



Community embraces Eagle Harbor Book Co. for 50 years

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Independent bookstore is home to a large variety of local authors and insightful readers

By Tyler Shuey

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BAINBRIDGE ISLAND | BOOKS

After 50 years in business, Eagle Harbor Book Co. on Winslow Way has become a fixture in the community.

So much so that when Dave and Jane Danielson bought it in June of 2016 they were told it really wasn't theirs. Previously, Jane was a bookseller and events manager for 12 years there.

“It’s funny when we bought the store I had so many people come up to me and basically let me know ‘you may have bought the store but you don’t own the store. This is our store,’” Jane said.

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“Everybody had an opinion on how the store should be run and about the value of the store. They let us know that it was very important to them that this store continues,” Jane continued. “It matters to people to have sort of a center of information and a cultural center on the island, and I think we serve that function for so many people.”

When asked what sets Eagle Harbor apart, Jane noted a few reasons.

“I think the local authors play a big, big part of that; there are lots of them,” she said.

“We have the feel of an old-fashioned bookstore,” Jane added, citing the creaky floors and old shelves. “Winslow has the feeling of a strong community. When people come over as tourists, it’s just an outstanding day for them to be able to stroll along a real village street and come into authentic stores.”

Jane noted the long-term best-selling book at the store is “Snow Falling on Cedars” by David Guterson, who used to be a teacher at Bainbridge High School and still resides here.

“The books recommended by the staff are the strongest selling section in the store,” she said. “You can almost always find something. If you’re not quite sure what you’re interested in but you just want a good read, you’ll find something on that wall.”

COVID’s effect

Eagle Harbor Book Co. initially closed when the COVID-19 pandemic began on March 26 before reopening at the end of May. During the closure, only one staff member could come into the store each day to handle online orders.

“We have sort of a clunky website, and yet people went online, and they ordered,” Jane said. “It was very heartening, even though we were closed for COVID, that people continued to invest in the bookstore.”

Jane said since reopening operations have slowed due to the lack of staffing allowed because of the virus. The front desk, which typically has four cash registers up, now only has one. As a result, Jane has started working from home to make space for others in the store.

With many customers diverting to online, more staff are processing orders. Also, the store has temporarily halted the sale of used books until at least the end of the year, Jane said.

She also touched on the difficulty behind the scenes.

“For the books to actually make it out onto the shelves, there’s lots of ordering and sorting and receiving,” she said. “To get them all out onto the shelves requires manpower, and we have less of that.”

The current capacity at the bookstore is 20 people, and Jane is worried about the mandate not going away before Christmas when shopping typically picks up.

"We've had to be nimble in our operations," she said. "Every hour, we have more than twenty people in the store in the days leading up to Christmas. We are asking everybody to shop early, October is the new December."

The COVID protocols at the store include required masks, gloves and hand sanitizer for customers; plexiglass between staff and customers at point of sale; staff temperatures and any symptoms reported daily; handwashing log for staff; and an hourly cleaning service with a bleach solution, Jane said.

She also said they provide a quarantine shelf for those who prefer not to use gloves. For example, if somebody has been browsing through several books and decides not to keep them, staff will put them on a quarantine shelf for several days.

"So far no one has come down with the illness, and we're trying to keep it that way," said Jane, whose mother passed away from COVID earlier this year in Arizona. "For me personally, I'm very grateful we live in a community that understands the severity of this problem."

Looking ahead to the next phase of reopening, Jane said she is hesitant to increase the capacity at her store until there is either a vaccine or when data trends show the transmission rate is nearly nonexistent. She also pointed out that all events at the book store will be put off until at least next spring.

"I think the virus has changed the way we'll be doing business for a long time," she said.

What's selling?

In terms of business through the pandemic, Jane said they obviously aren't doing as well as last year but are still seeing enough demand.

"We're not doing badly," she said. "We're much better than we expected to be. It's not only a supportive community but a well-read community. I think in Seattle, many stores are still closed. We're seeing, at least on weekends, lots and lots of traffic from Seattle."

The books that are selling now include non-fiction about the U.S. government and Black Lives Matter, as well as fictional novels, Jane said. She also said books by authors of color have been trending, and the store

also recently introduced a romance section that has been garnering interest.

"People read to become informed, and they read to escape," Jane said.

"Given all the things that are happening in our government in the last year or two, those kinds of books that inform people about the government...are selling quite well.

"Books that take you to a better place are also selling very well," she continued. "A lot of fiction is selling extremely well. Those books I think can help you through a crisis or an unusual situation."

Fast facts

The store was originally in 1969 called Betty's Books at 450 Winslow Way with 500 square feet of space, according to the store's website. The store has since moved to 157 Winslow Way where it has nearly 10 times more space.

Some notable upcoming releases at Eagle Harbor Book Co. include *A Promised Land* by former U.S. President Barack Obama and *Dearly: Poems* by Margaret Atwood, who is most known for writing *The Handmaid's Tale*.

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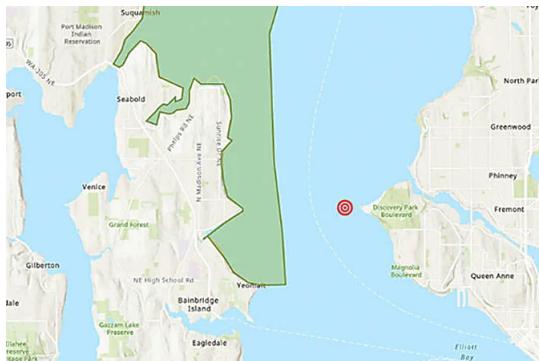
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