

# Keeping it local



Breakwater Books opened on the Guilford Green in 1972.



M. WATERS PHOTO

The fiction section at Breakwater awaits you.

## Breakwater Books, other indies, celebrate Independent Bookstore Day Saturday

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**GUILFORD** » When Breakwater Books first opened its doors onto the Guilford Green in 1972, the big box stores were Kmart and Caldor. One e-book existed: the Declaration of Independence someone had typed into a Xerox Sigma V mainframe. And Amazon was still just a river in South America.

"The first 25 years were the easy part," said Maureen Corcoran, owner of Breakwater which, along with its northerly neighbor R.J. Julia Booksellers in Madison, will observe Independent Bookstore Day this Saturday, a country-wide celebration of independent bookstores, with a host of readings by local authors, giveaways like book bags, and a craft table for children.

Asked to account for her store's longevity in the 18 years since, Corcoran ascribed it in part to sheer luck — specifically, Barnes & Noble and the other big box bookstores planting their giant footprints on the other side of the Q Bridge. Not to mention its prime location, on the pedestrian-friendly Whitfield Street.

True enough, but there's yet another reason that the picturesque brick and mortar has remained standing in an intemperate climate for indies. While others have

resorted to offering, among other sidelines, mugs, calendars and chocolates, Breakwater has kept things simple.

"For the most part, we're about books," Corcoran said on a recent afternoon at her desk in a sunny alcove tucked away in the back. There are cards and "the occasional pen," as she put it. But Breakwater Books has no cafe. There's no need. There are cafes on either side of the shop. Nor does the bookstore sell e-books. The reason: "Never has anyone come in asking for them."

What Corcoran, and the store's founding owners Marion Young and Marion Harold, have recognized, is that a book store, even one that sells only books, is not just a store. It is an entire universe of ideas. It is a quiet place where nestling into the latest Anna Quindlen or Richard Ford in one of the deep armchairs is an afternoon well spent.

Whether in sprawling spaces like the Scribner's-inspired R.J. Julia's or the bright, book-lined one occupied by Breakwater, indie bookstores also hold the key to your love life, your career, your passions. They're about stumbling onto a novel based in Norway that takes you on a journey as rich and varied as a real one. Or onto a meditation on motorcycle maintenance that changes



Breakwater Books owner Maureen Corcoran.

the direction of your life.

They're about the power to develop a love for reading and books in children, a point neatly summed up in the 1998 romantic comedy "You've Got Mail," by the bookstore owner, played by Meg Ryan, who recalls watching her mother as a girl.

"It wasn't that she was just selling books. It was that she was helping people become whoever it was (that) they were going to turn out to be. Because when you read a book as a child it becomes part of your identity in a way that no other reading in your whole life does."

That kind of gentle direction from an enthusiastic evangelist of the written word explains in part why, in spite of the forces of face-

less discount chains, Amazon, and the rise of e-books, reports of the death of the indie bookstore turned out to be greatly exaggerated. There's also the carefully curated attention to the home-grown taste of their loyal base — not least, offering a coveted space on their shelves for the work of local authors.

That's part and parcel of the buy-local movement which, according to the Christian Science Monitor, "has benefited everyone from restaurateurs to toy store owners to artisan soap and jam makers to those who run creaky-floored hardware stores." Like farmers' markets, independent bookstores "add to a community's sense of identity. And like farmers' markets, some customers come for the atmosphere."

All of which, it seems, is what's kept Breakwater Books in business all these years. And why, of course, Independent Bookstore Day is just the way to celebrate its success.

Independent Bookstore Day is on Saturday, May 2. For schedule of events at Breakwater Books, visit [www.facebook.com/search/str/breakwater%20books/keywords\\_top](http://www.facebook.com/search/str/breakwater%20books/keywords_top) or go to [facebook.com](http://facebook.com) and type in Breakwater Books. For R.J. Julia Booksellers' schedule, visit [www.rjulia.com/event/independent-bookstore-day](http://www.rjulia.com/event/independent-bookstore-day).