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DOWNTOWN *Coffeehouse* REVIEW

# THE BEAT GOES ON

A hub of community, The Beat keeps the conversation and coffee flowing in Fremont East.

When The Beat Coffeehouse & Records opened in Fremont East, there was no downtown coffee scene. There was no scene at all, at least not during the day. Friends wanting to get together, sip a cup of joe and talk about the arts had nowhere to go.

"Before The Beat, there wasn't a daytime place to hang out," says Jennifer Cornthwaite, who launched the café with her husband Michael five years ago. "Unless you were coming for a drink, there wasn't a whole lot to do."

For Jen and Michael, it was either make something happen or go somewhere else. They committed to each other that they'd say yes to every meeting, every opportunity, in order to create the type

of community space cities like New York and Seattle are known for.

## CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

First up, a location. They approached El Cortez about the Fremont Medical Building on the corner of Sixth and Fremont streets, which was empty. It was an ideal space: ready to be occupied with power, water and restrooms.

"We asked them to let us try to do something with it," Jennifer remembers. It was a tough sell, but El Cortez agreed and gave them one year to make a go of it. So, in March 2007, they got married, took two days for a honeymoon and then immediately started working on their grand plan: a creative collective anchored by a café.

There was a lot to do in 12 months and not much cash to do it. They focused on the coffee shop first. "We didn't have any money to do anything," said Jennifer. "We ripped the floor up and sealed it. We painted." They put up corkboards. A bench from an old church was recovered and used as seating. They got all the chairs and tables secondhand.

The City of Las Vegas Department of Building and Safety wouldn't allow them to do any construction, so no walls could be knocked down. Undaunted, they made the best use they could of the existing space. The medical center's waiting room became the main seating area. Jen and Michael removed the tacky baby blue plastic laminate that covered the check-in counter, replacing

it with wood. But they left the bays, using them to house supplies like cutlery and napkins.

*Jen said, "We just worked with it."*

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

"We wanted to be a community place," noted Jennifer, "the kind that you can always just sort of count on, that's always open for whatever you might need." Dubbed Emergency Arts, in a nod to the building's past and present, the two-story space now houses the Burlesque Hall of Fame along with artists, writers, designers, a spa and tech companies — all centered around the coffee shop on the ground floor.

In addition to coffee, made with locally roasted beans and tea, The Beat has beer, wine, vinyl records and food. The menu includes breakfast items, soup, salads and sandwiches like the signature "Slap & Tickle," an organic PB&J with smoked bacon. Hint: Say yes to the sliced jalapeños if you're feeling adventurous. Throw in the free Wi-Fi for customers, and it's no surprise that The Beat is now exactly the type of gathering place that Jen and Michael envisioned, where people stop by to discuss the local news, catch up with friends and find out what's happening downtown.

Downtown Vegas continues to evolve. Families are bringing their kids to the container park. People are extending their walk down Fremont, crossing Las Vegas Boulevard to explore the Learning Village, Insert Coins, the new restaurants and retail outlets.

Through it all, The Beat has remained a constant, a bona fide destination for art-loving tourists and locals hosting community meetings. "Emergency Arts was a catalyst," notes Jennifer. The Beat draws in people who live, work and play downtown with a central location, excellent coffee and the nearly same menu they started with.

All those elements combine to create a vibrant and attractive community hub.

*"It's a connection spot," says Jennifer. "The Beat has kind of become the living room for Fremont East."*

The Beat is located in the Emergency Arts building at 520 Fremont St. on the corner of Sixth and Fremont streets. It's open Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

