

Michigan News Agency Fun Facts

- The only bookstore left in downtown Kalamazoo
- The second-oldest retailer downtown (V & A Bootery is the oldest) - - THIS IS ACCORDING TO HAUCK
- Family-owned since its start in 1947
- One of the last remaining newsstands in the Midwest
- Stocks more than 15,000 paperbacks and 6,000 periodicals
- On Monday, the newsstand had 315 paying customers and 100 who just came to read

Fact Box

What: Michigan News Agency celebrates turning 60

When: Friday ((July 13)) from 4 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Where: 308 West Michigan, Kalamazoo

Food: Treats from the Copy Cup, wines from Vintner's Cellar

Highlights: Lynn Pattison and William Olsen will sign their recent poetry collections, drawings for Michigan News gift certificates and T-shirts

More info: www.michigannews.biz

Customer Quotes:

HAVE PHOTO: "I get my music magazines here; no one else has them. I like the fact that we have a little news store. It's homey but it's downtown. It's got the historic thing going on." – Michelle Brenes, 18, of Kalamazoo

HAVE PHOTO: "I come each month to get three fiber art magazines; the companies would probably prefer I subscribe but then I wouldn't see (owner Dean Hauck) now and then. Plus, she sells empty wooden cigar boxes for \$1."

--Johanna Timpson, 55, of Marcellus

"I love outdoors and I like fishing magazines. If I can't think of a title, the response to get that magazine is always friendly and helpful. You can relax in the store."

--Dwayne Powell, 54, of Kalamazoo

HAVE PHOTO: "I've been coming here since I was a little guy. I read books here and my grandmother comes for her tobacco. It's nice. It's peaceful. "

--Rodney Brewer, 35, of Kalamazoo

"She's open early and late. When you go in there, don't you get the impression there is every magazine in the world in there? You just feel comfortable in there; I like being recognized."

--Norma Berry, 60, of Kalamazoo

STORY

By Sue Ellen Christian
Special to the Gazette

The marquee on the original neon-lit sign reads: “Bringing the World to You Since ’47.” But for 60 years, the world that the Michigan News Agency has brought to countless residents from its downtown Kalamazoo home isn’t global: It’s decidedly local.

As longtime customer Ruth Lawson, 65, of Kalamazoo puts it: “It’s our local local.”

The News has survived despite big-box retailers such as Barnes and Noble by filling a niche (it provides more than 6,000 magazine titles), offering impeccable customer service (owner Dean Hauck will literally spend hours – yes, hours – phoning distributors to find one customer one particular magazine), and by cultivating that clichéd word, community.

This is community the way the Michigan News Agency does it: A hello when you walk in the door by someone who is not a designated “greeter.” A “Famous Friends” bulletin board with news clippings about local residents, who then stop in and autograph their keepsake articles. WMU and K College flags fly out front, a Kalamazoo map adorns the front window and books by local authors have their own corner inside.

When Kalamazoo College English professor Andy Mozina, 44, came in earlier this week ((TUESDAY)) bearing two copies of his just-published collection of short stories, he was hoping for a spot in that corner – but Hauck had already beat Mozina to his own sales pitch and had stocked -- and sold, to Mozina’s shock -- copies of his book.

“It’s a good community feeling,” Mozina said as he left the store, “the person running the show is on the premises.”

John Fink, 62, of Kalamazoo, can’t remember when he hasn’t been a customer. He describes the place this way:

“There’s always good music on,” begins Fink, a math professor at Kalamazoo College. “I love the smell of the place, the smell of the cigars underneath the glass. I like the candy storage boxes with Magic Marker labels. I buy my paper by the month and they pull out this notebook with three lines drawn down each page to list names and accounts. The people who come here have stories like mine.”

The shelves are crammed with 15,000 paperbacks organized alphabetically by genre, but beyond that, it’s a free-for-all, with some books stacked vertically, some horizontally, however they fit. Four rows of shelves holding extra magazines encircle the walls above the stacks like smoke rings. The college-student clerks take turns picking the CDs to play, and the boxes of cigars jam the glass case next to a candy counter where you can still find a package of “Chuckles.”

Here is just a small sampling of the magazines available at the News: Fantasy Sports, Mothering, Positive Thinking, Planet Muscle, Turkey Hunting, All About Beer, Poker

Pro, Montana Magazine, Practical Fishkeeping, Amazing Figure Molder, Autograph Collector, American Indian Art, Veterans Business Journal, and Radical Teacher.

Hauck, who is a certified high school English teacher and has a master's degree in English Literature, took over the newsstand in 1988 from her stepfather, Vincent Malmstrom, who founded the business. She keeps the newsstand open year-round from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. "Because people need their news," she says.

Hauck cultivates community through mutual trust between her and her customers. People are left alone to browse among the three aisles, each skinnier than a bowling lane but just as long, and no purchase is necessary. Customers can bring their dogs in to explore the stacks alongside them. Attorney Earl Dalzell, 74, walks off each morning with more newspapers than he pays for, and he brings them all back, including those he bought, after each workday. Ruth and Tom Lawson of Kalamazoo shuttle back and forth to Ireland, assured that the next six months' worth of New York *Times* will be saved and waiting for them when they return.

"We'll find the answer for you if we don't know it," Hauck declares, and customers know it's true. In fact, customers used to call her so often at home after hours that Hauck unlisted her number. Thanks to a monitor at the desk in her office one floor above the store, Hauck will appear as if by magic when customers are struggling to find what they need.

"My customers trust me," says Hauck. "People share their lives with us."

The trust goes both ways. "I'll have customers tell me they could have bought a book at Meijer's but they came here to get it instead," says Hauck. "The main reason we have survived: We believe in Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo believes in us."

ENDIT