

Enthusiasm makes the most of opportunity? BookLore celebrates 35th anniversary

By Constance Scrafield

Nancy Frater's beautiful BookLore, recipient of the Best Canadian Independent Book in 2013 and considered a cornerstone of the arts community in Orangeville, celebrated 35 years of business in the same location.

"We were jammed wall to wall," said Nancy Frater about the anniversary celebration held on February 8. "We had a collage of what it was like and over the years, there was young Margaret Atwood. We went through over 100 flutes of champagne."

In an early morning interview with Nancy Frater, BookLore's co-founder and owner, she told the Citizen some of the history and the philosophy behind it that has brought it to this fabulous anniversary.

It was with her friend, Ellen Clare in 1989 that they were able to open the bookstore they had been wanting.

"Ellen and I were friends," she said. "We wanted to open a business - a book store. We went away for a women's weekend and the idea was reborn."

Originally, the plan was to open in a location that was central in town but the new development there was not quite finished.

So, they spoke to Doc Gillies who had built the Creek Side Mall on First Street and there was one unit left. Coles Book store was in the Orangeville Mall. They thought they would have different books.

"Enthusiasm," she said, "makes the most of opportunity."

"We always got along with the people at Coles," Frater said. "We had a different array and wanted to be involved in the community."

Books were the market but the focus was on people and the arts within the community, she called their model "people-centred."

The first contribution was when they formed a group with two other people and called it Readings for Resources, designed to work for charities, to bring in many authors for the reading. Among these was hosted "a young Margaret Atwood," Rohinton Mistry and June Callwood.

Another thing was to be part of the Headwaters Arts Festival Gala, which was held in the SGI Centre for some years and was moved to the Alton Mill Arts Centre.

In partnership with the Mill Street Library, they started Dufferin Reads - One Book, One County. Then, began the tremendous series of Authors on Stage, an ongoing collaboration with Theatre Orangeville in support of its New Play Development program, which has brought many luminaries. They include Carol Off, Marc Garneau, Chris Hatfield, and many more.

A beautiful event, Theatre Orangeville featured Michael McCreary and Roland Kirouac, which entailed comedy about his autism from McCreary; sweet repertoire and elegant dance and movement by Kirouac - produced by Sophie Webber.

There was some electricity for a book signing at the store with Adam Copeland, a famous wrestler with the WWE, whose fight name is Edge. Copeland grew up in Orangeville and wanted to do a book signing at BookLore.

"Three hundred people showed up on a cold November afternoon to congratulate him and the WWE sent eight security guards with

him. He was a big deal," Frater told us.

Yet, she added, "He was one of the most erudite people I ever met."

By 2 p.m., it was standing room only for the 35th Anniversary party. It warmed her heart, Frater commented, to see so many people. It has been a "wonderful ride" that's for sure."

Knowing people will always find comfort in reading, it is important to keep up with knowing what they want to read. Frater told us that social media comes into play; TikTok is a big influence for young readers and there is a growing trend for "Romantasy," a combination of romance and fantasy, as well as autobiographies.

"I have never been a person who plans far ahead but I have always been people centred. We have publishing reps that come. They know the vibes in our store and what's happening in the world," Frater remarked.

Frater and her staff learn about new books from new orders. They can spark interest in a book they do not know about. They learn a lot from their customers.

"It's a two-way street," said Frater.

During a further telephone conversation with David Nairn, Theatre Orangeville's artistic director, he told the Citizen that BookLore's story is an essential part of the local arts scene.

Firstly, he opined, "it is the finest book store in Canada" a marvel." The staff are so up to speed; one can ask about any author and they would have it right there.

It was really the friendship and their partnership, "which is without equal," Nairn said. "The incredible authors Nancy has curated has brought funds to our new play development, so what every new play and playwright gets is the developmental process which would not be possible without Nancy. Those authors on stage, and we are having one to be announced, they have been the best of the best of the most remarkable authors, that have come and are supporting the process of creating new work."

It is the ethos that Nancy has to support writers, through the series, which "is primarily supported by BookLore" as Nairn put it, "to provide them with the means to sit in a dark corner and write."

With all that it takes to produce a new play: in part, draft readings, re-writes; and full readings with professional actors bring the community together.

It is not just Theatre Orangeville that Frater supports but all the other arts in the area, he explained. She sells tickets, puts posters in the shop windows, advocates for any arts and is a huge advocate for the cultural scene in theatre, dance and film.

Nairn made it clear: BookLore was a real part of whatever sparked that launched a number of new arts organizations, at about the same time: Theatre Orangeville itself (established in 1994), Headwaters Arts, In the Hills Magazine as founding establishments of what the arts community is today.

Frater had praise for the couple who have recently opened Plant.ed "a plant-forward cafe, right next door. They are concentrated on health, so she said. "Perfect, as long as I don't have to cook."