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## The Linden Tree's Owners



The many fans of Linden Tree Books rejoiced when local moms, Jill Curcio and Dianne Edmonds, kept the store from closing by buying it from long-time owners Linda and Dennis Ronberg. We caught up with Edmonds and Curcio to ask how the store is doing.

*Linden Tree Children's Records and Books was a labor of love from Linda and Dennis Ronberg, who started the Linden International from their home in Tacoma, Wash. in 1981. Linden Tree built a large regional following since its opening on 1st Street in Los Altos with an excellent selection of children's recordings, a broad inventory of books, and a selection of puppets and book-related dolls, tea sets, science and math games, toys, art materials, origami paper, water toys, paper dolls, infant and toddler toys, puzzles and gifts. Jill Curcio and Dianne Edmonds are carrying on the tradition at its current location at 170 State Street, where it's been since 1989.*

**Los Altos Patch:** How have your first six months gone as Linden Tree's owners?

**Jill Curcio:** It's been a fabulous experience. The loyal customers have kept us motivated and the staff has been our ultimate support.

**Dianne Edmonds:** It's been a steep learning curve, but one that we embraced from day one.

**Patch:** What's been the biggest surprise?

**Curcio:** The best surprise has been that Linden Tree's reputation extends far beyond Los Altos and even the Bay Area. We have people visiting and calling from around the U.S., and they all have a personal Linden Tree story.

**Edmonds:** We also have families living abroad who plan their annual visits home and Linden Tree is one of their mandatory stops. On the flip side, getting the word out to the community that Linden Tree is still open has been a challenge.

**Curcio:** The Ronbergs did an excellent job of advertising their planned retirement.

**Edmonds:** I can't help comparing last December with this month. Last year people came to pay tribute to the Ronbergs, and to say goodbye because they thought the store would close. This December, people come through the door, lists in hand, and they're happy that we're open.

**Patch:** We're happy that you're open! What do you do to bring people into the store—is it a challenge or do you have a steady stream of regular customers?

**Edmonds:** We do have a steady stream of regular customers, but we still need to have a draw. We recognize that we first need to build community around the store; we're almost there.

**Curcio:** We are also using events to foster that community spirit. We've had many events this holiday season (and still a few to come) and we plan to pack 2011 with exciting programs and events that have been requested by our customers.

**Patch:** I've also noticed the shelves of adult books, cookbooks, and best-selling authors such as Malcolm Gladwell. That's a change. It's so nice to be able to buy those books right here in Los Altos.

**Edmonds:** That's Jill's doing. She has made sure that when parents are in here with their children, they see books that appeal to adults.

**Patch:** What do you predict will be top sellers this holiday season?

**Edmonds:** The traditional Christmas stories that many of us experienced as children: *Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree*, *The Night Before Christmas*, *A Christmas Carol*, and anything Nutcracker.

**Curcio:** For the young adult reader, Rick Riordan's *The Lost Hero*. Family books are also big -- ones that the family can read together, such as *The Wind in The Willows*, *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte's Web*, or *Alice in Wonderland*.

**Patch:** What's your favorite thing that you've bought for yourself from Linden Tree Books?

**Edmonds:** Two series: *The Penderwicks* and *The Mysterious Benedict Society*. Not only did those two series endear me to our staff, they also changed reading as an avocation for my ten-year-old daughter.

**Curcio:** *Midnight Rider* by Joan Hyatt Harlow and *The Declaration of Independence, The Words that Made America* by Sam Fink.

**Edmonds (to Curcio):** Why *The Declaration of Independence*?

**Curcio:** I first gave this book to an adult friend and she liked it as much as I did. The writing of the Declaration of Independence isn't always accessible -- even for adults -- but this book, which is really a picture book, takes you through each sentence and gives you a sense of what the words mean, and how moving they are.

*(Curcio got up to find the book for Edmonds. She came back and handed it to her.)*

**Edmonds:** Oh, this is a nice book.

**Patch:** What do you think about the state of independent bookstores today? After several years when we saw so many independents close their doors, do you think anything has changed for the small stores?

**Edmonds:** I do. There's a good article on NPR.org by Lynn Neary about what small bookstores have done to bring in customers.

**Curcio:** Stores like ours create a place of community. Booklovers have found that buying from a bookstore in their area is often more rewarding.

*(A woman wheeling twin toddlers in a stroller approaches to ask if she can let her toddlers out of their stroller.)*

**Curcio:** Of course.

*(Both Curcio and Edmonds laugh as the boys race straight for the puppet rack.)*

**Edmonds:** When people come to their local bookstore, they see the value and are inclined to support it. If only Oprah would stop telling her readers to go to Amazon. She's done so much for reading; if we could bring her over to advocate for the smaller bookstores—if she would tell her readers to visit their local independent bookstores first instead of ordering everything from Amazon, then I'd feel even better about the chances for independent bookstores in the future.

How often do you forgo Amazon and shop at independent bookstores? Why? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

**About this column:** *What can you learn about fellow Los Altans in ten minutes? Ann Krueger Spivack explores both the new and familiar in Los Altos to uncover something different, perhaps a story you haven't heard.*

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