

Bookstore celebrates 20th anniversary

Lee Booksellers has thrived in Lincoln despite fierce competition.

By JOSH KRAUTER
Senior staff writer

In a world full of chains, corporations and mega-marts, independent and privately owned stores are increasingly being squeezed out of the market. Bookstores are no different.

But Lee Booksellers in Lincoln has managed to survive and even thrive in a cold, corporate world. Next week, Lee celebrates its 20th year of business.

Lee Booksellers is owned by Linda Hillegass, a former librarian, and her husband, Jim McKee, a historian who has written and taken pictures for several books of Nebraska history.

Hillegass said owning a bookstore was a longtime dream of McKee's, and the couple decided to go for it a year after they were married. McKee had a background in publishing, so, combined with Hillegass' library work, the two already had some experience in the business of buying and selling books.

Hillegass said the competition wasn't as intense as it is now when they started.

"What people thought of as chain competition when we started was businesses like B. Dalton and Waldenbooks," she said. "It was nothing like the voracious competition now."

That competition has squeezed

out all the independent sellers of new books in Lincoln except Lee. Most other cities have experienced the same thing this decade, Hillegass said.

In 1991, the American Booksellers Association had 5,200 members. By 1992, membership had dropped to 4,400. Numbers continued to decline throughout the decade.

Hillegass says she is worried the current generation is so saturated with chain stores that most young people won't shop anywhere else.

"One thing I have noticed is that the megastores have bred a generation who thinks that price is the bottom line," she said. "They don't know what they're missing."

In such a business climate, Lee Booksellers may be the exception that proves the rule. Lee's has three locations: one in East Park Plaza, one in Suite 25 at 1265 S. Cotner Blvd. and one at 5500 S. 56th St. Each has kept customers coming back.

Hillegass said the success of the stores is due to the relationship the staff has with the customers. She said she and McKee hire people who love to read and have a knowledge of a variety of genres. She said the customers are the same way.

"Our customers are intelligent, alert and have a good sense of humor," she said.

Hillegass said a store autograph signing made her see how much she appreciated the customers. When children's author Jan Brett signed autographs in the store, 500 people showed up. The store wasn't big enough to accommodate everyone, but, Hillegass said, the customers were polite, courteous and excited to

be there anyway.

"That day, I thought, 'These are my people.'"

Hillegass said it's the love of books that has kept her going for 20 years.

"Every time you open a shipment of books, it's like Christmas."

All next week, 18 local and regional authors will be reading and signing their books to celebrate Lee Booksellers' birthday.

On Nov. 14, National Geographic photographer Joel Sartore will sign copies of his book, "Nebraska: Under a Big Red Sky,"

and store co-owner Jim McKee will present a slide show at 7 p.m.

Children can meet Madeline, character of Ludwig Bemelmans' series of children's books, on Nov. 15.

On Tuesday, Nov. 16, local romance writers Stephanie Whitson and Virginia Lee will read and sign

copies of their books. Local authors and publishers Duane and Steve

Hutchinson will sign their collections of ghost stories and pioneer tales.

Four local World War II authors will read and sign their books Nov. 18.

Friday, Nov. 19, local poets Hilda Raz, Marjorie Saiser, Twyla Hansen and State Poet William Kloefkorn will read and sign their work, and free coffee will be served.

The week ends with a birthday party Nov. 20, at the Edgewood

Center location. KFOR will broadcast live in the morning, and authors Kent Haruf, Alan Boye and Brent Olson will sign their books. Entertainment will be provided by juggler The Amazing Arthur, banjo player and guitarist Tom Adkins and caricatures by Lincoln Journal Star cartoonist Paul Fell.

For times and store locations, call Lee Booksellers' main store at (402) 420-1919.



Shaping forces of Plains focus of art exhibition

By JASON HARDY
Senior staff writer

Two years ago, Martha Kennedy set out to move mountains.

As curator of the Great Plains Art Collection, Kennedy wanted to organize an exhibition focusing on wind and water as forces shaping the land.

She also wanted the works to reflect the diversity of textures found throughout the landscapes of Nebraska and its surrounding states. So, she chose five women with roots in the Great Plains.

"It seemed to me that, in all their work, they involved some aspect of nature," Kennedy said. "I was just struck by these women artists working with different media and very different styles but having a strong connection with landscape art."

Their work will be shown in the "Wind and Water on the Land" exhibit at the Great Plains Art Collection today through Dec. 12. The gallery of the Great Plains Art Collection is located in Room 215 Love Library at 13th and R streets.

Kennedy said the artists she contacted, Karen Dienstbier, Karen Kunc, Christina McPhee, Linda Meigs and Susan Puelz, were all receptive and created new works to be displayed in the show.

"They were very positive," Kennedy said. "So it was gratifying to be able to work with them and pull this exhibition together."

The 33 works compiled for the collection turned out to be just what Kennedy was looking for—a variety of media, styles and places throughout the Great Plains region.

"I think the visions are very individualistic," Kennedy said. "But there are some very interesting connections between specific images and the visual expressions conveyed by the artwork."

Stylistic approaches to the work include naturalistic, impressionistic, expressionist, abstract and symbolic. The media are also eclectic, including oils, acrylics, watercolors, woodcuts, pastels and combinations of different media.

Kennedy said she was pleased with the way the collection turned out and said the works beau-

Gallery Preview The Facts

What: "Wind and Water on the Land"
Where: Great Plains Art Collection, 215 Love Library
When: Today through Dec. 12
The Skinny: Exhibit features five women artists inspired by natural forces that shape the land.



COURTESY PHOTO
THE EXHIBIT "Wind and Water on the Land" features Karen Kunc's 1999 woodcut "Canyon," one of many works exploring how natural forces shape the land.

tifully represented the power held within the natural forces that shaped this region's countryside.

"These two shaping forces, moving wind and water, I think are especially important natural forces that shape the great plains landscape," Kennedy said.

Movie Review

'John Malkovich' a welcome relief to typical, fluffy fare

By CLIFF HICKS
Staff writer

These days, when it seems as if everyone's content to rehash the same romantic comedy over and over again for a buck, it's always nice to see a director try something completely different.

"Being John Malkovich" is Spike Jonze's first feature film, and it's about: a puppeteer named Craig (John Cusack); his wife, Lotte (Cameron Diaz); Maxine, the woman at work Craig lusts for (Catherine Keener); and, well, John Malkovich.

Craig hasn't been able to get a job with his puppeteering skills, so he takes a job as a filing clerk on the 7½ floor. Soon, behind a large file cabinet, he finds a door. When he enters the door, he is taken into the mind of John Malkovich, and 15 minutes later, he is dumped out on the New Jersey turnpike.

This, oddly enough, is the simplest part of the film.

For the most part, Jonze lets the script, from first-time screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, take control and lead the way. Instead of the often flashy camerawork that sometimes dominated his music videos, he keeps the camera in the background, each shot set exactly to help focus on what's happening and why, rather than how it's being shown.

And, as the story progresses, it becomes obvious that most of the actors are generally cast against type.

Instead of the lovable but awkward nice guy Cusack is used to playing, Craig is downright slimy, giving Cusack a chance to do some of his best acting since "The Grifters."

Diaz plays a sort of mousy and dazed housewife with a passion for animals.

The only person who's cast in type is Keener, who's basically recapping her character from

Film Review The Facts

Title: "Being John Malkovich"
Director: Spike Jonze
Stars: John Cusack, Catherine Keener, Cameron Diaz, John Malkovich
Grade: B
Five Words: It's odd "Being John Malkovich"

"Your Friends & Neighbors," which is fine because it fits the part well.

And John Malkovich is, well, John Malkovich, for the most part. He plays along with the film with great courteousness, even allowing a few cheap jokes at his own expense. (No, Malkovich was never a jewel thief in a film.)

But not everything is perfect in "Being John Malkovich." The ending seems a bit abrupt, with too many questions unanswered. The script asks a lot of questions about identity and morals, and a lot of them are glossed over, which hampers the film ever so slightly.

Still, these can be forgiven, since it is the first effort from both Jonze and Kaufman, and they're still getting into the swing of things. They're good, but a little practice will help.

The film provides a couple of masterstrokes, however. Appearances from Brad Pitt, Sean Penn and Charlie Sheen (who is hysterical parodying himself) add life to the film, taking it a little away from the silver screen to the rest of us.

And the shots of the puppetry bring a virtually lost art back to the silver screen and preserve it. To simply watch some of the wooden figures dance about is worth the price of admission.

If for no other reason, though, go see "Being John Malkovich" to see something radically different than the rest of the schlock Emptywood keeps spitting out.