

Word on the Street: Hart's Haven Books will close its doors

By Tim Sheehan



Shirley Hart, owner of Hart's Haven Books in Fresno's Tower District, reaches for one of the thousands of volumes she's trying to clear out before she sells the building and retires.

TIM SHEEHAN — THE FRESNO BEE

For almost 20 years, [Hart's Haven Books](#) has been, well, a haven in Fresno's Tower District for people seeking a quaint place to seek out old and hard-to-find volumes of the printed word.

But slowly, word of mouth is getting out about the clearance sale that owner Shirley Hart is having as she prepares — with very mixed emotions — to close the used-book business. After several attempts to try to sell the bookstore on [Van Ness Avenue, a few blocks south of Olive Avenue](#), Hart is now faced with clearing out her thousands of books before she sells the building and retires.

"I'll be 80 in March, and I need to retire," Hart said. "I had it listed three or four times and I really wanted to sell it as a bookstore. But it took me a long time to get that people don't want to buy a bookstore. ... I had to really ask my inner voice and work on that."

A lifelong fondness for reading is what prompted Hart to open her bookstore in the first place after she retired from teaching in North Fork. "I always wanted a bookstore," she said. "When I grew up, we never had a book in the house except the Bible. "My teachers in St. Louis motivated me. I would walk to the library — and if I was lucky, my bike was

working — so I could partake of the books. ... And when I became a teacher, I appreciated them even more.”

“When I lived in Yosemite Lakes Park, my whole balcony was full of books and my whole garage was full of books,” she added. “I would give people books, and they’d say, ‘You know, that changed my life.’ That’s part of my love for books.”

When she bought the 2,880-square-foot building — a former printer’s shop — to open the store in 1997, “I had all these bookcases built in, but when I got all my books in here, I was surprised at how few books I really had,” Hart said. “So over the years I’ve gone all over to find books” in thrift stores and elsewhere all over the state. “Then I would find out from my customers that I got some good finds. That’s how I learned about books. My customers taught me so much about books over the years.”

While she’s never uncovered any rarities or first-edition masterpieces in the boxes of books she’s bought to stock her store, Hart said her greatest pleasure comes in finding books that have been sought by customers. “Classics are some of their favorites. I found one last Steinbeck during the sale, and now it’s gone,” she said. “And science fiction.”

And more contemporary titles are also popular among people who are looking for cheaper deals than buying a new book from someplace like Barnes & Noble. “I still have ‘Fifty Shades of Grey’ because people were looking for that,” she said. But Hart — who has worked during her lifetime as a house cleaner, waitress, nurse and teacher and is an ordained minister — only made it about 80 pages into the popular tale of sexual bondage and domination before putting the book down.

She’s not sure how she’ll feel when she finally puts up the closed sign and locks the door for the last time, probably sometime in April. “Right now, I have a list of things I want to do,” Hart said. “One of them is to stay in my robe and read as long as I want to. ... I have so many books that I’ve learned about and want to discover.”

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