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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Actors Theatre Playhouse was a different entity started by the former director of the Brattleboro Center for the Performing Arts, which by all accounts appeared to be cursed (and was started by John Lithgow's father). Any changes I've made to the chronology was dated to Reformer archives. (Colors was a gay bar, but that was never actually committed to print, and it's kind of amusing to see how Reformer writers turned themselves into pretzels to say it without saying it.)

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

- 1 New building owners use doughnuts as a gateway to
- 2 sustainability

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

- 3 Habron and Glynn purchase 20 Elliot St., aiming to
- 4 revitalize the former Methodist church building and the planet

####END SUBHED####

- 5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

Entrepreneurs Geoffrey Habron and Kate Glynn are putting heart and soul into a sweet offering and help make a difference, locally and globally.

The Mermaid Collective will be located in the former First United Methodist Church at 20 Elliot St. (the former Hotel Pharmacy), along with four apartments.

The women-centered social enterprise is grounded in [Doughnut Economics](#), is a framework developed by economist Kate Raworth that seeks to balance human needs with a the planet's ecological needs, thus promoting sustainable and equitable economic practices.

"It's not just about doughnuts," Glynn says. "Doughnuts are the gateway to working with women."

A vibrant history

Given the history of the building, Habron says it's "important to recognize the myriad roles and ways that the building has hosted a range of community-oriented, inclusive, and safe spaces."

"We endeavor to recognize, continue and expand that tradition," he says on the project [website](#).

The building was built in 1880 as the sanctuary for the church, which moved to a new facility on Putney Road in 1970.

In 1973, the Elliot Street building became home to the Brattleboro Center for the Performing Arts. It was sold in 1981 and became retail space for a succession of shops and restaurants, including Colors, a nightclub.

In 1987, Wildwater Outfitters set up shop there.

The Hotel Pharmacy opened there in 1993 and was soon joined to share the building by Kidsplayce in 1995.

The pharmacy closed in 2023.

The couple bought the building in April of this year through their company, Sense of Purpose Properties, LLC.

38 It's important to Glynn and Habron to recognize the
39 historic significance of their building as a long-time community
40 hub.

41 "As we purchased the building, it already contained
42 remnants of its previous life as the last independent pharmacy in
43 town," Habron says in the project precis. "This included
44 hundreds of pharmacy shelving units and office furniture. When
45 we read of a new, independent pharmacy opening in town, we
46 reached out to see if they were interested in reusing the shelves.
47 They agreed and have moved all of the main shelving from the
48 retail space. Not only has the material been reused and avoided
49 landfill, it is being repurposed for its original and continued use
50 in a local independent pharmacy."

51 Due to the building's rich historical character, the
52 planned renovation "emphasizes regeneration, energy
53 consciousness, and respect for historic materials."

54 **Partners of like mind on board**

55 The project team of Helm Construction Solutions,
56 Stevens & Associates, Mathes Hulme Builders, and Energy
57 Balance "shares commitments to equity, sustainability, and
58 community-centered design," writes Habron. "They are already
59 rooted in shared principles that align with our goal."

60 In addition to salvaging and redistributing existing
61 shelving and furniture, the team is also addressing water-
62 damaged masonry and transitioning the building from oil heat to
63 cleaner energy options.

64 This fall, the building project received a Downtown and
65 Village Center Tax Credit award from the state.

66 That will help, says Habron, with needed brickwork, roof
67 repair, and code compliance/improvements.

68 It will also help the couple renovate to install sprinkler
69 systems in the planned two two-bedroom apartments in the
70 basement and two studios in the sub-basement.

71 “We’re going to refurbish it, try to make it more energy
72 efficient, and add workforce housing,” Habron says of the
73 housing aspect of the project.

74 **Meanwhile, there are** 75 **doughnuts**

76 The Mermaid Collective’s vision is “to empower women
77 through a supportive community anchored in an inclusive
78 professional kitchen and retail doughnut shop.”

79 Beyond selling gourmet doughnuts, the Collective aims
80 to offer fair wages, job training, cooperative child care
81 possibilities, and a safe space for personal and economic
82 development.

83 The space will include a training kitchen and also serve
84 as a women’s collective, offering art, jewelry, and more for sale.

85 “The idea being multiple benefits, not just us, which is
86 the idea behind sustainability — to elevate for others while you’re
87 doing your thing,” Habron says.

88 The project is, he adds, a three-year process that will
89 start this summer.

90 Meanwhile, there are doughnuts.

91 “While we have a three-year plan, we are currently
92 working to establish our collaborative networks developing our
93 doughnut sales,” says Habron.

94 Mermaid Collective doughnuts are handmade in small
95 batches without freezing or pre-made mixes.

96 Since the first floor of 20 Elliot St. isn’t yet habitable, the
97 couple has been hosting pop-up doughnut shops twice a month
98 and renting space to bake at the Stone Church, another former
99 church structure that’s become a concert and events venue.

100 Still, while the doughnuts can be prepared at the Stone
101 Church, they can’t be sold there, so the pop-ups are happening
102 outdoors and through a partnership with the newly opened and
103 woman-owned Humble Mug Tea Shop at 114 Main St.

A warm welcome and high hopes

Glynn and Habron moved here in 2024 from Asheville, North Carolina, and they live in West Brattleboro.

The couple met while serving as Peace Corps volunteers in St. Lucia, where Habron served in the Department of Fisheries and Glynn worked at the St. Lucia School for the Deaf.

Habron has retired from a 25-year career as a university professor teaching community-based natural resource conservation, sustainability, climate resilience/adaptation, and social justice.

Glynn has retired after a 30-year career as an audiologist. The couple has two sons, three grandchildren, and a dog.

“We were looking to retire,” says Habron of the couple’s move to Vermont. “And Kate had always wanted to explore New England and live in the woods with a pond.”

At the same time, Habron wanted to be within a six-hour drive to his mother in New Jersey and within 30 minutes of “a thriving town.”

Brattleboro fit the bill for arts, culture, and abundant outdoor activities.

And the fit appears to be a mutually good one.

Already the Collective has donated to the Windham County Humane Society’s fundraiser, and the Department of Public Works has asked for doughnuts for upcoming events.

“It seemed like a vibrant town,” says Habron, adding he’s not been disappointed. “It’s been great.”

He says the new venture has been embraced by town government, the Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance, and residents alike.

“Everybody has a suggestion, a story,” Habron says. “It’s been really good. The Hotel Pharmacy was a well-loved place, and their owner [the late Frank and Mary Giamartino] were well

138 regarded, and so people are really excited to see something
139 happening in the space.”

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