

by Judith Rosen

Although it does feel a bit like a well-kept secret, booksellers are not complaining. "It's like a mini-Christmas," said James Fugate, co-owner of Eso Wan, the Los Angeles African-American bookstore. "I've never seen anything like it in my life." Involved since the festival's inception, Fugate said it was a success from the very beginning and keeps building. "I think there were about 60,000 people at the first one," he told PW.

"We do almost the equivalent of a month's worth of business in two days," observed Mystery Bookstore's McArthur. "This festival was as good as, if not better than, last December."

Reuben Martinez, owner of Libreria Martinez in Orange County, and also one of the founders of the event, said this year was the best ever for his store. "And in difficult times, too—with budget cuts, the war and depressing times. But the readers were there. The first year, I sold one Spanish-language book. This year we sold five to six per minute, with two registers going."

Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena no longer runs a booth at the festival, but sent three bus-loads of customers to it. Logistically, it was difficult for a bookstore 40 minutes away to set up shop there, but publicity director Linda Urban said the store didn't want to miss out. "It's become so popular," she said. "We play games on the bus and give away galleys. And on the way back, we served homemade cookies and milk."

While sales and attendance figures point to a success, the festival has had challenges. A festival of its size could not be staged without corporate sponsors with deep pockets. Its corporate sponsorship—Target, Barnes & Noble and, to a lesser extent, Borders—is an issue, for obvious reasons, that did not sit well with independent booksellers.

"At first that bothered me," Fugate told PW. But booksellers said the L.A. Times Festival organizers have worked hard to make sure the independents are not outshined by their chain-store counterparts. A B&N spokesperson told PW that the L.A. Times Festival of the Book is its largest annual event, and that the company was pleased the coordinators made it possible for all booksellers to participate. Barnes & Noble has its own stage area and a huge tent, but most booksellers PW spoke with said they were too busy in their own booths to notice. The independents are assigned the task of selling books for the various event venues, and the festival managers parcel them out fairly, booksellers said.

More than anything, the independents said the festival reaffirmed their commitment to bookselling.

distribution daybook

Continuing to Grow

Although still in its infancy, Biblio Distribution in Lanham, Md., a division of National Book Network that was launched two years ago to handle distribution for micro presses, is "doing very well," according to NBN president Jed Lyons. After some reshuffling of personnel—Jen Linck is now director of Biblio—and rethinking of sales materials—Biblio added a hardcopy catalogue, even though it originally planned to use only an online one—Biblio is positioned for growth, something Lyons anticipates seeing more of in the months to come. "It's not an easy business," he acknowledged. "You're dealing with a lot of small publishers that are learning as they go. But there are often gems among the books. The publishing industry is consolidating so quickly. Most of the growth is going to come from the independent publishing sector." At present, Lyons aid, Biblio has about 500 clients, and counting. Many are referred to Biblio from Ingram; others are former clients of Bookworld, which recently dissolved its small-press division. Lyons noted that Biblio has its own sales force, although NBN provides help with marketing.

"We are profitable," added Linck, who attributes some of Biblio's growth to its selectivity in accepting new publishers. "What we look for," she explained, "is that the publishers have some kind of marketing plan and that their books look like books on bookshelves, not something from Kinko's." Among this season's bestsellers that more than meet that threshold, Linck singles out *The Jesus Thief* by J. R. Lankford (Great Reads Books LLC), a novel about cloning Jesus; Nancy Moshier's *Eat Yourself Thin* cookbooks (Nancy Moshier) on low-carb cooking and fabulous desserts, which benefited from an infomercial that Moshier ran earlier in the spring; and *Toygasms! The Insiders Guide to Sex Toys & Techniques* by Sadie Allison (Tickle Kitty Press), author of last year's Biblio hit *Tickle Your Fancy: A Woman's Guide to Sexual Self-Pleasure*.

In Memoriam

Helen Honig Meyer

Pioneering publisher.

Inspiring leader.

1907–2003



The Bantam Dell Publishing Group

A Division of Random House, Inc.