

Of tales with happy endings: Linden Tree's saga continues in sequel

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Photo Mary Beth Hislop/TownCrier

It's a whole new chapter in the tale of Linden Tree Children's Recordings & Books after new owners, front, from left, Dianne Edmonds and Jill Curcio purchased the State Street bookstore in April, much to the relief of longtime staffers Paula Lion and Tom Farley.

With a background in corporate finance and inventory management, including experience as a controller and accounting manager, Edmonds had it covered from that angle. And having established the library at her children's school and working several years researching and purchasing books, Curcio was the complementary partner for the other angle. Edmonds broached Curcio with the idea to buy Linden Tree.

"I would never have considered it to do on my own," Edmonds said.

The finalized purchase agreement couldn't have come sooner for Linden Tree's staff. Wielding business-ownership experience, Lisa Blanchette would have purchased the store she's worked in for approximately four years – if she'd had the money.

"I'm much happier being an employee than an employer," Blanchette said.

News of the purchase was music to 10-year staffer Tom Farley's ears.

Stories don't always have happy endings, but if they're the stuff of fabled fairy tales, the happily ever afters make enjoyable reading. So goes the story of Los Altos' Linden Tree Children's Recordings & Books, whose cliffhanging, final chapter under owners Dennis and Linda Ronberg ends on a happy note.

In a tanking economy, the Ronbergs' July 2009 announcement that their bookstore at 170 State St. was for sale prompted no prince to step forward to save it. By year's end, the Ronbergs had all but given up hope the store's legacy would continue.

Enter Princesses Charming – longtime customers and Los Altos residents Dianne Edmonds and Jill Curcio – who worried for the beloved bookstore's future.

"For me, it was when I saw the story in the Town Crier," Edmonds said of the November 2009 article. "At that point, it was, 'How sad.'"

But Edmonds and Curcio had some swords up their sleeves.

"I thought, if someone is going to carry this on, they have to know what to do from a business side," Edmonds said.

“It has the same feeling – there’s definitely the same feeling,” Farley said. “I think what we’re going to miss from Dennis and Linda is their knowledge of children’s music.”

But with his background in storytelling, Blanchette’s experience in preschool and Paula Lion’s knowledge of trains, everyone at Linden Tree has something valuable to contribute, Farley said.

“I’m delighted – I’m so happy,” said Lion, an eight-year Linden Tree employee. “We were all crossing our fingers and toes. We can’t lose another bookstore.”

Losing the downtown’s well-known, independent bookstore was anathema to Los Altos residents and Princes-Charming-wannabes Bill Prescott and Alan Louie, who teamed with two others to establish www.keeplindentree.com in November. Used with Twitter and Facebook, the site was designed to attract a buyer interested in rescuing the bookstore. Although Edmonds and Curcio didn’t communicate their interest in Linden Tree through the Web site, Prescott is happy with the outcome.

“We’re totally psyched,” he said. “The whole goal we had was to make sure the door stayed open. This is the best outcome we could have hoped for.”

Prescott said big-box bookstores don’t offer the children’s-books selection – nor the knowledgeable staff – that Linden Tree does. And amazon.com?

“It’s a lousy way to discover new books,” Prescott said of book shopping on the Internet. “Browsing, you find things you didn’t know you were looking for.”

And it’s not merely the grownups who are grateful for the rescue – Edmonds and Curcio’s littlest customers are happy, too.

“It’s been heartwarming to hear the thank-yous from the kids’ mouths,” Edmonds said.

With their moms as Linden Tree’s new owners, Curcio’s three children and Edmonds’ two are enjoying celebrity status at their elementary and junior high schools – and have a new place to hang out after school.

“The only better place would have been a candy store,” Curcio said. “(The children) are going to be very valuable to us. We have our own best (book) critics living under our roofs.”

There are some changes in store for Linden Tree – improving the inventory-catalog system, using window space, color-coding sections, adding signage – and widening the aisles.

“As prior customers, we knew the frustration of not getting a stroller between aisles,” Curcio said.

But more importantly, Edmonds said it’s crucial to maintain Linden Tree’s essence – its identity in Los Altos, its value to family and its contribution to literacy.

“Dennis and Linda will always be here in spirit, if not here physically,” she said. “We want to preserve their legacy.”

And the bookstore will honor that legacy Saturday, with a “Celebrate Linden Tree” day.

Scheduled 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the event will feature musicians, authors, raffles and giveaways. The community is invited to meet Curcio and Edmonds and say goodbye to the Ronbergs, who will be on hand to share their own music and stories – and celebrate a happy ending.

And for Curcio and Edmonds, Linden Tree is the perfectly fitting glass shoe.

“I know myself well enough at this point that I need to be surrounded by books,” Curcio said.

Linden Tree’s sequel begins.

For more information, call 949-3390.

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