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## 'I love reading. I love plants': New shop brings books and botanicals to Old Town

By MOLLY WILLIAMS The Winchester Star

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The idea was simple.

Ashley Hoffman loves reading, and she also loves plants.

What could be better than a space dedicated to her two favorite things?

And what better place to set up shop than a storefront in downtown Winchester?

Enter Moon and Moss, an independent bookstore dedicated to romance novels and houseplants that is one of Old Town's newest businesses. It officially opened its doors on April 11.

"I wanted to create a space where everyone felt comfortable reading, no matter what they like to read," said Hoffman, the store's owner, "whether it's fantasy, dark romance, anything like that. I just wanted a space that felt welcome to everyone."

Step inside Moon and Moss and you'll find floor-to-ceiling literary offerings spanning a variety of niche genres.

The shelves house stories for romance lovers of all orders, whether you dream of thumbing through a classic beach read or prefer to immerse yourself in a creative fantasy world.

There's also a section entirely dedicated to local authors, Hoffman noted.

"I like to highlight local authors," she said. "I think that's huge."

And while books line the walls at Moon and Moss, there's far more to browse as you move through the store.

Accessories, stickers, candles and jewelry are displayed on shelves and tables.

Once you make it to the back room, leaves of all shapes and sizes sit ready to brighten up your home.

"You know, a plant looks great on a bookshelf," said Hoffman. "So they kind of complement each other."

Hoffman works in an orthodontist's office, so owning and operating a small business is new territory for her.

"I don't think everyone realizes what goes into a small business. So it's definitely a humbling experience," she said.

That said, the response to Moon and Moss since it's opening has been "really, really impressive and really heartfelt," Hoffman said.

That may, in part, be because the store taps into a trend that has taken social media by storm.

"BookTok," as some call it, refers to a community of readers, largely women, who exchange thoughts and information about popular reads, which are often romance-based, online.

Hoffman said she thinks capitalizing on the popularity of such books, as well as the community surrounding them, in the Winchester area is a big reason why Moon and Moss has had "such a great experience so far."

"The book girls, we like to call each other, they rally," she said.

As the business continues to make its name downtown, Hoffman said she hopes to continue emphasizing that community aspect.

A book club, she said, "is definitely on the horizon," and she would love to host author signing events as well.

Right now, though, Hoffman just hopes that anyone who walks into her store feels welcome, and like everything they want is at their fingertips.

"I want you to feel like this is the place to be," she said. "This is your place, your home here."

Moon and Moss-Romance Books and Botanicals is located at 102 S. Loudoun St. on the Loudoun Street Mall.

Hours of operation are Thursday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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— Contact Molly Williams at [mwilliams@winchesterstar.com](mailto:mwilliams@winchesterstar.com)

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Molly Williams