

Why are local bookstores so important?

It was a foggy winter morning when I entered the Linden Tree bookstore. I had been to bookstores before but none had really ever stood out to me. From the moment I set foot inside Linden Tree I knew that it was different. There were thousands of books in the store, stuffed in every nook and cranny. Little kids were running around the store reading different books and playing with some of the toys. In the front corner of the store there was a play kitchen with a mini sink and fridge where kids could play house with their parents. In back of the store, there was a section filled with all different types of puppets. There were witches, clowns, bears, and even penguins all lying in a pile. I could spend hours in the store playing with my friends, playing with the toys, or just sitting on the floor reading different books. To this day when I go to the store the memories of the books, my friends, the toys and the good times come flooding back. I love those memories.

Linden Tree has been in Los Altos for more than 20 years. Twenty years is a long time for any business, especially an independent bookstore. Now that Amazon.com has made buying books as easy as clicking a button, I wonder why customers still go to Linden Tree. Why do people spend more money at independent bookstores instead of buying cheaper books online or at a box store? What about individual bookstores make people want them in their community?

How does the atmosphere draw people to local bookstores?

After interviewing many customers in the store I realized that there was no single thing that drew people to local bookstores. My mother, Nancy NeSmith, has been loyal customer to Linden Tree ever since I was three years old. I realized there were many reasons why she went there. She described Linden Tree as, "I thought it was really kid friendly. I really enjoyed walking through the different sections and reading the books. They have a lot of hands on stuff for the kids and it was a really great atmosphere. All of the employees were really knowledgeable about the books and they pointed us in the right directions. They knew exactly where to go and they always picked out really good books for us." (NeSmith) My mother went to the bookstore not just because of the books but also because of the atmosphere of the store and the employees. Compared to corporate bookstores, the employees at Linden Tree are much more helpful and knowledgeable. "Everybody was really knowledgeable about the books and they pointed us in the right direction. If it was Amanda, who was really interested in animals at the time, they'd pick out five or six different types of animal books. For Sarah, who was really into sports, they knew exactly where to go and they picked out some very good books for us." (NeSmith) Compared to big corporate bookstores, the employees at Linden Tree are much more helpful. In an article in a Michigan Paper a man was describing his experience in a Barnes and Noble. He was trying to find the book *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, which was celebrating its 50th anniversary that day. Barnes and Noble had a huge display for the book. "It's starting to feel hopeless and my happy place felt shut down for the day, so I asked to see a manager." She arrived and I asked, "Did you know your employees don't know who Jack Kerouac is?" She looked

unhappy and said, “Sir, we can’t expect all of our employees to have read every book ever printed.” Hmmm, I then said, “That particular attitude aside, I’ve been here 15 minutes and they haven’t found his section yet. Is that a good thing?” She said something frumpy, and the kid walked up with the book, and I thanked him. She said, “Anything else?”” (Dallas Observer) The employee’s of the store had really no knowledge of the book even though it was on a huge display in the front of the store. Compared to the employees of Linden Tree, the workers at Barnes and Noble are terrible and unknowledgeable. Taylor Smith, a teenager now, who went to Linden Tree as a kid, and still does today, describes what drew her to the store and why she is still going to Linden Tree today, “I like going to Linden Tree because it is a smaller local store that felt homier than local bookstores. I liked sitting next to the bookcases just reading the inside covers of a lot of books. I would go with my grandma on weekend and just spend hours there sitting on the floor reading books.” (Smith) Linden Tree isn’t the only independent bookstore that people feel the need to have in their community. There is a bookstore in San Francisco called Cover to Cover that was going out of business because of economic problems. Many of the loyal customers were hurt deeply by the news. When a local customer Mary Whitten found out the store was closing she was devastated. She said, “I feel like a friend of mine is dying. My daughter, America, grew up in that little yellow house. When she was old enough to walk down to the street by herself, I would let her walk to the bookstore while I went to the grocery store. Cover-to-Cover has been a big part of her life.” The customers at the store felt a very deep attachment to the store. It was the atmosphere, of the store, that drew people there in the first place and ultimately led them to try and save it. With the communities help they raised money for the owners. They collected over 100,000 dollars and many people committed to spend at least 25 dollars at the store each month. The neighbor’s

help surprised the owners Wynne and Ezarik. “The people’s response has been so touching, so moving, that no matter how this entire situation resolves, we’ll always have the memory of so many people mobilizing themselves on our behalf. That’s not something that carries a price tag. It can’t be qualified.” After all of the communities support and help there were many possibilities opening up for the two owners. (Noe Valley Voice)

After learning about the story of Cover-to-Cover and interviewing customers at Linden Tree I realized how much the customers cared about saving a local bookstore. The customers of Cover to Cover were so in love with the store that they were willing to give money to try and keep it alive. The atmosphere, the books they could touch, the knowledgeable staff, the other customers, and the overall ambience were what brought people there, not the amount of books or how big the store was. Independent bookstores bring something special to the community that no other chain bookstore could provide. The customers of both Linden Tree and Cover-to- Cover go to the bookstores because, of the general atmosphere. The stores give a warm and comfortable feeling to the people when they go into the store. The employees and the books in general are what draw the people to the store.

What economic benefits does a local bookstore give to the community?

While the atmosphere of the store is a big reason why people want local bookstores in their communities, there are also benefits of having locally owned businesses. Many independent bookstores such as Linden Tree provide many economic advantages to their local towns. Linden Tree first began in 1984 out of the owners, Dennis and Linda's, house. They started the store with nothing but desire and a little money. They didn't borrow any money so they started the store out of their house to generate revenue. After moving to California, they were able to move the store to a bigger space, where they are today. One of the reasons why Linden Tree is very liked by the public is the fact that the owners were able to start up the business on their own. (Ronberg).

Linden Tree helps the people of the town by hiring people from the local community. The store's employees range in age from teens to sixties. The staff includes students, teachers, librarians, storytellers, children's literature experts and enthusiasts. Compared to most bookstores, Linden Tree actually gives more benefits to their employees. In an article from The Michigan Daily it talks about the mistreatment of employees at Borders, a huge corporate bookstore. The employees of the stores all around the country went on strike to try and get more benefits and better pay. "They hire part-time workers to work up to 20 hours a week which keeps them just under full-time and they are not eligible for benefits." Plus compared to Linden Tree their pay per hour is less. "Currently, the living wage in Ann Arbor as established by City Council is \$8.70 an hour with benefits and \$10.20 an hour without benefits. The starting salary at Borders is \$6.50 an hour." (Michigan Daily) The current salary at Linden Tree is \$8.00 an hour. (Fisher) So compared to the huge corporate bookstores Linden Tree

gives more benefits and provides higher pay to their employees.

There are many economic reasons why supporting a local business can help the economy of a town. According to NewRules.org an online web site that dedicates itself to reviving locally owned businesses. “Locally owned businesses create more jobs locally. Compared to chain stores, locally owned businesses recycle a much larger share of their revenue back into the local economy, enriching the whole community.” (NewRules.org) As you can see local businesses such as Linden Tree give more money back to the local economy which makes people want to have these stores in their town.

Even if going to local bookstores such as Linden Tree gives money back to the town, most people believe that big department stores have cheaper prices when in reality that isn't always true. After comparing Linden Tree with some of the most popular online book web site I realized that for some of the products Linden Tree were actually cheaper than the other bookstores. According to Barnes and Noble Online the Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban paperback novel costs \$8.79 to buy online. (BarnesandNoble.com) But on the Linden Tree web site the Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban paperback novel only costs \$7.99 to buy online. (Lidentree.com) Going to the local bookstore in some cases is cheaper than going to a bigger chain store.

Overall one of the main reasons why people want local bookstores like Linden Tree in their community is because of the economic benefits it gives people all throughout the town. It allows a wider range of people to be able to get a job and it makes more money flow through the town economy and makes the town more successful.

Why are local bookstores so important?

From the first time I walked into Linden Tree I realized that it was something special. The clutters of books and random puppets were everywhere around the store. There was a homey warm feeling whenever anybody entered the store. But it wasn't until I interviewed the customers that I learned how much they really loved the store. It was so much more than a book store for the customers. Local bookstores are very important in a community. Compared to big chain bookstores they give so much back to the customers. They give the people many things that they couldn't get at big chain bookstores. They give them a store where the employes always knew where everything was, an unlimited selection of amazing books, and a warm welcome atmosphere. It was a place where they could relax and dive into a world that they didn't know before.