



ROASTING INTO TOWN

Rise Up Coffee's Easton location does more than just brew coffee

Story and photography by Rebekah Elliott



It's a late Sunday morning in August and Rise Up Coffee Roasters on Dover Road in Easton is teeming with customers—a particularly surprising circumstance for a store tucked away from the allure of shoppers perusing Easton's main street and the steady rush of beach traffic along U.S. Route 50.

In a cliché sort of way, the atmosphere is reminiscent of a sitcom. With each swing of the front door, the baristas welcome customers by name and, of course, with a smile. It might be corny to compare Rise Up to the beloved '80s series where everyone knows your name, but it's fitting.

Yet, this dedication to customer service isn't accidental, according to Tim Cureton, who owns the business with his wife, Abigail. The coffee business, he says, is all about connecting with people, hence Rise Up's motto—"grown by friends, roasted by friends, enjoyed by friends."

"So many times, I've witnessed customers come to Rise Up for the very first time and without even taking a sip of their beverage, they say 'I'll be back' or 'this place is great,' and that kind of shows you the connection that people are having with Rise Up," Cureton says. "It's more than just a cup of coffee. We are a place that

acknowledges you exist. We like to get to know you as a friend. So I think Rise Up Coffee has stayed an oasis in this crazy world for many of our customers."

Besides showing a personal interest in each customer, another unique aspect of the business is the fact that the Easton café roasts its own coffee beans. Shipments of more than 1,000 pounds of varying organic, fair-trade coffee beans from South America, Africa and Indonesia arrive every two weeks at the Easton branch. Cureton, along with General Manager Noah Kegley, spend two days a week roasting, on average, 700 pounds of coffee. "Realizing that roasting is a separate business, we spent over a year researching and educating ourselves on coffee roasting," Cureton says. "So it's not something we just jumped into."

Anyone familiar with the company likely is aware of Rise Up's initial location—a relatively small shack situated in the parking lot next to Pea Neck Road on the outskirts of St. Michaels. The drive-thru java hut was the Cureton's foray into the coffee world. Seven years later, it proudly remains a hotspot for those in need of a caffeine boost.

Cureton credits his inspiration to establish his own coffee shop to his time in the Peace Corps, during which he saw several coffee-growing regions of the world. He soon realized he could combine

his passion for the caffeinated beverage with the entrepreneurial spirit he'd acquired during his college days. With a shoestring budget and Abigail's retail experience, the couple set up shop in St. Michaels "on a random Tuesday" in March 2005, Cureton says. For the first year and a half, the pair served every drink.

"It wasn't really a thought to have (Rise Up) be a company; it was just going to be a little shop ... but things have obviously progressed from there. And the Eastern Shore has embraced Rise Up Coffee in a way that continually blows me away," Cureton says, noting that the company now employs 20-plus staff members.

In remodeling the new spot, Cureton says he was keen to preserve the industrial elements of the former garage space, while successfully transforming the building into a food-service facility. The brightly hued brick exterior and simple, earthy interior help create a cozy atmosphere that's enlivened with a sprinkling of retro-inspired decor.

While roasting its own coffee certainly sets Rise Up apart from neighboring coffee houses, perhaps an even greater distinction is the Easton branch's intention to remain a café, simply serving coffee and a few locally made pies and pastries (although guests are welcome to bring in breakfast and lunch of their own). It might seem like an odd concept, considering the abundance of breakfast and lunch items served nowadays in many coffee shops, but Cureton said he wants to ensure the aroma of coffee remains untarnished.

"For us, this is a coffee experience; so we didn't want you to walk in and smell burnt cheese or onion soup," he says, with a laugh. "We want you to smell the coffee, enjoy the coffee, so we kept our food pairings simple."

Having sat in the roastery on a Tuesday afternoon (when the first weekly bout of roasting takes place), it's safe to say Cureton's idea is a good one. The rich, full-bodied fragrance of approximately 20 pounds of roasting coffee beans is similar, in a way, to the scents that linger from a batch of warm, freshly baked brownies. It's a distinguished aroma that is satisfyingly sweet, yet savory, and inevitably evokes one to grab a brewed sampling of the liquid gold.

Adding to the allure is the fact that the coffee is sustainable, which, according to Cureton, means it is pesticide-free, fair-trade and shade-grown. "We believe that organic coffee not only tastes better, but that it's a healthier cup of coffee," he says.

Although quick to share details of the roasting and brewing business, Cureton remains modest when it comes to Rise Up's achievements, which are far from few. In less than a decade, the company has grown from a single drive-thru location to include the roastery in Easton and a café in Salisbury. Additionally, Rise Up Coffee is served at a slew of local restaurants, in addition to being the inspiration behind a Rise Up Coffee-infused Jamaican stout, courtesy of Evolution Craft Brewing Company.

"We don't spend a lot of time patting ourselves on the back. But for us, we wanted Rise Up to have a corporate quality feel while being an Eastern Shore original," Cureton says.

And from the list of ever-growing accomplishments, it certainly seems Cureton and the rest of the Rise Up team have achieved that delicate balance.

Rise Up Coffee Roasters is located at 618 Dover Road in Easton. For more information, visit www.riseupcoffee.com.

