

Durham's startup art scene

Runaway Clothes brings creative entrepreneurship to Bull City.

By Avery Rodriguez
The Durham VOICE

Runaway Clothes supports and showcases the Durham art scene, while working to create opportunities for future generations.

The Durham-based clothing company reflects a new wave of startups, many run by female and minority entrepreneurs, that have grown and brought business to the area.

Durham native Gabe Eng-Goetz founded Runaway in 2011 and brought on partners like Justin Laidlaw to keep up with the growing operation after the store took off.

Since joining the company in 2014, Laidlaw said, he's worked to support both the business and the community.

"We'd love for Durham and really the Triangle as a whole to be seen as a place where creative entrepreneurship is possible," Laidlaw said. "You don't have to go to the huge major markets to be a successful creative entrepreneur."

Runaway has contributed to local- and state-level programs to create opportunities for future generations.

"We'd like to create a foundation where kids that grow up in the area or maybe move to the area for school feel like they can pursue their creative interests in Durham," Laidlaw said. "If we can use Runaway to give back in some way to the growing arts community in the public school system, I think we would be doing our job."

Runaway has partnered with the Durham Arts Council, sponsored events such as Skate Away the Hate for victims of domestic violence, and currently campaigns with the North Carolinians Against Gun Violence.

"I think it's nice that Durham has stuck with a lot more independent businesses as opposed to bringing in the chains," said Durham resident Jeff Stern. "I think here



Justin Laidlaw and a coworker man the front desk at Runaway. The flagship store in Durham showcases Bull City-inspired clothing and art exhibits.

it's clear that the art scene influences the products and the products influence the art scene."

Runaway also hosts art exhibits by local artists online and in its storefront. The current exhibit celebrates the work of documentary photographer Carter McCall and his coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis.

Runaway regularly collaborates with other North Carolina artists, such as Chapel Thrill, to consistently showcase unique and new talent in the area.

Monet Marshall, an employee with Blackspace, a startup aimed at empowering and providing opportunities to young minorities in the area, said she supported Runaway's effort to unite the community.

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Justin Laidlaw

"There's something really dope about having things that we can wear to both show our pride in Durham and that are really specific to us," Marshall said. "When I put on one of my Runaway T-shirts, I know it's going to be about Durham today and loving Durham and all of Durham, not just the cool downtown part."