



BUSINESS

New Tacoma Mall store sells colorful socks and gives jobs to people with special needs

BY BECCA MOST

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Couple of Socks, which Jim Ciaciuch created to give employment opportunities to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, like his daughter, Molly. BY BRIAN HAYES

Jim Ciaciuch is on a mission to give employment opportunities to people with special needs. His store, [Couple of Socks](#), opened in the Tacoma Mall this month.

Next to Nordstrom is a small shop where the walls are covered in a colorful array of socks of every style and pattern. Some are food-related: Oreos, Coca Cola, Eggos,

Cheez-it and Fruit Loops-themed. Others reference hiking, sports, music, pop-culture, Disney or Bigfoot. A bin of loose single socks at the front of the store calls matching “Overrated!” and encourages customers to mix their favorite styles for \$9.

Couple of Socks is the product of years of planning, an idea Ciaciuch has been wanting to make a reality since his daughter Molly, who has autism, was 12 years old.

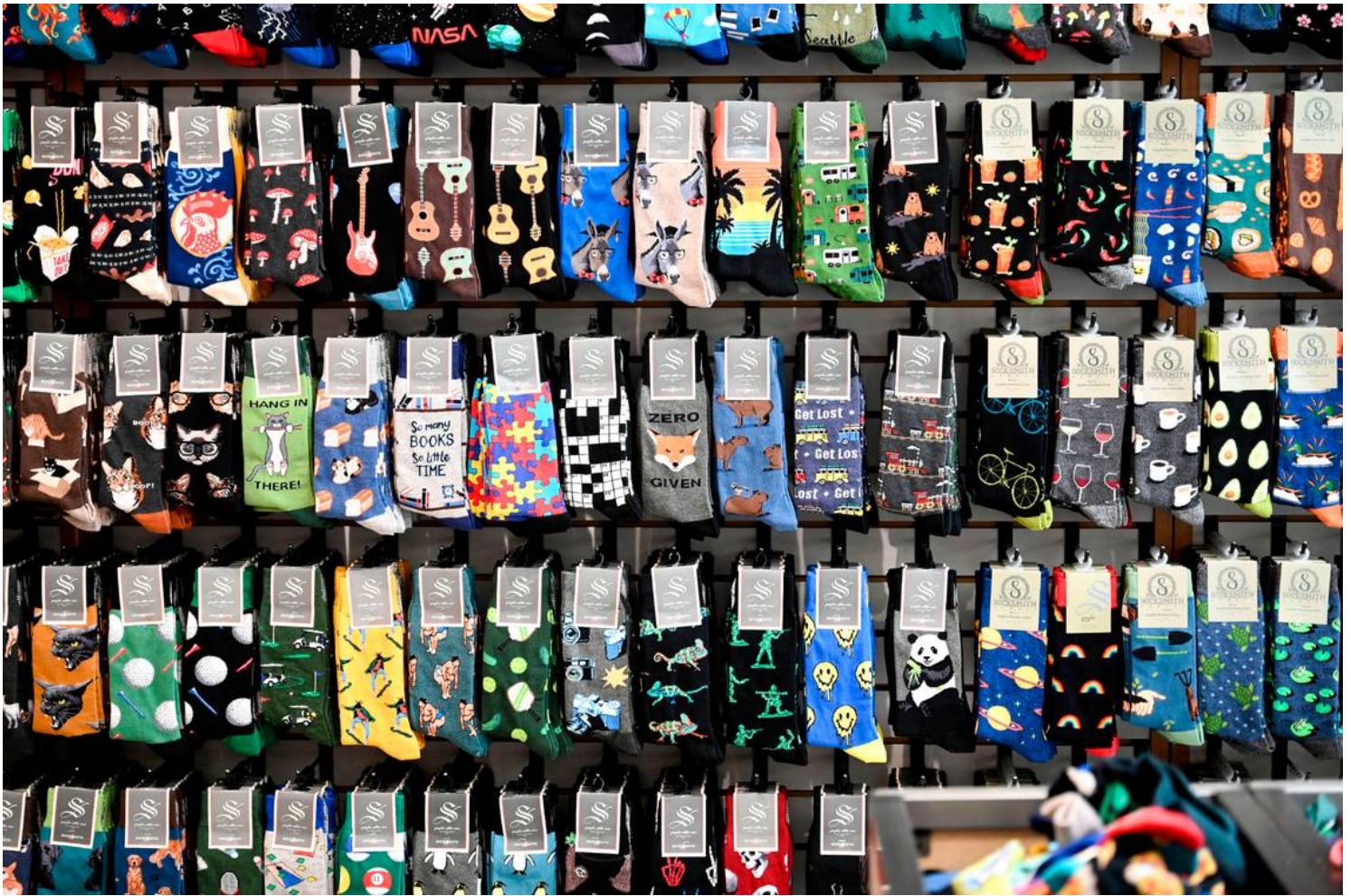
“Truthfully, a lot of times people like my daughter don’t get to [interact with people]. When she aged out of the school system, we tried for a while to get her a job. And all that popped up was a one-hour job at Jimmy John’s. One hour a week,” Ciaciuch said. “And what you find is most people that do have a job for people with special needs or disabilities, they have them doing more rudimentary things. I wanted this to be a place where they grow.”

Couple of Socks exists for the sole reason to give employment opportunities to people with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities, he said. Employees like Molly Ciaciuch, now 23, greet customers, operate the cash register and sort and unbox inventory, “because they can find that their value is not just picking up a broom, you know?” Ciaciuch said.

Employees do the work they’re able to, with flexible hours. All employees also make “well above” minimum wage, “and anything that we have extra goes back into the store, the staff,” Ciaciuch said. Managers do not have special needs but have worked with or been around people with special needs, he said.

Throughout his life Ciaciuch said he has watched his younger brother, who has Down syndrome, face discrimination. Fifty years later, Ciaciuch said discrimination and ignorance is still there, but he hopes to change that.

“I’m not trying to make this in-your-face, it’s more subtle. You come in to buy socks, but you’re going to slowly see as you’re here, some of the people are different. You know what, they’re kinder to you. They care that you’re here. You know, they’re smiling,” he said.



Owner Jim Ciaciuch opened Couple of Socks to give employment opportunities to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities like his daughter Molly Ciaciuch, Wednesday, July 26, 2023, in Tacoma. Brian Hayes bhayes@thenewstribune.com

With the rise in popularity of sock stores in recent years and the relatively straight-forward business model, Ciaciuch said he started setting money aside to open his own store when Molly was young. Ciaciuch owns some self storage properties and said Couple of Socks is profitable.

Since the shop opened, he's seen the positive impact. His employees have more confidence, and parents with special needs children who have stumbled upon the store have been moved to tears by their mission, Ciaciuch said.

"It still affects me," Ciaciuch said, choking up. "Because I never thought all we were doing was anything more than employing special people. But we're impacting people."

Manager Daniel Land said he loves helping staff be the best version of themselves.

“One of the things that I love about this place is helping our staff realize that they can do stuff they never thought they could, or that people had been telling them they couldn’t do because of something that’s not in their control,” Land said. “That’s the environment that I want to create.”

Couple of Socks offers a wide variety of sock styles, including compression socks, wide-calf, knee-high, crew, athletic, cotton, bamboo and seamless. Most socks range from \$12 to \$15, and kids socks are a bit cheaper.

(Molly said her favorite socks are the ones with unicorns on them.)

IF YOU GO:

- Hours: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Open noon to 6 p.m. Sunday
- Address: 4502 S. Steele St., Suite #1171, Tacoma
- Website: <https://coupleofsocks.com/>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/coupleofsocksofficial/>



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Becca Most is a reporter covering the Pierce County Council and other issues affecting Tacoma residents. Originally from the Midwest, Becca previously wrote about city and social issues in Central Minnesota, Minneapolis and St. Paul. Her work has been recognized by Gannett and the USA Today Network, as well as the Minnesota Newspaper Association where she won first place in arts, government/public affairs and investigative reporting in 2023.