

Brick Road Coffee: Brewing Community and Acceptance for LGBTQ+ Individuals

By: Cecilia Defino

Brick Road Coffee, a local LGBTQ+ inclusive coffee shop in Tempe, has created a welcoming and comfortable environment for all. They dedicate themselves to not only making coffee, but to supporting the local LGBTQ+ community through initiatives and events.

Since opening in late 2021, co-owners and husbands of Brick Road Coffee, Gabe Hagen and Jesse Shank, have worked to make the shop feel like a safe space for customers.

“Many say they feel seen and celebrated here, not just tolerated,” said Hagen. “They value our dedication to creating a place where they can bring their full selves without fear of judgment.”

Customers, such as Ashlee Singleton, have said that they are very proud that the coffee shop has become a sanctuary for many and that they “appreciate the intentionality behind the space.”

To ensure a welcoming environment for all customers, Brick Road Coffee employees take a “proactive” approach to inclusivity. They offer sensitivity training to staff, display visual affirmations such as Pride flags, and use gender-inclusive language in all customer interactions.

“From the moment customers step in, they’re welcomed with affirming messaging, inclusive discord, and a sense of belonging,” said Hagen. “Feedback from the community guides many of our decisions, ensuring we stay aligned with what matters most to our customers.”

Brick Road Coffee actively partners with local LGBTQ+ organizations and participates in community events. The shop hosts educational and advocacy-based events, such as panel discussions and partners with LGBTQ+ health organizations to host free testing events. These are to further create dialogue around LGBTQ+ policy and health issues.

“These initiatives help amplify our commitment to inclusivity and serve as a platform for positive change within the community,” said Shank.

These events are held to help create opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals to connect and build community. The co-owners said they regularly hold events centering on LGBTQ+ voices, which aim to create a space that serves not only as a coffee shop, but as a “community hub.”

Brick Road Coffee offers merchandise such as pins, stickers and gifts by local, queer artists. The shop’s free lending library is composed of books by queer authors and it partners with the Tempe Public Library to host queer book club events.

“These events reinforce our commitment to the LGBTQ+ community and have contributed to Brick Road Coffee becoming a cherished gathering space,” said Shank.

Brick Road Coffee’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. It has received numerous awards such as 2022 Tempe’s Friendliest Neighborhood Business Award and the 2022 and 2023 Phoenix Pride Community Spirit Award. Brick Road Coffee is also a proud member of numerous organizations, such as One Community, the Greater Phoenix Equality Chamber of Commerce, and the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce.

Amid Brick Road Coffee’s success, the owners have said that the most rewarding part is seeing the positive impact the events have on individuals - “whether it’s a conversation sparked about inclusivity, and individuals finding their voice, or a customer simply feeling seen and valued.”

Through Hagen and Shank’s dedication, Brick Road Coffee has become a cornerstone of connection for the LGBTQ+ community. For them, the most fulfilling part of their work isn’t just the coffee, it’s that they’re helping create a space where everyone can feel at home.

“As a business, it has strengthened our relationship with customers, built loyalty, and reinforced our mission to provide a coffee shop experience that goes beyond just serving drinks,” said Hagen. “It’s about making a difference.”

Sources:

Gabe Hagen - Co-Owner

info@brickroadcc.com

Jesse Shank - Co-Owner

theoryofeverything@live.com

Ashlee Singleton - customer

ashsing114@gmail.com