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New book store opens; offers thoughtful escape amid pandemic

By Pippa Fisher



Betty and Rudy Winnacker opened a new bookshop in Lafayette in mid-September Photo Pippa Fisher

available thoughtful, quality, "reasonable" materials, believing that there is enough stress in the world at the moment and that the mind can benefit from rest and healthy distractions.

They carry a roughly 50-50 split between fiction and non-fiction, along with a small selection, about 20%, of gently used books as well. The types of books include current fiction and non-fiction bestsellers along with classics, science, history, philosophy and other books of enduring quality. If they lack a title, they are happy to order it.

While Betty Winnacker prefers well-written fiction, her husband says he prefers non-fiction. "I became interested in history as a way to understand our current world," he says.

If their name sounds familiar, that is because local Moraga-Orinda Fire District Fire Chief Dave Winnacker is Rudy's cousin.

The challenges of opening a physical bookstore are real and not helped by the pandemic, but the couple is optimistic.

Rudy Winnacker says they're very pleased with how the first month has gone. "There is a steady stream of visitors and a lot of support and good will from the community," he says. "We are making sales, growing our inventory and learning a lot about how we can serve the readers in Lafayette and surrounding towns."

The couple plans to become very involved with the community, the Chamber of Commerce, schools and book clubs. They aim to have in-person events at the store such as books signings and author talks.

For now the pandemic has limited those opportunities, although they are currently featuring a couple of local authors - Ecolunchbox Founder Sandra Ann Harris (her book - "Say Goodbye to Plastic: A Survival Guide for Plastic-Free Living") and Jane Blomstrand, a veteran of public school leadership in California (her book - "Meet the Principal: My Journey Beyond the Curriculum") and hope to host virtual events with them soon.

The lack of in-store events meant adjustments in the Winnackers' opening plans. The store opened very quietly but word is spreading and they are grateful to the people who are making a point of visiting.

Rudy Winnacker says there was a lot of uncertainty at the beginning of the lockdown, which happened just days before signing the lease. On top of this, they faced the unexpected challenges of distance learning for their three children ages 10, 14, and 15 (who can often be spotted in the store on their Zoom classes).

While bookshops face stiff competition from internet sellers, Rudy Winnacker is emphatic that there is nothing online that can replicate the experience of taking time browsing through books.

Customer Rhonda Chaikin agrees. "We need a book store - we all need relationships with books," she says.

The store is located at 3645 C Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Independent bookstores are something of a rarity these days. And that's even without a pandemic. So it came as a bit of a surprise to many in Lafayette to see a brick-and-mortar book shop open its doors in mid-September.

Reasonable Books is located in the old Papyrus store near Trader Joe's. For owners Rudy and Betty Winnacker, this is their first time owning a bookshop.

It has been a dream of theirs inspired by their family's shared love of reading. Rudy Winnacker says the store is an opportunity he's looked forward to for sometime to work with the printed word after a career working with a number of digital publishing companies such as Blogger, Twitter and Medium. "Before that," he says, "I delivered newspapers and worked in most of the libraries at Cal as a gopher."

The store feels like a sanctuary of peace and quiet - a deliberate goal of the Winnackers. Their aim is to make

Open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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