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JayKayla Moses, a student at the Rising Stars Academy, bags baked goods during the Gather + Grounds grand opening Sept. 23.
 Photo by Patricia O'Blenes

Something's brewing at Gather + Grounds

By: Maria Allard (/reporterbio/Maria-Allard) | Warren Weekly (<https://www.candgnews.com/newspaper/warrenweekly>) | Published October 4, 2023

CENTER LINE — Ten years ago, Mark and Deb Prentiss founded the Rising Stars Academy, a culinary arts school for adults ages 18-26 with special needs.

Located at 23855 Lawrence Ave., the RSA students learn a number of skills that include gardening, cooking and serving meals in a restaurant setting. They've become so skilled in the kitchen that the school provides menu items to 75 restaurants in the Detroit area.

Over the years, the RSA has expanded to add other vocational programs — including bicycle repair, robotics, 3D printing and computer numerical control machining — where students develop hands-on skills needed to be employable. Life skills are also stressed in the school, which sees about 180 students per day.

This year, the Prentisses opened the Gather + Grounds coffee shop, at 25709 Van Dyke Ave. The new coffee shop, under the umbrella of the nonprofit Rising Stars Foundation, held a grand opening Sept. 23. Now open to the public, the shop offers espresso drinks, organic teas, soups, breakfast, lunch sandwiches and more.

The 4,000-square foot building also serves as a gathering spot for young adults with special needs to meet for coffee and conversation, karaoke, game nights and other social activities.

"We feel our kids need to work on their social skills," said Deb Prentiss, adding that organizers hope to add a similar building in the north end of Macomb County. "They don't understand the social part of work, and we wanted to have a social spot for our kids. It's a safe place to hang out."

Three staff members run Gather + Grounds with six culinary art students working part time at the cafe. Jaykayla Moses, 26, was among the RSA students on duty for the grand opening.

"I'm helping with serving and giving them their drinks and food and putting them in bags," Moses said, adding that the cafe "looks amazing and wonderful."

According to Michael Kaufman, one of three cafe supervisors, the grand opening was going well, and the students were working hard "to get the customers their needs."

"I couldn't ask for anything better," he said.



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Peter and Shelley Harenski have already become regular customers at Gather + Grounds.

"We've been in quite a number of times for breakfast," Shelley Harenski said. "The sandwiches are delicious."

Shelley, the vice president of the Center Line Public Schools Board of Education, and Peter, her husband, who is a member of the Center Line City Council, made sure they attended the cafe's official grand opening.

"This is a great outlet for the kids. I would like to see more schools like this," Peter Harenski said. "Anything the school needs, the city is always there to help them."

Gather + Grounds is open from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday. The cafe is closed on Sunday. For more information visit gather-grounds.com or call (586) 501-3399.

The Rising Stars Foundation will hold its "Night Under the Stars" fundraiser Oct. 5. The event will include a student showcase from 4 to 6 p.m., with dinner at 6:30 p.m. For more information and tickets, call (586) 806-6455 or visit rising-stars-academy.org.

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