

Huntington's Book Revue Reads Like Bestseller

By PETER GOODMAN
STAFF WRITER

When it started, they were just a bunch of leftover hippies in a vacant Huntington department store with a handful of sawhorses and planks for tables and a collection of used books and old National Geographics that they called a bookstore.

Now, journalist and author Pete Hamill says, "If there is a better bookstore in the U.S. than Book Revue, I don't know where the hell it is." Novelist Susan Isaacs of Port Washington says, "I do my job. I write the book. The publishers do their job. And Book Revue does their job, and does it splendidly." Author Nelson DeMille of Garden City, the second writer to sign books there (Alan Dershowitz was first), says, "I was amazed. I was picturing a small, storefront, independent bookstore, but I realized it was a major operation."

In truth, Book Revue, today one of Huntington's cultural anchors, is also among the largest and most prestigious independent bookstores in the country. It's a social center and nighttime hot spot, and also, according to Isaacs, one of the nation's top four or five favorites for writers on tour.

"There's Tattered Cover in Denver; Books & Books in Miami; Powell's in Portland, Ore.; one in Marin County, Calif., and then there's Book Revue," Isaacs says. "This is one that the authors say, 'Oh, yes,' because it is a lovely

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crowd of people — real readers — in a pleasant area." Novelist Joan Collins was a recent guest; Garrison Keillor of "A Prairie Home Companion's" is set for Dec. 3.

Still, despite its reputation and size — about 17,500 square feet and 150,000 volumes — founders Richard and Robert Klein don't plan to celebrate much Monday on their store's 25th birthday. "We got a sign as a gift, and we'll put it out front," Robert Klein says. Other than that, there's a raffle through Dec. 14 for store gift certificates. "We're not planning a cake," he says.

That's typical of the casual style of a place where visitors can drop in and hang out on the couches and chairs scattered among the shelves. "If they buy something, they do. If they don't, we don't care," brother Richard says.

The Kleins, who grew up in Woodbury, and colleague John Teague opened what was then called Encore Books on the day after Thanksgiving in 1977. They'd spent a few years at loose ends — Richard painted houses and cleaned toilets — before realizing that they wanted to run a book store. The brothers hoped to create something worthwhile and make a living at it, too.

"We opened a bookstore to do something we could feel good about," Richard Klein says. "And it was about the love of books."

The colleagues pooled their money — \$8,000 each — slept in the Klein parents' basement and gathered used books at yard and estate sales. They came in under budget: just \$20,000 to get started. The transportation included a Volkswagen Beetle with no reverse: "We would push it out of the driveways." "We were hippies with bare feet," Richard's wife, Julie, says. Richard spotted her while she was browsing and asked her on a date so fast she couldn't think of a way out, he says. That was after the first of four expansions. They've been married 21 years, and the brothers say Julie is the heart of the operation. "She does the computers, buys the cookbooks; she's a workhorse," Richard says.

With its tiny cafe, overflowing shelves (old, new, rare, bestsellers, discounted or full price) and expansive selection of calendars and gifts, Book Revue has managed to survive in a very bad time for independents. The four other Huntington bookstores around when Encore opened have disappeared, though rare-book seller George Lenz is open a block away. Borders and Barnes & Noble superstores dot the Island, but Huntington Village is still chain-free.

"Book Revue has weathered the storm due to personal service, customer loyalty and great events," says Carl Lennertz, director of Book Sense, an American Booksellers Associa-



Richard Klein flanked by his wife, Julie, and brother, Robert, outside their bookstore. A cultural anchor in Huntington Village, the shop also is among the largest and most prestigious independent bookstores in the country.

tion division that supports independent stores.

Networking, Anyone?

Speaking of books, the East End Alliance of East Hampton is holding a panel discussion Sunday afternoon that's likely to be full of information for aspiring writers. "From Manuscript to Marketplace: Book Publishing in the 21st Century" features literary agents Philip Spitzer and Janet Reid, Pushcart Press publisher Bill Henderson, Newmarket Press publisher Esther Margolis, Random House editor Robert Loomis and Harvard University Press editor Joyce Seltzer. Writer-artist Irwin Perlon moderates. It's at Guild Hall, Main Street, East Hampton; \$5; refreshments. Call 631-324-1922. ■

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