

Turning a page



Photos by Neal Patten

Customers browse through book during the Kismet Books grand opening on Saturday, Nov. 7. The store is located at 101 N. Main St., in the historic Matts House.

Kismet Books opens in historic downtown building

JOE HALLEY

Verona Press correspondent

When trying to fulfill a childhood dream of opening a bookstore, Ryan Kimmett was looking for the perfect building to fit the vibe she wanted.

She envisioned an old school building that had a home-like feel to it. When she came across the historic Verona building, The Matts House, she knew that was the one.

The bookstore, previously occupied by the clothing store Purple Goose, opened up Saturday, Nov. 7. The name stems from the word kismet, which means fate, and Kimmett says the name made sense as it is also very similar to the spelling of her last name.

"Sometimes the right book can find you at the right time," she said. "It's perfectly speaking to their situation at that moment, so the name made sense to me."

One of the biggest attractions that lured her to The Matts House, she said, was being able to preserve the community space of the historic building. To purchase the building, Kimmett started a Go-Fund me page and raised \$3,000 over the summer to help make it happen.

While things are just getting up and running, Kimmett has many plans for the near future, she said.

The building has a community space upstairs called the Brick House Studio that is set to open to customers starting



Titles stand on display atop the bookshelves during the Kismet Books grand opening.

Kismet Books

101 N. Main St.

207-8871

kismetbookshop.com

Saturday, Nov. 21. Kimmett plans to include local art on the walls and host classes and storytimes for children. The bookstore, which also offers gifts and stationary items, is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

For now, customer safety and health is a top priority, she said, so the store offers virtual storytime for kids and also offers appointment times for private shopping. Kimmett, who has lived in the Verona community with her family for the past five years, has



A customer looks through the pages of a book during the Kismet Books grand opening.

been overwhelmed with the response she has received so far.

"Everyone has been great and really supportive so far, she said. "They really make me feel at home."

From Hometown, USA to Broadway

VAHS grad Caleb Mathura sets sight on NYC stages

NEAL PATTEN

Unified Newspaper Group



Mathura

Verona Area High School graduate Caleb Mathura made it to the top 15 of the "Broadway's Next on Stage" competition hosted by Broadway Records last month.

While he fell short of winning \$1,000 for the charity of his choice – Verona Area Community Theater – he still rose to the top of over 1,000 submissions.

Mathura, who first got involved in VACT in the seventh grade, playing Donkey in "Shrek," made it to the top 30 of the Broadway competition by singing "It Hurts Me" – a 1950s doo-wop swing song from the Elvis Presley-inspired musical, "All Shook Up." For the second round of the competition, he sang "The Wizard and I" from Wicked. He said they're two of his favorite songs, and he wanted to use the witch's song to showcase his voice.

"The Wizard and I" is a song not a lot of guys sing, it's usually sung by a woman," Mathura said.

He re-shot the two videos he entered into the competition "many times" over two days.

"Filming and filming and filing until I got a take I liked," he said.

His hard work was not enough to woo the over 1,500 voters who narrowed down the top 15 to a top 10. But he earned a 10-minute critique from the judges, who are Broadway professionals.

Since graduating from VAHS in 2018, Mathura has been studying music theater and dance at Point Park University in Pittsburgh and is set to graduate in 2022.

His experience with Verona's community theater organization propelled him towards his aspirations of a life in the New York City theater scene.

"I didn't have any leads until VACT gave me a lot of opportunity to handle larger roles," he said, calling those directors and castmates a "second family."

He chose Point Park to continue his studies because it's one of the top 10

colleges where Broadway performers graduate from.

"It was important to go to a school with a reputation," Mathura said. "It's intense, they push students to their limit, but for their own benefit so they can grow."

One of the most interesting classes, he said, is taught by Ameenah Kaplan of The Office series and The Avengers films. The musical theater history class connects parts of theater to minstrels and blackface.

He also liked the proximity of the school to New York City, where he can take a bus to auditions and return back to his college overnight.

He was set to perform in all six shows at the Woodstock playhouse this summer, but because of COVID-19, those shows were canceled.

He also was cast in the lead role of Pippin at school this spring, but was only able to perform once before the pandemic shut down the remaining performances.

"That was hard after working months on it, for it to be one and done," he said. "You put all that time and energy into something to not reap any of the rewards."

After graduation, Mathura plans to move to New York City and pursue his stage career. He said he is attracted more to the "offbeat" shows performed off-Broadway.

His dream role would be to play Evan Hansen in "Dear Evan Hansen", calling it a character he "really relates to."

He enjoys trying something different or unexpected when he auditions, he said.

"I do my best to be myself and bring authenticity, not be what the judges or casting directors want to see," he said. "I think people have an experience when they see me perform – they haven't seen a guy sing that song before or a song sung that way. I like finding ways to be creative in how I sing and perform."

Neal Patten, community reporter, can be contacted at neal.patten@wcinet.com.

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