

LOCAL STORE HIT BY GOOD KIND OF MOB

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Bookseller Richard Wheaton of Winchester sorts a cart of books Saturday as “cash mob” buyers Lisa Miller, 11, of Winchester and Loa Jane Miller of Aynor, S.C., shop at Blue Plate Books on Valley Avenue in Winchester. (Photo by Jeff Taylor/The

Winchester Star)



Jessica Miller, 6, of Winchester tries to get the attention of her mother, Sharon, while she pays for books during a “cash mob” event Saturday at Blue Plate Books on Valley Avenue in Winchester. (Photo by Jeff Taylor/The Winchester Star)

The Winchester Star

Winchester — For eight hours Saturday, a local bookstore was overrun by a mob armed with cash.

Blue Plate Books at 2257 Valley Ave. was chosen as the first target of a Winchester

“cash mob” —a group that gathers at a local business and buys its products.

By the time the dust and cash settled and the mob dispersed at 7 p.m., Blue Plate Books owner Pat Saine was a little tired but happy with the turnout.

“It went very, very well,” he said. “There were about twice as many customers as on typical Saturday.”

One of the customers, Joann Rinker, was there with her two daughters. Rinker learned about the local cash mob on Facebook and thought the idea was “really cool.” She browsed for books holding one of her daughters. The other daughter had already decided how she wanted to spend her allowance and was searching for the right dinosaur book.

Sharon Miller and her daughter Lisa were already big fans of Blue Plate and didn't think twice about being part of the cash mob.

"This is one of my favorite bookstores anyway," Sharon said. "It's a local business, and I'd much rather give my money here than to Amazon."

Both had their arms were full of books. "I have four [books]," said Lisa, a fifth-grader at Daniel Morgan Middle School. "I want another one, but I can't afford it."

All the business was much appreciated, since a bookstore isn't exactly the most profitable business anymore, Saine said. "If you want to be a millionaire, you wouldn't open a bookstore in this day and age."

As pleased as Saine was with the turnout,

he wasn't the organizer of the mob.

It was started by local farm worker Sharon Hanks, who moved to Winchester from Richmond last summer.

Hanks got the idea from a friend in Richmond who read about a cash mob in Detroit. When Hanks heard about how businesses attracted customers when a cash mob formed, she decided to start one here in Winchester.

“I want to see that community spirit in Winchester,” she said.

She searched for a small Winchester business off the beaten path, preferably one that was homegrown and was focused on recycled products.

She said she came to the conclusion, “What better place than the used-book store?”

She created the event on Facebook and shared it with her friends, who shared it with their friends and so on. By Saturday, more than 1,000 invitations had gone out, Hanks said.

Saine thinks the cash mob is “a real man-bites-dog story.” Technological advances are often blamed for putting used bookstores out of business, he said. “But here Facebook really helped.”

Hanks is hoping to organize the mobbing of a local store on the first Saturday of every month.

But she won't be the one choosing the mob destination anymore. She's leaving that up to the business that was previously mobbed. So, Blue Plate Books will now choose May's cash mob location.

“I didn’t want people to think I was being biased or that I was getting a kickback,” Hanks explained. “I’m really excited to see what the next business will be.”

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