

So GOES LOGOS

THE 40-YEAR HISTORY OF THE DOWNTOWN USED BOOKSTORE REFLECTS IN MICROCOSM THE CHANGES OF SANTA CRUZ



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Logos owner John Livingston, second from right, is surrounded by some of his veteran staff, from left, Heidi Kernysky, Scott Clements, Dave Iermini and Saarin Schwartz. Between them, the five have sold books at Logos for more than 120 years.

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Bus. L By WALLACE BAINE

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✓ The day after signing a lease to open a bookstore in downtown Santa Cruz, John Livingston had an anxiety attack. It was a nice Sunday in the middle of the summer, 1969, and there was not a soul on the street.

"There's nobody around anywhere," he remembers. "You could see tumbleweeds going across the street. And I thought, 'What have I done? I've opened up a new business in a ghost town.'"

Livingston soon learned that that day was not a typical Sunday. While he was wandering Pacific Avenue trying to shake a serious case of buyer's remorse, the whole world was watching Apollo 11 land on the surface on the moon.

That bookstore was called Logos. What was then a small, modest bookstore trafficking in used books and records is now a downtown institution. Livings-



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A customer spends a quiet afternoon browsing through the stacks at Logos in downtown Santa Cruz.

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LOGOS

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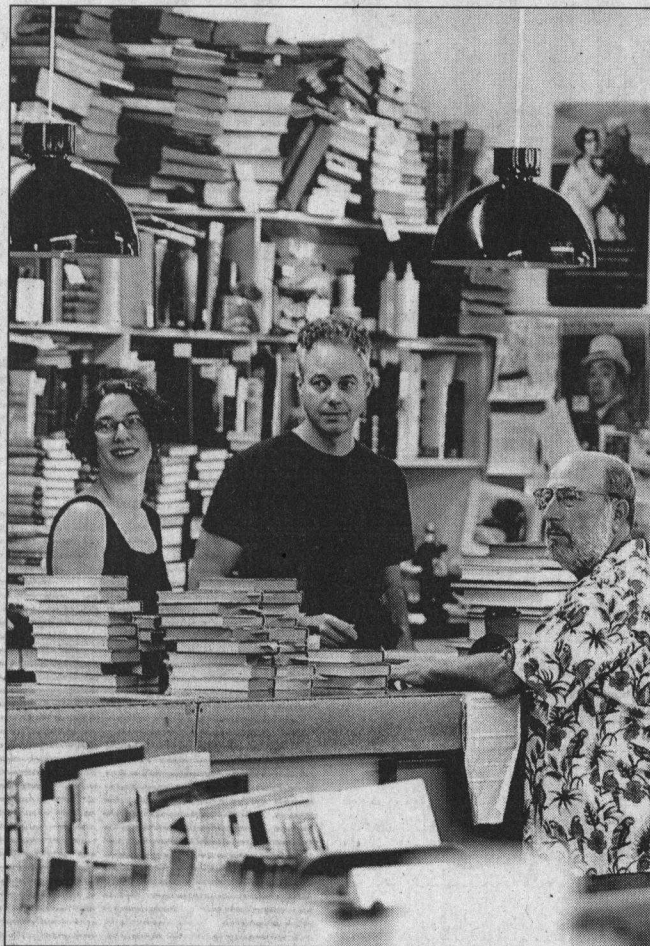
ton was to find out soon enough that, in the realm of books and music, Santa Cruz was nobody's idea of a ghost town.

Having survived the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, as well as big-box competition and the threat of the Internet, Logos is marking its 40th anniversary in business this fall. In a distinct way, the story of Logos is the story of downtown Santa Cruz. It was, in fact, a key agent in the transformation of Santa Cruz from a conservative retirement community to a culturally diverse college town. As goes Logos, so goes Santa Cruz.

In selling mostly used books, CDs and vinyl, Logos has always worked on a different model than other businesses. The public is both its customers and its suppliers, a dynamic that made for an awkward first day in business.

"When I opened the store," said Livingston, "my stock was so thin that I took out every other shelf. My old boss (from a Berkeley used bookstore) came down for the opening, takes one look around and says, 'You got a space problem.' I'm like, 'Yeah I know, I don't have any books. And he says, 'No. I said, you got a space problem. You're going to need more space.'"

When Logos first opened on Cooper Street, across the street from the old Cooper House, UC Santa Cruz was still a new kid in town, and students came downtown in much smaller numbers than they do today. Pacific Avenue was a Capra-esque Main Street of department stores and hardware stores. It was bookstores — first the old Hip Pocket Books, then the Bookshop Santa Cruz, and finally Logos — that staked out a claim for a new college-town ethos



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Heidi Kernysky and Scott Clements work the counter at Logos with owner John Livingston.

to emerge in Santa Cruz's business district.

When the store opened, Livingston's old boss was exactly right. Business exploded. A week after the opening, the store had tripled its projections and the small store filled up almost instantly. The new store coincided with the opening of the recently constructed Pacific Garden Mall, and suddenly, students and tourists were flowing into downtown. "It was like the floodgates opened," said Livingston.

Five years later, the bookstore moved onto Pacific Avenue at its present location, and underwent a remodeling in 1979. Logos had become part of Santa Cruz's transition to a college town and was firmly embedded in the downtown

business community when the Loma Prieta earthquake hit.

In fact, Livingston was planning a 20th anniversary staff party on Oct. 17 at his downtown store at the time. The store was full of customers and, even though dust was everywhere, he had to urge people to leave the building. A few minutes later, while standing out in the street, examining the building, he saw that north wall had completely collapsed into the store next to his.

"I'm still in complete denial at this point," he said. "I'm thinking we could be open tomorrow. No problem."

Like most buildings on Pacific, Logos was red-tagged, and after a heroic effort to retrieve the inven-

tory from the condemned building, Livingston and his staff moved to temporary digs at the old ice plant at Laurel and Chestnut.

"We couldn't get our PG&E hook-ups for the first winter we were there. We had no heat. My workers were in there in down jackets and gloves and you could see your breath. It was ridiculous."

It was almost three years before Logos was able to reopen on Pacific in a new building, just in time for big-box stores and online retailers like Amazon to pose a new threat to business. Used books have held their own in the new retail environment, said Livingston. It's the market for used music that's taken a nosedive.

"We sell less than half of what we used to sell in CDs because of downloading. DVDs are pretty good, but they are going to go away too, by the same method. CDs will probably disappear altogether."

However, Logos still enjoys a reputation for having hard-to-find and rare books, which it collects thanks to a staff of buyers steeped in various genres and subcategories of used books. Some of Livingston's staff, including Debbie Shayne, Dave Iermini, Scott Clements and Saarin Schwartz, have been with Logos for 20 years or longer.

Livingston is not particularly sanguine about the future of Logos. He said he has not taken a salary out of the store in many years. But the store has survived challenges in the past, and he'll continue to run the bookstore as long as he's able.

"There are lots of motivations to keep the store open," he said. "First, it's a Santa Cruz institution and I'm very mindful of that. Secondly, I love the store. I don't have kids, so this is my kid. And lastly, I have a great staff and I want to keep these people around."