

BRAD CARPENTER

TWA members and others are talking to writer Sharon Babcock about enduring inspirations, life lessons, and perspectives from their experiences on the working waterfront.

*This month's feature: **Brad Carpenter**, the owner of Treos Coffee in Old Town.*



Brad Carpenter, the owner of Treos Coffee in Old Town, says his café exists to offer customers a bridge to the life of the community, a place to gather, rekindle relationships, and recharge. He created the word “treos” to represent a third place in people’s lives—a place apart.

Q: What is the significance of “the third place”?

A: The first place is the home, the second (is) the workplace. We offer a place apart. The name Treos is additionally representative of the business’ three core values: faith first; friends, family and guests second; and staff third. I was inspired by the way Brian Bigelow from the film “Brian’s Song” ordered his priorities.

Q: How did you come to be a small business owner in Old Town?

A: I am a retired detective. In the course of my previous work, I talked to four to eight people daily. Most of those meetings were in coffee shops because we needed a neutral and safe place to talk. One day I realized that “I could do this!” regarding running a coffee shop. It first led me to operate a shop in University Place and then it snowballed into a franchise. The franchise went from five shops to 25 overnight, and I sold it in 2009. Then while working with Tully’s Coffee in Idaho on their rebranding, I became aware that the Old Town Tully’s spot was soon to be available. We’re about to celebrate our third anniversary.

Q: From a community standpoint, what are you most proud of in this venture?

A: Besides the good coffee, tapas, flatbreads and beverages to go along, I like the demographics of who comes to our Treos Summer Concert Series on Wednesday evenings in Old Town Park next to our shop. It is 14 beautiful evenings of two hours of live music, with young families bringing picnics and kids in wagons. It is newborns through 80-year-olds. The common denominator is people who are invested in music and community, and there is a special enthusiasm between the crowd and the musicians. Our goal is to offer the community a quality live concert that is family friendly right in the middle of the week. This year we have 46 requests to perform. We have the good problem of having to pare those down to 14. We also draw a wide range of people together throughout the year by doing regular music nights and trivia nights in the café.

Q: What have you learned in these three years you have been in business on the shores of Commencement Bay?

A: The place is a bridge between different lifestyles. There is every demographic between teens and seniors drinking coffee here. For shuttered folks, it is an outing; they are very curious about what is going on. Few people have offices anymore. If you work from a laptop, you need people to gather with, so we see entrepreneurs. I can tell which people have met online by their body language. You can track the stock market by who is in the shop on any given day; if they are depressed by results, they'll want to be around others. The most important thing for me is that as a business our job is to embrace problems—either we've just completed solving one or one is coming up shortly or we're in the middle of one. Either we embrace the problems or we're crushed by them. I've learned that our efforts are not pediatric surgery. We try to keep it as simple as possible.

Q: What in the work keeps you energized?

A: Most of the time this does not feel like work. Some of our staff members are very long timers, going back to Tully's owning the place. It is gratifying to me that they choose to come back to the shop even when they are off duty—for a music or a trivia night. It is a good family. The fact that more people are taking ownership of this area along the waterfront is encouraging. They are putting up new signs, taking care of trees, landscape, Christmas decorations, participating in the Old Town Blues Fest. Critical is that the sense of community is growing significantly. Each year I see the pride increasing; people actually choosing to come from all over Tacoma to Old Town for some leisure time. It is quite a contrast from what I used to do working on homicides in Oakland, Calif.

And then there is the water. There is something about being able to see the water every day. I make sure I drive down 30th Street on my way to work so that I can see the water. I think it is vital to our sense of well-being.