

Episode 148: The sweeter side of Dinkytown

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Dinkytown has a unique culture where some businesses foster community through free treats and covert trades while student workers find camaraderie amidst their college experiences.

SANIAH BATES: Hey guys, my name is Saniah Bates and I'm your host from the Minnesota Daily. Right now you're listening to In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota by students, for students.

Whenever you visit Dinkytown, what do you think of? Is it the stores? The restaurants? The students? What if you considered all of those factors? The stores, the restaurants and the students? Well, Dinkytown's culture is like that of no other, acting as the center of Minneapolis student life here at the University of Minnesota. Even if you're someone who doesn't attend the U, you may just find yourself exploring this bustling college town.

With a mix of small clothing stores, cafes and casual bars, Dinkytown has become a staple in the lives of those who attend the University, live near it or visit frequently. Its close proximity to several of the Gopher's sporting arenas such as Williams Arena and 3M Arena at Mariucci has also fostered a place for Gopher sports lovers to congregate before and after games. Bringing in people from all walks of life, Dinkytown undoubtedly has a community worth talking about.

Everyone and everything in Dinky is connected in one way or another. Whether it's where you go to get your coffee every morning, or who might be serving you a nice warm cookie! Lance Kociemba, one of the managers at Insomnia Cookies, is always eager to give away cookies, as they bring a different kind of joy to his daily life.

LANCE KOCIEMBA: Cookies bring joy to people, and I love giving away free cookies. I love giving those to customers because a free cookie makes someone's day. And just to see people smile is just I love customer service, but like, you know, Walmart and all those places, people are a lot less happy. And so many people are always just happy because, you know, we got delicious cookies. They're just happy to be here. So, definitely giving people a smile every day and just being in a really happy environment.

BATES: While Insomnia gives out free cookies to customers every now and then, say, when someone breaks their newly bought cookie or the managing staff are feeling generous, they also give away cookies to those who are in need. According to Kociemba, Dinkytown

Insomnia often gives away free cookies to Halfway Houses, which are community based rehabilitation facilities that aid recently incarcerated individuals in returning to society.

KOCIEMBA: Halfway houses are, they're stepping into a society where it's like, maybe in between jail and like in between like real life where it's like, they need the most support right then and there. So like, you know, cookies. They always come in and tell us how much they love our cookies. We give them a lot of free cookies. And so that's also something I love doing. Just, you know, giving free cookies to the halfway house because those guys always, all those guys appreciate it.

BATES: Once again, Dinkytown is a perfect example of your classic college town. Unlike other towns around Minnesota, the average age in Dinkytown is usually somewhere between 18 and 22, making the college town, well, a college town! The youth in Dinky keeps its bustling streets packed at all times, whether it's 8 a.m. or 2 a.m., there'll always be kids out on the town. And that's something that makes running a cookie shop in a college town so unique in comparison to running one in another town elsewhere.

KOCIEMBA: I think, it sounds bad, but like the youth. Like everyone just, I mean I used to live up north, you know, average age 73, you know, there's a lot of old people. But here it's like, you look around, there's young, youthful people, happy. And you know, nothing wrong with old people. I like, you know, there's no, you know, it's just nice to see people my own age compared to up north.

BATES: Speaking of a college town being like none other, there's a unique trading system within Dinkytown that we're sure not everyone is aware of. That's right, the different restaurants in Dinky give goods and services to each other, just as they do to you, the everyday customer. Cherry Bailey, one of the managers at Jimmy John's right next door to Insomnia says that the two restaurants enjoy trading, but like to keep their transactions lowkey.

CHERRY BAILEY: We just do it because sometimes the employees want to eat something different. So that's our way of treating our employees to different type of food other than eating our food here. We kind of just like, hey, you want to trade our food off like that. But we kind of stirred not to doing trade like that because it kind of messes up the inventory with the food.

Yeah, we try to can kind of keep the trade kind of minimum as far as like, hey, you can trade just your sandwich. Don't trade a whole like Party platter or something like that. Party platter worth which is like 60 worth for food. So we try not to do that versus just \$10. Keep it minimal.

KOCIEMBA: Cruncheese and us also have a partnership where we always give each other free food, even if we're not trading, just if they walk in there they get free cookies here and we just get, I don't know, we just do a lot of trades. That's about it, that's about it, but I guess

Blarney's also, we get to cut the line at Blarney's, but that's, I can't really think of what else with other community, other stores.

BATES: But of course, these lovely businesses love serving you just as much as they love serving each other. Both Insomnia Cookies and Jimmy John's are food joints that stay open pretty late. Loads of different people make their way through the both of them, especially rowdy college kids after a night of drinking or coming from a big game!

BAILEY: Like, once the, like, Spring Jam happens, those are my fun times working here. The games are pretty much fun. Dealing with all the drunk kids is fun for me. I don't know, but some people don't like working when it's busy, but I, me, personally, I love working when there's a big rush here.

Late night bar rushes are very fun. You get to see all the kids on their drunk hours just walking around, eating their sandwiches in weird ways. Like I've seen some just eat it upside down. Yeah, I've seen weird ways on how they eat their sandwich when they're drunk and how they act when they're drunk. So yeah, the night rushes will be fun.

BATES: Alongside all of the workers having a blast getting to collaborate with each other and serve in a college community, there are also students within these establishments who are getting the Dinkytown insider experience, too. Sifaan Biru, an employee at Cruncheese, has gotten to experience all of Dinkytown's ins and outs being both a student attending the U and someone working within the Dinky business scene.

SIFAAN BIRU: There's a really nice community in Dinkytown. I work with a friend and it's really nice getting to see her and able to like, you know, work and talk between the slow hours. I've gotten like close with my other coworkers. It's like close knit community. I don't feel like I'm scared to like ask for like days off or anything compared to like my other jobs. I feel more relaxed.

Just like bonding with all my coworkers because we all like have We're all students, so we just bond over like, teacher trauma, or like, weird roommates, and just like, be able to like, talk with each other, and like, just feel a little bit, like, free within our shift. It feels like more than the family, more than like just, you know, just a bunch of businesses that are separate.

BATES: So, the next time you take a trip to Dinkytown, take some time to think about your surroundings— you just might discover that you're part of something much bigger than just a little college town!

This episode was written by Saniah Bates and produced by Kaylie Sirovy. As always, we appreciate you listening in and feel free to leave us an email at podcasting@mndaily.com with comments, questions or concerns. I'm Saniah, and this is In The Know.

