



# bookstore bliss

STORY BY JENNIFER STREISAND  
PHOTOS PROVIDED

In the age of e-books, there is one reading activity that no e-reader, BlackBerry, iPhone, iPad—or any other device—can take away: the joy of browsing in an eclectic bookstore. Although there is increased competition from the Internet and large retailers, Greater Lafayette shoppers still have a great variety of such

bookstores in their midst.

The pink and red neon type lights at Von's Shops on West State Street in West Lafayette are a familiar sight and hint at the marvels inside the store.

"We get 500 newly published titles a month," says John von Erdmannsdorff, owner of the store since 1968, when he operated it out of his apartment. Now the shop in the heart of Purdue Village is considered a West Lafayette institution. Jim Martin has been the manager of the book store for 40 years. "It's a good place to work, and we like what we do," he says about his longevity at Von's. Pam Fisher is the assistant manager, and she has been there for 11 years. Von Erdmannsdorff, Martin and Fisher all love books, and their passion for reading keeps them working there. ▶▶



Buy the Book



Von's

The strength of the bookstore is the breadth of books offered, von Erdmannsdorff says. He, Martin and Fisher pay close attention to the tastes of the customers who come into the store, and they travel long distances to find books for their used book section in the basement of Von's.

"I think bookstores can educate people as much as or more than schools do," says von Erdmannsdorff. He notes that anyone can be a reader, if you just observe what the person likes to do and match that interest in the narrative of a book. He has ample opportunity for this type of observation, because Von's also sells other merchandise, including cards and gifts, music and videos, jewelry and the newest section—boutique style clothing.

"It will be interesting to see how the new and improved fashion department will change things at the store," von Erdmannsdorff says.

Across town and into Lafayette, where five streets intersect, known locally as "Five Points," sits another bookstore treasure. It may not be as well known as Von's, but it is growing in name recognition because of its colorful inventory of used books and the store's aura. Buy the Book Coffeehouse has many flavors of coffee, baked goods, and activities like knitting classes, open mic night and family and game activities. The atmosphere is that of an old-fashioned intimate book shop, with cream colored book shelves, warm lighting and a lot of tables and chairs for sipping and browsing.

Buy the Book gives store credit and sometimes cash for used books and has developed a loyal following who come in regularly to shop or to partake in the coffee and the baked goods.

Owners Tami Marshall and Larry Mussche say that the people they have met through their business is what matters the most. Often people come in with cherished books with which they need to part for one reason or another.

"The best memory comes from a time last summer when a gentleman who grew up in the area stopped in and introduced himself, and proceeded to tell me that he was just diagnosed with cancer," recalls Marshall. He was going through his things and decided that he wanted to donate his large library. "He wanted to give back to a place that had brought him wonderful memories, such as reading books at the drugstore in the Five Points area."

The store originally opened in 2009 on Fourth Street in Lafayette and moved to the new location at 1538 Main St. in the Five Points neighborhood in 2010, says Mussche.

If you prefer a no-frills venue but still want the same good value for books, another independent bookstore awaits your visit: Earl Plaza Books, 402 N. Earl Ave., Lafayette. At Earl Plaza Books, the first thing customers notice is its large space and magical clutter, including old toy cars and golf balls stacked in egg crates. The store is a family business, originally owned by Jim Atkins Sr., now

owned by James Atkins Jr.

He says that e-readers are only the newest challenge to the survival of the independent book shop.

"They haven't reached the extreme market saturation yet. We are only at the beginning of the electronic book reader age," Atkins says. Still, he and the other independent bookstore owners in Greater Lafayette have no immediate plans to sell or promote e-readers in their stores.

The concept of his store, and other used bookstores, allows people to be good stewards in the community, pass their books on, and save money on what they are buying at the same time, he says.

"You can give them to places like Good Will, the library, and nursing homes, and that's a great way to share them, but it doesn't save you any money at the same time," Atkins says.

The sale of used books has improved during this recent sluggish economy, notes Tricia Blomgren, the owner of Lafayette's newest independent bookstore, Robots & Rogues New and Used Books.

"People won't go out and spend the \$15 on a brand new paperback, but they would go get it used," she says. Blomgren opened the store at 531 Main Street in the heart of downtown in June 2011. Kevin Flanagan, who is a volunteer in the store, helped Blomgren open the business and works closely with her.

Except for a small shelf of books in the front of the store, all of the books in Robots & Rogues are science fiction, fantasy, mystery, horror and graphic novels. The store's decoration and aura mirror the genres it sells: simple and straight bookshelves, fantasy-like artwork for sale from local artists, pictures of clocks, and large posters quoting famous science-fiction personalities, such as Rod Serling.

Blomgren and Flanagan consider themselves booksellers first and foremost, and they say speaking to human beings who know the genre they want can't be replaced by the Internet or a device. They find joy in being able to offer and recommend books in their favorite genres, which are increasingly hard to come by at larger retailers and most bookstores.

Since the store is so new, its inventory and its aura are evolving. For example, Robots & Rogues has added a children's section.

"It's mostly sci-fi and fantasy for kids, but we do have some classics, like the Goosebump series," Blomgren says.

For now, all four bookshops are here to stay in the community, and they welcome customers who browse the old fashioned way.

"The one thing that our customers want that electronics can't provide—the thrill of the hunt!" says Marshall about how customers finger through books at her store. "People tell us it is like searching for a lost treasure when browsing in used bookstores." ❧

Summer months are the ideal time to immerse yourself in a good book. There are so many, it's often hard to choose. Here are some suggestions from area booksellers:

### 11/22/63 by Stephen King, 2011

(Recommended by Tami Marshall, Buy the Book Coffeehouse)

Marshall says King's new book stands in a category by itself and could be of interest to general readers as well as diehard Stephen King fans.

"I would categorize it as alternate history with a bit of science-fiction and plenty of historical fiction," explains Marshall. "King recreates the JFK shooting, while the main character is a time traveler attempting to stop the assassination."

### The Beekeeper's Apprentice by Laurie R. King, 2007

(Recommended by Robots & Rogues New and Used Books)

The setting of the book is Sussex, England. Protagonist Mary Russell "stumbles upon a retired Sherlock Holmes," writes Tricia Blomgren of Robots & Rogues. He really would like to work again, and so he starts to teach Mary his detective trade, "finally finding a mind equal to his own to apprentice as a detective," describes Blomgren.

"I adore Sherlock Holmes, and King's series hits the nail on the head. Excellent mysteries, wonderful characters, and a delightful look into the later part of Sherlock's life."

### The Lies of Locke Lamora by Scott Lynch, 2007

(Recommended by Robots & Rogues New and Used Books)

"Imagine Ocean's Eleven blended with epic fantasy, with a generous helping of mythology, and you may have an idea of this debut novel by Scott Lynch," says Blomgren and Kevin Flanagan of Robots & Rogues. The plot involves a group that is trying to finagle a lot of money from a noble family.

"We absolutely love this story and recommend it every chance we get. Lynch has an excellent pace, truly lovable characters, and well-established mythology and history for his fantasy world." This book is part of a series, and is the first of the series.

# must-reads

### A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith, 1943

(Recommended by Tami Marshall, Buy the Book Coffeehouse)

"The book that surprisingly remains unknown to many, I consider a classic, and I even put it in the classics section of our store," says Marshall. The setting is Brooklyn, New York. The narrative is a coming of age novel that "addresses issues like alcoholism, poverty, and the need for determination to overcome adversity," describes Marshall. "It will make you laugh, cry and wish that it would never end."

*Additional recommendation from the writer of this article:*

### Dear Gloria: Homesick for America in Wartime Japan by Toneko Kimura Hirai, Taro Kimura, and edited by Gregg Ramshaw, 2011

The Gloria featured in the title of this book is my mother, Gloria Goodman, then a teenager, growing up in Forest Hills, New York, in the 1940s. Her neighbor and best friend in Forest Hills was Toneko Kimura, a Japanese citizen. The two girls had a close friendship until the impending war separated the two girls when Toneko and her family moved back to Japan, shortly before Pearl Harbor.

In Tokyo Toneko continued the friendship by writing to my mother, always beginning the letters with "Dear Gloria," although most of the letters were never sent. They became diary entries and "a precious record of the history of our times," as her brother, Taro Kimura, wrote in the postscript of the book. The letters to my mother and summary text in between Toneko's letters are the content of this book and describe the war's impact on citizens inside Japan. I recommend the book as a great read with a lot of suspense and first-hand information about the bombing of Tokyo during World War II.

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