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Feminist bookstore has 20th birthday

■ **BUSINESS:** Mother Kali's has a hard time keeping up with large bookstore corporations

By Marcelene Edwards
Community Editor

Gray-haired Izzie Harbaugh sits behind the counter of Mother Kali's Bookstore waiting for the phone to ring or for a customer to come through the door.

At 9:20 a.m. a man walks into the store looking for a book he ordered. She sells him the book and then sits down to wait — that's all the business she gets during the next 40 minutes except for a few phone calls.

Harbaugh, a 58-year-old lesbian, has been working at the shop for 17 years. She spends most of her time straightening books and answering questions.

Featuring calendars, books and a red, 8-foot statue of a naked woman, Mother Kali's Bookstore, the oldest feminist bookstore in Oregon, operates on a shoestring budget, barely making payroll.

Harbaugh has been working as a volunteer for about a year because money is in short supply. She said she stays because she loves the place so much. The hours for the other two employees were also cut back.

A celebration for the store's 20th birthday will be held Saturday night to help offset large debts to publishers and creditors. Community members have donated items for a silent auction and Blue Lightning, an all-women rock band from Ashland, will perform for a dance.

Nancy Johnson, an employee of the bookstore, was categorizing the donated items on Thursday morning, getting them ready for the birthday bash.

Johnson, who is in her 30s, has worked at the store for over a year and says she is motivated by her interest in the resources the store offers.

"[Helping with the auction] is what I can do for the store to keep Mother Kali's in exist-



NATALIE MONTGOMERY/Emerald

A celebration for 20 years of business for Mother Kali's, a feminist bookstore, will be held Saturday night.

MOTHER KALI'S BOOKSTORE

Hours: Monday through
Friday 9 a.m.-6 p.m.
Saturday 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
Location: 720 E. 13th
Phone: 343-4864

EMERALD

tence," she said. "I think she is really important to the community."

Harbaugh describes the place as a feminist bookstore that celebrates women's lives. Sections titled lesbian fiction and international feminists provide a broad range of titles.

Mother Kali's Bookstore was located on Franklin Boulevard until July of 1994.

About a year and a half ago Harbaugh was walking down East 13th Avenue and saw the vacant store front they now occupy. She said she thought it would be a good move financially because it would give them more accessibility and visibility.

Business had not been good on Franklin Boulevard and customers complained about the location. But so far she has not seen signs of the prosperity she hoped for.

"I don't think people know we are here," she said. "And they don't know there is free parking in the basement."

Harbaugh says the store is a unique resource for people in the community and tries to keep sources of information other stores don't have.

The business of small, independent bookstores has been hurt, she said, by the proliferation of large chains.

"Now we are just trying to do what we can," she said.

Mother Kali's Bookstore is a non-profit organization, although it is not tax exempt. A board of directors and Harbaugh oversee the operation.

The bookstore, which opened 20 years ago, sprung from the re-emergence of the women's movement. The name comes from the Hindu goddess Kali, which one of the original members found interesting.

The founders were involved in civil rights and the anti-war movement and had very little money.

"The store has always had associations with progressive movements," Harbaugh said.

A little house on 11th Avenue near Lincoln Street housed the store until someone threw a brick through the front window. Mother Kali's was evicted soon after that. The store moved around a bit and then settled on Franklin Boulevard before moving to the current location on East 13th Avenue.



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