

BEACHCOMBER.....*"Let us take a journey down the Shore to see what we can find..."*

Long Live The Jersey Shore Independent Bookstore!



Owner Rita Maggio and staff at BookTowne in downtown Manasquan.

If there's one staple in life at the Jersey Shore, it's having a good book to read no matter the season. In summer, there's a book in just about every beach bag and bicycle basket. After a day at the beach, sand falls out of the leaves of a book like leaves from a tree. Then, in autumn, perhaps a festive red and yellow leaf, the same shade as the pages of an old classic, becomes a favorite bookmark. In winter, on a cold day, a cuppa and a cozy blanket are the perfect partners to a good book. And in spring, the rebirth of all things green and floral fuels a rebirth for reading.

It wasn't long ago that the future of independent bookstores appeared to be bleak at best. Along with the popularity of the big-name bookstores on the internet came the shift to competing digital e-readers and e-books. Independent bookstores

found themselves on the front lines, with many falling victim to the changing climate of "going digital" and the declining economy. In 2009, the number of independent bookstores belonging to the American Booksellers Association hit an all-time low of 1,651 locations



BookTowne features a wide assortment of literature for young and old alike and hosts numerous events throughout the year.

nationwide.

Fast forward to 2017, and that number has bounced back to more than 2,320.

Ocean and Monmouth counties are lucky enough to be the home to a small handful of exceptional independent bookstores that beat the odds despite the lure of the internet and the temptation of an e-reader.

What the mainstream naysayers forgot about when forecasting the death of printed books was the *feeling* of walking into a small bookstore with its titles all carefully arranged with intention and shelved in a manner that welcomes and soothes browsers and customers alike. The experience of wandering around a bookstore in person and seeing all of the titles raising their hands whispering, "Pick me!" cannot be replaced by browsing an online. A real book feels

at home in one's hand, something that e-reader users realized the hard way as they ditched technology and steadily returned to actual books.

One of the ways independent bookstores at the Shore continue to thrive is by establishing a sense of community. By hosting special events such as author signings and storytime for children, the intimacy of in-person events creates a sense of belonging for both patrons and writers alike that cannot be found on a technological screen.

BookTowne, a quaint, small bookstore located in downtown Manasquan, hosts author events throughout the year, many of which are free and in such demand that spots fill up quickly. "Along with a wide assortment of literature to choose from for the young and old alike, BookTowne also has events and happenings throughout the year that involve and nurture the reader in all of us," says owner Rita Maggio. Authors from as close as down the street to as far away as Ireland have visited the store to promote and sign their books.

Maggio explains that, in order to survive, it's important to know her community of customers and their interests. She works closely with publishers so that she can stock books that readers will want. "In summer, I have a lot of books that are beach related, with authors like Elin Hilderbrand that I know readers will want," she says.

One of the biggest sellers at BookTowne recently was Bruce Springsteen's autobiography *Born to Run*. "He's in our community. That's our person. We sold well over one hundred copies," Maggio says.

Maggio makes sure that there are

plenty of options for children, whether they come into the store with their parents or if an aunt or a grandmother comes to buy something for them. A display of Story Box Figures is one of the most popular areas of

the store. "Children come over to the figures and begin playing with them immediately," Maggio says.

Seasonal window and store displays are updated regularly so that visitors

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INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES in Ocean and Monmouth Counties

BOOKTOWNE

171 Main Street, Manasquan

(732) 722-7255

www.booktowne.com

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [@booktowne](#)

A favorite of authors and readers alike, BookTowne celebrates its tenth anniversary in 2017. In a cozy and friendly atmosphere, the store offers a wide assortment of literature, from the classics to the modern, including children's books, young adult, fiction, non-fiction, Jersey Shore topics and titles, and more. BookTowne hosts author signings and events throughout the year as well as storytime for children. Open Mon. – Fri. 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM; Sat. 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM; Sun. 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM.

THE BOOKWORM

1509 Long Beach Island Boulevard

Surf City, (609) 494-8112

www.bookwormlbi.com

[f](#) [t](#) [@The-Bookworm-410517082417344](#)

[t](#) [@bookwormlbi](#)

Located in Surf City on Long Beach Island, The Bookworm has offered a selection of books plus cards and book-related items for fifteen years. The store's selections include new releases and classic favorites for both children and adults, and browsers are welcome. The store holds storytime for children and author signings throughout the season. Open April – Dec. Call for hours.

RIVER ROAD BOOKS

759 River Road, Fair Haven

(732) 747-9455

www.riverroadbooks.net

[f](#) [t](#) [@riverroadbooksfairhaven](#)

[t](#) [@riverroadbooks](#)

River Road Books opened in 2006 and continues to thrive as they bring the community of readers together. The store offers new titles and classics for children and adults. Events include author appearances throughout the year. Open Mon. – Fri. 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM; Sat. 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM.

WORDS!

623 Cookman Avenue, Asbury Park

(732) 455-5549

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [@wordsAsburyPark](#)

Words! is a hip, independent bookstore that sells new and used books. Their library promotes new ideas, aspiring authors, and discussions with authors and artists. Events include storytime and author talks. Open daily 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM.



USED BOOKSTORES

in Ocean and Monmouth Counties

RECYCLED READING

2814 Bridge Avenue, Point Pleasant

(732) 899-8100

[f](#) [t](#) [@recycledreadingatthenjshore1990/#](#)

Open Tues., Wed., Fri., Sat. 10:30 AM – 5:30 PM.

A PAPERBACK EXCHANGE

703 Belmar Plaza, Belmar

(732) 681-6829

www.apaperbackexchange.com

Open Tues. – Thurs. and Sat. 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM; Fri. 10:00 AM – 7:00 PM.

THE BOOK GARDEN

868 Monmouth Road, Cream Ridge

(609) 758-7770

www.bookgardennj.com

[f](#) [t](#) [@bookgardennj](#)

Open Wed. – Sun. 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM.

sense the time of year by the store's atmosphere.

Laurie Potter, owner of River Road Books in Fair Haven, knows that if she builds a community in her book-



Jill Ocone

River Road Books in Fair Haven.

store, people will come. "We think about our community all the time. People rely on us for our book recommendations, whether for children or adults," she says. She explains that there's no community to belong to when purchasing books online, but when a browser walks into River Road Books, they most likely turn into a customer who will become part of the real community that exists in her store.

Jan Sparrow, owner of "words!" in Asbury Park, sells books that are up-to-date with the bestseller lists as well as children's titles plus a large number of "gently read" books. Sparrow says that her staff's knowl-



Jill Ocone

The children's section at "words!".

edge of literature is something customers can count on. "What helps us thrive is our customer service. Everyone who works at words! can offer great suggestions." Their well-read staff brings well-read customers, and receiving the right title suggestion at the right time is what keeps them coming back for more.

Independent bookstore owners such as Maggio, Potter, and Sparrow know they have to stay in contact with their customers through frequent newsletters and social media

posts, which entice readers to visit the next time they pass through town. Maggio explained that BookTowne's staff keeps on top of



Jill Ocone

"words!" in Asbury Park.



Jill Ocone

At River Road Books, they strive to create a community of readers that you can't find in an online store.

emailing newsletters and posting on Instagram and Facebook many times a week. She says, "It's what people want to see, and we have to keep on top of our online presence."

While the days of each town having their own bookstore may be behind us, Jersey Shore readers need look no further than one of the nearby independent bookstores to find that classic they hope to read again, the newest memoir from the *New York Times* list of bestsellers, the perfect book to read to their children at bedtime, or the latest collection of Jersey Shore memories.

—Jill Ocone