

It's a sunny morning. The bikes parked outside of the small brick building are patiently waiting for the cyclists to finish enjoying their pumpkin chocolate chip muffins. Students are working peacefully on essays and updating their planners whilst drinking iced chai lattes. A guitarist strums and sings outside, performing in front of those sitting at the picnic tables. Small conversation fills the space inside and out. This is the typical Sunday setting of Mama D's, a beloved coffee shop around the corner of Kettle Moraine High School in Wales, Wisconsin. Not only is it the perfect study spot, its atmosphere is also incredibly welcoming. Whether it's donating to organizations, providing a space for musicians to perform, serving high quality food and drinks, or allowing the art club to meet in the cafe weekly, Mama D's always finds a way to give back to the community.

Diana Markus, affectionately known as Mama D, opened Mama D's in Wales in 2012. Markus's inspiration to open a coffee shop stemmed from volunteering with Kettle Moraine's Young Life group. After volunteering as a mentor for the sophomore girls group, they began to meet in many different places after the school day. "The main hub was Stone Creek Coffee," Markus said. "We would stay there until closing at least once a week, and they would always have to kick us out at 8pm every time." She felt inspired to open a place where she could have meaningful conversation with other people in a safe and comfortable environment. "It was a God thing. I felt this yearning to have a good place to have a coffee and a good muffin. It couldn't be this shiny, Starbucks, strip mall. It had to be old-fashioned - with character." And so, Mama D's soon opened and did just that. Comfy chairs, charming wooden tables, and even products created by local businesses all have a home in this coffee shop. Mama D's quickly became a staple in the small town of Wales. The community loved this cafe so much that she opened a second location in Waukesha in 2015.

Markus is incredibly grateful for her wonderful customers, and so she stands strong in her belief that giving back to the community is a must, whether it be through hospitality or through financial contributions. One way she gives back is through Mama D's Cares Day. Mama D's Cares Day is a biannual event that donates 15% of profits made that day toward a selected organization. All organizations Mama D's has supported have been nominated by the baristas. Past organizations they have donated to include the HAWS, MS Run the US, and the Milwaukee Diaper Fund. Many locals show up on these days to show their support and provide donations, whether it be monetary or requested items. Mama D's Cares Day lets both the business and the community support fellow Wisconsinites.

Markus also finds ways to support the artists in her community. There are a couple of ways she does this, one of which being through live music. In fact, when Markus first told her husband that she wanted to open the coffee shop, he said, "I am on board as long as I have a place to play music... And a stage." She happily agreed with that request. Outside of the brick building, a small space is reserved for musicians who are ready to share their music with the world - or those cycling by - every Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. On top of supporting musicians, she supports young artists, too. Every week, she allows the Kettle Moraine High School Art Club to join in the meeting room (known as the "pink room") for absolutely free. Here, the students converse and create art individually and with others. Because Mama D values good conversation, she ensured that the Pink Room can be reserved for no cost at all so groups of people can meet whenever they please. "All I ask is that they maybe buy a drink," she said with a smile.

I have been to Mama D's countless times, traditionally almost every Sunday. When their location in Genesee Depot was still open, I would order their baked oatmeal so often that they would ask my eight-year-old self if I wanted "the usual" whenever I walked in. I've always

enjoyed the cozy atmosphere and their kind baristas. “I have an amazing group of employees. People like working in a friendly place, and I’m proud of that.” Markus continued to show her gratitude for her employees over the course of the entire interview that I had with her.

I’ve also enjoyed their attention to detail when it comes to their food. Mama D doesn’t believe in serving her customers just an ordinary sandwich or muffin. She always aims for a step above while still keeping menu items at an affordable price. She believes in finding high-quality local vendors and sticking to them. For example, Mama D’s has been serving Valentine Coffee since day one; This local coffee brand roasts their beans in Wauwatosa. Her soups are sourced from a local company called The Soup Market that was founded by a friend of hers. Some bakery items are made by Sally’s Sweet Shoppe, a local bakery in Genesee Depot. Other small businesses are also able to sell their products, whether it be honey, ketchup, earrings, or custom cups.

Not much comes to mind when people think of Wales, Wisconsin, but Mama D’s is the one thing that people tend to know about. And for good reason, too - their comfortable atmosphere, kind employees, quality food, and community efforts all make up the equation for the perfect coffee shop. They strive to put others first, whether it’s through helping out an organization or letting people showcase their musical talents. It’s a study spot to some and a place to catch up with friends for others; but no matter what people consider it to be, Mama D’s is truly a cornerstone of the Wisconsin community.