



SIBA's Search for Authors, Education

by Judith Rosen, PW Daily -- 9/12/2006

Judging by the nearly 700 booksellers who attended the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance (SIBA) Trade Show this past weekend at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Kissimmee, Fla, education and authors are what frontline booksellers are looking for.

Perhaps spurred on, at least subliminally, by emerging leader Margaret Osondu's letter-writing campaign to lure Oprah to her store in "the real Cold Mountains" in Waynesville, N.C., the mood was decidedly upbeat at the first of the fall regional bookseller meetings. Booksellers drank in information on finding new sales, creating viable independent alliances and putting together PR campaigns that work.

That can-do feeling was also exuded by members looking to reopen brick-and-mortar locations that had closed, like Scott Naugle of Pass Christian Books in Pass Christian, Miss., whose store was hit by Hurricane Katrina. Other retailers were looking forward to silver anniversaries. Both Sarah Pishko of Prince Books in Norfolk, Va., and Mitchell Kaplan of Books and Books in Coral Gables, Miami Beach and Bal Harbour opened their businesses in 1982.

On the exhibit floor, even sales people were surprised by the number of orders being written. Workman sales manager Steve Pace attributed it to the fact that the show is early and that there were a number of booksellers at the show that Workman doesn't normally see at SIBA. "I've just been so amazed," said Barbara Witke, associate publisher at Peachtree Publishers. "There's a lot of enthusiasm, and a lot of new stores."

This year SIBA added several new rep-driven events, including frontlist presentations and a rep breakfast where they presented their favorites. The most popular title that emerged was Frank Beddor's young adult novel, *Looking Glass Wars* (Dial), according to Jen Reynolds, director of publisher relations and events for the Joseph-Beth Group in Cincinnati.

Going into the show, many booksellers cited Charles Frazier's *Thirteen Moons* (Random House) as a holiday pick, along with *Miami Herald* columnist Carl Hiaasen's first book for adults in several years, *Nature Girl* (Knopf). Judy Mathys, co-owner of Family Book Shop in DeLand, Fla., said that she expects both *Water for Elephants* (Algonquin) and *Marley and Me* (Morrow) to continue selling briskly through the fall.

Carla Jimenez, co-owner of 15-year-old Inkwood Books in Tampa, Fla., said that she plans to handsell *The Constitution* (Random House), illustrated by Sam Fink, especially to lawyers that shop her store. Tammy Lynn, co-owner of The Book Basket in the "Mayberry-like" town of Weumpka, Ala., expects her customers to enjoy Robert Dalby's comic debut set in Mississippi, *Waltzing at the Piggly Wiggly* (Putnam).

Interspersed with educational sessions were author breakfasts, lunches, dinners and panels. One based on Jennifer Horne and Wendy Reed's anthology, *All Out of Faith* (University of Alabama Press), produced one of the weekend's most memorable lines. Here's Lee Smith on the inspiration for her novel *Saving Grace* (Algonquin), released in paperback in April: 'When you have a serpent in your hands, the world takes on a different edge, honey.'