

suburban life



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Where Imagination Comes Alive

A recent renovation transforms **The Shop @ Crazy Aaron's** in Norristown into an interactive "laboratory" where visitors of all ages can play, create, and make lasting memories.

by **BILL DONAHUE** | photos by **ALISON DUNLAP**

It's easy to compare **The Shop @ Crazy Aaron's** with Willy Wonka's fictional chocolate factory; after all, each abounds with off-the-wall creations, interactive experiences, and a spectrum of colors, scents, and sensations designed to spark creativity. Whereas Wonka's magical world sprang from the mind of author Roald Dahl, **The Shop @ Crazy Aaron's** stems from the imagination of a man named Aaron Muderick.

Located on the bottom floor of an historic knitting mill along Norristown's Main Street, **The Shop @ Crazy Aaron's** serves as the flagship store of Crazy Aaron's, an interactive toy brand founded by Muderick in 1998. The shop sells an assortment of whimsical wares that inspire curiosity and delight customers of all ages: Crazy Aaron's Thinking Putty, a series of inventive silicone-based putties featuring sparkles, scents, and fantastical properties such as magnetism and phosphorescence; Land of Dough, a reinvention of a core part of classic play, starring a unique color palette, invigorating scents, and a smooth-as-silk feel; and SlimeCharmers, a high-quality slime product—"not too goopy or sticky," Muderick insists—each infused with thematic charms.

The Shop @ Crazy Aaron's recently completed a significant expansion and will host a grand-opening celebration the third week of June. Much more than a place to "buy stuff," **The Shop @ Crazy Aaron's** provides visitors with opportunities to engage in interactive play, stoke their imaginations, and make memories with friends and family members.

Some of the store's exhibits were influenced by Crazy Aaron's Mix Mart at FAO Schwarz's iconic toy store in New York City's Rockefeller Center. The flagship store has its very own Mix Mart, where guests can make their own SlimeCharmers or Thinking Putty, a loveseat made entirely of putty, a "Guess the Scent" wall, and a four-foot-tall glass tower where guests can see tins of Thinking Putty in motion, floating in a column of Crazy Aaron's transparent putty creation, Liquid Glass.

"What we're talking about is intergenerational kid time, where people of all ages can have

an experience they enjoy together and have photo moments together," he says. "We used to have a mini mixing table [at the store prior to the renovations], but now we offer this special experience that will make people say, 'This is something I'll always remember.'"

"We do get a lot of people who come from the surrounding area," he continues, "but there are others from out of town who come here for a wedding, a family event, or are just visiting Philly, and they see us as something they can only do in Philly. We're going to make sure they're making good use of their time."

Full of Surprises

The toys on display at **The Shop @ Crazy Aaron's** are marketed primarily to children and adolescents. Interestingly, the company's roots grew out of a product that served the needs of a much different audience.

Muderick, a Havertown native, grew up fascinated by technology and understanding how things work. He studied computer science in college, then spent some time working in Silicon Valley, and later returned to the Philadelphia to put his education and experience to use helping companies "connect the dots" through technology. Although the work was unexciting, the humdrum nature of the workdays helped him dream up the building blocks for the toy empire he would soon build.

To help the time pass, Muderick had accumulated all manner of toys in his office,



including “a big ball of putty” he and his co-workers would sometimes use to work through problems or busy their minds during less than engaging tasks. Eventually he wound up purchasing large quantities of putty to disseminate to his co-workers, and he was amazed at how the putty transformed the office culture for the better—namely, fostering connections and making people happier.

The proverbial light bulb flickered to life. Muderick decided to buy 100 pounds of the putty with the goal of “conducting experiments.” A problem solver by nature, he wanted to know how the putty worked and, more importantly, what he could make it do. As it turns out, he could make it do quite a bit. He wound up selling his resulting creations out of the trunk of his 1998 Honda Civic—a sales tactic that helped him earn the nickname that now adorns his flourishing business.

The Honda Civic is long gone, and in its place are the sprawling headquarters at 700 East Main Street in Norristown. Since opening its doors in 2018, the company’s HQ has grown to employ more than 100 people—product development, accounting, and workers



in the factory who manufacture the product, among others—many of whom live in the 19401 ZIP code. With the renovations complete on The Shop @ Crazy Aaron’s, Muderick sees unlimited potential in terms of its ability to make closer connections with visitors.

“The store expansion has been positive in a multifaceted way,” he says. “It has enabled us to connect with consumers and the community, and it also gives us a laboratory as we develop new products and see how consumers respond.”

He cites a product called Ninja Thinking Putty, which gets stronger with every stretch. The product had not been terribly successful at retail, but giving customers the opportunity to see the product in action gave the company a better understanding of how to market the product to consumers. Ninja’s fortunes have reversed as a result.



Crazy Aaron’s
www.crazyaaron.com

The Shop @ Crazy Aaron’s
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Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
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“We’re always working on new products, and we’ll have more new things released in time for the February 2026 [North American International] Toy Fair in New York,” Muderick says. “New things are always coming together here in our toy factory, and we’ll continue to develop out these interactive experiences for people who want to come here.”

Muderick has bold plans for the Crazy Aaron’s brand, not only in the Philadelphia area, but also in tourist destinations much farther afield. While he can’t yet share specifics, he can say this: “My goal is for you to be on vacation anywhere in the world and there will be a Crazy Aaron’s experience there to surprise you.” ■

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always coming
together here in
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—AARON MUDERICK, CRAZY AARON’S

