

Humans of Madison

Interviews collected on JMU's campus



ALEXA FITZPATRICK / THE BREEZE

Meredith Mahen

"So, I went to JMU for undergrad and graduated 2017, and this year is my first year back as a physician assistant student, so I'm really excited to be kind of on the upper-end of things. So, in undergrad, I volunteered at the Harrisonburg/Rockingham Free Clinic just as, like, an EMT there. I was able to help with taking vitals, checking in the patients and really got to get closer with the community, hear a lot of the community members' stories and just saw how grateful these people were to get some type of care, 'cause, otherwise, they wouldn't be able to receive it now."

"As a P.A. student, we actually get to go into the free clinic in our rotations and practice our skills and work with these community members again. And, now that I'm in this other level, I'm really looking forward to using my higher skill set, becoming closer with the patient and really working on that relationship — improving the community relationship with P.A.s and medicine in general, so I'm really excited about that."

Watch the video on breezejmu.org

PHOTOS BY REBECCA GVOZDEN / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER



On the Wreck-ord

JMU student opens recording studio in downtown Harrisonburg

By PAIGE PETTRY
contributing writer

When one walks into Wrecked Records, they might first notice the large mirror covering the wall or the instruments dotting the room.

The most eye-catching, however, is what takes up the majority of the studio's space.

Protruding from the left wall is Jake Hitzges' audio engineering alcove. Speakers, a soundboard and computers create a U-shaped area for Hitzges to work, and a large TV displaying audio software is the center of it all. Blue, black and teal wood panels hang in seemingly random places all around. This is where his and others' music can come to life.

"We didn't sleep, for like, three days to build everything and get it all set up for our first client," Hitzges, a junior computer science major, said.

Hitzges is the owner of Wrecked Records, a recently opened recording studio in downtown Harrisonburg. He explained his team's ambitious plan to bring in their first client just three days after moving into the building.

"When we first moved in, we had to build all the wood acoustic panels;

we had to build the vocal booth, so I remember I actually was in Home Depot for eight hours," Hitzges said.

Hitzges began his music career as a two-year-old when he learned violin on a cardboard cutout instrument. While he was initially a musician, he became interested in audio engineering at 16 when he realized the quality it added to his band's songs. Learning this craft was originally a necessity to improve the sound of his band's music, but Hitzges eventually realized he enjoyed the process as well.

Launching his recording studio began with finding business partners. He then sought out an investor, someone to run social media and another to keep the studio's books, essentially constructing a team that was willing to help him open the studio. Then, they began looking for a location.

Luckily for Hitzges, a recording studio on East Market Street was leaving right as he and his team began searching, which left a vacancy for Wrecked Records. The studio has been open for about two months and has received opportunities Hitzges never imagined at the outset. However, whether the artists he brings in are local or well-known, Hitzges has

the same goal in mind.

"Myself and many, many engineers in my generation started out in basements," Hitzges said. "[Artists] can work with a basement engineer, and they can feel comfortable. And so, ideally, I'd like to have a studio that has the quality of a professional studio but the feel of a basement studio."

It's consistently important to Hitzges and his team that the artist gets what he or she wants out of their experience. As a musician himself, he recognizes the importance of making sure the finished product is something the artist is completely happy with and not simply a task done to obtain a paycheck.

Dylan Bernetich, a junior media arts and design major, was impressed with Hitzges' authenticity when he and his fellow band member, Jake Rodriguez, toured Wrecked Records. Bernetich and Rodriguez make up an Americana band called American Woodstock.

"They literally want to take your image and be able to portray it in the best form of music they possibly can," Bernetich said. "It's nice knowing there's someone out there who wants to help you become an even better artist."



GRAPHICS BY KAILLEY CHENG / THE BREEZE

Jacob Rozmajzl, a senior music major who occasionally works as a drum session player for Wrecked Records, has been a part of the team since the studio opened. As a drum session player, Rozmajzl is hired by the artist to play when the musician doesn't already have a drummer on hand.

"Jake came to one of my shows. He found me and then gave me a shot, and I enjoy working with him," Rozmajzl said about his time working at the studio with Hitzges.

Hitzges has received encouraging feedback, but his experience hasn't come without its challenges. Currently, Hitzges faces difficulties balancing schoolwork and production at the studio. To combat this, he said he's training new audio engineers to help him and allow him to be there less often. Right now, he's typically at the studio five days a week.

However, when asked what advice he has for other students looking to get started on their own businesses, Hitzges is only encouraging.

"Working on a company that can pay the rent of a commercial building; [that's something] I

"Ideally, I'd like to have a studio that has the quality of a professional studio but the feel of a basement studio."

Jacob Hitzges

Wrecked Records owner

believe a lot of students can do," Hitzges said.

Bernetich similarly shares this inspiration. He said that if one's passionate about something, they can make it happen."

While opening Wrecked Records was a huge step for Hitzges, he's only getting started. In

the future, he plans to work with a variety of artists spanning every genre, not just the heavy rock and rap musicians he usually covers. The goal is to keep evolving, working with as many artists, audio engineers and musicians as possible while always producing authentic music that sounds good.

For Hitzges, there are aspects he enjoys about his job at the recording studio, such as being his own

boss and deciding for himself how much he gets paid. What comes to mind first, though, is the people.

"You'll meet people you thought never would've wanted that, and they'll come in and be so passionate about it," Hitzges said. "It's just so interesting the people that you meet. You'll always see something new in all the musicians that you work with, and that's something that I like about it."

CONTACT Paige Pettry at pettrytype@dukes.jmu.edu. For more on the culture, arts and lifestyle of the JMU and Harrisonburg communities, follow the culture desk on Twitter @Breeze_Culture.



A recording studio on East Market Street closed right as Wrecked Records was looking for a place to open.



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Thursday, October 10, 2019



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ALEXA FITZPATRICK / THE BREEZE



Marc Henry Monk

"I'm currently the president of the club PlayMU on campus, which is JMU's biggest video game organization. Every year, we run an event called Extra Life, which is a charity event that's run pretty much globally at this point that supports Children's Miracle Network Hospitals. And how it works is different teams are formed in different places, and they all stream video games online for 24 hours straight as a team, as a collective, to raise money and have people donate to charity. That money gets donated to Children's Miracle Network Hospitals and put towards cancer research and stuff like that but also towards paying off medical bills for kids' families who can't afford it."

"For us at PlayMU, we've been doing Extra Life for that past couple years, and how we do it is break it down into a bunch of different shifts. So, everyone takes, like, an hour-long shift of the 24 hours, and we just go all the way through. This year is gonna be my second year in a row on the team running the event, so it's gonna be an awesome experience."

"It's such an amazing experience to see all these people come together to support this one cause, keeping such high energy for the full 24 hours. It's insane, but it's so much fun."

Watch the video and submit a nomination on breezejmu.org

PHOTOS BY KURT PEREZ / THE BREEZE



'Get ssam'

Mashita food truck opens downtown storefront to bring Korean flavors to the 'Burg



Customers at Mashita enjoy house-made kimbap and bulgogi bibimbap.

By KAILEY CHENG
The Breeze

Mikey Reisenberg had an identity crisis in high school.

The JMU alumnus ('09) was adopted from Seoul, South Korea, and grew up in the Shenandoah Valley, but he always felt like there was something missing. Raised in a less racially diverse area, he wanted to learn more about his Korean culture.

Reisenberg discovered learning the culture was difficult without knowing the language, so he said food was the next available path for him to learn from. He started cooking and working in restaurants like the one in the Joshua Wilton House on South Main Street.

"It must be in my blood," Reisenberg said. "Because all my Asian food turned out much better than the other food I was trying to cook."

Now, he's the owner and executive chef of Mashita, a recently opened, Korean-inspired restaurant downtown. But, he couldn't have done it without starting in

the food truck business.

In 2013, at the end of Reisenberg's time at the Joshua Wilton House, he decided to find a full-time job, but working for a company wasn't for him. He said his true love was "taking care of people, providing good customer service and being proud of the products that [he] can produce [himself]."

The young chef dropped all his applications and invited his sous-chef, Kevin Chapman, to quit his job at the same restaurant, live with him and build a food truck from scratch. Chapman jumped right in.

The duo got started when Reisenberg purchased an old step van and named his business "Mashita," which is an informal way of saying "the food is delicious" in Korean. He said it was a play on who he is.

"Mostly because of me being adopted, 100% Korean born, but also knowing I'm as American as anyone else in the Shenandoah Valley, I thought it was a neat way to, kind of, create our image," Reisenberg said.

The business was built on buns — specifically, made-from-scratch steamed

buns topped with a protein of the customer's choice. Chapman said the recipe was adapted from big-time chef David Chang.

"As soon as we ate them, we were like, 'Man, we've gotta do something with these,'" Chapman said.

They did, and in the past six years, Mashita has become a hit.

Reisenberg said that before he started, there was hardly any kind of Korean cuisine in Harrisonburg. He adopted an identity for Mashita by mashing Korean flavors found in authentic cuisine with popular food items in the Valley, like fried green tomatoes. It's been voted Best Food Truck in the Daily News-Record's Best of the Valley almost every year since it opened. Customer Sean Mullen said what makes Mashita distinct is "definitely the food."

"I've been here 14 years, and the stuff that I see on his menu, I knew I haven't seen anywhere else," Mullen said. "And that's what drew me to his food. His flavor profile is just off the chain."



The Mashita sauce trio



Mikey Reisenberg (left) and Kevin Chapman work in the kitchen prepping pulled pork.

What also makes Mashita stand out is its ability to bring an urban mindset and culture to a historically rural area. Still, it's been influenced by the Valley in positive ways. For example, Mashita purchases ingredients locally, and the staff cooks each meal from scratch.

"Now, after six years of growing, we have one of the best culinary identities in downtown Harrisonburg," Reisenberg said.

Mashita's popularity created a foundation for a client base and catering department that eventually led to Reisenberg opening a storefront downtown.

On Oct. 1, Reisenberg and his staff formally opened the Mashita brick-and-mortar, a quaint space on North Liberty Street. Customers are greeted by a colorful mural, Korean artifacts lining the walls, silver chopsticks atop polished wood tables and the mouth-watering smell of beef bulgogi. Here, lovers of the food truck can enjoy their handmade steamed buns and ssam — lettuce wraps — in a comfy sit-down restaurant.

Opening weekend was nonstop for the staff. It had two weddings to cater to in addition to restaurant work. Mashita is currently open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. The greatest challenge is balancing the hectic food truck catering and event schedule with restaurant operations.

But Chapman said one challenge has been

taken away by "just having space." The larger kitchen allows staff members to prep without moving things out of the way and hitting elbows with one another. Despite this, he finds it difficult to hear customer feedback with the kitchen being a separate room.

"I'm thankful some of our other staff would come back and tell us people really enjoy things," Chapman said. "That's something that makes it easier to cook, though, is hearing people appreciate the stuff you're doing."

Reisenberg and Chapman have big plans. They want to gain name recognition as one of the best restaurants in Harrisonburg, even if Mashita is considered "fast-casual." They

also hope to undertake a third expansion that'll allow them to increase seating area and incorporate a full-service cocktail bar. Reisenberg said it might happen sooner than planned, considering the current business they're making.

"It's been a really fun experience to see the business grow, to see me and my staff grow and to establish an identity that is uniquely ours here in this area where we all grew up," Reisenberg said.

"Now, after six years of growing, we have one of the best culinary identities in downtown Harrisonburg."

Mikey Reisenberg

Mashita owner and executive chef

CONTACT Kailey Cheng at thebreezeculture@gmail.com. For more on the culture, arts and lifestyle of the JMU and Harrisonburg communities, follow the culture desk on Twitter @Breeze_Culture.

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Logan Stoltzfus, left, and Taven Wilson, right, inspect one-of-a-kind vinyls. The business offers a variety of color and material options.

PHOTOS BY TRISTAN LOREI / THE BREEZE

By **TRISTAN LOREI**
The Breeze

Inside the large record press in the center of the room, a mechanical arm grabs vinyl records, rotates around and drops them on two spindles. Each time, it switches which spindle it places them on. Here, the vinyls cure for up to 10 hours before being packaged and shipped out.

Chris Jackson and Logan Stoltzfus, the owner and plant manager of Blue Sprocket Pressing, respectively, start each day at 9 a.m. by turning on the infrastructure. This includes the boiler, which allows steam to fill the pipes for heating the molds which press the grooves into the vinyl, and the chiller, which provides cold water to cool them down.

Then, Jackson, Stoltzfus and their team begin prepping stampers — metal pieces that stamp the form of the vinyl into the plastic — and make sure the vinyl labels are dry so they don't stick to the press. Each step is set up to allow an easy transition from one job to the next. By the end of the first hour, their first project is already on the press.

"I'm a very hands-on owner," Jackson said. "One day I'll be helping reply to emails or reaching out to people I know in the business and just facilitating relationships, the next day I'll have a pipe wrench, tightening a loose connection on a pipe somewhere. I love doing all of it. It exercises every last bit of my brain."

Jackson began his work in Harrisonburg with recording studio Blue Sprocket Sound in 2013. After a period of working out of makeshift spaces and traveling to use professional studios, they decided to build the studio they use today.

After being established at Blue Sprocket Sound for around four years, Jackson began to notice a problem when it came to clients getting their albums pressed to vinyl: They were placing the orders only to receive them

at least six months later and were often unsatisfied with the result. This sparked Jackson's idea to open a vinyl manufacturing business so he could press his clients' albums to vinyl himself.

"That process took a lot of research and a lot of time," Jackson said. "[We were] reaching out to people we had worked with in the past and also clients, getting their experiences and trying to take this holistic view of what's out there now. What holes are there in the market, build a business plan, try to track down equipment and design a facility."

Blue Sprocket Pressing, located next to Backcountry Restaurant and Lounge on South Main Street, uses ground PVC — polyvinyl chloride — plastic to make their vinyl. It gets shipments in different colors ranging from black, the most popular, to any other color a client may want. Some of the PVC is never-before-used plastic, but they also use recycled plastic.

Some clients request the new plastic, but the company also offers a cheaper option that uses a combination of different colors and the recycled plastic. This is a way to cater to all kinds of clients while lowering their carbon footprint.

Stoltzfus, who's also a co-owner of the business with Jackson, developed a love for music at a young age. His dad had a couple boxes of records he'd listen to, and he was drawn to them quickly.

"Vinyl kind of demands that you engage with it and that you pay attention to what's happening," Stoltzfus said. "There's also something about the collectability of it that really appealed to me. It makes it a really fun collector's item to dig through record stores to see what you can find."

Jackson enjoys the entire experience he's able to have with vinyl, from the 12-by-12-inch album artwork and liners to the music the band produced. This is something he loves to share with his kids.

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Blue Sprocket
Sound opens
vinyl pressing
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“My 1-year-old daughter just thinks it’s cool that there’s this thing spinning on a platter,” Jackson said. “But my son, he’s got some of his favorite Disney soundtracks on vinyl. And I’ll be like, ‘Hey, can we go listen to the Moana record?’ And we’ll go over there and he pulls that record out, we brush it off and he loves watching the needle drop.”

Taven Wilson, the press operator, worked in record stores for the majority of his adult life until he began his job at Blue Sprocket Sound.

“As someone who has been involved in making music on the creative end, it makes it easier to be committed and diligent about it,” Wilson said. “Because you know how much work goes into the whole process from beginning to end. Having first-hand knowledge on that helps us to stay focused on putting

out the best product.”

Being involved in every part of the process for these bands and musicians is something everyone at Blue Sprocket Pressing takes pride in. From recording an artist’s music to putting it on vinyl, the team is able to make clients’ idea a reality.

“I love music and love being a part of helping people realize their dream of having their songs come to life,” Jackson said. “That started with the whole recording process: the tracking, the mixing, the mastering, and now, this is just a step farther, which is taking that music and helping people get it onto this magical format that is vinyl.”

CONTACT Tristan Lorei at loreitm@dukes.jmu.edu. For more on the culture, arts and lifestyle of the JMU and Harrisonburg communities, follow the culture desk on Twitter @Breeze_Culture.



Each record is pressed in between two stampers, which will produce the form of the vinyl, made of PVC plastic.

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