

Opening up worlds to customers in Capitola

Quirky Buck's Worlds celebrates 10 years

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CAPITOLA — For anyone working on a school report about, say, Cameroon, Cambodia or Croatia, who wants to add a splash of color with a country flag and perhaps a sticker representing one of those places, Buck's Worlds in Capitola is the place to go.

Such reports might also be bolstered by a coin from the country in question. In that case, there's a good chance owner Bill Buck has it.

Perhaps National Geographic has in the past published a story about a topic of interest. Well, Buck has a collection of that magazine dating back to the magazine's origins.

In fact, the tiny but well-appointed store is a veritable clearinghouse when it comes to flags, globes, maps, and all things geography-related, in addition to a multitude of curios ranging from patches to fossils to wind-up, chattering teeth.

Buck is a bit of a curiosity himself. He is an ebullient, retired engineer with a passion for and encyclopedic knowledge of geography, astronomy and history, along with any number of topics.

He is also more than willing to share that knowledge with customers.

This might include discussions about why Pluto should still be considered a planet or the symbolism behind the Philippine flag.

Buck first pitched the idea for his store 10 years ago

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Photos by Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

ABOVE: Bill Buck, owner of Buck's Worlds of Capitola, shows a Croatian flag in his vast flag collection inside his 10-year-old shop. **BELOW:** Buck's Worlds features a unique inventory, including globes, masks and coins from around the world, fossils, insect collections and gag novelty items.

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to dubious friends in the business community, who told him to focus on just one thing, such as coins.

Dejected, he went home to his wife, who helped Buck do just that: combining all his interests by making up the catch-all word astrohistogeography on the spot, a word Buck is fond of saying and which certainly describes in a nutshell the scientifically eclectic nature of the place.

"Now, I do concentrate on just one thing," he joked.

Perhaps the most difficult thing for Buck is keeping every

flag for the world's countries, which are thought to number nearly 200. That means keeping on hand some 2,400 mini flags, in addition to the larger ones.

But the effort to keep up his inventory is worth it for Buck, who says the best thing about his business is having exactly the items his customers want.

That can mean a lot to the large Croatian community, and to the sizable population of people who immigrated from the Azores, many of whom come in looking for flags from their home countries.



"One woman came in and wanted a three-by-five flag of Taiwan and a small flag of Denmark," he said. "I had both."