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Smaller booksellers uncover their niche

■ What they lack in mass volume, independent booksellers make up for in the size of their selection

By Suzanne O'Kelley for the Emerald

Since their onset, the success of chain bookstores such as Barnes & Noble and Borders has been a call to arms for small, independent book shops. In 1997, a new contestant arrived in the form of Amazon.com, Jeff Bezos's bookseller Web site.

Eugene booklovers have watched several local stores close their doors during the past 10 years, but most have continued to succeed.

Refusing to be submerged in the "new economy" wave, independent booksellers in Eugene have adapted and strengthened their offerings to appeal to buyers in ways the larger corporate stores can not. Whether it be excellent service, out-of-print books or large holdings in certain areas, each local store offers something unavailable at large chain stores.

Many consumers overlook the benefits of local booksellers in favor of a discount, a broad selection or convenience. But independents offer more to the community than

a cute storefront and a knowledgeable staff.

Marc Weinstein, an assistant professor in the Lindquist College of Business, said that local stores are often in areas of low economic activity, forming a base for other merchants to rally around. Take downtown, for example.

Despite efforts to revive the area, relatively few stores have managed to stay in business. Yet Emerald City, Hungry Head, the Bookmark, Smith Family and J. Michaels have all continued to draw humble Eugene residents in. And, while a dollar spent on Amazon.com goes directly to Seattle, money spent in Eugene stays in the community.

"Anytime you spend money in a business that is not locally owned, it ends up elsewhere," J. Michaels owner Jeremy Nissel said.

According to the American Booksellers Association, the combination of big national chains and Internet bookselling sites have put almost half of the mom-and-pop book stores out of business since 1994. In 1999, almost 1.1 billion adult-consumer books were sold in the United States, of which inde-

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