

Anthology for Books in Geneseo aims to create space for community

leilia.magee

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Anthology for Books co-owners Jim and Beth Nyland pose for a photo outside of their store at the Geneseo House.

PROVIDED PHOTO

GENESEO — To say Jim and Beth Nyland have taken a leap of faith and found their passion would probably be an understatement.

"If you had asked us six months ago, 'Will you be opening a bookstore?' We would have laughed," Beth Nyland said. "It was a dream, but it was not something we really took seriously until about eight or 10 weeks ago."

Photographer Jim Nyland and consultant Beth Nyland consider themselves voracious readers, with deep ties to the Geneseo community. Thinking about what they could do to make an impact, they began brainstorming.

There appeared to be no freestanding bookstore in Henry County. Early in the process, they sought advice from Kara Taghon, owner of recently opened Moline bookstore Atlas Collective, who gave them the push they needed to get started.

With the idea in mind to establish a place for literature and for all kinds of people to share their voice, the Nylands got right to work looking at properties.

Their main priority was accessibility. What they found, however, was that even though the buildings that lined State Street were historic and beautiful, availability was almost nonexistent.

"It was hard to find a building, much less a building that satisfied our requirement that we want everybody, regardless of their ability to be able to enter the store, to communicate with us, connect with other people, and be part of conversations and great storytelling," Beth Nyland said, adding that many of the older buildings weren't compliant with accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

That's when the Nylands stumbled upon availability at the Geneseo House, which features The Cellar restaurant. They hit another roadblock when they saw that the space available was only about 15 x 15 feet. But then, a lucky coincidence: Fellow building tenant Jenna Eden Designs was looking to downsize and offered up one of her spaces. The Nylands got their space, right near the elevator, ADA compliance and all.

Anthology for Books, as the name implies, will offer a collection of material based on community input.

"We wanted to curate a selection of books that was really based on the feedback of the people that are here in this community, because we want to make sure that this is a place for exploration, for connection; a gathering place. We want to make sure that we have the right books, the right access to literature, to the different styles and genres that are of interest," Jim Nyland said. Remarking that the social media response has been overwhelming, he added, "Just based on the size of the feedback that we got, we're going to be predominantly, initially at least, new titles."

The Nylands have big plans to make sure there is something for everyone. They're looking to purchase non-book items from local vendors to support other small makers and businesses. They've got plans in motion to hold book signings, writing program partnerships, events for kids and local artist displays, starting with Bishop Hill visual artist Katrina Morrison. They'll have all sorts of genres, ranging from historical fiction to romance to fantasy, with their own categorization system. They're even creating an atmosphere.



While normally, print and digital are competing against each other, now digital trends are actually lending print a hand, partly with the help of "BookTok," a genre of TikToks with book recommendations, reviews and discussions. We started to see this trend take off during the beginning of the pandemic when stay-at home orders were put in place and TikTok was growing in popularity in the U.S.

"(Jim) picked these fancy air fresheners that run from an app. And when you come into the store, it's one of the first things that hits you," Beth Nyland said. "If you're really perceptive, you notice that it smells different in the front room than it does in the back; it's just one of those little details."

With everything happening so quickly, they credit their business planning acumen to their partnership and individuals roles: Beth Nyland's as the communicator and storyteller, and Jim Nyland as the self-described "numbers geek" working on the back end of the business.

Anthology for Books celebrated its grand opening Saturday with a ribbon cutting by the Geneseo Chamber of Commerce. The store is located at 137 S. State St., Suite 101, with regular hours of operation from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

To find out more, visit **www.anthology4books.com**.

By leilia.magee