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## Smoke on the mountain

By Zach Taylor on Wednesday, September 4, 2024

### Duo starts cigar business at market



Tim Ganley and Vie Binga pose in front of the TR Cigars sign at Amy's Creek Farmer's Market. The pair sells handmade cigars from the market on the weekends and most weekdays, weather permitting. ZACH TAYLOR/Staff

A pair of now-northeast Georgians from St. Petersburg, Florida, sell handmade cigars at a local farmer's market on HWY 17.

Tim Ganley opens up another entrepreneurial venture, this time in the cigar world.

After a five-year career in the United States Coast Guard, 11 years in law enforcement, and 23 years as an entrepreneur, owning a personal training, water sports, and yoga studio, Ganley has moved into the world of cigars full-time.

Vie Banga, Ganley's partner, was born and raised in Greece. She moved to St. Petersburg to pursue a mathematics and software engineering graduate degree. She then thrived in the fitness space, pursuing a yoga teaching career at Ganley's studio while practicing ayurveda, a type of holistic medicine.

Ganley has enjoyed cigars throughout most of his life. Starting at a young age.

"I started smoking cigars when I was 14, and throughout all of my careers, I smoked cigars. When COVID hit, we had to close our yoga studios and personal training studios because of social distancing," said Ganley.

After the move to the mountains, a local cigar shop, Chief's, closed down. The closing of Cheif's opened the market for handmade cigars.

"Chief's had closed, and we just started having an interest. A friend of ours retired from the military, moved to the Dominican Republic and decided he hated retirement. So, he started a cigar business. He kind of talked us into doing this, but it wasn't that hard to twist our arms," said Ganley.

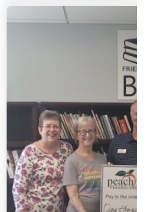
There are many different types of cigars from all over the world. The pair sells handmade cigars from many retailers, including legacy shops, boutiques and other mainstream and small-batch companies.



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“Legacy cigar companies are those that have been around since the 1800s. Basically everyone who smokes cigars knows of them. We also carry what is considered boutique or craft cigars, and those are companies that have less than ten years of production,” said Ganley. “They make great cigars, but they don’t really make a lot of them.”

Ganley said true, handmade cigars have no machine interaction whatsoever. The cigars go through roughly 25-50 different hands, from picking the tobacco to rolling the final product. Some companies require years of experience in the industry before allowing someone to hand-roll cigars.

“Rolling a cigar is an art. If they (cigar rollers) roll it too tight, the draw will be terrible. But, if it’s rolled too loose, it will burn too quickly and get hot too quickly. It will not be a good experience,” said Ganley. “All of these companies are looking for the best rollers to create cigars into art.”

Cigars are temperature and humidity-sensitive, causing different and sometimes unwanted results when not stored correctly. TR Cigars has a state-of-the-art humidor to keep the cigars at 70 degrees and between 62 and 70 percent humidity.

“If the cigar is too dry or the humidity is too low, it will burn too quickly. If the humidity is too high, it will constantly go out.”

Banga is just as passionate about cigars’ social aspect as their medicinal aspect. With her background in holistic medicine, she has taken a different approach to the wide world of cigars.

“It’s considered a nootropic. Which means it shifts the mind. We used cigars for contemplation and meditation in our studio in Florida,” she said.

The dynamic duo uses their home as a base of operation and travels to Amy’s Creek Farmer’s Market for sales. Customers can find the duo selling luxury cigars in a booth with a TR Cigars sign on a nearby pickup truck every weekend, weather permitting.



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