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Selling Smiles and Coffee

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SELLING
SMILES
AND COFFEE
As he stood behind the counter, dressed in all black, his orange and pink shoelaces matching the neon Dunkin’ Donuts sign hanging above, Vernon Joseph focused on the latte he was making.

Almost every morning at 7:30, Joseph arrives at Dunkin’ Donuts in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Adele Coryell Hall Learning Commons to work his shift as general manager.

Joseph said he started working for the coffee chain in 2014 to make extra money, but he said he loved the fast-paced environment and the positive impact he could make on people with a coffee and a smile. He decided to pick it up as a full-time job so he could have that positive impact all the time.

“I was talking to a girl, and she asked what I did,” Joseph said. “When I told her I worked at Dunkin’ Donuts, she said, ‘You sell smiles.’ Because when someone’s going to work, going to the mall or coming home from work, we have a chance to make their day good.”

Employee and senior English major Erin Martinez said she has developed a close and playful friendship with him since beginning last year. When the job gets stressful because everyone wants their coffee at once, Martinez said Joseph always makes work more manageable.

“He’s really fun, and he’s a really good boss. He really knows what he’s doing here, and he does a good job at his work,” she said. “He makes it fun, but also really easy for you too because he’s so good at showing you how to do things the right way. Even if you mess up, he’ll just poke fun at you a little bit. He just makes it a good time.”

Joseph said he always enjoys spending time with his employees. He said the small things they do to make work more enjoyable are his favorite memories.

"Last year, several of my staff members dressed up for Halloween," he said. "That was pretty fun for the staff and the guests."

Though he enjoys making coffee the most, Joseph said a highlight of his day is when he makes the donuts fresh every afternoon, especially when he makes his favorites — the vanilla cream or double chocolate.

When he’s not standing in front of the espresso machine making drinks or in the kitchen frying donuts, Joseph said he can be found behind the register taking orders.

While he enjoys making the products they sell, Joseph said it’s always a great feeling when he has a longer conversation with a customer or when he remembers a regular’s order.

“Whenever we have a good laugh with a guest, that’s always a fun time,” he said. “There’s times where a guest comes up and you get to know their order. It’s just their usual, but sometimes we can get them to try something new, and that’s always fun.”

Joseph enjoys having a close relationship with his customers, but he said he also gets along well with his fellow workers.

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Though he worked at an Omaha location before switching to the UNL kiosk, Joseph said he can’t imagine leaving this location.

"The interactions I have with the guests — students, faculty and staff — are the best parts of my job," he said. "Getting to chat for a little bit with people from different parts of the country and world is really rewarding."

Joseph said he feels his job is the most valuable is at the end of the day, when he’s working until 1 a.m. and the library only has a few lingering students. No matter how tired or stressed the students are, he said it’s a great feeling to know he can brighten their spirits with a cup of coffee.

"In this environment when it’s 10 o’clock at night, 11 o’clock at night, study sessions are going on and someone comes over to get a donut, bagel or drink to keep them going all night until 2 when it’s time to go home," Joseph said, "we can keep them running and make just a little small part of someone’s day a little lighter." «