

# City Brew Coffee cooks up new business model



Jason Schultz / Herald photo

**CITY BREW COFFEE GENERAL MANAGER** Mike Ferrante stands at the kiosk window, ready to take orders at one of two drive-through windows at Webster's newest coffee spot.

**BY JASON SCHULTZ**

Herald Reporter

Mike Blanchard, part-owner of newly-opened City Brew Coffee, is not one to think inside the box, whether it comes to building coffeehouses or working with community organizations.

Founded in 1998, City Brew is a coffee company out of Billings, MT. Their trademark design is a small drive-up kiosk, which have gone up in dozens of states over the past decade.

Blanchard said the building, which contains all the coffee-making amenities people want in only 100 square feet, can be built for a fraction of the cost of a traditional brick-and-mortar building.

He said the small size is key to business success in the age of the drive-through window and on-the-go lifestyle.

"Most towns would like to see a new \$1 million building go up, but to me that's an antiquated business model," Blanchard said. "Starbucks pioneered their business as the 'third place,' after home and work, as a place to relax, but we're going after the 'fourth place,' which is the car, where a lot of people spend more and more of their time."

Another part of what makes City Brew unique is its Community Partnership Program, which allows customers to direct a portion of every dollar spent to a local youth sports, educational or community program of their choice.

Blanchard says the initial goal is to earmark five cents out of every dollar to the program. He said the plan, which is unique to the area, was done in hopes of capturing the millions of dollars he estimates Webster residents spend on coffee each year.

Customers would be issued City Brew cards that would offer a host of benefits, from being used as a gift card, frequent customers perks as well as the

community giveback program.

"The advantages of this program are that you don't have to pay anymore than you normally would, each person gets to decide where their contribution goes and groups can pool their resources for the programs they find important," said Blanchard.

He says the program can reap a lot for those organizations that choose to take advantage of it. For example, a club with 100 members that buys their daily cup of joe at City Brew and pools resources through the program can make about \$12,000 a year.

Currently City Brew has a commitment to the Webster Aquatic Center for three months, during which time all money from the program will go toward funding the center.

Blanchard said that although the program is still in the early stages, the response from the community has already been extremely enthusiastic, with a number of local organizations already showing interest in joining the partnership.

One local Webster organization already involved with the program is the Webster Theatre Guild, whose upcoming production of the "Wizard of Oz" will be catered by City Brew.

Jim Pringle, producer for the musical extravaganza, said the community giveback program seems like a great way for both partners and the community at large to benefit.

"A lot of people drink coffee, and as long as they indicate support for the theatre guild when they make their purchase, there's not a lot of need to work for fund raising," Pringle said. "The best part is that the money stays in the community, which is why City Brew is making itself more than just another business in Webster; it wants to be a good neighbor, as well."