

other's books on their cash register so the customer has to do *even less* walking. "We usually ring up four or five of their sales a day," Barry said. "We trust each other." With their few overlapping titles—such as parenting books and classics—the booksellers use stickers to identify which store they came from.

"You have to get along pretty well with your neighbor to do this," Scott commented. "We give cash back and forth to each other. The only glitch is that when we take a credit card purchase and give the cash to the other store, sometimes we end up with negative cash."

Both stores cited a 10% increase in sales and a noticeable rise in traffic since they became joined at the hip. Starting with a celebration to inaugurate the new doorway, the stores have participated in several joint marketing ventures—including a weekend where customers who bought a book on one side were given a coupon for 50% off a book bought on the other side. The stores also contributed an article to the shopping center's newsletter, describing the recent change in their status. Future plans include "customer-appreciation days" offering select discounts and a Christmas promotion featuring radio and newspaper ads.

Omaha Indies Take Defensive Action

A GROUP OF 13 independent bookstores in Omaha, Neb., banded together to create one weekend, July 14–16, for "customer-appreciation days" and raising customer awareness of independents. Informally called the Omaha Independent Booksellers Association, the group put together a brochure listing their names, locations and specialties. During the designated weekend, they offered their customers special discounts set individually by each store as well as coupons good for 10% off a book at another store if the first store visited didn't have it in stock.

"We're doing this because Barnes & Noble will open the first superstore ever in Omaha this July and Borders is opening one in October," said Ellen Scott, co-owner of the Bookhouse, a children's store, and one of the event's organizers. "We decided we wanted to raise the consciousness of the community about the difference between

chains and independents, and get them to realize that any of the books they'd find at a Barnes & Noble or a Borders can be found at our stores." The 13 stores involved represent "30,000 square feet of bookstore and 200,000 titles," Scott maintained. She added that the Omaha booksellers got the idea for the coupon from a group of independents in Minneapolis/St. Paul that offer the 10%-off coupon between stores on an ongoing basis.

The 12 other members of the Omaha Independent Booksellers Association are Baker Square Book Center; the Bookworm; Combs & Combs; Cover to Cover; Kettersons' Old Market Bookstore; Kieser's Book Store; Little Professor Book Center, La Vista; New Realities; the Pegasus Book Center; Star Realm; Travel Stuff; and Village Book & Stationery.

—K. A.

NYC's Endicott To Close

AFTER 14 YEARS in business, Endicott Booksellers on Manhattan's Upper West Side will close its doors by Labor Day, according to vice-president and buyer Stuart Bernstein. Bernstein succinctly summed up the main reason for the store's failure: "Barnes & Noble. From the very first day that [their] store opened, sales dropped and did not come back." The decrease in sales, he

said, ranged from 25% to 50% over two years. Endicott is currently offering its customers 40% off on all merchandise.

After Endicott opened in November 1981 on Columbus Avenue between 81st and 82nd streets, sales rose steadily every year by 5% to 7%, owner Encarnita Quinlan said. But then, in April 1993, the Barnes & Noble superstore arrived on Broadway and 82nd Street, two blocks away. More customer mailings and a new newsletter didn't stem the erosion. "It seemed like customers would just take the information and buy those books somewhere else at a discount," Bernstein said.

"We reduced our staff, cut back our hours and tried corporate sales," Quinlan said. "But American Express and other companies were not interested since there are so many Barnes & Nobles all over. All the customer has to do to buy books is walk across the street.

"There is nothing else I could have done," she concluded. "There isn't a single service we don't offer." The services she cited include free delivery anywhere in Manhattan, free special ordering, free gift wrapping and involvement in activities sponsored by community organizations such as schools and museums.

"As far as adapting, if we tried to be everything to everybody, we would have no way to compete," Bernstein said. "None of us here got into the book business to sell Jackie Collins."

—K. A.

Toadstool's Cafe Goes Cyber

AESOP'S TABLE, the cafe in the Toadstool Bookshop in Peterborough, N.H., has installed a computer so that customers can connect with Toadstool's new World Wide Web site, or any other site on the Internet that they wish to browse. The service will cost customers \$4.95 for half an hour and \$6.95 for an hour. Compucare Business Services, a computer store located in the same building as Toadstool, provided the hardware and obtained the store's Web site; Compucare will share in the cafe's proceeds. To commemorate its new service, the cafe is offering CyberChip Cookies and Megabyte Brownies.

The new "cyber cafe" was launched on June 5 when Toadstool, Aesop's Table and Compucare staff tuned in to a question-and-answer session with House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who was at the ABA show.

"Our hope is that we'll get additional traffic and sell more books," said store manager Willard Williams. "Customers can pick up information on our home page about events taking place at our three stores. They'll also have a chance to find out from the ABA's BookWeb about new books coming out and book events that they might not have heard about.

"The idea is to stir up interest in the Internet, so that may mean selling some additional books on the Internet," he added. "And Compucare may see more sales of modems or computers because people have an environment that's simple and nonthreatening where they can try out the equipment. Everybody is hearing about the Internet, its virtues and drawbacks. Now they can see what it is—and get a cup of coffee, too."

—STEVE SHERMAN