

The Editorial Board: A new, larger location for the West Side Bazaar builds on a community asset

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The new West Side Bazaar is five times bigger than the original facility, offering more resources to small businesses, many of them refugee-owned.

Derek Gee, Buffalo News

It's a richly deserved upgrade and good news for all of Western New York. The West Side Bazaar – a nonprofit business incubator designed to help aspiring entrepreneurs, many of them newcomers to the United States – is reopening in a new, larger location at 1432 Niagara St. More businesses will be helped and more one-on-one education will take place about the struggles of those who leave their homelands to find better lives and new opportunities. Since its opening, more than 70% of West Side Bazaar's 48 businesses have been refugee-owned.



Buffalo News/File photo

With a new, larger location on Niagara Street, the West Side bazaar can continue to help small businesses, many owned by refugees. Their food stands have raised awareness of different cultures and the contributions of these newcomers.

The original West Side Bazaar at Grant and Ferry streets, founded by the Westminster Economic Development Initiative in 2011, almost immediately created a strong buzz throughout the region. It was about the food. Burmese chicken noodle soup (owno koksware), Thai green coconut curry and Ethiopian pan-fried beef with injera flatbread are just a few of the dishes many Western New Yorkers have found they can't live without.

Specialty retailers have also found a home at the West Side Bazaar, introducing traditional items from Africa, Sri Lanka and other international wares. The Grant Street location suffered a fire in 2022 and had to close, but the new Niagara Street facility is five times bigger, with twice the number of food kiosks, as well as an event space and even a small stage.

Food provides an accessible, visceral introduction to another culture. Behind the traditional flavors lies a larger context of the geography, climate and customs that help determine why people eat the way they do.

In the United States, where so many of us no longer have strong connections to how our food makes its way to our tables and may have lost touch with ancestral cuisines, we welcome the fresh, vibrant dishes of these new arrivals – all the more enjoyable for their unfamiliarity.

Expect even more of those exciting tastes when the new West Side Bazaar opens with Malaysian, Egyptian and Congolese food in the mix, as well as Japanese, Korean, Burmese and Vietnamese restaurants.

After the Grant Street location closed, some of the businesses were able to relocate at the former Expo Market adjacent to the Market Arcade at 617 Main St. In a secondary wave of good news, it looks like a few of those businesses will remain on Main Street.

Thus, Niagara Street gains a popular culinary attraction, adding to the ongoing revitalization of this essential urban artery, and the Theatre District retains important dining choices. It's important, too, that this large Market Arcade space remains tenanted.

The West Side Bazaar is only one of the programs created and administered by the Westminster Economic Development Initiative, as part of its efforts to improve the quality of life for underserved residents of Buffalo's West Side.

The Bazaar was not originally intended to be a culinary hotspot, but it happened, and in that evolution, those who visited to try Burmese and Vietnamese specialties also gained a broader understanding and appreciation for their new neighbors.

Both the downtown and Niagara Street locations of this rich asset are improving the quality of life for everyone who lives, visits – and eats – in Western New York.

The new Bazaar is holding a grand opening week Oct. 31-Nov. 4; visit **wedibuffalo.org** for hours and other information.

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