

## Book business booms



Bending for books at Metro News



Books for all ages

By ELIOT H. BENSON

"Fish gotta swim and birds gotta fly," the song goes, in which bookstores can add, "and people gotta read." At least that seems to be the case, for despite the recession, or perhaps because of it, bookstores are enjoying strong business.

A recent survey of a number of local bookstores supports the premise that Americans traditionally maintain their appetite for books even during hard times. The survey, almost too in-

formal to be called that, turns up the following as the most frequently cited explanation:

- Books are inexpensive substitutes for other, more expensive activities or entertainment.
- Books provide temporary escape from personal problems.
- Movies, TV programs, and talk shows featuring authors exert considerable influence on reading habits and interests.

Rod Salminen, regional sales manager for B. Dalton Booksellers, the na-

tionwide retail chain owned by the Dayton Hudson Corp. (which also owns Hudson's department stores) puts it this way: "People have less money to spend on trips or other expensive forms of entertainment, so they are apparently sticking close to home and have more time to read. Books are cheap but good entertainment."

So far this year Dalton's sales are up 30 per cent. Last year the chain rang up an increase of almost 34 per cent. To be sure, higher prices for books account for part of the gains

"AGGRESSIVE merchandising and innovative advertising and promotional programs by publishers and retailers like ourselves, help to stimulate book buying. And, these activities are also creating new book buyers," Salminen adds.

The Dalton stores carry wide varieties of books with some 30,000 titles in the typical unit. The impact of the attractively displayed books, with something for everybody, encourages self-selection and impulse buying.

The opening of new stores in high-traffic shopping centers and other con-

venient locations is also contributing to sales growth. Dalton established its first store in metropolitan Detroit in 1968 and now has six units in Michigan. Two more are scheduled to open in the state this year.

These stores are lively places. They are full of people looking for books that meet their needs.

According to William Rayburn, manager of the Dalton store in the Oakland Mall in Troy, do-it-yourself manuals on auto maintenance and home repair, as well as books on gardening, crafts, hobbies, and cooking are big sellers.

"IN THESE difficult times doing it yourself has a special appeal. Along with the savings, there is the involvement and an opportunity to express creativity," Rayburn states.

At the Orchard Mall shopping center in West Bloomfield, Maurine Silman, owner of Bookpeople, an independent shop, says, "Like the movies, books help you to escape from the harsh realities of everyday living. And they're cheap, even cheaper than the movies. Then, too, books last, and they can be read and reread many times."

Bookpeople, which has been open for less than two years, is receiving enthusiastic response from the community.

"Our business is good," Mrs. Silman reports, "and we hope to build it by providing personal service and being knowledgeable about our merchandise."

In Birmingham, at the Little Professor Book Center, Gene Gordon, proprietor, says, "Movies, like 'Jaws,' TV specials, and talk shows with authors, have awakened the public's curiosity and interest about many subjects. This brings people into the bookstores to find answers."

At the Doubleday store in Birmingham, a customer declares that "books make perfect gifts. Whenever I visit my grandchildren in Virginia, I bring them books. They love the stories and I enjoy reading to them. I remember reading some of these same books to my children and I don't want my grandchildren to miss them."

INDEED, THE PURCHASE of books for gifts, which probably accounts for a significant portion of hardcover book sales, is believed to be another important reason for the rise in demand for books.

Eric Fromm, a former teacher who

opened his own store in June under the Open Book name in the Bloomfield Commons shopping center in Bloomfield Township, says, "I hope to do good business in this area because the people here have a fairly high level of education and these people tend to read a good deal."

Ilma Findlater, owner of Books 'N Things in Rochester, says her business is "up tremendously" this year. "I serve a college community where there is a continuing thirst for knowledge. Also, students from the high schools and from nearby Oakland University are always coming in looking for paperback" for supplementary course reading," Ms. Findlater states.

People traveling on business or vacation also do a lot of reading. At the Metro News book store in the Bloomfield Plaza shopping center in Bloomfield Township, Jerry Trumper, a customer, says he reads a great deal, especially when he takes a trip.

"I READ ONE or two paperback mystery books a day when I'm on vacation," he notes.

According to Shirley Feinberg, owner of Mostly Books, with stores in the Tel-Twelve shopping center and the Pontiac Mall, sales are very good at both locations. She thinks that people are getting bored with TV and are turning to books as ideal low-cost entertainment.

A check with local libraries also confirms the increase in reading with circulation and registration well ahead of the previous year. Rebecca Lamb, assistant director of the Bloomfield Township Public Library, believes that one of the main reasons is the desire and need for self advancement.

"I believe that people today feel a need to know and understand more about this world of ours. They seem to want to learn more for the sake of knowing than for the purpose of getting a job or improving their job prospects," she explains.

The trend to nonfiction, with emphasis on factual information, biographies, pop psychology, and how-to books, tend to support this view.

"We also think that our library activities, such as the summer reading programs for youngsters and book reviews for adults, are contributing to the development of the reading habit," Miss Lamb adds.

Whatever the reasons, books are filling ever greater needs in American life and the demand means good business for the bookstores.

Staff photos  
By Douglas Bauman



Eugene Gordon, Little Professor owner

It's got to be the one on top.