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RETAIL » THIS AIN'T THE ROSEDALE LIBRARY

Bookstore battle close to claiming another victim

Kensington Market store's future in jeopardy as bailiff's notice on the door says it owes the landlord more than \$40,000

BY KAREN HOWLETT TORONTO

One of Toronto's few remaining independent bookstores is at risk of closing its doors, the latest casualty in an escalating battle with the world's largest online retailer.

A bailiff's notice slapped on This Ain't the Rosedale Library says the store's owners have until Thursday to come up with \$40,000 plus costs owed to the landlord. The bookstore in downtown Kensington Market was closed on Saturday and the bailiff changed the locks.

"It's a tough business," lamented Mika Bareket, owner of the Good Egg cookbook shop in Kensington Market. "I hope they pull through."

Ms. Bareket said This Ain't the Rosedale Library owner Charlie Huisken did business the old-fashioned way – using no computer system to track inventory and reading every single book before adding it to the shelves.

"They've never carried a book they don't believe in," she said. "I wish more people supported their vision."

Mr. Huisken could not be reached for comment. But other bookshop owners said the traditional way of doing business that has served the independents well for decades is under siege right across Canada. They said the independents are struggling to compete against online bookseller Amazon.com., which sells at deep discounts that the small stores cannot afford to match and which recently got the nod from Ottawa to operate its own distribution warehouse in Canada.

Many independent bookstores that were fixtures in their community have gone out of business in recent years. But the demise of the first wave of stores – notably Britnell's and Lichtman's in Toronto and Duthie Books in Vancouver – happened because these independents could not compete against big-box retailers such as Indigo Books & Music Inc.



A bailiff's notice was posted on the door of This Ain't the Rosedale Library in Kensington Market on Saturday. RYAN ENN HUGHES FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Mika Bareket

WORST INTERSECTIONS
will return

Today, it is online behemoth Amazon that is hurting the business, according to those trying to eke out a living owning and operating one-of-a-kind independent bookstores.

Glad Day Bookshop, North America's oldest gay and lesbian bookstore and the only one of its kind left in Toronto, could be forced to close its doors at the end of summer, said owner John Scythes. It has been in business for 40 years.

Mr. Scythes said he cannot compete against Amazon, which uses its buying clout with publishers and buys books at deep discounts and

then sells them at 30 per cent off the suggested retail price. As a result, he said, there is a two-tiered pricing system in the book retailing sector.

"That's what's killing people like Charlie," he said, referring to the owner of This Ain't the Rosedale Library.

Mr. Huisken founded This Ain't The Rosedale Library in 1979 and later brought his son, Jesse, into the business. In 2005, the store made it on to the list of the Guardian newspaper's top 10 bookshops in the world. A Canadian writer described it as "Canada's best independent bookstore, full of

small-press publications" and "a model of how an independent can survive."

Toronto Women's Bookstore, Canada's largest feminist bookstore, was on the verge of closing until an employee, Victoria Moreno, hatched a rescue plan. She is in the process of buying the 35-year-old store and plans to add a café as well as high-speed Internet access for customers.

"I want to create a social setting as well as a bookstore," Ms. Moreno said.

But the ruling by Stephen Harper's government allowing Seattle-based Amazon to open

a warehouse here and cut its costs significantly has prompted worries by local booksellers that Amazon will be able to price Canadian businesses out of the market.

Until now, the online retailer has operated a website in Canada known as Amazon.ca with no physical presence here.

Amazon.ca has used a Canada Post subsidiary to ship goods in this country to avoid violating cultural-protection rules.

"Amazon.com is a big company," Mr. Scythes said. "There's no way to stop them. It's a free market and it's dog eat dog."