behind Black-owned businesses go through societal pressures, microaggressions and inequities yet still persist to put themselves out there as business owners? ... Is it because you've become curious about what someone who has a different life-experience has to offer in the community? Is it because you see our humanity and have compassion for recognizing that we too have similar goals for living and working and prospering where we live?"

Michelle said she believes shopping at Black-owned businesses shows allyship because when we treat all business owners with genuine support, we lift the entirety of our community out of inequity.

"When we support the community, the community supports us," Michelle said. "Every business owner wants to have a sense of pride and belonging to the towns they've rooted their business in. Patronage builds that with a sense of belonging and warmth and this gets passed back and forth like an energy loop that has the potential to never end. It has the potential to become stronger and bigger within its community."

Joe Buckner is the owner of Beautifully Savage, a local boxing and physical fitness center. He said the conversation of wanting to help Black businesses is occurring as more people see violence through cameras and social media screens. Buckner said it's necessary to promote businesses that are in alignment with who you are as an individual.

"Less for me right now is 'let me intentionally find Black businesses to support,'" Buckner said. "I'm paying attention to who's being silent (and) who's not taking a stand and making the conscious decision to never support them again."

SMALL HINGES SWING BIG DOORS. WE HAVE TO MAKE SMALL INCREMENTAL CHANGES WHERE WE'RE AT. WE HAVE TO MOVE THROUGH THIS WORLD WITH EMPATHY.

-Joe Buckner, owner, Beautifully Savage

Buckner said the African American population in Fort Collins is not even 1% which leaves few Black businesses to care about. Buckner said that's not a knock against Black businesses that exist, but exposes the difficulty in Fort Collins to find a Black real estate agent, a Black mortgage broker or a Black banker.

"The conversation I want to start leading is how do we get to that point — where there are more Black business owners because we are one of the races that have zero economic basis in this country," Buckner said.

Buckner said that one thing we can all do right now is to be the best person we can be within our space without worrying too much about being like Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X. He said we have to get outside of thinking that everything we do has to be massive.

"Small hinges swing big doors," Buckner said. "We have to make small incremental changes where we're at. We have to move through this world with empathy."

There are actions the community can take to create a more inclusive, diverse environment. Shallenberg said she feels like people show up during times of crisis, but they don't show up every day.

"What that looks like is saying to your friends when something racial comes up, 'That's racist. I don't want to hear that,'" Shallenberg said. "It goes a long way. You may reach some people who will then hold other people accountable. It will no longer be a racist echo chamber."

Michelle said another gesture our community can take is urge local police to remove blue lives matter flag decals from their police vehicles. She said, though the meaning has evolved to support families and communities of officers killed in the line of duty, it is a direct countermovement to Black Lives Matter.

EXPERIENCES WILL REPEAT UNTIL WE WAKE UP, LEARN AND CHANGE. I SINCERELY HOPE YOU WILL ANSWER THE CALL TO DEDICATE YOURSELF TO A MORE PEACEFUL AND EQUITABLE COMMUNITY.

-Gina Michelle, owner, Malama Massage & Bodywork

"I'm not sure many people know that," Michelle said. "In my opinion, it is another example of offensive appropriation. Police lives historically predominate Black lives. We all know blue lives matter. Of course, their lives matter as they risk themselves every day during duty. But I think we can communicate the support of safety for our police officers in a different way."

Michelle said when she witnesses that flag on a police vehicle, it feels like a threat and makes her wonder whether her life would matter if she was in need or if she got stopped.

"My son continually asks me, 'What happens when I become a man?'" Michelle said. "How many times does a white community member contemplate the fate of their lives in a day? My skin is not like a uniform that I can take off and walk about in the world unharassed. Now is the time to create ... change."

Michelle said the deepest and most long-term action we can all take to combat racial inequality is to look within ourselves and ask what has come up for us. She said if you feel at a loss of words, keep feeling your feelings. Michelle said that no matter what stage of awakening you might be in, to keep going and heal these feelings and strive to uncover compassion.

"This is our chance for growth and maturity as a collective consciousness," Michelle said. "If you believe in fate or a higher source consciousness, then perhaps you also believe that this experience is no accident, and we are meant to consciously evolve through these present moments and heal all the way back to familial and ancestral histories. We are meant to grow out of human disparities through our lifetimes. Experiences will repeat until we wake up, learn and change. I sincerely hope you will answer the call to dedicate yourself to a more peaceful and equitable community."

Editor's Note: Paige Moorhead is also the Social Media Editor for The Collegian.

Editors's Note: Passages were updated in order to relay an accurate representation of a quote.

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