

David Moffet, owner of the Classic Movie & Comic Center in Livonia, spends a few moments paging through a comic book behind the counter of his store. While Moffet

got into the business because he enjoyed reading comic books, he said he does not have the time now.

DAN DEAN/Staff photographer

'I struck up a friendship with a Farmington bookstore owner. When he complained about paying rent on his unused basement, I suggested using the space for a comic bookstore. He liked the idea, and offered me a job running it.'

David Moffet
owner
Classic Movie & Comic Center

Comic book hobby is now his business

By K.M. Kozlowski
special writer

HOW DO YOU transform a hobby into a flourishing business? Ask David Moffet, proprietor of Classic Movie and Comic Center, located in the Mid 7 Shopping Center, on Middlebelt at Seven Mile. Moffet, a vintage comic book collector, was working on his masters in business administration at the University of Detroit when he began his venture into business. As a collector of first issue comic books, Moffet regularly made the rounds of area bookstores, looking for comic book finds.

"I struck up a friendship with a Farmington bookstore owner," said Moffet, a Farmington resident and 1986 graduate of North Farmington High School. "When he complained about paying rent on his unused basement, I suggested using the space for a comic bookstore. He liked the idea, and offered me a job running it."

Leaving school, Moffet joined the business as an employee in 1977, and gradually bought out the original owner. While the comic division grew, the bookstore upstairs also underwent some change, evolving over a period of time from a general bookstore into an entertainment bookstore, with movie books, biographies, and music anthologies, in addition to movie and personality posters, old records, and movie stills.

As the business developed, decisions had to be made regarding the future. Opting for more space and a one story than two story layout, Moffet moved Classic from its Grand River and Farmington Road location to its present Livonia locale in 1981.

"PEOPLE WOULD go downstairs and never look around upstairs, and vice versa, at the Farmington store," Moffet said. "I wanted a layout

where people could eyeball the entire store as they entered."

With the decision to move settled, another decision had to be made: what to fill the additional space with? Moffet looked at the booming videotape market. "At that time, everyone was getting into video. Video stores were springing up on every corner, like mushrooms. So I decided to go with being a complete 'paper' store (dealing with books, posters, lobby cards, and other paper goods)."

Moffet does not rule video out altogether, however. Classic orders videotapes for some of its regular customers, shopping around for the best rate. "Eventually, Classic will expand its video line, but not until the paper goods can wholly support the venture," Moffet said.

Differing from the conventional store, Classic combines modern sale techniques with the old style of retailing, bartering; not only selling, but buying and trading with customers.

"We have two types of suppliers: companies on each coast that furnish Classic with a large proportion of its paper goods; and people off the street, looking to expand or shorten their collections through trade or sale."

Demand also creates a market, as Classic found out most recently with its latest endeavor, baseball cards. "We had a lot of little boys coming up on their bicycles, asking about baseball cards. So I picked up a few cards to see how they would do, and they were so well received that we have expanded our line of ball cards," Moffet said.

With the assistance of two managers, and five full-time, two part-time employees, Moffet's Classic Movie and Comic Center has handled its growing pains well. But, does Moffet find the time to read the comics that got him started in this enterprise in the first place?

"Unfortunately, no," the entrepreneur sighed. "Comics occupy all of my time as a business now."

Comic collecting up

Shows cater to buyer trades

Imagine yourself with special "superpowers" that give you the ability not only to confront your deadliest enemy without fear but also to win out over evil forces bent on destroying the world.

It's easy — with the help of one of the many superhero comic books popular today. Although these comic books provide plots that are pure fantasy, their growing popularity and profitability with readers, collectors and dealers are very real.

As demand for current comics as well as collectible back issues has increased, comic book shows have become a popular way for comic book enthusiasts to buy, trade and search out their favorite issues.

Although many view comic book collecting as a "kid's hobby," comic book shows attract a variety of people.

Many customers in their 20s have continuously been reading comic books, while people in their 30s come back to collecting because of nostalgia. The younger ones are into it because they are kids. "They have an excuse," said Tony Brown, coordinator of the comic book shows at Livonia's Holiday Inn on Plymouth Road.

Brown, a music instructor at Washtenaw Community College, got involved in the shows out of a need to sell his own collection and now finds it profitable to run shows continually on a six-week basis. His table includes cheaper comics selling three for a dollar, as well as early "Superman" comic books costing as much as \$210.

THAT \$210 price shocks no one in the comic book business, since a copy of Action Comic No. 1, containing the first appearance of Superman, sells for \$1,000 to \$1,600, depending on its condition.

According to Brown, comic book dealing can be a profitable business. "If you play your cards right."

"It is like any other investment. If something dies you are stuck with it. It's like a mini stock market," he said, while pointing to his copy of "Howard the Duck," a trendy comic fading in popularity.

This Livonia show, which Brown and his brother Mike put on every six weeks, attracts many collectors hoping to find that one comic that will complete their collection. Some collect every comic book by one artist, while others try to get every comic that contains their favorite superhero.

Brown began collecting hoping to get a complete run of Superman. He finally gave up when he realized he would need another \$7,500. Now he sells his superman, with the exception of the ones that came out when he was young.

"Those are the ones that mean something to me," he said. "I collect them to recapture part of my childhood."

Brown stopped collecting "Superman" comics when he entered junior high, because it was consid-

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ered "little kid's stuff." After sponsoring many shows, however, he has observed many kids who see more to it than that.

"Now you find kids buying multiple copies of new issues because they think they may become collectible. Before it was just a kid thing," he recalled.

COMIC BOOK shows attract not only independent dealers, but also area comic book stores. Store employees bring out store stock for promotion or to find buyers for "hard to move" merchandise.

According to David Moffet, owner of Livonia's Classic Movie and Comic Center, comic specialty stores sprang up after the conventions and shows legitimized the hobby. Now, these stores can provide as much diversity in comics as the shows do.

"Before 1968, there were no stores. Then, to find a back issue, you had to go to a garage sale," said Moffet.

By buying private collections, Moffet now manages one out of approximately 10 comic book stores in the metropolitan Detroit area. Although his stock contains almost anything a collector could want, there are some books he will not take in.

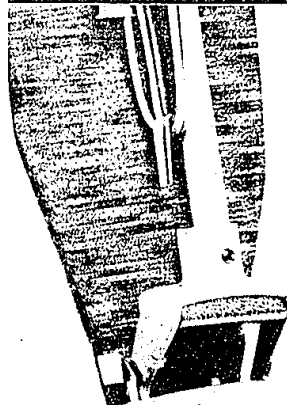
"We sell the middle-priced books," he said. "The economy is affecting the sale of the more expensive comic books. Now the \$200 and on up books are selling slowly, where before they would move quickly."

He describes his average customers as male, between the ages of 10 and 35, and primarily interested in collecting superhero comics.

"My personal theory of why they are so popular is because the superheroes don't have to pay taxes and can go around beating people up," Moffet said.

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