

Kukulu Market

Assefa Retta came to this country from Ethiopia in November 1999. Prior to leaving his country, he and his family ran a grocery store for several years. While waiting for the opportunity to immigrate to the United States, his family continued to operate the store back home.



After arriving in the US, and preparing for his family to join him, Mr. Retta became involved with the Ethiopian community who provided him with advice and support as he settled on the north side of Chicago. Mr. Retta's plan was to start a business like the one he owned back home. The Ethiopian Community Association is very helpful in supporting new refugees and they advised Mr. Retta to seek assistance from the Uptown Hull House Small Business Development Center for his business idea. The Uptown Hull House Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the US Small Business Administration.

When he was ready to open a small grocery store specializing in Ethiopian foods at the end of 2003, Mr. Retta met with Curt Roeschley the Director of the Center, and with Jennifer Sierenski, a counselor with the Uptown Hull House SBDC. Ms. Sierenski heard about Mr. Retta's dream

to open an Ethiopian market and worked closely with Mr. Retta in preparing his paperwork and making arrangements for the lease of the store. The SBDC and its partners also helped Mr. Retta secure a loan from the North Side Community Bank Federal Credit Union to purchase the necessary materials and equipment for the grocery store.

Mr. Retta's business, Kukulu Market is named after the Amharic word for the sound a rooster makes to announce the arrival of the morning or more familiarly, a wake up call. The market is located at 6129 North Broadway in the Edgewater neighborhood of Chicago.

"Jennifer is a nice person, and she helped me understand how to pay back the loan, prepare all the business reports, and helped me find a good location for my grocery" said Mr. Retta. "Jennifer reviewed my business plan, edited and rewrote parts of it, and went with me to the bank when I applied for my loan. Everyone at the SBDC has been so helpful and supportive" he added. Today, both Mr. and Mrs. Retta work at the grocery. During college breaks, their children assist their parents in running the market.

The market, although quite small, is in an excellent visible location. Kukulu Market stocks ethnic specialty products for the Ethiopian community, including traditional and cultural Ethiopian spices, butter, and Injera, a special bread often found in Ethiopian homes. Injera is unique to Ethiopia and a staple food and source of carbohydrates. Injera is a large circular shaped, thin bread made of Teff grain flour. Teff is highly nutritious, tasty and the smallest grain in the world. Teff flour has for centuries been a favorite food of highland Ethiopia. Both the Tiff flour and Injera bread are found at Kukulu Market.

The store also stocks the usual general and convenience store items including candy, drinks, snack items, coffee and tea. Ethiopian coffee, which according to Mr. Retta, is the best in the world. Wild coffee was originally found in one of the regions of Ethiopia called Kaffa. Kukulu Market carries the two best varieties of Ethiopian coffees--Sidamo (Yirgacheff) and Harar (Mechara, Gelemos and Bedesa) says Mr. Retta. The Market offers these coffees green, roasted or ground. Kukulu Market also stocks videos and CD's of traditional Ethiopian music.

Kukulu Market is an Illinois lottery retailer, and sells phone cards and cigarettes. Mr. Retta is also an agent for Money Gram International Money Transfer, so that Ethiopian community members can wire funds home to friends and family there. Open since November 2003, the market has found its niche with the local Ethiopian community and with others in the neighborhood. "There is so much opportunity in America. It is much easier to run a business here, and we have had no problem starting our business. The advice we got from the SBDC has been great" said Mr. Retta. He hopes that his experience with the grocery store is a "stepping stone for the future" for him and his family.

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