

# The Miami Student

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*Photo by Connor Moriraty, Photography Editor*

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## Keds to partner with Miami startup

BY [STAFF WRITER](#) • NOVEMBER 6, 2015

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*By Olivia Owens, For The Miami Student*

In spring 2014, Miami University alumna Ashley VanBuskirk launched a stationery business with her sister, Victoria. The business sold stationery and journals to raise proceeds that helped a Kosovar woman named Ema attend university.

Now, shoe company Keds has approached the VanBuskirk sisters about partnering with them. Keds learned of Flora Stationery in fall 2014 through a grant proposal Ashley submitted. The line is set to launch in the spring.

Victoria said she is excited for the shoes to come out this spring.

“It’s just been a really fun process,” Victoria said about partnering with Keds, “working with a company that is definitely for women and definitely for our cause, which we’re really excited about.”

Keds was working on a project that aimed to share

stories of young women pursuing ambitious projects. The company wanted to tell the story of Flora Stationery.

But a year and a half ago, Flora Stationery was just an idea Ashley had after her study abroad experience at Miami.

Ashley VanBuskirk met Ema, the girl who helped inspire the business, on a study abroad trip to Kosovo for her international studies major.

Kosovo is located in southeastern Europe, and is the poorest country in the region, according to Fund Futures. The people of Kosovo often live off less than a dollar a day. The unemployment rate for Kosovar students between the ages of 15 and 24 is 55.3 percent, the second highest in the world.

Nicollette Staton was Ashley’s classmate and spent two months with her in Kosovo. Staton said VanBuskirk went to Ema’s village and learned that Ema could not continue with her education because she needed to help provide for her family.

The VanBuskirk sisters began planning the business when Ashley returned from her trip. Flora Stationery sold products that displayed artwork designed by Kosovar students. With the proceeds from the sales, the VanBuskirk sisters were able to fund Ema’s education completely.

Soon after, the sisters graduated — Ashley from Miami and Victoria from Grove City College in Pennsylvania. In August 2014, the company became a nonprofit organization registered in Texas.

Staton said she can’t believe how much the business has grown in such a short amount of time.

“I’m really excited to see how successful it’s been and how far it’s come,” Staton said. “I think a lot of people have ideas and just don’t do it, so it’s great to see someone who just took that extra step.”

Just a few months after they graduated, the sisters were able to help five women attend university in Kosovo.

“From there, it’s just kind of been a snowball effect,” Victoria said.

Currently, the sisters are funding 18 full-time students at the University of Prishtina in Kosovo.

After hearing about the VanBuskirk sisters’ story, junior Shelby Singh was intrigued.

“I think that what they did was a really good idea, especially since it was actually very selfless of them,” Singh said.

The shoes by Flora Stationery and Keds will feature two designs created by Kosovar students, similar to the journals and stationery.

“We’re really excited for the shoes to come out and for us to continue to share the mission of Flora,” Ashley said.

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Great read. Awesome students.

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