



Moonlighting

Countless Christian-retail store mission statements and business plans include the words, “Impact the community for Christ.” Mine stated it. How about yours?

Those five words make for an inspiring concept and champion a noble cause; however, in the mundane day-to-day operations of retailing, “community” involvement can become distant as we focus more on the business at hand. What takes place in and around our store during “open” hours often trumps our intended community participation and ministry.

For clarity, all Christian-retail stores have the potential for impacting the communities in which they’re located simply by functioning. Their very presence allows shoppers to sample life-changing products. That is an awesome impact by itself. However, for this article, the focus isn’t on the ministry found in the products Christian retailers sell, nor is it on the random acts of kindness store employees engage in. Instead, the spotlight is on those retailers intentionally going above and beyond bookstore commonplace to ensure they make a difference in their community relationship landscape.

WANTED: COMMUNITY-MINDED RETAILERS

Finding Christian retailers who can initiate and sustain creative ways of impacting their communities can be difficult. While some retailers host VBS workshops, book signings, and Bible studies, others have discovered their community impact in other ways: before, after, and even during store hours.

“We intentionally stay open past our posted closing times when Operation Christmas Child revs up,” says Pat Pope, owner of Cornerstone Books, in Boone, NC. “So many volunteers work hard all day at the nearby Franklin Graham ministry that we want to make it special for them in the evenings by serving hot chocolate, handing out coupons, and providing an atmosphere of fellowship. We also host a monthly Girls of Faith club, ages 5-12, on Saturday

mornings on our upper level with games and crafts.”

“Local piano teachers utilize our store. Students are given lessons in our private practice rooms,” says Michael Wilbur, store manager of Lamb’s Book and Bible, in Bangor, ME. “Parents bring their children in for piano lessons and then browse the store, while they are waiting. This service brings in Christians and non-Christians alike.”

THINKING OUTSIDE THE STORE

“Several years ago, I approached our local Kiwanis chapter to help sponsor a blood drive,” says Susan Lutz, owner of the Healing Touch Bookstore in Altoona, IA. “Now, every eight weeks, a nurse sets up a registration table inside the store, while the Central Iowa Blood Bank mobile lab parks outside the front of our store. Donors often browse our product selections while waiting to give blood. We could have never spared the space inside the store, but with that big bus parked outside, we can serve the community better.”

“Being located in an enclosed mall, our after-hours impact opportunities are limited,” states Corey Lancto, Manager of the Christian Bookshelf in Grand Forks, ND. “Our store is bulging with merchandise from wall to wall. However, we partner with a nearby church to host ‘premier parties’ for each new VeggieTales release. We help make it a fun time for kids and their parents, with lots of store prizes and giveaways. We also provide sale tables just outside the store with the profits benefiting the local chapter of the Women’s Pregnancy Center.”

FRUGALITY REALITY DOESN’T STOP IMPACT

Today, with rising rents, swelling taxes, and small-business uncertainties, it seems every available square foot of store space has to be justified and productive. Inventory turns are critical, leaving little in-store floor space for anything else but merchandise.

In many parts of the country, retailers have battened down the hatches doing their best to survive the current economic inertia. While many stores at one time or another have embraced coffee ar-