

Chicago-area Independent Booksellers Respond to Announcement of Amazon Store in Chicago

CHICAGO – August 31, 2016 - In response to news that Amazon will open a brick-and-mortar store in the Lakeview neighborhood of Chicago next year, the independent bookstores of Chicago and the Chicago area unite to issue the following joint statement.

The Amazon announcement represents an opportunity to expand the conversations indie booksellers have been having for years with customers about sustainable publishing, bookselling, and retailing, as well as sustainable communities. Sarah Hollenbeck, co-owner of Women & Children First in Andersonville, explains that “Chicago’s independent bookstore community works hard to bring authors to Chicago, as well as to highlight local authors and work with local businesses. Events held in our stores strengthen community bonds, as well as provide safe spaces where people can meet, share ideas, and debate issues.”

Whereas Amazon’s initial choice to sell books was largely for the purpose of collecting customer data, independent bookstores pride themselves on serving customers who read voraciously and eclectically and on using books to create a conversation with customers and their communities. Booksellers get to know their customers so that they are able to make personal recommendations that enrich and sometimes change people’s lives. In addition, independent bookstores collect—and have always collected—full sales taxes as required by law, thereby supporting schools, fire and police departments, and state and local governments generally. Amazon has also begun collecting and paying sales taxes, after being forced to by lawsuits and negative public opinion.

Industry experts speculate that the purpose of brick-and-mortar Amazon stores is to continue to collect information that would aid Amazon in future non-book sales endeavors. To Chicago’s independent bookstores, customers are not just instruments for data collection to enable future sales; rather, customer support is the lifeblood that helps sustain both the stores and the vital communities those stores create.

Booksellers also cite the recent study [“Amazon and Empty Storefronts,”](#) a report issued in January 2016 that quantified, for the first time, how billions of dollars’ worth of Amazon sales are rapidly imperiling the future of brick-and-mortar downtowns and viable shopping districts, along with the property taxes, employment opportunities, social engagement, and the sense of “place” that small businesses provide in their communities.

Co-sponsored by [the American Booksellers Association](#) and the research firm [Civic Economics](#), the report was designed to provide policymakers and consumers with a better understanding of

the effect at the state and local levels of the growth of online retail as a substitute for storefront purchases. At the national level, its findings are staggering:

- In 2014, Amazon sold \$44.1 billion worth of retail goods nationwide, all while avoiding \$625 million in state and local sales taxes.
- That is the equivalent of 31,000 retail storefronts, 107 million square feet of commercial space, which might have paid \$420 million in property taxes.
- A total of more than \$1 billion in revenue lost to state and local governments, \$8.48 for every household in America.
- Amazon also operated 65 million square feet of distribution space, employing roughly 30,000 full-time workers and 104,000 part-time and seasonal workers.
- Even counting all the jobs in Amazon distribution centers, Amazon sales produced a net loss of 135,973 retail jobs.

According to an earlier Civic Economics study called "Local Works!", dollars spent in locally owned businesses continue to circulate locally and enrich that community. For every \$100 spent in a locally owned business, \$68 stays in that community; but for every \$100 spent in non-local businesses, only \$43 stays in the community. Over a period of years, that \$25 difference can mean millions of dollars siphoned away from local communities to corporate headquarters.

Amazon is known for its low prices and convenience. However, as booksellers at Bookends & Beginnings in Evanston point out, "What's largely invisible is the price we're really paying for that kind of convenience, if we ignore the likely consequences of Amazon's snowballing monopolistic practices." In Illinois alone, the numbers are shocking. The study estimates that in 2014, Amazon sold more than \$1.8 billion worth of retail goods in Illinois. That is the equivalent of 1,289 retail storefronts, 4.5 million square feet of commercial space, which might have paid \$23.6 million in property taxes and more than \$59.8 million in revenue lost to state and local governments. Even counting all the jobs in Amazon distribution centers, Civic Economics finds that Amazon sales produced a net loss of 7,802 retail jobs in Illinois.

The list of Chicago and Chicago-area stores, as well as our regional booksellers' association, endorsing this statement, along with their individual comments and contact information for follow-up, follow:

57th Street Books, 1301 E. 57th St., Chicago

Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, Inc., 824 W. Superior St., Ste. 100, Chicago

Anderson's Book Shop, Naperville, Downers Grove, and La Grange

The Book Cellar, 4736-38 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago

The Book Stall at Chestnut Court, 811 Elm St., Winnetka

The Book Table, 1045 Lake Street, Oak Park

Bookends & Beginnings, 1712 Sherman Ave., Rear 1, Evanston

City Lit Books, 2523 N. Kedzie Blvd., Chicago

Great Lakes Independent Booksellers Association, 2113 Roosevelt, Ypsilanti, MI

Lake Forest Bookstore, 662 N. Western Ave., Lake Forest

RoscoeBooks, 2142 W. Roscoe St., Chicago

Sandmeyer's Bookstore, 714 S. Dearborn St., Chicago

Seminary Co-Op Bookstore, 5751 S. Woodlawn Ave., Chicago

Unabridged Books, 3251 N. Broadway, Chicago

Volumes Bookcafe, 1474 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago

Wicker Park Secret Agent Supply Co. / 826CHI, 1276 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago

Women & Children First, 5233 N. Clark St., Chicago

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Anderson's of Naperville, Downers Grove, and La Grange: "Independent bookshops all over Chicagoland and the country are deeply rooted in their communities, building relationships and creating lifelong readers. We know what our towns and cities want to read, and we do this face to face and by reading books we know will engage our friends and neighbors—we don't use algorithms and formulas to tell someone what they should read. Chicagoland indie bookstores have collected sales tax for decades and property taxes are paid for the buildings we have occupied for many years. Amazon has avoided paying these for years. Chicagoland independent stores give back in countless ways to local organizations, not-for-profits, and schools. Amazon does not. We are the heart and soul of our neighborhoods because we are a place of ideas, a place to meet the authors behind the books, and most of all a place to converse with like-minded people about the

books we love. We are the brick and mortar of our communities. No Amazon store can do that.” Contact: Becky Anderson, becky@andersonsbookshop.net, [630-768-5725](tel:630-768-5725)

Bookends & Beginnings, Evanston: “There’s a kind of retail ‘climate change’ going on right now that’s not obvious to most consumers, who focus on Amazon’s convenience and price-slashing,” the booksellers said. “What’s largely invisible is the price we’re really paying for that kind of convenience, if we ignore the likely consequences of Amazon’s snowballing monopolistic practices.” Contact: Nina Barrett, nina@bookendsandbeginnings.com, [224-999-7722](tel:224-999-7722)

City Lit, Chicago: “City Lit has developed a strong, local community in four years. People are coming together here around book clubs, author events, story times, and great spontaneous discussions about obscure books. The independent bookstore will survive because people are looking for such opportunities that cannot be found in a business based on algorithms.” Contact: Teresa Kirschbraun, teresa@citylitbooks.com, [773-235-2523](tel:773-235-2523)

Great Lakes Independent Booksellers Association, Ypsilanti, Mich.: “Booksellers in Chicagoland are more than just merchants. Their stores provide a “Third Place”-- somewhere that isn’t home and isn’t work, but rather a place where we can just be ourselves--a place for the exchange of ideas; a place where the customer isn’t part of a logarithm but is instead a friend and neighbor; a place where the selection is tailored to those customers and friends. If you are looking for a place where you are more than just a data point, check out one (or many) of the stores listed here. They will be glad to see you!” Contact: Deb Leonard, deb@gliba.org, [734-340-6397](tel:734-340-6397)

RoscoeBooks, Roscoe Village: “Though we are disappointed on many levels to hear that Amazon is opening a brick-and-mortar store in our area, we will continue to strive to build connection and better our community through our love of books. We love being a part of this community and appreciate every single one of our customers as friends and fellow booklovers.” Contact: Erika VanDam, roscoebooks@gmail.com, [773-857-2676](tel:773-857-2676)

Women & Children First, Andersonville: “This time it feels personal. Just when indie bookstores are regaining the business they’d lost to two predatory national chains oversaturating the market, when sales are up for the first time in 10 years, along comes Amazon to take another bite out of our business. I choose to think of this as the ultimate compliment, though--that a profit-driven corporation like Amazon is trying to copy our business model. I know they can’t copy our commitment to community building, sustainable local economies, social activism, and free speech and the free exchange of ideas, so I’m confident we’ll come out even stronger in the end.” Contact: Lynn Mooney, co-owner, wcflynn@gmail.com, [773-575-3365](tel:773-575-3365) or [773-769-9299](tel:773-769-9299)