

# Where to go when the spirit moves you

Christian culture found at **Connections Cafe** in Flemington.

By **BOB MAKIN**  
STAFF WRITER

**FLEMINGTON** — The sea-blue and lime-green walls, enormous salt-water fish tank and soft track lighting of the new Connections Cafe create a “blue chill zone,” co-owner Kim Grom said.

The relaxing space next to the Bible Bookstore, 18 Turntable Junction, opened Nov. 2 as a means for Christians to connect with each other and the Holy Spirit, said Sean Grom, the cafe’s talent buyer and the owners’ 23-year-old son. For those wishing to explore Central Jersey’s growing contemporary Christian culture before committing to a church experience, Connections Cafe is a good place to start, he said.

“It’s a cool thing,” Sean Grom said. “There’s a new Christian culture in here. It’s wonderful to facilitate an environment where people can come together and go deeper in truth in a way that’s different from church. Church can be uncomfortable for someone new. It can be heavy and a lot to deal with. But here, you can come in and enjoy the music, enjoy the coffee, enjoy the atmosphere and get a real take on where the culture is at. The connection is genuine.”

About 30 patrons checked out Connections’ Nov. 2 grand opening with a two-set solo-acoustic performance by John Reilly, frontman of Philadelphia-based Reilly, winner of the battle of the bands organized for Revelation Generation. The Groms’ Christian youth festival is held each Labor Day on their 40-acre horse farm in nearby Kingwood.

Throughout the opening, videos from the 3-year-old fest flashed on two LCD and one plasma-screen TV.

“It’s a privilege and honor to be the first ever act at the cafe,” said Reilly, a Morris County native whose band also won the

Autumn Blaze Battle of the Bands. “We need more venues like it, venues that place a high value on the arts and have experienced, dedicated people casting vision to influence and serve the community. It’s my hope that Connections Cafe will blossom into something huge, where people are truly being connected with one another and with God through the wonderful world of music and coffee, the nectar of heaven.”

Like a Barnes & Noble for the Christian set, the Bible Bookstore’s neighboring cafe offers a menu of coffees, teas, other beverages, snacks and baked goods, plus enough tables and chairs for 50 patrons to sit and relax, while munching, sipping, reading and/or listening.

While they weren’t allowed to drink coffee, six young friends from Hunterdon Christian Academy in Lambertville were among the impressed patrons.

“It’s really cool,” said Ashley O’Connor, 11, of Flemington. “The music is so awesome. I like the colors and the lighting. I thought it’d be different, smaller. But it’s nice and spread out and comfortable. I’m glad I can come here with my friends and hang out.”

Cara Knudsen, 11, of Bridgewater, added, “There’s no need to worry about kids coming here because it’s just Christian people around. I’m going to like coming here to hear the bands.”

Shannon Nusser, principal of Hunterdon Christian Academy, brought her 10-year-old daughter, Alyssa, to meet several of her friends at the opening.

The cafe meets a great need, Nusser said.

“There are very few places where kids can be safe,” she said.

“Knowing a place like this exists is wonderful to me, as a mom, a teacher and a principal.”

Kim Grom said she was happy to see the goal of providing fellowship and fun for all ages realized in the cafe’s first night of operation. She added that she was surprised to see as many “tweens” as teens.

“They’re the next generation,” she said. “They’ll be the ones who will set the standards and have some input into what they want to see at the cafe.”

Alesha Peluso, 18, of the Anandale section of Clinton Township, is among the cafe’s young staff. A student at Raritan Valley Community College, Peluso also is working at a Dunkin’ Donuts in Clinton to help pay for college.

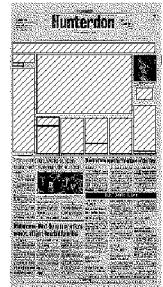
For the churched teen, who was raised in South Branch Community Chapel, Clinton Township, Connections Cafe is a haven, where she not only can work with fellow Christians but also be a witness.

“I love it,” Peluso said. “It’s a really different atmosphere, more personal. It’s more of a ministry. It’s not just, ‘Here’s your coffee. Have a good day.’ It’s more like, ‘How’s your life?’”

Youth groups have an open invitation to gather at the cafe. So far, two churches, Gateway Baptist in Bridgewater and Assembly of God in Flemington, will use the space on a monthly basis, Kim Grom said. More are expected, she said.

An open-mic night and weekend music bookings also are in the works. The schedule through year’s end is about half complete, Sean Grom said.

As with the festival, the entire Grom family helps with the cafe, including three college-age daughters: Chelsea, Tara and



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Katie.

The cafe, bookstore and festival make up the Grom family's Christian Integrated Ministries. The family ministry is financed by Flemington-based Grom Associates, a lucrative information technology and business management consulting firm owned by Bob Grom.

Unlike Grom's business, which relies on financial profits, the ministry's profits can be found in its impact on the community, he said.

"If we can help someone like a drug addict get on track, then it's all worth it," Grom said. "It's missionary work."

### What you can do

◆ For more info about Connections Cafe, 18 Turntable Junction, Flemington, call (908) 782-1790.



Customers enjoy coffee and conversation at the new Christian Cafe in Flemington, which opened Nov. 2.

MARY IUVONE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER