

## **Books/Reading**

### **Guelph Life Magazine**

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Hot sun, comfortable beach chair, a break from the daily grind – and a good book. That’s the vision of summer that many of us share. But with busy lives and the powerful pull of cell phones, email, and Internet, not to mention the easy access to films and television, do we still find time to read real books? Three of Guelph’s long-standing literary institutions, each one celebrating a significant anniversary in 2008, insist that books are still very much alive and well, even if readers’ tastes have changed over the past 30 years.

“The internet didn’t kill books,” insists Norman McLeod, Chief Librarian at the Guelph Public Library which is currently celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. “It gave them a new lease on life.”

The reading public may be increasingly more comfortable with new technologies such as Internet access to library catalogues and booksellers, as well as e-books and books on CD, but librarians are still hard at work doing what they do best: connecting well-informed readers to the perfect book.

“Librarians are really matchmakers,” says McLeod, explaining that the library tries to cater to every taste, both highbrow and “shlop”. In fact, McLeod suggests that although the biggest change over the past 20 years has been in new technologies and reading formats, the one constant has been the library’s efforts to offer something to every reader.

While trends in reading may change over time, McLeod suggests that some types of books have non-stop appeal. Detective fiction is always popular, no matter what style, nationality or era, and current crafts, gardening, and other how-to books are also in demand.

Nancy Giovanelli of Macondo Books, now in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, would agree that today’s readers are especially interested in crafts, travel, and other how-to topics – not to mention the ever-present detective fiction. But while library patrons expect to see the most current titles on the shelves, Macondo’s shoppers are looking for the lower prices and breadth of material that second-hand books offer.

Over the past 30 years, her customers have been “as varied as the books on the shelves,” she says.

Recently, Giovanelli has noticed that more young people are interested in discovering the classics, and older readers are looking for favourite titles or authors from their past.

“They’re not always looking for a specific book,” says Giovanelli, “but they want to see what has recently turned up.”

Browsing is a huge part of the Macondo experience, something that has not changed in the store's 30-year history. Shoppers will confess that they've been looking for a particular title for ten years, or that they could buy something online, but it's so much more satisfying to come into the shop in person.

Giovanelli also sees a library connection. "We are seeing more librarians now taking advantage of our good books and low prices," she explains. "People today are more conscientious about spending. They are willing to wait until new titles turn up as used books or remainders."

While the poetry section draws a lot of attention (perhaps, as one patron suggested, because browsers can eavesdrop on the staff's conversations), Giovanelli notes that the children's section has grown dramatically.

"We have an unusually high number of very good children's books in good condition," she says, "which is rare in second-hand bookstores."

Perhaps that's because, in this age of electronics and technology, people see books as something to be treated with care and respect.

"I think that for most people, a book is still a treasure," says Barb Minett, owner of The Bookshelf, currently celebrating its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary. "People want to pass this on to their children, and I hope that trend will continue."

For Minett, who started her career as a teacher, it's a joy to see her former students now bringing their own children into the store.

"The most exciting thing," she enthuses, "is that our kids' section is growing. As kids get older, there are more diversions, but our Young Adult section has grown."

Minett also notes that Bookshelf customers are looking for more non-fiction than they used to, especially books pertaining to the environment, health, science and nature.

"We do sell a lot of literary fiction," Minett says, "but I think sometimes that the rumour that literary fiction is no longer popular could possibly be true. People are very interested in the world around them."

So, despite our busy lives and the constant barrage of technology, it seems we still crave the delights of a good book. Topics, styles and trends may have changed, but book lovers have not.

And Norman McLeod knows why. "People love to read."