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# International travel inspires neighborhood market near downtown Phoenix

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JT Taber II and Jacqueline Garay are co-owners of the Buena Vida Bodega, which they opened in the Garfield neighborhood near downtown Phoenix.

CORINA VANEK

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By Corina Vanek - Reporter, Phoenix Business Journal  
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While traveling around Central and South America, JT Taber II and Jacqueline Garay noticed many communities had neighborhood corner stores, which served as a local gathering space as well as a place to purchase necessities.

The two, now newlyweds, had purchased a home in the Garfield neighborhood near downtown Phoenix, and Taber had been eyeing a shop space at 10th and Pierce streets, across the street from the Gallo Blanco restaurant where he had previously worked.

"I loved this space, and I knew the landlord, and I had told him that if the space ever became available to let me know," Taber said. When the space opened up, the two decided to fulfill their vision of a small neighborhood market, which would fill some needs they had identified in the area. The store, called Buena Vida Bodega, sells food, beer and wine, flowers, local art, gifts, plants and other items, most of which are sourced from local producers.

Garay said while living in the neighborhood, the two sometimes found themselves wishing there was a place nearby where they could buy certain items, without having to drive into the more commercial areas on the north side of Interstate 10.

The two worked with Jason Morris, partner at Withey Morris, and a family friend of Taber's, to get a use permit from the city to allow alcohol sales at the store, which has an extensive beer and wine selection.

"Phoenix, to me, when Phoenix can support uses like this, I think that is when we are truly urbanizing," Morris said, adding that the Garfield neighborhood, one of Phoenix's few truly walkable neighborhoods, is the perfect place for a store like Buena Vida Bodega.

"There aren't a lot of walking neighborhoods in Phoenix, and the ones that are don't necessarily have the commercial space," Taber said. Taber and Garay said they did not know of many other examples of neighborhood stores like theirs in Phoenix.

## Revitalizing storefronts

The store has been open for four months, and Garay said they want to continue to hear suggestions from the community about items they should stock or ways they can better serve the area.

The city of Phoenix has begun exploring some ways to encourage revitalization of vacant storefronts, and among the suggestions has been to eliminate the need for some types of special permits, like what is required for a tattoo parlor or outdoor dining. Morris said changes like that in some instances and uses like the Buena Vida Bodega in urban settings could encourage some creative uses in areas that had previously been vacant.

"There is going to be a culmination of adaptive uses, and different retail uses in new combinations," Morris said, adding that retail has significantly changed in recent years to more experience-focused and toward more services.

Garay hopes the bodega will bring both of those elements. As a licensed aromatherapist, she hopes to do aromatherapy sessions and other practices, as well as have meetings and gatherings at the space, in addition to selling beverages and unique gifts in the neighborhood.

Taber, who grew up in Phoenix, said having a neighborhood market that focuses heavily on local products and art can also help foster the creative environment in the city.

"For me, it's looking at ways that Phoenix can retain talent," he said. "If we grow the possibility for independent artists and food producers here, they might grow their business and stay here."

While the two are focused on hitting the stride for the new store, they eventually have goals to grow the business.

"We hope it's not the only Buena Vida Bodega," Taber said.

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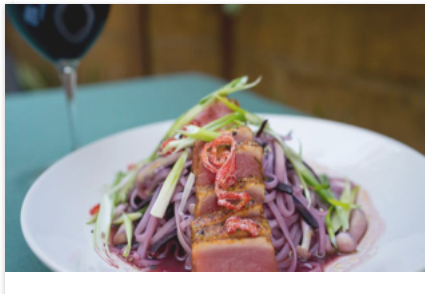
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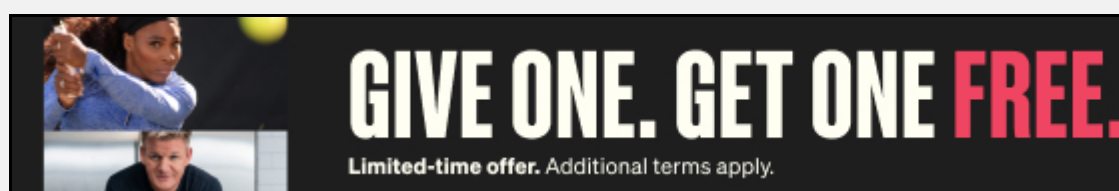
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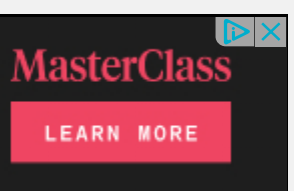
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