

Grand re-opening tonight:

# Merritt Bookstore's long and winding road to success

By Matt Bechard

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Scott Meyer seems to have a permanent smile on his face these days, and when asked to remember the past 12 years with Merritt Bookstore, his smile widens like a father remembering his child's first steps.

Meyer and his wife, Alison, are enjoying the success of their bookstore. Following extensive remodeling which began in October 1994, they will celebrate the grand re-opening of the store tonight, Thursday, Dec. 14 from 6 to 8 p.m. Although Merritt Bookstore has never been closed for a lengthy period of time, the store has come a long way in 12 years.

In 1983, Scott Meyer retired as an elementary school teacher in Massachusetts to concentrate on the bookstore. Meyer, who grew up on Millbrook, began running the business from his house in the village, but soon moved to two tables in front of John Kading's Corner Store.

"I bought 1,000 books on a 30-day credit, and paid for the ones I sold and returned the rest. Then I kept ordering more on credit," he said.

Meyer said by ordering his merchandise on credit, he never had to take out a loan. However, he said while working in front of Kading's he realized water and books do not mix.

"There was a downpour one afternoon, and I was running around like a crazy guy trying to get all my books covered," he said.

## Getting a roof

Seeing the need for a store with a roof, Meyer packed up his books and moved into a space he shared with Eddie Maggiacomo.

"I had a deal where I would pay him 10% of my profits," he said, "when I moved four months later, I paid him \$21."

However, slow business never discouraged Meyer.

"I didn't know any better," he said. "I have never taken any business classes. Everything I learned about business was from John Kading, Eddie Maggiacomo, and Joe Spagnola."

Merritt Bookstore then moved down the street, sharing a space with Taylor Oil. Meyer said he often answered the phone for Taylor Oil when its employees were not available. Shortly after, Meyer moved again, this time into the Village Department Store.

"I was there for three years, but I outgrew the space," he said.

“I asked around, inquiring whether anyone had a larger, affordable space to rent, but nothing was available.”

Then Meyer said he turned to George Whalen, what found Merritt Bookstore its current location. Volunteers from the community pitched in and pushed shopping carts full of books to the store on Front Street which opened for business on January 1, 1988.

This year Merritt Bookstore expanded again, but did not change location. A fresh coat of dark green paint, a new sign and parking lot, and an expanded upstairs gallery are just some of the changes at the bookstore.

### **Grand re-opening**

Meyer said he is glad to have the remodeling finally done. “We thought we would have our grand re-opening in July, but every time we asked when the work would be done, the answer was always ‘two more weeks’,” he said. “The gutters and shutters still aren’t finished, but we wanted to have the opening before it got too late.”

Alone with a bigger location came more work, Alison Meyer said.

“It is a lot more exercise running around a bigger store,” she said. “With more space we get to create bigger displays and organize better and provide unlimited types of programs.”

As part of the grand re-opening, Merritt Bookstore is have many special events, including four New Yorker cartoonists participating in a show called “Humor Come to Millbrook,” which opens with a reception on Saturday Dec. 16 (see Weekend, pages 13 and 14).

The name of the store does not have any relation to Merritt Avenue, as many residents might think. “I was looking for a name for the business and my father’s middle name is Merritt, so I bought the name from him for a dollar,” he said. “It was a family thing. I don’t know if he ever cashed the check.”

Meyer said making money was never his focus until his son, Lawton, was born. “Myself and Alison do not get paid a salary, so the first time we became aware of money was when our son was born. Now we have to think about paying for college,” he said.

Meyer said the staff has helped the store succeed. “Everybody knows how to do everything,” he said. Meyer hires many local students for part-time jobs.

One of his newest employees is Jen Stransky. She said she loves working at the bookstore because of the family atmosphere. “The people here really make me feel welcomed,” she said.

One of Merritt Bookstore’s longtime customers helping Stransky feel at home is Millbrook resident Nancy Opperman, who said she has seen the store grow tremendously over the years. “There is a wonderful selection, and Scott always remembers to have a chair for me,” she said.