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YP opens rare and used bookstore in Webster

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WEBSTER — Ask 27-year-old Jonathan Smalter what he's most proud of in his bookstore, and he'll probably lead you to the rare book room and point to a first-edition copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger.

The book, priced at \$3,500, is by far the most expensive item in Yesterday's Muse.

Smalter's used bookstore opened in December on West Main Street in the village of Webster. The store has several rare books and thousands of regular used books, from genre fiction to literary fiction to books on local history.

The store has the crisp feel of a new bookstore. Every book has a price tag. Tables of books are scattered throughout, and Smalter changes the theme of each table every couple of months.

In honor of spring, he now has tables for sports books, cookbooks, gardening books and Christian books (a nod to Easter).

Smalter's girlfriend, Kristine Rinebold, handles data entry, promotions, customer inquiries and aspects of the store's Web site. She also contributes to the bookstore's blog.

"We'll call her the Jill of all trades," Smalter said. "She's kind of amazing."

The bookstore even has a resident tabby cat, Ophelia Paige, who recently wandered in as a stray.

While the physical incarnation of Yesterday's Muse was born during a recession, Smalter has been building his bookselling career online for years. The Webster native started buying used books at garage sales and library sales when he was a philosophy major at Nazareth College. He began to learn what sorts of books would sell well on the Internet.

"I sold books out of my closet," Smalter said. "I bought a ton of stuff and I was wrong about a lot of it."

Some books sell quickly online for a decent profit; other titles have too many copies available on the Internet and are harder to sell, he says.

With time, Smalter has developed an eye for which titles are worth his while.

Smalter got into the book business as a teenager. The first job he ever held was unrelated: He worked as a dishwasher in the Chinese food department at Wegmans.

But Smalter's mother encouraged him to find a job that wouldn't send him home smelling like soy sauce and grease, and since he knew someone working at Webster Village Used Book Store, he

applied for a data-entry position.

Store owner Tim Ryan hired Smalter, who was 17 at the time. He worked there for three years.

Then he sold books out of his closet for a time. And after graduating from Nazareth in 2003, he moved home and sold books out of his parents' attic.

He had accounts with Amazon Marketplace and abebooks.com, among others. Eventually, he started Yesterday's Muse as an online-only store.

Now he has a 15,000-book collection. About half of the books are displayed in his store; the rest are in storage. They're almost all for sale online.

The trick to Smalter's business, he says, is maximizing the different strengths of online and in-store sales. Books that don't sell well on the Internet, such as popular fiction titles, fly out of his store.

Obscure titles might fetch a profit online, but could sit on a store shelf for months.

Gardner J. Ryan of Irondequoit was driving down Main Street a couple of months ago when he noticed the sign for Yesterday's Muse.

"I thought, my goodness, there's a bookstore I haven't been in," Ryan said.

Ryan says he's impressed with the store's clean layout. He's also sold 12 boxes of books to Smalter. Ryan's personal book collection once included about 3,000 titles, he said, though he has cut it by a third.

He's told all his book friends about the store and has brought people in to see it, he said.

Trish Corcoran and her 4-year-old daughter, Eva Nielson, are two regular customers of Smalter's store. Although they live in Ontario, Wayne County, they do a lot of shopping in Webster.

Corcoran was excited to discover Yesterday's Muse.

"I was brokenhearted when Brown Bag (Book Shop) closed in the city," she said, referring to the Monroe Avenue store that shut down last year.

Corcoran, who is in a book club, enjoys used bookstores because she can buy book club books that she may not normally have bought on her own, and she doesn't have to spend a fortune.

She says she can afford to buy her children books more often at Yesterday's Muse.

Her 12-year-old son, Bjarne Nielson, is also an avid reader.

And Corcoran enjoys getting store credit when she sells Smalter some of her own books.

"It's nice to recycle your books," she said.

"Books that I've enjoyed are going to another home rather than collecting dust on my shelves."

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