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Ventana Del Soul offers coffee, culture and connectivity

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By Doug Shupe

The Ventana del Soul facility offers a coffee house and meeting spaces. There's a new coffee house in Southeast Austin where you can find a cup of java and a whole lot more.

The Ventana Del Soul, a play on words that means "window of the soul" is providing a perk for the entire neighborhood.

The nonprofit coffee house also offers business and computer classes, meeting spaces, reading materials and free Internet connection to the Southeast Austin community.

"I work out of my home, but sometimes my home environment gets stale and sometimes getting out of the house can kick start my creativity, and being able to use wireless in a place like this can help me get my work done in a fun way," regular Shelley Leyden said.

Ventana Del Soul pays for itself with money from the sale of local artwork and homegrown products like Amy's Ice Cream, Round Rock Donuts and Texas French Bread.

Clare Fleming came up with the idea a couple years ago. Her goal was provide new opportunities to the Southeast Austin community she calls home.

"All of us from South Austin and East Austin; we really wouldn't live anywhere else ... This has been the most exciting project I have ever worked on," she said.



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

Ventana Del Soul is unique because it offers support to small businesses, neighborhood groups, charitable organizations and the YWCA.

"Clare has been very creative in trying to bring in partners so that we, those of us nonprofit organizations that are struggling financially, can take advantage of this incredible center and continue to provide our service in a variety of ways," YWCA executive director Diana Gorham said.

Ventana Del Soul also provides internships and employment for college students.

Community space

Ventana del Soul offers meeting spaces to community groups and nonprofits.

"I've learned about advertising, public relations, business especially. I definitely think it's been an advantage to have an asset," employee Whitnie Strauss said.

And for those who live nearby it fills a void.

"When I first discovered it, I told them that exact thing we've been needing something like this, so I'm very happy they're here ... I think people are finding that east of I-35 is a really well-kept secret," customer Colleen Sears said.

Fleming said many donations from companies and businesses in the community made Ventana Del Soul possible.

Her next goal is to collect patio garden furniture so everyone can enjoy the cooler weather outdoors.

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