

# LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

2025 Q2



## LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOUNDATION AWARDS

and the Lawrence Magnet - Returning to start a New Chapter



# Returning With a Purpose

The energy, intellect and sense of community in Lawrence draw people of all ages back here to live and run businesses.

by Emily Mulligan, photos by Steven Hertzog  
and contributed by Pope and Grace

Lawrence has a magnetic quality for people, there's no doubt about that. Between with the University, Downtown, the people and countless other community amenities, this little town pulls people in from near and far.

Many people come to Lawrence for the four- (or five- or six-) year stint of a college education. Others come for longer to be the teachers or administrators of that education, whether for their full career or a slice of it, bringing with them families who immerse themselves in schools and the community. Lawrence's businesses and neighborhoods further attract people in all phases of their lives, both higher-education-related and not, to bask in the energy and intellect of all the town has to offer.

It's no wonder that Lawrence also has been known to have a boomerang effect of sorts. People are here for college or for a job, then they leave, all the while still feeling a call to return. Some do return, but not all return to Lawrence and launch a new business, as both Shantel Grace and Amy Pope have done.

Grace is the co-owner of Ramen Bowls restaurant, and Pope is the owner of Repetition Coffee. Both native Kansans, the women each came to Lawrence to attend The University of Kansas (KU), then both left the state to pursue careers and additional schooling. It's fair to say that when they left, neither of them was sure they would ever return, nor did they know that they eventually would be proprietors of a restaurant and coffee roastery, respectively.

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Shantel Grace at the new Ramen Bowl location



## Roads Lead Away From Lawrence

Grace left Lawrence for Nashville, where she spent 10 years in music as a singer and songwriter. From there, she and her then-husband, Tim, moved to Hawaii for his job as a shipping consultant, where she discovered that happy hour in the Honolulu ramen shops provided delicious, fortifying food at a reasonable cost. As a graduate student in creative writing and editor for the *Honolulu Weekly*, the couple didn't have excess funds for dining out.

After a few years in Hawaii, Grace came back to Lawrence for Saint Patrick's Day in 2012. As dinnertime neared after a day full of celebrating, Grace yearned for a bowl of ramen. That was before the idea of ramen shops had taken hold in the continental U.S., so there was no ramen to behold in Lawrence except the 50-cent packages on grocery-store shelves. Thus, her idea was born: to orchestrate a return to Kansas with plans to open her own ramen shop.

"On the plane back to Hawaii that last time from Kansas, there was an article in the plane magazine about ramen," Grace says. "I talked to Tim, and within 24 hours, I had contacted a consultant; five or six days later, I had a business plan."

The couple's first son, Leo, was 9 months old at that point, and she says it was hard to have his grandparents an ocean away.

"Watching our families have to come all the way, and the pain of saying goodbye every time, I knew I couldn't do that," Grace says.

The ramen shop was their ticket back to Kansas and specifically back to Lawrence, where she had been longing to return since she'd first left for Nashville.

"I always knew I would come back, but I needed a purpose. Lawrence felt too special for me to just come back and not have anything to contribute," Grace says.

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Amy Pope top to bottom:  
Popayán, Colombia 2016 -  
Sourcing coffee with Café  
Imports in the heart of the  
jungle in Cauca - an area  
that most Colombians  
don't get to see.

Nango, Japan 2003 -  
Receiving my job title as  
Coordinator of International  
Relation for Nango Town  
Hall in Miyazaki.

Horseback somewhere  
in Honduras March 2020.  
Traveling with List &  
Biesler to source coffee.



Shantel Grace top to bottom:  
One of Shantel's early record covers,  
released in 2003, and propelling her  
Nashville music career which spanned  
from 1999-2008



Some at-home research with turkey red  
wheat noodles, foraged scallions, and  
chili prawns.



One of Shantel's longtime and most  
beloved employees, Shizuka Pirie,  
standing under the tent at a 4th of July  
ramen pop-up in 2014

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Pope left Lawrence, degree in hand, to take a job in Japan with the Japanese government. She had a degree in East Asian Studies and Japanese, and she began what would become a fruitful career and the pursuit of a career in diplomacy, which also led her to work in Spain and bicycle across South America.

In 2013, while working on a master's degree in international trade with a minor in peace studies in Paris, Pope's father fell terminally ill. Doctors thought he only had hours or days to live, so she flew back from Paris to be with her family and her dad in Topeka. As it turned out, he lived 10 more years, but, "I started to realize the gravity of the situation and that my family would need me," she explains.

So Pope decided to stay and got a job at a bank in Topeka for what turned into two years. Then, seeing that she was going to need to be in Kansas with her family for the duration of her dad's protracted battle, she decided to start a business. In 2015, she started Repetition Coffee with her then-husband, Ryan Pope.

"I had to find the correct profession; otherwise, I'm in Lawrence spinning my wheels trying to have an international career. Lawrence was the best place I could be for a small business, and I could create an international career for myself from here," she says.

## Landing on a Business in Lawrence

Grace returned to Lawrence and secured a Small Business Administration loan from Intrust Bank to open the ramen shop. The loan took about six months, and, "We should've asked for three times the amount, but we didn't know," she says.

The Graces rented an apartment for their small family, and they looked at countless potential locations for their shop. Grace says she wanted to be downtown, so when they saw the space at 125 E. 10th St., in spite of it having the reputation as a "cursed" restaurant location, Grace knew the small, quirky spot could work.

"It reminded me of the old ramen shops in Hawaii. The prices of rent in downtown terrified me, but working with the independent landlords in Lawrence was a really good experience," she says.

Ramen Bowls opened in 2013, and Grace says the restaurant reached a turning point at about the four-year mark.

"For the first three-plus years, it was the biggest challenge of my life. The work, the stress, the nonstop adrenaline rush of restaurant life is beyond anything I imagined," she explains.



Grace launched Luckyberry in 2017 at Ninth and Massachusetts streets, which closed in 2019. Then she had the opportunity in 2017 to move Ramen Bowls to 918 Mass. St. from its long-outgrown spot. Now, the restaurant is at 900 New Hampshire St., where it has been since 2024.

As Pope came to grips with her father's illness and the necessity of being close to her family, she needed to find a way to combine her international experiences and desire for travel with launching a small business.

"Coffee ticks all my boxes. I studied conflict resolution, which came in handy particularly with the Colombian peace agreement [in 2016]. The coffee belt has a lot of conflict plus the effects of climate change. Going to Kenya and Uganda, I use my understanding of the colonial structure and supply chain. I'm getting to use foreign languages and culturally explore the world," she says.

Though Pope's business and the actual coffee roasting take place in Lawrence at her facility at 512 E. Ninth St., Suite C, she travels internationally to build and maintain relationships with coffee growers and suppliers. Even her dad was part of the operation, helping her bag coffee beans for a few years before he passed away.

She says she benefits directly from being in Lawrence, both because of the University and because of the larger community. She has taught one-day courses on international business at KU, where she answers questions from students about issues in international trade and the worldwide coffee industry. And she says the size of Lawrence means that the same people and entities who are her competitors are also her friends and neighbors.

"We don't have coffee competition here, we have coffee community," Pope says.

# Firmly Rooted

Ramen Bowls has 55 employees and is open seven days a week. The newest location has an expanded bar and outdoor spaces, and Grace says the restaurant offers catering, as well.

In 2021, Grace opened Saltwell Farm Kitchen in Overbrook after renovating a dilapidated farmhouse and transforming it into a unique dining experience alongside co-owner and head chef Rozz Petrozz. She oversees both the operations at Ramen Bowls and manages service and the front of house at Saltwell.

Repetition Coffee roasts and sells its coffee wholesale to stores and restaurants around the region. The company employs five people in addition to Pope, and in 2024, Repetition sold about one shipping container of coffee, she says.

As a business owner, Pope feels a responsibility to be part of the larger community beyond coffee. She rents out part of her space as an incubator program for small businesses, and she has housed the nonprofit Honor Moon period pantry in the space for several years.

The incubator has space for four small businesses each to operate a



Amy Pope roasting coffee beans at Repetition

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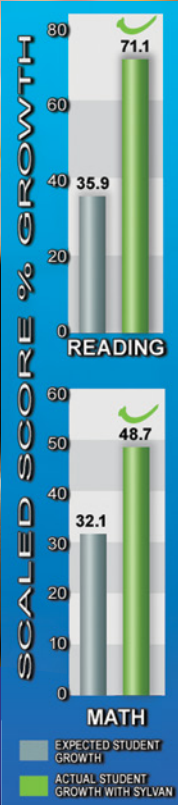
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Evening service at Saltwell making sure chef Rozz's beet & goat cheese crostinis are garnished with a little extra sparkle.



The aperitif was called, "For Women Who Can't Get a Loan Without the Signature of a Man!" Originally made with yellow and green chartreuse, (made by Carthusian monks with extremely limited production), dandelion liqueur, and bitter Malört.



Shantel and her 76-year old father, Glenn Ringler, standing in front of the wheat truck she drove during harvest as a teenager. He continues to farm heirloom wheat for his daughter's noodle shop as well as Freestate Brewery.

storefront with low monthly rent and access to any of Repetition's resources. A few of the incubator businesses, such as The Nostalgia Room and Pocket Studio Creative, have moved out of Pope's incubator and into their own spaces. Groupie Candles and local artists Molly Murphy and Margo Jane are the current incubator occupants.

Now, Grace's and Pope's well-established businesses are integral and visible parts of the Lawrence scene that both residents and wannabe residents can look to as they consider staying in or returning to Lawrence. No telling how many Lawrence epiphanies will take place over a bowl of ramen or a cup of locally roasted coffee in the years to come. ▲



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