

# Successful Transitions: Three New Indie Owners Stress Community

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Three Northern California bookstores have successfully transitioned to new owners in moves that the indie community could take as a sign that bookselling is still a viable and attractive business.

Cheshire Bookshop in Fort Bragg, which sells new adult and children's books, was purchased by Christine Lindauer, a former CPA, in October 2010. "I've always found my comfort zone in bookstores, and although the learning curve is huge, my customers are so well-informed that the transition has been fairly easy," Lindauer says. Located in a community that is diverse socially, politically, and ethnically allows Lindauer to carry on Cheshire's tradition of stocking a "very broad spectrum of books." The 1,500-square-foot store does best with the sci-fi, mystery, biography, and history genres. Lindauer's husband is creating a new Web site for the store, and Cheshire will soon be implementing IndieBound's e-book program "to satisfy our e-reading customers," especially in light of the big drop in sales at Cheshire following the holidays, which Lindauer attributes to her customers' use of e-readers.

Nothing could have prepared Lindauer for the amount of work and constant hat-changing that come with owning a bookstore, but she's thrilled by the experience. "The store would have closed if we hadn't bought it," she notes, "and our customers have shared an overwhelming joy with us because of the store's survival. This is a wonderful community, and it's great to be an integral part of it."

Dianne Edmonds and Jill Curcio purchased Linden Tree Children's Recordings and Books in Los Altos last spring after its original owners put the 26-year-old store up for sale. The new partners' complementary backgrounds—Edmonds's in corporate finance and inventory management; Curcio's as a children's librarian at an elementary school—have made for an effective transition into bookselling. Edmonds also gives kudos to Linden Tree's staff, many of whom stayed on following the sale of the store. "Their support has been immeasurable and an endless reservoir of knowledge around children's literature and reading," she says.

Linden Tree is now focusing on upgrading the store's computer system, creating a new Web site, and having a broader social media presence on the Internet. "Behind the scenes we have implemented a new accounting and payroll system and made systemic changes to our inventory management," Edmonds says. "Coming down the pipeline is a new logo and branding, and we've made substantial investments in new inventory and store layout."

Curcio and Edmonds have been surprised that Linden Tree's reputation has spread "far beyond Los Altos and the Bay Area: we have people visiting and calling from around the U.S., and they all have a personal story to tell about the store." The partners were customers of the store before buying it, and realized how much their community valued an independent bookstore. "This community believes in books, trusts and depends on their relationships with the staff, and needed this bookstore as a community cornerstone and resource," Edmonds says. Support has also come in from other indies, who have helped by mentoring and sharing knowledge. "It's made us realize that the strength of indies lies with all of us being successful," she concludes.

When Carl Baker-Madsen and his wife purchased the 50-year-old Hayward Bookshop in 2009 they inherited an enormous organizing job. Before taking over the store, he was a mechanic for the city of

Hayward, and his wife, Marilyn, was the city's library director. The couple's business partners are Alison and Sherman Lewis.

Previous owner Hank Maschal "ran the store frugally," Baker-Madsen says, "and business here was all done on pencil and paper. We had to do a lot of work to get the store into shape. Hank was a curmudgeon and built a wall of books at the old cash register that he hid behind. That was the first thing to go." Baker-Madsen credits store manager Renee Rettig, who's worked at Hayward Bookshop for 15 years, for helping make the transition easier: "She's an amazing bookseller, and also our human database." He is now using the Basil inventory system and spends much of his time with the "daunting task" of putting the titles of 40,000 used and 6,000 new books into the store's computer.

Hayward Bookshop now stocks more bestsellers and hardcovers in the 3,000-square-foot store, which is located on the ground floor of a century-old building that has a hotel upstairs. In keeping with the town's history of attracting rodeos and cowboy movie stars in the 1930s, Hayward Bookshop has a large collection of used vintage westerns, many of which are now collectible and being sold online by Baker-Madsen to help defray the cost of running the bookstore. "We haven't made a penny yet," he says. "I work for free. We just love our customers and books, and our goal is to keep this going."