

Store sells fantasies to comic book fans

By STEPHANIE BONSAITI
Of the Emerald

Someone once called the Fantasy Shop and asked if the shop sold marital aids.

If the caller had seen the store, located in the Smith Family building on 13th Avenue, he would have known its aids are for the wandering mind interested in superheroes and villains.

Comic books ranging in price from \$4.50 to \$350 fill an upper wall behind one of the store's counters. Other walls are decorated with cartoons, comic book covers and a giant Mickey Mouse watch belonging to store owner Darrell Grimes.

Eugene-born Grimes borrowed money from his parents to buy the store from a former partner in 1974. The business grossed \$500 a month then, but

now grosses \$3,900 a month, he says.

Grimes and the store's only employee, Don Collver, share an interest in soccer, the fantasy table game Dungeons and Dragons, and comic books.

Friday afternoons at the Fantasy Shop are busy. A bearded, balding art teacher rushes in and asks, "Any new X-men?"

"No new X-men, sorry," Collver calls back.

Collver pulls out stacks of the more valuable comics for collector Pat Slemko, who sorts through each stack quickly and mechanically. Slemko spends from \$100 to \$125 a month on comics, but most collectors spend between \$10 and \$20 a month.

While a few children read comics in the store aisles, a 14-year-old collector searches for comics scribbled on a list. He's trying to complete sets, he says, even though he no longer reads some of the comics.

Collectors usually try to acquire complete series, Grimes says. "It's just fun trying... to get a whole set — value increases and that just adds to the enjoyment."

"They're something to read," Joe LeRoux says of his comics collection. Recently, LeRoux bought an \$800 Batman 1, the shop's most expensive comic, because, he said, he "decided to start collecting Batman, and that seemed like a good place to start."

During the early 1970s a comic book collector was seen as "a guy with subnormal intelligence who never had a bath or a social life," Collver says.

But now only a few of the almost 200 regular customers fit the old stereotype. Businessmen and couples regularly visit the shop, and most customers are under 30.

Respect for comic books is increasing, Grimes says. The Wall Street Journal published

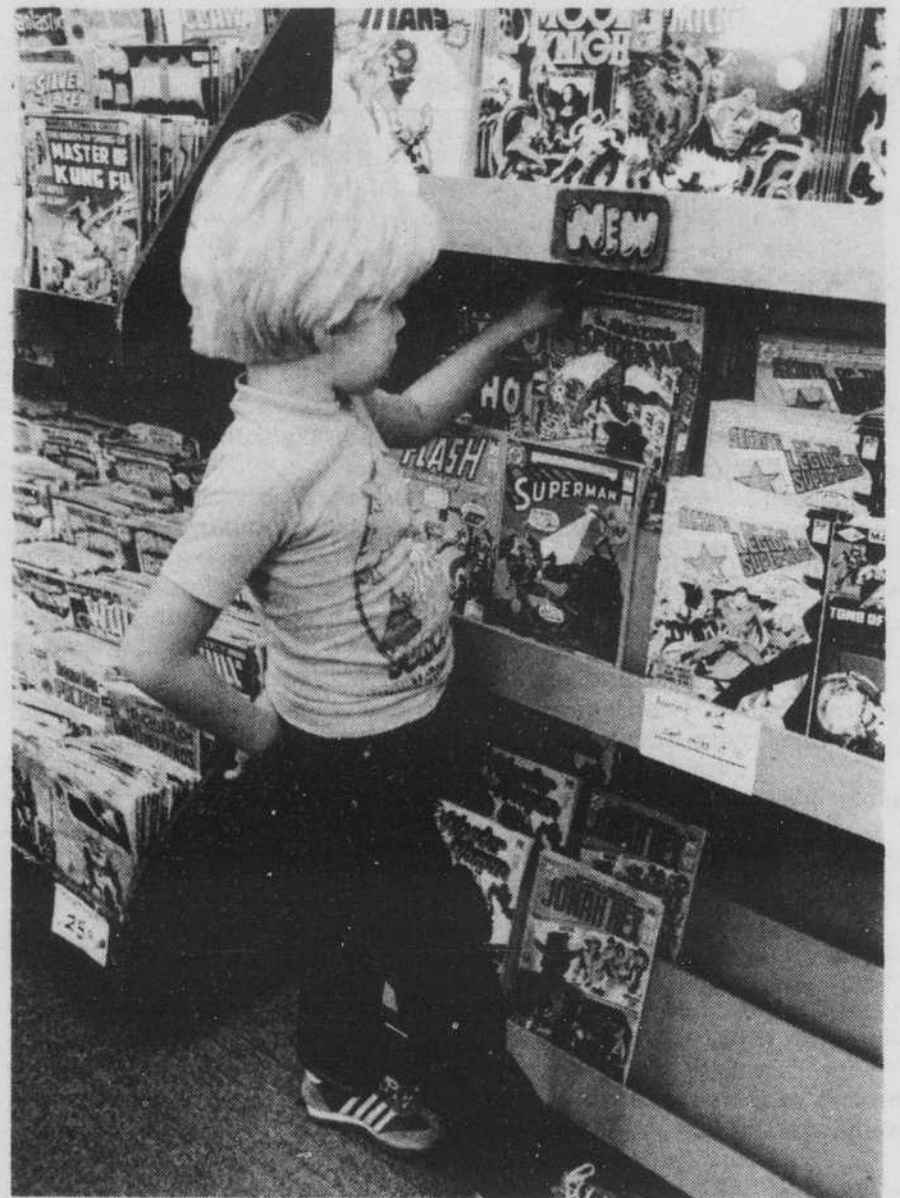


Photo by Dennis Tachibana

Young collector browses through the wide selection of comic books in Fantasy Shop

an article about him and the increasing investment in comic books following his purchase of a \$7,500 Action 1 (first appearance of Superman) last spring.

Comic books are inflation beaters. Value of the Action 1 has increased \$1,000 every year since 1974, Grimes says. He estimates that most comics leap 25 to 50 percent in value each year.

Comics with a believable

character, a good storyline and good art — such as the X-men comic by John Byrne and the new Teen Titans drawn by George Perez — appreciate most in value.

But the value collectors place on their comics isn't just monetary. "If it ever turns out that I need something more than I need my comic books, then I'll part with them," LeRoux says.

"But I haven't found anything I need that much yet."

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