

7

YEARS IN
BUSINESS

BOB MANESS

OWNER/DIRECTOR

CRT has become one of the north state's favorite choices for high quality Broadway performance. Started in 2012, this top-notch theatre company has brought 72 shows to Chico in its brief existence. Owner and director Bob Maness comes from a 30 year history of working in community and professional theatre, from Los Angeles to San Francisco and now here in Chico.

CRT has several divisions beyond full Broadway shows, including a Black Box venue for intimate performances, and a youth theater academy (CRT KIDS) hosting over 140 students ranging from ages 5-16! "One of our core values", says owner Bob Maness, "is People Over Project. We believe if we invest in the performers, the show will come together easily". Local community is important to CRT who has donated thousands in ticket sales to local needs including Camp Fire victims, local School districts and many other local non-



profits. They are excited for the coming season which will include, 'Matilda the Musical', 'Sweeney Todd', and for youth 'Frozen Jr'.



1.800.722.4522 | WWW.CRTSHOWS.COM

84

YEARS IN
BUSINESSLOCALLY
MADEGREEN
BUSINESS

LEWIS JOHNSON

OWNER

Butte View Olive Co. and Stella Cadente, two wildly popular olive oil labels that serve cooks across the nation, are produced right here in Oroville by Lewis Johnson and his family.

It all began in 1935, when Johnson's grandfather first began farming the 150 acres of olive trees that they still have today. In 1999 Johnson produced the first bottle of Butte View olive oil after three years of fine-tuning his process.

Today, Butte View produces a wide variety of extra virgin olive oils infused with flavors including: jalapeño, garlic, basil, lemon, lime, blood orange and rosemary. These pure, light and delicate hand crafted oils provide wonderful aromas and distinctive accents to any dish making them truly unique and excellent – just one more reason why these olive oils are "Gold" and "Best of Class" medal winners.



Mr. Johnson welcomes you to come experience California sunshine in a bottle!

Available in Chico at Maisie Jane's, Made in Chico, and S&S Produce, in Oroville at Collins & Denny Market, and Wagon Wheel Market, in 250ml and 500ml bottles.

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VIEW**
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Success in adaptation

BaT Comics owner Trent Walsh on surviving the internet, other trends as a retail business



Twenty-six years ago, Trent Walsh opened BaT Comics & Games on Broadway in downtown Chico. He's moved the store a few times—some of his landlords weren't the greatest, he says—but for the past 11 years, he's occupied a spot about a block away from that first storefront. He couldn't imagine being anywhere else.

"When we first started, we had to decide what kind of business we wanted to be," he said of himself and former business partner Benny Louie. "We wanted to be geared toward the college crowd—so that meant being downtown, and not, say, in the mall." That was 1994. Since then, the internet certainly "has taken a toll" on the industry—

"Amazon is fairly terrible," Walsh said. "Most of my down [times] are attributed to that." But it's not all been bad. For instance, there are a plethora of blogs and YouTube channels dedicated to comic books and games that never would have existed without the internet. They spur random bursts of product popularity. Something he's been carrying for years might suddenly become a hot

Walsh's pro tip:

Get a business degree or at least take some business classes. It's great to have passion—necessary, really—but you have to have some basic business understanding or you'll not survive long-term.

218 Broadway St., 898-0550,
batcomicsandgames.com

commodity because a celebrity hypes it online, or a popular blogger turns people onto it.

Walsh has seen trends come and go, most noticeably in the realms of board games and comics. The former have evolved past the "I'm beating you or you're beating me" style to more involving team efforts

Trent Walsh sees downtown as a vital segment of Chico's economy, part of why he's kept his store, BaT Comics & Games, in the district for 26 years.

PHOTO BY MEREDITH J. COOPER

in accomplishing goals, he says. And while comics and graphic novels still make up the majority of his business, Walsh says they've gone from constituting about 60 percent to 45 percent of sales to 40 percent to 45 percent.

"Literacy is much lower than it used to be," he said. People would rather come in and buy T-shirts with comic book characters on them than the comic books themselves—because they're just not that into reading, he says.

"One of the things we do—and we do well—is we have a huge variety of stuff," Walsh said, adding that he carries 30 distinct product lines in the store. "We try to have enough variety so if comics aren't that popular for a while we hopefully have enough other stuff to make up for it. If you want to survive long-term, you have to be able to adapt to trends."

That adaptation applies to Walsh, too. When he first started, he was the demographic he hoped to reach. Now he finds he relies on his employees' opinions on what's cool. "I'm terrible at choosing 'cute' things," he said as an example, pointing to a large plush unicorn he was preparing to put in the window display. "People wouldn't necessarily think of us as selling plush toys—but we sell a ton of them. We've got to do whatever we can to get people in."

—MEREDITH J. COOPER
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