

The Bulletin

Remembering the Arb at Tappan Square



Morgan Smith, general manager of the Arb at Tappan Square, stands in the restaurant.

Photo courtesy of Aaron Morales Dolich

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Oberlin eatery The Arb at Tappan Square, where Oberlin residents and students were able to conveniently pick up sandwiches, smoothies, and salads, closed its door this past July.

Owners Henry and Morgan Smith started the business in late 2020 despite the uncertain future for Oberlin businesses. They acquired the space with the intention of opening a smoke shop, but shifted into providing healthy foods. Starting off with five staff members, the restaurant was one of two Black-owned businesses opened downtown during the pandemic.

By the time of its closure, the staff size had more than doubled to 14 people. In an interview with the *Review*, Henry Smith discussed how inflation and labor costs made it difficult to maintain his business, especially over the summer. He added that when students are absent, there is a 40 percent drop in business.

"It got to a point where it didn't make business sense anymore," Smith said. "It was a hard decision to close at that point."

Raised in Oberlin, Smith has tried his hand in other business ventures. He has worked in the music industry and owned a record store in town from 2000–2002. He's also worked on restaurants in Cleveland and in home renovations. Currently, he owns and operates Doobie's Smoke Shop on West College Street.



Henry Smith and his family pose in the Arb space.

Photo courtesy of Brooke Madison

As a lifelong entrepreneur, Smith is not closed off to the idea of opening another restaurant in Oberlin.

"Maybe one day again we'll revisit and do another restaurant in Oberlin," he said. "It is a great unique place for both students and community, and this is our home, so we like to protect home."

The restaurant provided a space of community for everyone residing in Oberlin. Conservatory students and local artists were able to use The Arb as a place to perform. In May, local artists Mila Brown, College fourth-year

Chemutai Ruto, and Conservatory group HopScotch With The Homies performed. Smith also invited students from Oberlin City Schools to tour The Arb, try the menu, and learn about the restaurant industry.

Ryan Beatty, OC '24, spoke to the *Review* about the restaurant's convenience and flavorful food. They noted the quality of the hot sandwiches, complemented by The Arb's green goddess smoothie.

"Living in Oberlin over the summer this year, I loved having it within walking distance. I cannot express how good

it felt to wake up at noon after a night out and go to The Arb," they wrote. "A trip to The Arb could be two meals or could just be a little pit stop and either way would be absolutely satisfying."

Employee Kianna Sebree worked at The Arb during its four-year run, and noted the impact it had on her life.

"I am already missing my experience there, I'll never forget The Arb," she wrote.

