

The Industrial Commons
647 Hopewell Road
Morganton, NC 28655
amy@theindustrialcommons.org



February 12, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cedar Mountain Canteen Transitions to Employee Ownership

Cooperative Model Keeps the Music Going with Support from The Industrial Commons

Cedar Mountain, NC:

The circle is a little wider at Cedar Mountain Canteen. Kim Coram and John Wiseman officially welcomed Owen Grooms as an employee-owner of the business this month. Their partnership has been an organic, evolving relationship, which started several years ago with an initiative to help their community. With help from The Industrial Commons (TIC), they began, in Groom's words, "an organic transition" to a worker-owned cooperative in 2023, hosting the official announcement on New Year's Eve to a standing room only crowd.

"The Industrial Commons supports employee ownership as a way to root wealth in our communities and create opportunity and agency for workers and community-run businesses," said Molly Hemstreet, TIC Co-Executive Director. The Industrial Commons met with the business and provided a governance book coaching them through the transition. John Wiseman said, "It opened up four different points of view on the business as it existed, and then we got a better view of what was good and what was deficient for the transition."

Many would think that changing the structure of a business to a worker-owned cooperative is a tricky procedure, but Coram said, "I don't think any of this was hard because we had The Industrial Commons." These tools provided by TIC helped them lay out their operating agreement, which then went to Steve Virgil, from Regen Law Firm who supported the business in the conversion process. "It has been great working with The Industrial Commons. I couldn't imagine doing this without them. We needed that guidance," Grooms said. Wiseman and Coram also extend an invitation to other businesses in the region interested in converting to contact them. Worker ownership ensures that the business continues, especially for anyone thinking about retirement. Wiseman said, "Instead of shuttering the business - employee-owned cooperatives are a great alternative."

The Canteen has a dual purpose in the Cedar Mountain community: in the spirit of a public house, John and Kim want their business to be a gathering place, and Owen, dubbed the “Grandfather of Canteen Music,” has brought an emphasis on music. Grooms, a talented musician in his own right, has witnessed the struggle of many seasonal musicians. He pointed out the difficulty for modern musicians: the pay rate for a gig is about the same as in the 1970’s. Grooms said, “It is important to keep getting money back into the musician's pockets.” The goal at the Canteen is to raise the standard of living for all of the musicians who play there and includes hosts and staff. Cedar Mountain is a tiny community of almost 500. Last year the Canteen was able to pay over \$50,000 to musicians who played there according to Coram. She continued explaining this happens because of “a community supported arts fund, where people can subscribe or give us a monthly income, enabling a more stable year-round income for musicians.”

Their focus is on healthy options for the entire community. Cedar Mountain Canteen offers over 150 beverages both alcoholic and non alcoholic. The worker-owned cooperative recently held a Mocktail Party and Grooms’ partner offered healthy alcohol free alternatives with organic tinctures, elixirs, and teas. They aim to offer something for anyone walking through their doors. Upcoming events are a Mocktail Party February 28th from 5:30-7:30 featuring The Plaid Mountain Boys and Briar Rose Organics. Or join their Adult Music Camp March 11th-14th.

—

About Cedar Mountain Canteen

Cedar Mountain Canteen’s mission is to provide a public home for our community that offers comfort and nourishment. Comfort in knowing we are focused on sustainability, resiliency and the arts. Nourishment to the mind, soul and body. We are an employee-owned cooperative. Visit their website at www.cedarmountaincanteen.com/

About The Industrial Commons

The Industrial Commons is a 501(c)(3) that founds and scales social enterprises and delivers a suite of workforce development and youth engagement programs. To learn more about TIC, visit www.theindustrialcommons.org.



Photo Caption/Credit: Owen Grooms (center) is welcomed as a worker-owner by Kim Coram and John Wiseman after working with The Industrial Commons to convert the business to an employee-owned cooperative. Photo Credit: Ken Voltz

