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New and used bookstore tries to fill 'niche' market

The campus-area branch of the 29-year-old bookstore has more than 300,000 books for sale on two floors

By **Steven Neuman**
Freelance Reporter

Just down the street from the well-known University Bookstore sits the Smith Family Bookstore, which is filled with almost 300,000 used and new books.

The books don't seem to stay on the shelves; they are everywhere, piled high in a mountain behind the buy-back counter; sitting on tables, on counters, in little piles all along the aisles, and of course on shelves that seemingly stretch upward forever.

"We really have a lot of books," said Evon Smith, smiling sheepishly in front of the mountain of books. She is standing behind the counter at the store at

768 E. 13th Ave., just upstairs from Rainbow Optics. Evon is the daughter of Del and Misa Smith, who started the used bookstore (originally on Alder Street) in 1974, and she now works at her parents' store with her sister and mother.

What started out as a small store with two sections — fiction, which was the right wall, and nonfiction, which took up the left — has now blossomed into a multi-storied, independent book haven with two massive stores.

The second store, at 525 Willamette St. near Fifth Street Public Market, is just as large as the first.

"The second location isn't as well-known by students," Evon Smith said. "But the only difference is that we don't sell textbooks there. Other than that, we have the exact same sections."

Even if the stores have the same sections, they don't have identical selections. Their bookstore doesn't try to emulate the "big-box" national book-

sellers, she said, but attempts to fill the niches that chain stores miss.

"One thing we emphasize to our customers is that we depend on the knowledge of our staff," she said. "We don't use computers for that, this store is run by people. Customers expect something different nowadays — they'll come in and ask if we have a book and want to know immediately if we have it."

The reliance on a knowledgeable staff generally means a more personalized experience for customers.

"The customer service is great here, excellent even," said Ryan Doberstein, a patron of the bookstore. He estimates that he has shopped at the bookstore for four and a half years. "Personally, I like (the 13th Avenue) store; I think there's a bigger selection. It feels bigger."

Both stores stock every conceivable type of book, from car manuals to

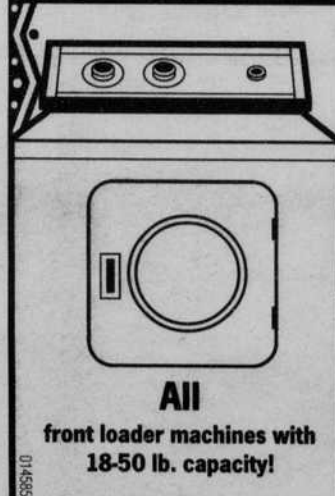
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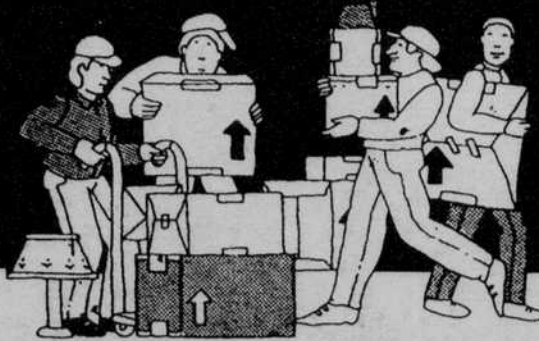
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