

Ann Arbor, Michigan, residents in shock over Borders' imminent closure

Our reporters
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The Borders Bookstore in downtown Ann Arbor, Michigan, at Liberty and Maynard Streets, is the flagship location of what became the second-largest bookseller in the country. Borders was founded in 1971, with a small inventory of used books by brothers Tom and Louis Borders, just across the street from the current location.

It will be closing as part of the liquidation of the national Borders Book Group (see "Bookseller Borders Group to liquidate, eliminating over 10,000 jobs"). The news of the demise of Borders comes as a shock to residents and hits at a particularly sensitive time for the city of Ann Arbor, a Midwestern city of 115,000 people near Detroit.

Every year, the city hosts an Art Fair in the downtown area, where several of the major streets are blocked off to vehicle traffic and lined with the covered booths of artisans and merchants.

On July 21, in the midst of the fair, Borders will be presenting its plan for liquidation to a US Bankruptcy Court in New York. If approved, the firm could be out of business by September, closing its last 399 stores, including the Ann Arbor flagship store. The closures will result in the loss of 10,700 jobs nationally.

During the preparations for the Art Fair, a WSWS reporting team interviewed residents near the Borders store about the impact of the closures.

Scott, a long-time resident of Ann Arbor, said, "It is disappointing that they are closing. It almost seems like it could have been preventable. The structure of the corporation was flawed.

"They really expanded in the 1980s, and it was a big part of this area. Borders was a huge employer with 1,800 employees in Ann Arbor. When they were doing well they gave money to help non-profits here and even helped put on some concerts.

"I was always proud that Borders started here, and now it is a question mark over what will replace it.

"I would guess the first sign of the closing will be on Friday. They are holding up until after the art fair."

Patrick, a student, said "I moved here from Florida to get job training. I think it will really suck to have Borders closing. I go in there to hang out and read"

Jerry, a customer at Borders, told the WSWS, "Even though the store is going into liquidation I'm not sure what it is going to look like. What are they going to do with the books?"

"Barnes and Noble, and Borders at some point decided to use different tactics. Now Borders is late to the e-book game. The book business is changing. The book in my hand is hard cover and I could get it online for nine dollars. All the same people would get paid, except who they rent this building from and the printer.

"I think time will tell about the long-term effects of this. But there is definitely going to be a human cost to it"

Bill Gilmore, owner of The Dawn Trader Book Shop, on the next block from Borders, was setting up his fair booth in the street outside his store. He told our reporters, "I think Borders' closing is a result of non-bookmen running a book store. The store used to send someone to Shaman Drum [a one-time local book store] and order what they had. When Shaman Drum closed, they had no idea what to do. That's when the Borders brothers sold the store to Kmart [1994]. Kmart had no idea what to do with it and just fired the manager. That is what ruined it. Everything is run by MBAs for money now.

"Now there will be a huge vacant space, and it hurts the area. People go to areas where there are a lot of bookstores. It is going to hurt me as a bookseller.

"The only difference between Barnes and Noble and

Borders is that they beat them to the Internet. My customers tell me that if they know what book they want they just buy it online. The only way to sell books now is if people are browsing and you have a staff that really knows books. Borders just doesn't have that kind of staff, they only can look things up on the computer.”



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