



*BOPARC's Wiles Hill Community Center, home to Eureka Cafe.*

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# BOPARC's Eureka Cafe is popular, and a little complicated

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MORGANTOWN — It's a fine line to walk.

In March 2023, Eureka Cafe opened in BOPARC's Wiles Hill Community Center.

It was a post-COVID request of a neighborhood that's never really had a place to call its own.

Credit to BOPARC, it brought in some talented people to run it.

And it's popular.

BOPARC Executive Director Melissa Wiles said the business drew some 10,000 customers in 2023 — about 1,000 a month.

But here's the rub.

It really couldn't fail.

It's taxpayer funded.

You see, the cafe isn't the result of a proprietor paying the city rent to run a business in a city-owned building.

It's a city-owned business.

And now BOPARC finds itself trying to balance the contradictory positions of operating a popular business while not competing with privately-owned businesses.

Wiles said the spirit of Eureka Cafe has always been about offering something unique for folks already visiting the community center — a historic former school that BOPARC has owned for some 20 years.

“We have a great deal of respect for our private business community and are committed to reminding ourselves of the fact that Eureka is a programmatic element of the Wiles Hill Community Center. We do not want to, nor should we be, a full-service restaurant,” she explained.

To that end, Wiles recently explained to the BOPARC board of directors, the cafe's budget was reigned in late last year.

Talk of expanding hours and releasing a catering menu was nixed.

The cafe is open from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. during the week. It's not open on the weekends.

In January, after some retooling, expenses tied to the cafe were about \$7,000. Wiles said it made a little over \$3,000 in profit that month.

That's with the services of two full-time BOPARC employees and a roster of four to five part-time staff members.

Amel Morris isn't an 'I told you so,' kind of guy.

He's the proprietor of Lefty's Place, a popular and growing pizza business. He's not in competition with Eureka Cafe. He sells pizza, wings and beer.

He's also on the BOPARC Board of Directors.

Morris first spoke up in April of last year.

“The last thing I want is for people to think I'm worried about how this is going to impact my business. We're polar opposites. I'm thinking of the owners of those small cafes around town that are in that same market,” Morris told The Dominion Post on Friday.

“Think about it. Those businesses have to collect a 1% sales tax, and BOPARC gets a chunk of that. Maybe people would think that's a reach, but to me, that's getting to a point where I feel like we really need to be careful.”

BOPARC President Danielle Trumble admitted the cafe is uncharted territory.

“We're not really looking to compete with small business. We're looking to improve upon what's offered in this building,” she said. “We just want to supplement what's already in the building and meet the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.”

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