

Bookstores from page 8A

spokeswoman for Waldenbooks.

Money for growth

Fresh capital combined with their profits have given these companies the fuel to open superstores to match the unrelenting demand for books and music revealed in a series of studies by Time-Warner, said Robert DiRomualdo, Borders Books president. "Studies showed that 70 percent of the American population considered music very important in their lives, yet, as we aged, our music purchases declined," he said. "However, as we age, the financial ability to purchase music increases. There's a demand right there that wasn't being satisfied. Maybe because the only music stores in town are hard-driven rock stores, which are an unpleasant experience for most adults."

The light went on at both Borders and Barnes & Noble, and well-stocked music rooms were added to all their newest stores.

Espresso cafes (which also sell other beverages) were added to add ambience and encourage shoppers to linger.

DiRomualdo discussed his views on the reasons for the big bookstore phenomenon:

"First of all, the number of college graduates on the streets goes up every year, creating a greater demand for books. These people

"Next, the baby boomers are having kids, and they want books and the joy of reading to be a part of their children's lives.

"Third, since we're purveyors of information in a world hungry for knowledge, we've got it made. We sell a lot of medical reference books, psychology titles, law books."

Finally, he mentioned the home

improvement craze:

"Everybody shopping at all these new home improvement superstores stops in here sooner or later for a book to tell them how-to. Have you seen our selection of plumbing, remodeling and refinishing titles?"

Winning shopper praise

Customers had nothing but words of praise for the arts-oriented superstores.

"Now this is how a music store should be," said Graham Brown of Novi as he selected a compact disc containing a Paul Simon retrospective at the Borders store in Novi.

"There's got to be 20,000 tapes and CDs here to choose from. The artists are marked according their category of music. The sales staff is up front to answer questions, quiet jazz plays in the background. I've been in here for 45 minutes, and no one has bugged me. It's a class operation."

A customer at the Barnes and Noble store in Bloomfield Township, who did not wish to reveal her name, said since the store opened a few months ago, she shops in once a week to have lunch at the espresso cafe and buy a book or magazine. "It's just a nice place to be. I feel as though I'm surrounded by great thoughts and lofty ideas. I get inspired."

The flip side

The first casualty of the big bookstore wars is Metro News, an independent bookseller across the street from Barnes & Noble. It announced its decision to close.

The Little Professor Book Shop in downtown Plymouth said its fate might be the same "if a Barnes and Noble moved in a few blocks away. But right now, we're doing fine," said Rob Tipplany, sales associate. "Our customer

base is strong, and we have lots of local shoppers."

Cannie Mannino, owner of the popular children's book shop Half-Way Down the Stairs in downtown Rochester, said the first two months that Barnes & Noble opened a few miles down the road, her business fell drastically.

"But we've rebounded," she said, "because they can't touch us in terms of personal hand-selling of book titles by well-informed salespeople, and they can't touch us in terms of the breadth of our selection of quality children's books." Mannino lamented the dawn of the book superstores.

"I've personally grown weary of explaining to customers why I can't give discounts and sales like the chain stores. We just don't buy in the quantities that they do to offer such prices."

Mannino cautioned book lovers against the "bottom-line buying" of the bookstore chains, which could affect the publishing world and its ability to introduce new or alternative authors.

"Books have become a commodity and not the means of communicating ideas from one human being to another," she said. "The independents have always taken chances on new or unknown authors. I wonder if the corporate-buying teams of national bookstore chains will do the same?"

Barnes and Nobles' Becker said the concern was unfounded. "Of our 100,000 titles, all are not best-sellers. What else comprises our inventory but local authors, small publishing houses and university presses? Each store has racks of off-the-beaten-path books. Every angle, every subject, every viewpoint is represented at Barnes and Noble."

Bill would force disclosure of secret suit settlements

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Local governments would no longer be able to hide lawsuit settlements — but businesses could — under a bill before the state House of Representatives.

Recommended by the House Judiciary Committee last week, the bill declares that any secret settlement "is against public policy and is void."

The bill by Rep. Michael Griffin, D-Jackson, is aimed against the practice of governmental units paying off plaintiffs, ensuring that the payment be kept secret,

and asking the circuit court to seal the records.

The government then hides the payment by including it in a lump sum payment to its attorney. The attorney writes the plaintiff a check — not a public record under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act.

The bill applies to counties, cities, villages, townships, special authorities, public universities, community colleges, special assessment districts and all other boards created by either state law or municipal charter.

Griffin introduced the bill two years ago after public outcry when the Jackson County Board of Commissioners made a secret settlement with two prisoners who had been beaten up in the jail.

Rep. David Gubow, D-Huntington Woods, sought to expand the bill to all parties, including businesses. With 10 votes needed in committee, Republicans rejected Gubow's amendment, five yes

to six no with one abstention and six absent.

The issue was brought to light nationally in December 1991 by Texas attorney Bob Gibbins in the American Bar Association Journal.

In "Secrecy versus Safety," Gibbins argued that companies like Upjohn, Dow Corning, McNeilab Inc. and Cessna Aircraft not only hid their payouts from stockholders, but the gag orders prohibited public release of product safety information. Even scientific journals were prohibited from discussing adverse effects of painkilling medicines, Gibbins said.

The Dow Corning case involved breast implants. Plaintiffs' attorneys say hundreds of women never would have asked for implants if facts about earlier cases hadn't been sealed in court records.

Refer to House Bill 4577 when writing to your state representative in Lansing.

Jazz ensemble performs at OU

Oakland University's Vocal Jazz Ensemble and Afram Jazz Ensemble will perform at 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 18, in Varner Recital Hall on campus.

Tickets are \$5. Call 370-3013.

Straight Talk tackles cloning

"Cloning Human Beings: Are We Stepping Over the Line?" is the next Straight Talk subject hosted by Fox 50 news anchor Amyre Makupson.

Taping is 5 p.m. Friday at WKBD studios, 26905 West 11 Mile, in Southfield. The program is to be aired 7 a.m. Saturday. To be part of the studio audience, make a reservation by calling 355-7089. No tickets are necessary.

Education plan is Keane's topic

William G. Keane, superintendent of Oakland Schools, will speak on "How will Gov. Engler's education proposals affect you?" 7:30-8:45 p.m. today at the Troy Library, 510 Big Beaver (in the Troy Civic Center complex, just east of I-75 and north of Big Beaver).

Issues to be discussed include

charter schools, elimination of the property tax and its replacement and teacher retirement. A question-and-answer session will follow.

The talk is sponsored by the Lambda Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma.



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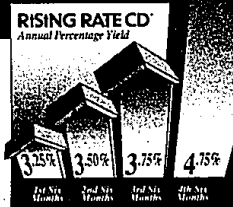
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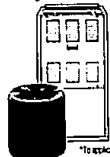
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