

The next chapter

Local bookstores join the Internet sales movement as a way to stay alive in an increasingly online world

BY JOSH LINTEREUR
PULSE REPORTER

Eugene lost one of its oldest independent booksellers this month when the owners of the Book Mark decided to retire rather than continue on in the face of dwindling profits.

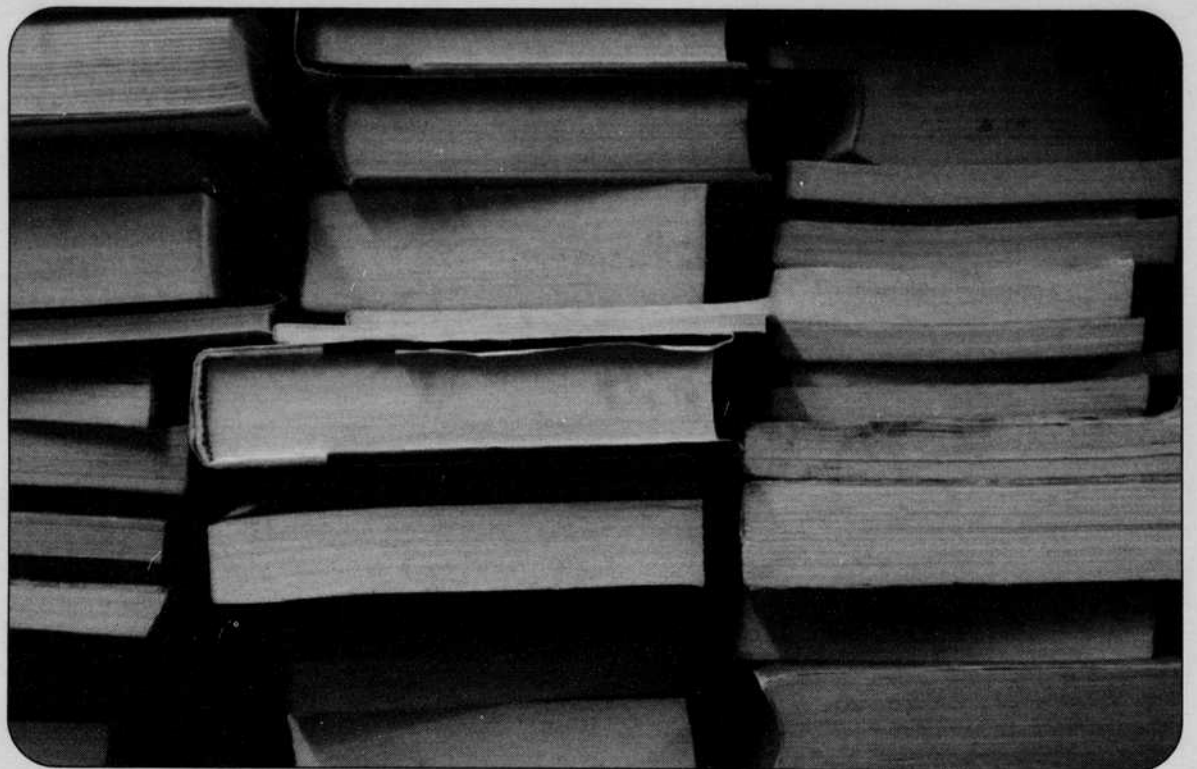
The closing of the more than 30-year-old business is part of a decade-long national attrition of independent bookstores, which has been spurred on by the arrival of big-box chains and the still-evolving Internet book market. With more than 20 locally owned bookstores, Eugene's independent book market hasn't eroded nearly as quickly thanks to a book-hungry population that is supportive of locally owned business. But in the long run those local values alone may not be enough to sustain them all, and the savviest are re-thinking the way they do business.

"Eugene prides itself on being an independent-minded community

that supports independent businesses," said Evon Smith, whose parents founded the Smith Family Bookstore more than 30 years ago. "But every time I say that I have to remind myself how many independent businesses have gone out of business in the last 10 years."

For Smith and other local used bookstores, the presence of behemoth discounters like Wal-Mart, Barnes & Noble and Borders aren't their biggest concern. While those corporate-owned businesses do a significant amount of business by discounting new copies of the latest bestsellers, most independents only sell a handful of new books (if any at all), leaving the chains to compete with one another.

For most used booksellers, which includes virtually all of Eugene's remaining independent bookstores, the most significant competitive force comes from the Internet. And some have chosen to fight fire



LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Local independent bookstores struggle to survive in a market changed by discount bookdealers and the Internet. Many stores here in Eugene are learning to adapt.

with fire. At Emerald City Fine Books, a specialty used bookseller located downtown, the strategy has become very simple.

"If you don't go online, you go out of business," said associate manager Paco Schiraldi. Emerald City went online seven years ago with Abebooks (www.abebooks.com), an online book market that lists over

13,000 booksellers. Schiraldi estimates that the store now does more than two-thirds of its business in cyberspace.

As foot traffic decreases and booksellers do an increasing amount of their business online, it forces many to reconsider the idea of having an actual store.

"The majority of independent bookstores in America have closed

in the past 10 years, but a lot of them went online," said Scott Landfield, who co-owns Tsunami Books in South Eugene. "You're almost an artifact when you have an open shop."

Like Emerald City Fine Books, Tsunami has used the Internet to its advantage. By selling books online at Abebooks, Landfield said the store's sales increased by

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