

IKE Box celebrates five years of helping

Coffee shop houses programs for at-risk Mid-Valley students

By STACEY BARCHENGER
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Mark and Tiffany Bulgin's family has grown in the past five years to include a crew of baristas and a following of regular visitors to the IKE Box in downtown Salem.

"This is the story of our family and our extended, expanded family," Mark Bulgin said at the IKE Box's fifth birthday celebration Wednesday.

At the birthday party, several students and baristas credited the IKE Box and the programs it houses for positive changes in their lives.

The IKE Box and its coffee shop provide the physical space and financial means to keep the Bulgins' nonprofit organization, Isaac's Room, afloat.

"It's a building full of life," Tiffany Bulgin said.

She said that after five years in existence, she feels the IKE Box has reached a point where it helps and reaches kids on a daily basis.

"Our goal is to help them in the way we would have helped Isaac," she said.

Isaac was the couple's son who died as an infant in 1998. He is the namesake of Isaac's Room, a nonprofit they helped found in 1999.

The goal of the IKE Box and Isaac's Room is to get at-risk youths moving in the right direction, Mark Bulgin said.

The birthday celebration was a way to thank sponsors and donors who made a recent building renovation a success.

The Bulgins spearheaded the overhaul of the 120-year-old building, dubbed the Inside Out Project.

"The transformation we made in this place is

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almost an exact parallel to the transformation that we look for in kids," Bulgin said.

With \$40,000 cash, and labor and donations from the community valued at \$49,000, the Bulgins renovated the outside of the building to match its interior.

"We looked beyond the surface, the rough exterior, to see the beauty locked inside," Mark Bulgin said.

That is exactly what the Bulgins hope they, and the community, can continue to do for children.

"We can reveal to the community what is beautiful, be it a building or a person," he said.

"It is safe and it is comfortable here," Irma Oliveros said.

Oliveros runs a Salem-Keizer School District program that helps homeless and foster students continue their education. For some, they take high school credit recovery classes online using a computer lab at IKE Box, which is at 299 Cottage St. NE.

"Each one of these kids is a jewel, a resource and an asset in the community. All they need is their own Inside Out Project," Mark Bulgin said.

The Bulgins' mission will continue for at least the next five years if the crowd that gathered Wednesday to celebrate has anything to say about it.

"I want to have the opportunity to meet more kids and take care of them the way we would for Isaac; for our own kids," Mark Bulgin said.

Andrew Quackenbush — who also celebrated his birthday Wednesday — is the barista with the longest tenure at the IKE Box coffee shop. He considers the Bulgins his second parents.

From them he's learned to "love and love and love all over again," he said.

"IKE is a way of life," Quackenbush said. "May it continue to prosper."

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