

service, and deeply knowledgeable staff who are a trusted source for nutritional and wellness information. In a nod to this success, Mastel's was named 2021's Retailer of the Year by Vitamin Retailer Magazine. Learn more [here](#).

**Mountain Harvest Community Market** became an INFRA Member on August 2, 2023. Their fast-growing natural food store is well-loved in the Salmon, ID, community. In 2021, Mountain Harvest won a KeHE contest – resulting in their store being featured as the community profile on the Cadia coffee bag. Mountain Harvest is a fast-growing family business that believes the independent grocer is an investment into the community, and nothing is more rewarding than being part of a growing, thriving, sustainable culture. Learn more [here](#).

**Super Value Nutrition** joined INFRA on August 2, 2023. The two Sarasota, FL, stores have been family owned since the first store opened in 1977. Their goal is to promote physical and mental wellness at an affordable price, aiming to educate their community along the way. Super Value's robust supplement department exemplifies their mission and dedication to their customers. Learn more [here](#).

**Treebird Market** joined INFRA on August 2, 2023. The Hood River, OR, store is a vibrant place for the community to gather. Their mission is to build a resilient local and regional food system that provides fresh, healthy, and delicious products while increasing access to good food for all. Treebird prides themselves on its unique approach to natural food, supportive stance on the health of local farmers, and growing customer base. Learn more [here](#).

**Essence of Health**, a health food store and juice bar in Easton, PA became an INFRA Member on August 3, 2023. Their friendly staff and great customer service is well known throughout the community – with the same loyal community members following them to a new, spacious building. Voted Best Health Food Store by Reader's Choice 6 years running, the passion of their staff radiates throughout the store. Learn more [here](#).

**Heaven's Peak Organic Market** in Eureka, MT, joined INFRA Membership on August 3, 2023. Their store serves the Northwest Montana area with products from local artisans and monthly events. They will be opening a second location later this year in Libby, MT, with the hope of engaging a new community with natural food and a place to gather. Learn more [here](#).

## Walking the Walk with Kindred Market

What is the role of the independent natural grocer? How does a local business position itself as a community hub? They're interesting questions with interesting answers that differ from business to business and community to community.

We're joined by one business that is answering those questions. Kindred Market, the collective brainchild of the Kinnard family, has only been open since 2019, but you'd never know it. Their philosophy of business, the store itself, and the staff running it are as vibrant as the community they serve. That's no small feat – Athens, the small college town in rural southern Ohio that Kindred Market calls home, has a reputation for effervescence.

Kindred Market recently won the 2023 INFRA Brix Award for Equitable Access in recognition of all that they do to feed their community and keep natural food accessible. Athens, local food friendly as it may be, does not have many options for natural food. When Kindred Market stepped onto the scene, that all changed.

"We create access to these products that a lot of people in our community wouldn't be able to find otherwise," said Riley Kinnard, Kindred Market General Manager. "People are ordering these things online or driving to Columbus to get things that they can get here." For reference, it's more than an hour's drive from Athens to Columbus, one way.

For Kindred Market, however, access is just one part of the mission.

"I think that our small independent grocer in a town like ours is creating community," Riley continued. "It's providing access to the products and vendors in a positive way and in a way that creates positive impact... And it creates this positive, vibrant space around it. When people come here... they're given energy, and they feel good when they leave."

Kindred Market is self-described as a "conscious retailer," which means many things. "That means that we are actively working with companies, vendors that have sustainable practices, treat their employees well, and are contributing to the greater good," said Riley. Ashley Eastman, Kindred Market's Wellness Manager continued: "There are so many layers to that. How we relate to our community, to our customers, amongst ourselves, and also the types of products we bring in. We are doing our best to walk the walk."



It also means that Kindred Market provides resources to shoppers so they can be conscious consumers. Robust website resources and shelf talkers make it easy for shoppers to prioritize local, women-owned, Black-owned, and LGBTQ+-owned companies. Emphasis on robustness – their resources are enough that a shopper could finish their shopping list with just women-owned, just local, or just Black-owned brands.

Kindred Market has been walking the walk for four years now, and there are no plans of slowing down. Independent natural food retailers are positioned to fill unique roles in their respective communities. Riley and the Kindred team recognize that, as one of the very few natural food retailers in Athens – a town of about 20,000 – Kindred Market can evolve to fill many community needs.

"I'd love to offer fun and educational classes or expand the building," Riley shared as she thought of the ways Kindred Market can evolve as it grows. "A yoga studio... a workspace or a community space. I think it would just be about deepening our connection in the community and cultivating all those ideas."

Kindred Market's vision of the future is one of mindful, conscious growth – growth not for growth's sake as under traditional models, but growth for the community's sake. Of course, they need to move product and make money (what retailer doesn't?), but a conscious retailer can grow intentionally. How does the business impact the community? How do business decisions benefit the community? What about the supply chain? Are the impacts positive? These are the questions that guide decisions made at Kindred Market as they walk the walk.

It's for all these reasons that Kindred Market was the obvious choice for the 2023 INFRA Brix Award for Equitable Access. Their philosophy is so baked into Kindred's DNA that Riley and Ashley, while sitting in the audience listening to their INFRA Member Business Advisor John Fieldstrom introduce them, did not even realize that their business had earned the recognition of their peers.

"We were totally blown away," Riley said. "I'm new to the business... my store is four years old. The decisions I've made... A lot of them have been ideas that the staff brought to the table or reflections of the culture of our town... I was surprised to learn that we deserved recognition at that level."

In other words, Kindred Market's commitment to equitable access is so intuitive to them that they never saw themselves as standouts – just a conscious retailer doing conscious retailer things. As we closed out our talks, we wanted to know the biggest lessons Riley and Ashley have learned on their journey together.

"That I can have an idea," Ashley said. "I can be very nervous about presenting it to our group... And maybe even thinking, maybe I shouldn't do that. And still taking a deep breath and saying [the idea anyway]. Because that's how we got here. That's how we're doing it."

"Self-care and taking good care of myself is really important," Riley said in speaking of the culture at Kindred and balancing expectations of work and rest. "I tend to burn the candle at both ends. I want everybody that works here to apply themselves and work hard. But if you're not setting an example for a healthy work-life balance and you're the person at the helm of the organization, then you're not doing your job."

Riley added one more lesson that can be as easily applied to any part of life as it can to her own experiences that she references: "It's really important to be conscious of the energy you bring into your work environment... A tiny seed of negativity planted here or planted there; I can just watch it grow. But then... being positive and connective and doing good things, it just wants to live here and be in the space, so you don't do anything to stifle it. And it will flourish."

It's safe to say that the seeds of positive energy have already begun to flourish. Though they have won the 2023 Equitable Access Brix Award, their continual championing of accessibility and inclusion is not a recent change, nor do they see it as exceptional. At Kindred, that's just the intuitive, day-to-day philosophy – from their founding in 2019 and into the future as they continue to grow and evolve in the Athens, Ohio community. Find Kindred Market [online](#)!