



# Binding Partnerships

By Abby Kleckler

**M**any people enjoy curling up with a good book (or maybe an e-reader nowadays). Independently owned bookstores, like many local businesses, have had to find ways to keep people flipping pages despite e-books and larger retailers.

Lake Forest Book Store has been a staple in the northern Chicago suburbs for more than 60 years. As the only independently owned bookstore in the county, the shop serves a large population, a population owner Eleanor Thorn and her team have found to be very engaged in attending events.

"We put a face behind every product," Thorn says. "It's a totally different niche that the big-box stores couldn't even come close to doing, or

can think of, so it's an easy pairing to do."

These pairings often give attendees the opportunity to interact with authors. One example is Lake Forest Book Store's frequent partnerships with local restaurants. The author will do a cooking demonstration after which readers can purchase the book and have it signed.

In February, the store brought Doug Sohn, owner of one of Chicago's most well-known hot dog restaurants and author of *Hot Doug's: The Book*, to a local library for a signing where attendees could sample some of his most popular dogs.

Thorn has found by combining forces for events, they get larger turnouts and see fresh faces.

"Anytime you can have a collaboration of two

Thorn says. "[At book fairs] we can pick and choose what we think are the best reading materials for different ages of children."

## Between the Aisles

The events bring together individuals from surrounding communities, and these attendees often become regular customers at the shop, located right in the center of the town square.

Booksellers at Lake Forest Book Store offer recommendations every day to customers and to the many book groups in the area.

"We maintain a list of all the book groups and keep a record of what they're reading and what we can suggest," Thorn says.

The approximately 20 booksellers who make up the store's staff at any given time know each of the books on the shelf quite well.

"We added up the years of book-selling experience these women have, and it was 300 years or something," Thorn says. "Customers can come in here and get a great recommendation and actually know people who have read the book, instead of some of the bigger box stores who are just hiring 16 year olds to go sell books behind the counter."

Thorn attributes the store's large amount of repeat customers to the work of her knowledgeable staff.

"Seventy-five percent of the time one of the salespeople knows the customer, whether they actually know them personally or whether they've just been in the store so our staff knows what they like," she says.

Both in the store and at outside events, the staff's ability to actually "hand sell" books, as Thorn refers to

it, makes the customers want to come back again and again.

"It's the unique touch which makes our store so wonderful," she says.

Coupled with a knowledgeable staff, working with other local stores to boost the company's sales has been a best-selling story for the Lake Forest Book Store. **LGR**

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- Eleanor Thorn,  
Lake Forest Book Store

probably wouldn't have the effectiveness to do."

This niche includes getting involved in the community and really getting to know their customer base.

## Outside the Shop

Lake Forest Book Store works closely with many local businesses to host book and author events that appeal to a wide variety of people.

"There are so many places you can partner with, from a garden store to a bakery," Thorn says. "There's a book on every possible thing you

businesses put together, you have a bigger impact in the community by bringing two sources of customer base together," she says. "It's always about pairing and working with other businesses to know what their clients want to see or their customers want to see and then we know what our clients are interested in."

Events are not just for adults. Partnerships with libraries and book fairs at schools aim to get children involved at a young age.

"It's important to get books in the hands of kids early on so they love the coziness of reading,"