

Morning Grind prepares to close doors, say goodbye to loyal customers

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Not many people get to have the fulfillment of whatever their dream job might be. But for the past nine years, Daneen Theobald has been one of the lucky ones to work that dream job.

"It has," Theobald said. "It totally has. It's been a great job.

"It was just kind of a dream to have a coffee shop. I always have been a coffee lover."

She is the co-owner, along with her husband Brian Theobald, of the local coffee shop Morning Grind (301 First Ave. S.W.). The java spot will close its doors, or rather, shut its drive-through and walk-up windows, Dec. 31. The shop serves various coffee drinks, smoothies and some baked goods such as muffins and scones.

She and her husband made the decision a couple months ago to close at year's end. It was a decision that was very difficult, she said, and "very emotional for me."

Business just hasn't been the same since the chain Caribou Coffee came to town in summer 2011.

"They have just killed us," Theobald said. "You can't compete with them. You can't compete with their prices."

The personal relationships she has with her customers is quite evident. Just take the fact that she handed a lot of her customers letters explaining they were closing.

"I felt like I owed that to them at least, to be the one to let them know," Theobald said. "That's just the kind of business we've had. We've had a very close relationship with our customers."

Theobald recalls one of her first loyal customers, a woman with a baby daughter who loved teething on the Morning Grind's biscotti. That girl is now 9 years old, and Theobald gave her a big tub of biscotti as a Christmas/going away present.

They have been through so many life events with customers: birthdays, babies, deaths.

"I know their families, I know their pets, I know their grandkids," Theobald said. "They're going to miss us, and we're going to miss them."

Morning Grind has been a family affair as well. All three of Theobald's sons, her sister, mother, nephew and niece have worked in the shop, in the quaint house along one of the main drags in Austin.

Most of the customers have been very supportive and understanding of the decision to close, Theobald said, with a little sadness mixed in. One of the loyal customer groups have been police officers, Theobald said. An Austin police officer swung by the drive-through Wednesday afternoon for a cup.

"It's sad for all of us cops," he said.

For her next chapter, Theobald hopes to get into child care, work on projects at home and spend more time

with her three grandchildren. Basically, "focus on the little ones," she said.