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brimming with purpose





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In 2016, Deedee Ungetheim grew concerned for her son's future in Greensboro, North Carolina. Bryce has intellectual developmental disabilities and his options, as well as his peers', were limited after high school graduation. At about that time, Ungetheim visited Bitty & Beau's Coffee, a shop employing people with IDD, in Wilmington, North Carolina.

"I was just mesmerized by the joy and the dignity on their faces," Ungetheim says. "They were clearly so proud of what they were doing. I was even more mesmerized by the atmosphere in this little store. There were people with and without disabilities interacting, laughing together, bantering back and forth. It caught my heart."

On the way to Greensboro, Ungetheim told her husband she wanted to open a coffee shop like the one in Wilmington. Although she and her husband didn't have experience in business or running a coffee shop, they gathered a board of directors and raised \$300,000 to outfit a space.

"Quite honestly, it wasn't that hard to raise that money," she says. "They seemed to get that it wasn't only good for the individuals with IDD and their families, but it was good for Greensboro."

Just two years later, in 2018, A Special Blend opened in Greensboro, serving coffee drinks, milkshakes, pastries and smoothies.

"On opening day, we had 1,200 customers," she says. "The line circled around the store for nine straight hours. That was a great start."

Staff members with IDD are baristas, cashiers and greeters, working three- to-six-hour shifts. A shift manager without IDD is always there to help with training and problem-solving. Bryce, now 28 years old, makes drinks and serves food in a barista role.

In 2023, A Special Blend opened in High Point, North Carolina. It's a Certified Autism Destination through the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards, one of 20 businesses in High Point with this designation. Eighty percent of the shop's shift managers and store managers participated in the online training, learning how to approach families who may be visiting with someone who has autism, what language and terms to use and how to offer help in a respectful way.

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On the cover: Jenny, shift manger, left, and cashier Bobbieann are two of the employees at A Special Blend – a Certified Autism Destination – in Greensboro, North Carolina. Photo by Michelle Phillips. Article by Vanessa Infanzon. Published 10 times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to [marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com](mailto:marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com). ©2025 Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group. Produced by Content Spectrum.

