



# MICHIGAN'S Independent Bookstores – *A Labor of Love*

WRITER | JULIE FORD    PHOTOS | JULIE FORD, SHANNON MCMASTER

It takes just one or two steps through the door of one of Michigan's beloved independent bookstores to hear, "What can I help you find today?" It's not a hurried question; instead, it's a sincere inquiry awaiting an answer to send the bookseller into a gleeful search. Add a comfortable atmosphere as unique as its owner, well-stocked shelves, a list of readings, groups, and events to join, canine or feline greeters, and one might not want to leave.

"When you walk into a store of people who love what they are doing, you'll get very personalized service – they care about you and want to make sure you get the right book in your hands," explains Deborah Leonard, executive director of the Great Lakes Independent Booksellers Association, dedicated to supporting more than 125 independent bookstores in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky.

Leonard notes the heyday for independent bookstores was in the 1970s, and now those owners are retiring. "Years ago, when people opened bookstores, the reason was 'I love to be around books, so I'll open a

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store,'" says Leonard. "Today, owners are smarter, doing more homework, have a good idea of what to do, and now are more successful than in the past."

Success is an understatement for Ann Arbor's Literati bookstore. The husband and wife team of Mike and Hilary Gustafson have more than filled the void Borders left when it closed in 2011. "When we first opened, we didn't

know what to expect. Opening a new bookstore in the age of e-readers and Amazon equals scary adventure," explains Mike. "We could not have predicted the widespread enthusiastic support of Ann Arbor, Southeast Michigan, and even Toledo and Cleveland. That has surprised us a lot."

Since opening in spring of 2013, Literati expanded from 7 to 25 employees and has more than 21,000 "likes" on Facebook. "We thought that it would be a slightly smaller-scale operation," says Gustafson. "That kind of growth was unanticipated." He attributes Literati's success to superior customer service and says the booksellers of Literati are devoted to building a level of trust with their customers akin to a book-loving friend with infallible recommendations.

In Kalamazoo, Kazoo Books owner Gloria Tiller says personal service, offering books the big chains do not carry, and the quirky Kazoo Books experience have made her bookstore a vibrant member of the community for 29 years. Initially a paperback swap store, Kazoo Books now sells new and used books both in the store and online, takes books in on trade, and offers signed, rare, and first editions – a testament to Tiller's antiquarian expertise.



# INDEPENDENT Bookstores

## WEST MICHIGAN

**Between the Covers**  
*Used - Current & Classics*  
 12330 James St., Suite B-55B  
 Holland, MI 49424  
 (616) 377-7202  
 BetweentheCovers.us

**Booked for the Season**  
*Gently Used Books*  
 8 North 7th St.  
 Grand Haven, MI 49417  
 (616) 296-0465

**Reader's World**  
*Books /Magazines/Newspapers*  
 194 S. River Ave.  
 Holland, MI 49423  
 (616) 396-8548  
 ReadersWorldBookstore.com

**The Bookman**  
*New/Used/Current/Classics/Children's/  
 Special Orders/Periodicals/Gifts*  
 715 Washington  
 Grand Haven, MI 49456  
 (616) 846-3520  
 BookmanBookstore.com

## NORTHERN MICHIGAN

**Purple Tree Books**  
*New and Used Books*  
 334 North Main St.  
 Cheboygan, MI 49721  
 (231) 818-8586  
 PurpleTreeBooks.com

## GRAND TRAVERSE

**Landmark Books**  
*Rare Collectors & Classics*  
 800 Cottageview Dr. #45,  
 Traverse City, MI 49684  
 (231) 922-7225  
 LandmarkBooksTC.com



Gloria Tiller, Owner Kazoo Books

"We're very different," says Tiller. "People want to shop locally because we offer something unique, we have great books at great prices, and we're accommodating. Whether it's sitting in front of the fireplace, petting the cat, or browsing books – it's a very comfortable place to do book shopping." Tiller says she and her staff constantly watch trends and intimately know their inventory.

Grand Haven residents Dick and Sharon Tanis, Alexa McGuinness, and Diane Steggerda are approaching two years of ownership of Bookman, an independent bookstore mainstay in Grand Haven since 1974. "Three of us are retired, and we're really back to work," says Steggerda. "We are committed to enhancing the quality of life for our community members with local author book signings, partnering with libraries and trying to do extra things that are good for everybody."

In addition to more than 7,000 books, Bookman carries a large selection of magazines, offers an exchange program for used paperbacks, and has a special area for children. "I hope that people realize we depend on the community to keep us alive and well," says Steggerda. "We provide serious customer service, and we are somebody you can talk to."

Leonard notes that 50 percent of every dollar spent at an independent bookstore goes back to its community. Only 30 percent is returned for chain stores, and, for every dollar spent online, zero funds are returned. "Bookstores allow you to surprise yourself," notes Gustafson. "I think what has been lost in purchasing products online is both the whimsy of selecting something you normally wouldn't as well as the ability to surprise your own idea of what you are interested in. People will come into our bookshop and pick out cookbooks they would never have found online. Algorithms can't do that." □



### April 29, 2017, is Independent Bookstore Day

A much-anticipated day for special editions and unique items produced by publishers exclusively for independent bookstores. Check local bookstore social media for event details.



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