



"I'm Caley Gunthrope, the sole owner of Apple Blossom Kombucha.

In my previous career, I was a teacher. Honestly, ever since elementary school I knew I wanted to be a PE teacher, so no surprise I ended up attending Grand Valley State University to study PE and Health Education. That's actually where I brewed my first kombucha: on top of my fridge when I was in college. My roommate thought I was going to die, of course. Not only did I not die, it turned out pretty good. So, I began to get more and more serious about it.

In 2018, I started my LCC and doing kombucha by the books. Allen Neighborhood Center was the only place where I could not only use the licensed kitchen to mix all the ingredients for the kombucha, but also ferment and store my product in a safe space. I remember Joan Nelson giving me a tour of the place and just helping me with everything from how to put sanitizer in a sink, to licensing and insurance. The first bottles I ever sold were at the Allen Farmers Market in the summer of 2019. I brought 16 bottles to the farmers market – which is so silly – and I sold out. It was such a joke! But doing the farmers market is really where I figured it out and where it clicked – especially using local ingredients that just taste better and are better for you.

I also supply kombucha as a Veggie Box add-on. I actually participated as a member of Veggie Box before I was ever a supplier to Veggie Box. I knew that I wanted all these amazing foods – veggies, eggs, and cheese – all year round! It was such a convenient way to support everyone. I thought about what it would look like to have a kombucha add-on, and I mentioned it to Kat. By the time the next season rolled around, Kat was like, 'So do we want to do this?' And the rest is history.

I was still a teacher, but it was when I got pregnant with my daughter that I decided to switch to part-time and started teaching Special Education in St. Johns. I also was also doing personal training – I've always done that. What can I say? I had a lot of side-gigs. But then I realized, man, this is even hard to juggle being a part-time teacher, a part-time kombucha brewer, part-time personal trainer, and full-time mom. Could I really drop teaching? I mean, I went to college for it, I've always wanted to be a teacher. But finally, I decided to pursue Apple Blossom Kombucha, full-time. And I don't regret it for a second. I may not be helping students, but I feel like I am helping the community and the farmers, and making people healthier and educating them about kombucha.

So what is kombucha? Kombucha is a fermented tea that has been around for thousands of years. I use a blend of green and black teas, and also add sugar and a SCOBY, and put it all together with cold water in the fermenter. You use a SCOBY – which stands for Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast – to eat the caffeine and sugar from the tea and create healthy bacteria.

The thing I'm most prideful of that I don't think people truly understand, is supporting hyper-local. Not only are my glass bottles local, but it's someone in Michigan who actually prints them – even my designer lives down the street. But I also source my ingredients locally as well. I'm not using juices or doing forced carbonation, I'm buying sustainably grown, seasonal, Michigan produce from people I know. I want to support Tony and Sarah, Steve and Emma, Nate and Aliza. Sure, it's not the most cost effective, but you have to think about the magnitude of what it all means...

You can find me all over Lansing: the three LFA locations, Foods for Living, Horrocks, Tom's Food Center, Capital City Market, Old Town General Store, Abundance Café, Menu Bubble, Oh Mi Organics, Campbell's Market Basket, Ham Sweet Farm, 517 Coffee, and ANC's Veggie Box.

Once you're in with Allen Neighborhood Center, you're in with the community. With the Allen Place development, they're making it so people in the neighborhood will have housing, a grocery store, Veggie Box, a health clinic, a farmers market, and so many social programs. All right here. Because ANC sees how people can benefit – they hear their stories, and they make it happen. I couldn't be here without all the help I had from the people at ANC. I know I'm just one little blip in all that it does and is – one small blip in Joan's, Kat's, and Julia's lives. But that's the point! I'm just one small blip, and I was so cared for. ANC is able to help so many people because it recognizes that every person has a story; this is mine.”