



NEWSLETTER

May 2009

NCIBA Spring Gathering a Hit for Booksellers

This year's Spring Gathering gave booksellers an opportunity to get together, learn from each other, and meet a bevy of authors. And in spite of the challenging economic climate, attendance was up over the past several years, with determination and enthusiasm much in evidence.

Even booksellers out of the area responded, with 11 stores taking advantage of the NCIBA's free motel room offer for booksellers traveling more than 75 miles to San Francisco and coming in the night before the event (compared to five rooms booked last year). And at the invitation of board member Heather Lyon, most 'outliers' gathered for dinner that evening and began their socializing and networking early.

The official Gathering got underway with breakfast and a wildly funny talk by author Mary Roach, who graciously stayed to sign paperback copies of her book *Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex*, donated by publisher WW Norton. Then, *Paperback Dreams* filmmaker Alex Beckstead presented an engaging session on using video and other multimedia to promote your bookstore. Following lunch, attendees went to workshops on store signage, cause and cross-marketing, working with local authors, and sidelines.

We also added a new element to this year's Gathering, allowing knowledge-stuffed booksellers to end the afternoon on a more relaxing note by meeting and receiving signed books from a dozen authors on hand to showcase their new books. The

meet-and-greet reception proved hugely popular with all involved, as eager writers made contacts with new bookstores and booksellers put faces to names on book jackets. Conversations were had, emails exchanged, store visits discussed, and bonds between authors and independent booksellers strengthened and enhanced. All in all, a good day.

Joyce Turns a New Page in Her Life

After more than 10 years on the job, NCIBA Administrator Joyce Ripp has decided to move on. She will be leaving at the end of July for Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina to live with her aging mother. Her decision was based on a confluence of factors, including family considerations, and is one that we accept with understanding but regret.



Joyce came to the NCIBA with solid administrative and office experience, as well as bookselling experience. She brought competence, efficiency, and (thankfully for Hut) a wonderful sense of humor to the office. She learned on the job how to produce a successful trade show and, for several years, a public book fair (Books By the Bay).

She also quickly discovered the NCIBA wasn't an organization that sat on its hands doing nothing, and she adapted to the ever-changing projects, activities, and causes that kept popping up and changing her job description. Whether answering the phone, photographing visiting authors, or registering booksellers at the trade show, Joyce has been professional, adaptable, and supportive. Her work has been critical to NCIBA's ability to help its members, and we will all miss her.

NCIBA News and Notes

New NCIBA Board Excited to Get to Work

The NCIBA welcomed four new members and three new officers to its board of directors at the May board meeting, and the newly-configured 15-member group wasted no time in setting goals and resurrecting stagnant committees.

Two groups that will convene soon are the Education committee and the Trade Show task force. The former will begin to put together the education program that will be offered at the trade show (any ideas or subject requests are welcomed -- send to hut@nciba.com). The latter will be taking a look at all other aspects of the trade show, which this year moves from a Friday-Sunday format to a Thursday-Saturday event (October 8-10) and will use slightly less space at the Oakland Convention Center.

Also at the meeting, the board accepted with mixed emotions the resignation of Ingrid Nystrom formerly with Stacey's Books. Ingrid's participation will be missed, but her reason for resigning was good news -- she needed devote all her energy to her new job managing Books Inc. at Laurel Village.

Here is a current list of the NCIBA board of directors. In addition to the office, please feel free to contact any of them if you have questions.

Mike Barnard, Rakestraw Books, President
NEW Calvin Crosby, Books Inc., Vice-President
NEW Kate Levinson, Pt. Reyes Books, Secretary
NEW John Russel, Mountain Bookshop, Treasurer

Marion Abbott, Mrs. Dalloway's NEW
Kathleen Caldwell, A Great Good Place for Books
Traci Fishburn, Bookworks

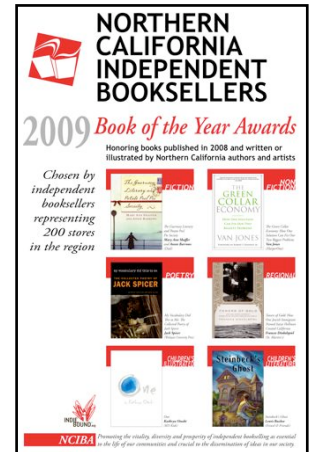
Heather Lyon, Lyon Books
Pete Mulvihill, Green Apple Books NEW
Jenn Ramage, Random House NEW

Lise Solomon, Karel/Dutton Group
Antonia Squire, Kepler's Books NEW
Paul Takushi, UC Davis Bookstore
Tracy Wynne, Cover to Cover Booksellers

2009 Book of Year Awards

The second annual Book of the Year awards, presented by members of the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association (NCIBA), have been announced. The 2009 awards honor local authors and a children's book illustrator whose books were published in 2008. Member independent booksellers voted for their favorite titles from a Finalists ballot created by committees.

The NCIBA also commissioned a color poster of the winning books and peel-off stickers for the book covers. If you're interested in either, please contact the office.



FICTION

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society
 Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows (Dial)

NONFICTION

The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems
 Van Jones (HarperOne)

POETRY

My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer
 Jack Spicer (Wesleyan University Press)

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Steinbeck's Ghost
 Lewis Buzbee (Feiwel & Friends)

CHILDREN'S ILLUSTRATED

One
 Kathryn Otoshi (KO Kids Books)

REGIONAL TITLE

Towers of Gold: How One Jewish Immigrant Named Isaias Hellman Created California
 Frances Dinkelspiel (St. Martin's)

Helping Your Customers Find You Online

By Thomas Gladysz

Michael Barnard had a problem.

When he entered the words “bookstore” and “Danville” into an internet search engine, the top result was not his own Rakestraw Books – *despite the fact it was the only bookstore in Danville*. Instead, the top result was a chain store located nearby in Contra Costa County. The problem facing Rakestraw - and many other local booksellers - was how to get their store ranked first or near the top in search engine results.

Barnard, the owner of Rakestraw, took a three-pronged, do-it-yourself approach. With the help of his web designer, he set out to 1) improve his search engine rankings, to 2) drive additional traffic to his website, and to 3) normalize the many links, contact information, and references to his bookstore scattered across the web. The latter was especially important, as the store had changed its web address (known as a URL) and was about to relocate to a new space in Danville.

Concentrating his efforts on Google, the long-time bookseller visited nearly every search result which mentioned Rakestraw Books. He did so to ensure the page’s accuracy – and when possible, to offer a correction or update and even suggest a link to his own business. Barnard feels that reciprocal links are especially important in both improving search results and in driving traffic to his site.

Barnard also took the time to either establish or tweak the store’s many other presences on the web. The bookseller visited websites like the Danville Area Chamber of Commerce, Readers Circle, East Bay Social, SF Station, Yelp, Z Events, Insider Pages, and Merchants Circle. All of these sites now feature basic information on the store, and when possible, details on store events and images meant to appeal to customers. [Each of these sites is linked from the Rakestraw Books homepage at www.rakestrawbooks.com]

Facebook is the internet’s leading social network site. It’s a phenomenon that’s hard to ignore. That’s why Barnard made a special effort to rework and update the store’s Facebook pages. There, one can view pictures of the new store, as well as snapshots of readings and Rakestraw author events. All of these efforts – along with targeted ads and the joining of relevant fan clubs - help sell the store to readers on Facebook. Barnard noted that he has received lots of positive feedback. AND, guess what? More people than ever have been showing up at Rakestraw events and purchasing signed

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“I can’t explain it – it’s just a funny feeling that I’m being Googled.”

books through the mail.

“Search engine optimization,” as it is termed, has been widely discussed and written about. There are those who will tell you it is impossible to substantially affect search results, while there are just as many willing to sell you services that do just that. There is even a long and interesting Wikipedia entry worth checking out discussing the topic and differences of opinion which surround it.

Michael Barnard feels his efforts have paid off. Traffic to his website and customers in the store are both up. And, when you keyword search “bookstore” and “Danville,” the top result is Rakestraw Books.

Thomas Gladysz is a former bookseller and internet consultant.

Booksellers on the Road

By Sheryl Cotleur, buyer at Book Passage

It started as an idea to re-visit bookstores not seen in years, and to drop in on ones never seen before. It ended up being a trip of connection, delightful discoveries, re-energized relationships and a deeper appreciation for the diversity of Bay Area bookselling.

Paul Yamazaki, buyer at City Lights, and I had discussed taking a day or two off to visit bookstores outside of San Francisco, and on a Thursday in April, we set out to do just that. We left San Francisco at 9 am and 32 miles later arrived at Kepler's in Menlo Park.

We visited with Clark Kepler, Frank Sanchez, Marilyn Smith, and other staff and admired the results of their recent remodel. The store feels bright and airy. There are lots of tables of intriguing face-up choices and plenty of staff to answer questions and help you find things. Paul and I loved the custom-designed cash register area that sits on hidden wheels so it can be moved when need arises or to accommodate large events. Kepler's has a powerful community feel with plenty of signs that encourage shopping local and joining their membership program. Book selection covers everyone from college kids to business people to families looking for puzzles or books to read together.

Then it was on to Rakestraw Books in Danville 55 miles later. By happenstance, our tour coincided with Rakestraw having just moved and remodeled. Michael Barnard has got to have about the prettiest bookstore in the area. His bright yellow, red and blue walls accented by wonderful carpets over a bare but beautiful floor make for a stunning space that includes wonderful tables and lamps.

Paul and I felt how much the space just brings out the simple pleasure of shopping and how the layout encourages one to wander everywhere. We loved the unusual combination of subjects, imagining how much the customers must delight in finding treasures next to known authors. Michael was careful to include in his new store the ability to

create a large welcoming space for events. Also, because of all the large windows on to the walkable street, one imagines folks easily being drawn to this inviting store.

Then it was back on the road, and 18 miles later we pulled up at A Great Good Place For Books in Oakland. Kathleen Caldwell's store may have been the smallest we visited, but it certainly does not lack for a large selection of books. She knows her neighborhood and her authors, so it's a reader's paradise. Specializing in literary fiction, young adult and children's books, A Great Good Place For Books lives up to its name. Kathleen talked about her thriving book club business and her off-site sales program. Her store is a great example of a smallish space with long arms into the community. Paul and I loved the well-crafted signs everywhere

At Mrs. Dalloway's, we were completely taken with the large bowl of beautifully reproduced free poems given out for poetry month.

that said if you loved this book, then try these, and included descriptions of four more choices. Paul commented on the quality of these recommendations and later pulled a few books unknown to him off the shelf.

On our way again, we, ended up 10 miles, later at Mrs. Dalloway's in Berkeley. Unfortunately, it was late enough that we missed the owners Marion Abbott and Ann Leyhe but were greeted and welcomed by Frayda Simon and Michael Ichioka.

First, we had to spend time on the sidewalk admiring the window displays. It amused Paul no end that the full size mannequin of Mrs. Dalloway in the window was reading a copy of Poetry As Insurgent Art. I took pictures to send to Lawrence (Ferlinghetti) at Paul's request.

This store has the feel of being outdoors when you are inside, perhaps because of the large

gardening section, high ceilings and light green and white colors. We were completely taken with the large bowl of beautifully reproduced free poems given out for poetry month and the truly wonderful poetry section. We were told Mary Fox was responsible -- bravo! I loved the shelf talkers here, and the large ampersand symbol on the front desk perfectly expresses the symbiosis between the gardening section and literature. Mrs. Dalloway's is also looking forward to remodeling soon and expanding their space.

This day ended with a brief stop at Diesel in the Rockridge neighborhood of Oakland, where we read some of their vast number of cheeky and delicious shelf talkers, and then on to some food and drink to talk over the day.

The very next Thursday, we continued our road trip by heading north. I picked Paul up at 9 am at the Larkspur Ferry and traveled the very short distance to my stomping grounds, Book Passage. Paul got a good look at how we've evolved over the years into two buildings with extra classroom spaces to accommodate our expanding list of community events and conferences. Mostly though, Paul, as booksellers do, focused on looking at books. It was fun to have him over to our place.

Then on the road again and up to lovely Sonoma, where 26 miles later we arrived at Reader's Books. Owners Lilla and Andy Weinberger greeted us as soon as we stepped inside. This is a charming store completely woven into the fabric of the community, complementing a heady mix of fiction with their newly-added sideline, premium fresh organic eggs. Reader's also has great current non-fiction, children's books and an especially rich cookbook selection. And you can even purchase a bottle of locally produced olive oil to augment your cookbook purchase. Lilla, Andy and their staff move around their favorite and featured titles often to keep the surprises coming for their loyal customers, and they have a wonderful patio out back to accommodate events and readings during good weather, which appears in abundance in Sonoma.

After lunch, we took a 45-minute drive over 29 miles of gorgeous countryside to Sebastopol, where we visited Copperfield's. This store also houses the offices of the six-location independent family of bookstores. We were able to visit with Ty



Wilson, the buyer and store manager Robin Laine. Also, events coordinator Stephanie Deignan stopped in to tell us about some of the lively things the store is doing, like hosting an on-going chess tournament in the front window all summer and having a local dance troupe perform in the back parking lot. Robin told us that their community was the Berkeley of Sonoma County and that their stock and events reflected that.

Ty, Paul and I chatted a bit and looked around at the books, enjoying Copperfield's particular unique mix of selections. This store has a local authors section as well as tables full of current paperback fiction and non-fiction artfully arranged. It also boasts wonderful signage!

After Copperfields, we headed for the coast and Point Reyes Bookstore, some 33 miles and many stunning vistas later. The road meandered through vast ranch lands to the edge of Tomales Bay and down a part of that coast. Point Reyes has not lost one whit of its local charm and vibrant ranching

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**Hut Landon, Executive Director
Joyce Ripp, Administrator**

community feel while managing to serve its expanding creative population of writers, artists, poets, and thinkers. In fact, the sustainability movement, both practical and philosophical, is most strongly felt here, and the bookstore reflects that. Paul was impressed with the quality of books packed into this 1000-square-foot store, saying they actually bore some resemblance to the kind of books living on the shelves at City Lights.

Owners Steve Costa and Kate Levinson could not be on hand to greet us, but Steve and I spoke the day before. I was fascinated to hear details of their two Geography of Hope conferences, the first on Wallace Stegner whose writings provided the title and the philosophy behind it all, and the second on writing on farming and the rural life.

These conferences, in back-to-back years, took place over three days, drew 600 participants, over 35 renown authors and created excitement far and wide. Steve and Kate hope to continue this week-end conference every other year on related topics.

As the day drew to a close, it was hard to choose from all the wonderful places to have dinner. In the end, we drove another 14 miles into Bolinas, because, well, it's Bolinas. After a leisurely drink at Smiley's, with the house dog for company, we went across the street for dinner and much conversation – reviewing the entire experience. We wished we could continue on other days and visit every single independent bookstore, large and small within 100 miles of San Francisco.

Finally, when it was time to go, we drove the Coast Highway back toward the city, which even at night is lovely, and after another 32 miles arrived at Paul's doorstep. I dropped him off and then turned for home. It was 10 pm and the end of a truly remarkable and fun two days. We were encouraged by the breadth and depth of Bay Area bookselling and enlivened by visiting our brethren booksellers. We saw evidence in every store of creative efforts to continue to bring cherished, hand selected, good quality books to every community – something that is becoming increasingly difficult in this economy and culture and yet still is a labor of love. Everyone we visited wished they were on the trip with us, and to that we say grab some friends and do your own trip! You will love it and the people you visit will love having you come by. We are a most welcoming community!

Note From Nancy Suib

It is with mixed feelings that I share with you the news of Anne Shulenberg's pending retirement, effective June 1, 2009.

In our ever evolving and extraordinary industry, Anne has always been a reliable provider of quality service to independent booksellers in the Bay Area. A sales representative since 1981 (joining Suib Associates in 1996), Anne has been an ardent champion of dozens of independent presses and a true friend to the independent bookstores.

It has been a privilege working with her over these many years and she will definitely be missed by all. For those who attend the NCIBA Show, Anne will continue to assist at our booth, and she hopes that you will stop by and continue the dialogue about our rich and exceptional profession.

Please join me and the rest of the Suib Associates, past and present, in wishing her and husband Dieter a healthy and joyful retirement. However, knowing Anne the way I do, she will be probably be just as busy with her artwork, jewelry making, and of course reading.

Anne can be reached at annesart@sbcglobal.net and, in case you are interested, her art website is www.anneshulenberg.com.

E-Newsletter Inspiration

Ideas, opportunities, and trends is the focus of a new e-newsletter, *Indie Bookstore Entrepreneur*, launched this spring by the Bookstore Training Group of Paz & Associates and being offered free to booksellers.

“Transitions are fertile ground for innovation and creativity, and there are a number of factors that are driving people to reinvent themselves and develop a career of their own,” said Donna Paz Kaufman. “Most interesting is the financial struggle of corporate stores while citizens are pondering their role in creating sustainable local economies.”

Focusing on ideas from big thinkers, trends in buying and being, and business possibilities across industries, the e-newsletter will offer a periodic dose of what is good for business and communities, what feeds our souls as leaders and citizens, and what makes an indie bookstore a great place to shop ... and work. The goal of the publication is to foster entrepreneurial thought as prospective and new booksellers define, refine, and revise their businesses as the world changes.

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Simitian Selects Hicklebee's as District's Small Business of the Year

State Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto (pictured), announced today his selection of a San Jose independent bookstore as his district's Small Business of the Year. Hicklebee's, located at 1378 Lincoln Ave. in San Jose's Willow Glen neighborhood, specializes in books for children and young adults.



"Hicklebee's is a champion in the world of reading. Over the years they've introduced generations of children to the magic of books," Simitian said in a statement.

Hicklebee's continued success despite the challenges bookstores face today demonstrates that they're valued by our community," he said.

The bookstore was founded in 1979 and is owned by two sisters, Valerie Lewis and Monica Holmes. The business hosts "book fair" fundraisers at local schools, and also donates a portion of store transactions to schools mentioned by name at the store's cash register. Hicklebee's recently celebrated its 30th anniversary with a series of events on April 18, including the presentation of the Small Business of the Year award.

It is the fifth year in a row that Simitian chose to name an independent bookseller as the winner of the award in the 11th Senate District. "As we watch the continual 'malling of America,' we ought to take a moment to appreciate our locally owned, neighborhood bookstores," Simitian said. "They are helping to grow the next generation of well-read young adults."

State legislators hand out Small Business of the Year awards in conjunction with the California Small Business Association. This year's selections were recognized in Sacramento during California Small Business Day on May 26.

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