

outside THE BOX

*A new Massachusetts-based
business crafts gift boxes
for every occasion.*

BY **LANNAN OBRIEN**
PHOTOS BY **KERRY BRETT**



Kim Cooper (right) and Shannon Hedstrom made the transition from friends to business partners this year when they launched North Meets South.

Friends Kim Cooper and Shannon Hedstrom have been close for almost 20 years and Hopkinton neighbors for the past seven. But it wasn't until their eldest children left for college that they were inspired to start a business together.

"We remembered when we were in college how much we loved getting a care package," says Cooper, "but every time we looked for things to send our own kids, everything was food."

This realization sparked an idea that they discussed and perfected during their daily two-mile walks: they could create more interesting and varied care packages than those currently on the market. The women already enjoyed traveling together and shopping for thoughtful gifts for their friends and families, which made the new business venture a natural fit. "We said, 'Why don't we make gift boxes for students in college that are like a hug from home?'" Cooper reflects.

This past January, Cooper and Hedstrom launched North Meets South, a curated collection of themed gift boxes sold online. The brand name is both a nod to

their New England-raised children attending southern schools and the two women's backgrounds: Hedstrom is originally from Kentucky, and Cooper is from New York.

In addition to a selection of collegiate boxes themed with the logos and colors of five different schools, they have gift packages suited to holidays, birthdays, self-care, and more, with plans to offer graduation boxes and must-haves for rising college freshmen. After just a few months in business, they are already busy filling custom orders, such as employee thank-you gifts for real estate agents and business owners.



"People are really liking both the stylish presentation and the creativity," says Hedstrom. Together, she and Cooper brainstorm ideas, focusing on the question, "What would be fun for this person to open?" When tasked with crafting a "100th-day" box for a friend's daughter at Providence College, for example, they went with a fun, celebratory theme inspired by the student's upcoming spring break trip with her roommates.

Between the two of them, the business partners have sent four children to college, and Cooper feels the timing of launching North Meets South has been perfect. For many years, the women took a step back from their careers to raise their families, so now was the moment to decide what they wanted for themselves. "What better way to do that than with a good friend whom you're happy to spend a lot of time with every day?" she asks. Hedstrom agrees, "We are really having a lot of fun with it."



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