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Cultural center boosts nonprofits

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By Erin Ochoa

A new cultural center and cafe is giving perks to some local groups. Ventana del Soul opened its doors about three weeks ago, and is designed to help other nonprofits and groups that support the Austin community.

Amber Vandergriff is a senior at The University of Texas and works at Ventana del Soul for some college credit.

"I feel good about my job," she said.

Vandergriff is getting a lot of hands-on training.

"I've helped open it up, make the inventory list, design the menu, do pricing, program the cash register. So, I've gotten a lot of experience -- not just with management training -- but with starting a business," she said.

"They do the professional work to earn the professional title credit and they get a lot of work for their portfolio," director for Ventana del Soul Clare Fleming said.

Fleming said this new non-profit is designed to give other groups a boost, such as small businesses, neighborhood associations and charitable organizations.

For starters, it simply offers space for community meetings and events free of charge.



The Ventana del Soul facility offers a coffee house and meeting spaces.

"We have a lot of meeting space for training and seminars for small businesses and nonprofits and they can use our space for that reason," Fleming said.

On top of that, the cafe only sells foods made locally.

"The local brands like Amy's Ice Cream, Texas French Bread, Round Rock Donuts -- we have like a whole sale arrangement," Fleming said. "Anything that sells above the cost of what it costs us to have them here will help our program."

It also sells local artwork and even plants from the Marbridge Foundation, an organization that helps men and women

with mental retardation.

"We buy all of our plants from Marbridge -- when we sell them -- it helps both the Marbridge Foundation and our program," Fleming said.

Almost everything at Ventana del Soul is donated -- from the tables and chairs to the books for sale. Charitable support helps the center help other ones.

The nonprofit formed in December, but the center still needs a few items, such as a conference table, futons and chairs.

If you'd like to help, or for more information about the center, call (512) 707-7447.

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