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Tina Ferguson, owner of Face in a Book



another pitfall is those writers who problematize the genre and think they're oh so clever—and they just don't tie things up—but then they cast that as something above what we mystery writers do." Smiling, she adds in a mock drawl, "We lowly practitioners of the fair play puzzle plot."

McPherson had a successful career spinning those story lines before she moved to Davis, where her husband took a teaching job at the University of California. She says the staff at Avid Reader were among the first to welcome her with open arms.

"They've supported me since I came off the boat and didn't know anyone," she recalls.

Knickerbocker, a die-hard lit-devotee who opened Avid Reader 32 years ago, says author appearances add another dimension to the store's mission of bringing Davis the very best books.

"It's very exciting," Knickerbocker said of the turnout for McPherson. "This was a community event, but it was around writing, and not only that, it was around successful writing."

The Davis festivities weren't the region's only early spring get-together. On March 9, Face in A Book in El Dorado Hills held a bustling launch party for Claire Booth's new novel, *A Deadly Turn*.

Booth is a former newspaper crime reporter for the Contra Costa Times. In 2008, she turned the case of a homicidal cult leader from Concord into a true crime enigma called *The False Prophet*. After that book's release, Booth began writing fiction. She created a series of police procedurals set in the '70s-chic country music netherworld of Branson, Missouri. The books follow an elected sheriff named Hank Worth, and some of their originality stems from the trends and tropes Booth *isn't* trying to copy.

"He's not an emotionally tortured protagonist or brooding seeker who's dealing with a battered past," Booth admits. "I wanted him to be more of a normal guy. I thought that would be more interesting."

Worth's relatability gained Booth a national audience. Now that she lives in Fair Oaks, she considers Face in a Book her "home bookstore." Booth says owner Tina Ferguson and her team have done a stellar job hosting events that get kids and teens interested in reading.

"I like how specifically independent bookstores can tailor themselves to the needs of their community," Booth says. "And from a reader's perspective, they don't have any corporate overlord dictating what their stock is going to be, and what they have to display."

Mystery writer Catriona McPherson, who lives in Davis, holds one of her recent awards inside Avid Reader in Davis.
PHOTO BY SCOTT THOMAS ANDERSON

Ferguson opened Face in a Book in 2012, not long after Borders Books in Folsom met its unceremonious demise. Ferguson saw that as a sign that neighborhoods needed a space for written culture and creativity to thrive. Today, Face in a Book runs six book clubs, a writers' coffee house meet-up and some of the biggest literary events in the Sacramento region.

In 2016, it hosted *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* author Jeff Kinney and sold-out 1,400 seats at an off-site venue. During its Independent Bookstore Day celebration on April 27, it will host former Pixar illustrator and famed children's author Christian Robinson.

While Ferguson's events are putting Sacramento on the map for literary tours, she says the role her store plays in everyday lives is the most rewarding part of the journey.

"People might think of a bookstore as a retail establishment, but it's really so much more to so many people," she notes. "It's a place where readers can connect with others, a place of discovery; and we have a lot of customers who have become like family to us now." □

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