

Once in a Blue Moon

A BELOVED NICHE BOOKSTORE IN EUGENE WILL SOON CLOSE ITS DOORS FOR GOOD

By Colin Houck

As of September, Eugene will have one less independently owned bookstore. In its place will be an expanded liquor store.

Blue Moon Books owner Dona Wilson says she is closing up shop after nearly 10 years in business due to having lost the lease on her location in the Big Y Center on West 6th Avenue. Wilson says the landlord informed her that a neighboring business, Big Y Liquor, will be moving into the space.

Blue Moon's closing comes at a time when independent booksellers are generally seeing increased sales despite competition from big retailers like Barnes & Noble and the online giant Amazon. According to data from the Association of American Publishers, hardcover book sales have increased 6.9 percent while e-book sales have declined 3.6 percent.

Reports aggregated by the American Booksellers Association indicate small independent shops are seeing a healthy part of those sales.

Wilson says she was never in real competition with the big stores, as she served a niche-market — one that will be sorely missed, according to comments she says she's received.

Blue Moon specialized in mass-market fiction, including crime novels, mysteries, western novels and romance novels. Wilson noted Blue Moon was also known for its sizeable comic book selection in addition to having a unique trade-in policy that was particularly popular.

"That's the big vacuum that's going to be left. For



Photo by Colin Houck

the mass-market fiction, there's no stores left in town carrying that, and there are actually no used bookstores in Springfield, period," she says. "All of my customers are asking 'Where can I go?' and I can only tell them there's a store in Corvallis I know of."

Smith Family Bookstore says it buys and sells used books, but does not have a trade-in policy, nor does it buy romances, according to its website. Tsunami Books says it will begin accepting trade-ins in September.

Both of those shops, however, are different from Blue Moon in terms of selection. Wilson says while she would like to continue on with the bookstore, the timing and expense of relocating to a new location would be too overwhelming. She adds that she will continue selling comic books.

"It's just not feasible, so we're calling it on the books, which is unfortunate," Wilson says. "The comics we'll keep. We put on Sasquatch Comic Swap twice a year at the Elks Club and we're booked out at comic book shows into 2020."

The idea for Blue Moon Books came about, Wilson says, after her father passed in 2010. She recalled her mother operating a bookstore in her childhood. During the process of dealing with her father's book collection, she was faced with the decision of getting rid of everything or to "just go for it."

As for her experience running a bookstore, Wilson says it hasn't been easy.

"You know, it's been a struggle," she says. "But I just enjoy books. I've had some of the best customers, so there's that reward. It's not something you're ever going to get rich off of."

Wilson says her landlord is working with her during the liquidation process, and she may be able to continue that process through the first half of September, though no firm arrangements have been made.

Prices will continue to go down on remaining inventory every Sunday while Blue Moon Books is open. ■

Blue Moon Books is located at 2166 W. 6th Avenue in Eugene. Its hours of operation are from 9 am to 5 pm. Inquiries can be made by phone at 541-485-2665.

HAPPENING PEOPLE BY PAUL NEEVEL

Charlene Bigelow

"I enjoy learning about people's lives and their history," says Charlene Bigelow, who has put in 17 years as a volunteer long-term care ombudsman in Eugene-area facilities. "I found out about it in the AARP magazine when my parents were aging. I thought it might be useful and it appealed to me." Certified ombudsman volunteers are independent citizen advocates who listen to and address the concerns of residents in long-term care facilities. Since her initial 48-hour certification course, Bigelow has worked at nursing homes, adult foster homes and assisted living facilities. Her current assignment is Waterford Grand, a riverbank retirement community offering assisted living and memory care. "I am an advocate," she says. "I make sure that their rights are upheld and that their concerns are investigated and resolved." She introduces herself at resident council meetings, knocks on doors to explain the program and mentors newly certified ombudsmen. A longtime certified master gardener, she is on the Oregon State University Extension Service's adaptive gardening committee, developing techniques and tools for gardeners with physical limitations. "I took extra training in memory care," says Bigelow, who facilitates caregiver support groups for the Alzheimer's Association and helps in planning for its Oct. 13 fundraiser, the Walk to End Alzheimer's. She also mentors recently released inmates for Sponsors, Inc. "It keeps me busy," says Bigelow, winner of a few volunteer-of-the-year awards. "I'm probably out doing something five days out of seven." She began her volunteer career as the mother of four in Phoenix, Arizona, her hometown, where she spent 14 years as a homeroom mom at her kids' school. Her husband, Doug Bigelow, is an Oregon native whose family once owned Belknap Hot Springs Resort. When he retired in 1997, the couple moved to Oregon, toured the state with a travel trailer and settled in Eugene.

