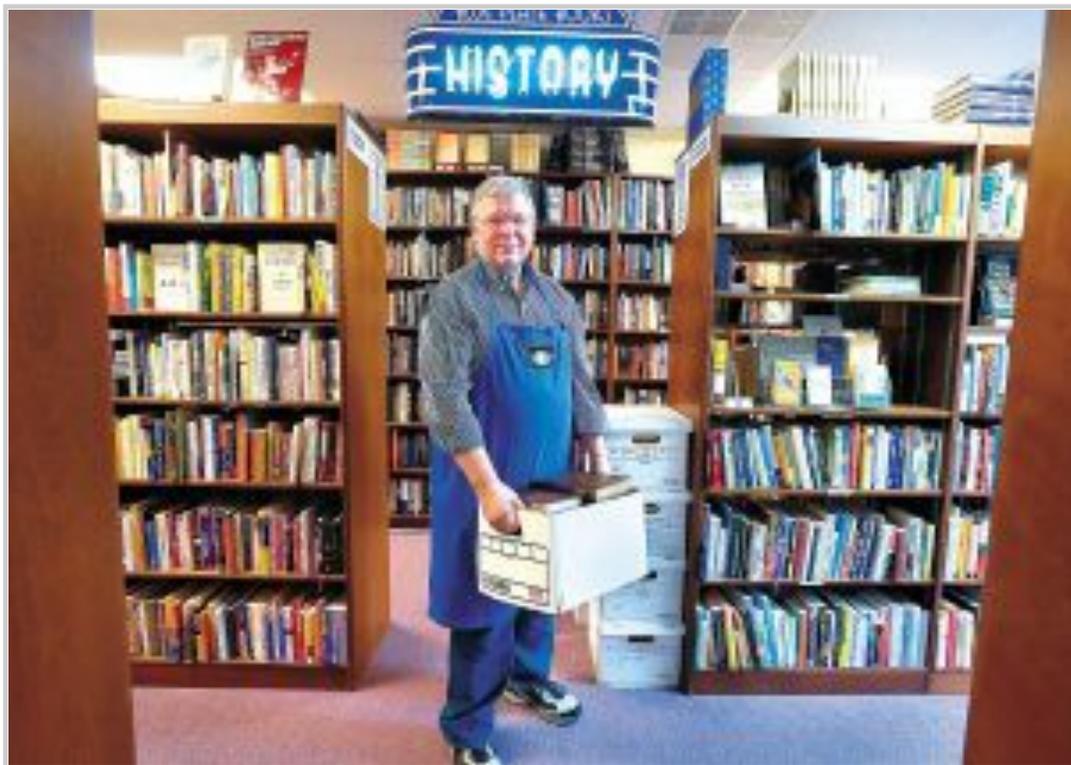


BLUE PLATE FEEDING NEEDS OF READERS

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Blue Plate Books owner Pat Saine stands in the history section of his Valley Avenue store

Tuesday. The store recently added 1,100 square feet of retail space. Saine said used bookstores are popular because books are some of the easiest things to reuse. (Photo by Ginger Perry/The Winchester Star)

WINCHESTER — With the addition this year of 1,100 square feet of retail space, Blue Plate Books in Winchester has become the kind of bookstore in which a reader can lose himself for an hour or two.

And that's encouraged. Soft sofas, chairs and even a church pew placed throughout the store invite patrons to sit a spell.

With 50,000 used, rare and vintage books in stock, "it's a good browsing store," said proprietor Pat Saine.

Blue Plate Books is one of three used bookstores in Winchester.

Opened in 1997 as a 1,200-square-foot store, the bookstore on Valley Avenue has been growing ever since. Today the store comprises 3,500 square feet, half of which is devoted to fiction and half to non-fiction, including sections for history, religion, art, food and rare books. There is also a children's room with an area rug that displays the alphabet, a section for Manga comics and a section just for young-adult readers.

It was Saine's dream to own a bookstore, even during his original 25-year career as an ophthalmic photographer. His website, PJSaine.com, includes images of retinas, corneas and lenses that were made for clinical use.

"I had written books and taught around the world," Saine said. "I was ready for a career change, and I had always wanted to run a

bookstore.”

His wife’s career in pharmacy led the couple to Winchester, where Saine got a job at Border’s bookstore. He wanted to be sure he really loved the job he had always dreamed about.

After a year, “when they gave me my first raise of a nickel, I said it was time to open my own bookstore,” he said.

Saine found a retail space and signed a two-year lease. “We didn’t know whether it would work,” he said.

Today, in addition to attracting local patrons, Blue Plate Books is a destination for travelers who love used books. Just as people use Yelp to find restaurants or hotels, “people who are looking for a used bookstore will Google that,” Saine said.

“You never know what you’ll find in a bookstore that’s out of town.”

Saine said that in particular, “every used bookstore brings the personality of the person who owns it.”

The organization of Blue Plate Books is unlike many used bookstores, in which warrens of rooms hold dusty shelves that may — or may not — hold treasures.

“I’ve been in used bookstores where they give you a flashlight” to combat the dimness,” Saine said.

Instead, Blue Plate Books maintains a detailed inventory of the books on the shelves and also those stored in a back room that was added during the recent expansion. Saine’s goal is to maximize the variability of the books on the shelves, he

said.

A typical big-box retail bookstore will have an author's latest release and maybe the book that preceded it, Saine said. Readers depend on used bookstores to find an author's entire catalogue.

“We try to stock deep to the author.”

Saine said the store has several missions. First, to offer “a good, inexpensive book to read. One that's cheaper than a Kindle.”

Second, to “keep book culture alive.”

And also, to keep history alive. Many of the books on the shelves are books to collect rather than to read, he said. The oldest one in the store is an English law book dated 1685.

In fact, the antique book section of the

store has its own perfume, which rises from the original, plant-based adhesive in the spines of old leather-bound books.

“It has that special used-book smell, which is the lignin in the bindings,” Saine said.

Another of Saine’s missions is to stock budget copies of the books being assigned in schools. Stored in a back room are additional copies of the titles students usually need.

“‘Mrs. Dalloway’ or ‘To Kill A Mockingbird,’ you can never have too many of these,” Saine said.

Before the expansion, second- and third-copies of volumes were kept in an unheated storeroom not connected to the store. It was outside and down half a block, forcing employees to fetch second copies in the

rain, snow and mud.

Saine's biggest surprise during the nine-month construction period was discovering "so many books that I had bought that I hadn't gotten on the shelves yet."

Enlarging the store "emptied our warehouse of books," he said.

Saine updates his inventory mainly by buying books that people bring in. From Tuesday through Saturday, Saine is available at the store to examine the potential treasures that come through the door. Also, he will attend auctions and occasionally receives volumes when people die.

Saine said used bookstores are doing well because books are the easiest things to

reuse and used books are cheap. Also, it can sometimes be easier to find something in a bookstore rather than online.

It won't be soon, but perhaps eventually another expansion is in the future for the bookstore.

“We may find more books to buy,” he said.

Saine said he loves being surrounded by books.

“And I get to meet book people every day.”