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HARFORD

Spring 2019

Vol. 21 No. 1

harfordmagazine.com



HARFORD MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED BY
The Baltimore Sun Media Group

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Publisher & Editor-in-Chief
The Baltimore Sun Media Group

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CIRCULATION: 47,000

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Correction: An article in the winter issue of *Harford Magazine* misidentified Stevie Boi's mother. Her name is Gloria Scott. *Harford Magazine* regrets the error.



Liz Decker opened Caprichos Books on Main Street in Bel Air in late summer. The store sells a mix of new and used books. PHOTO BY KENNETH K. LAM

Turning a page

Bel Air's only used bookstore is getting its start in the Armory's incubator

BY KATHI SANTORA | For Harford Magazine

When shoppers describe Caprichos Books, Bel Air's only used bookstore, they recall the cushy chairs, restful aura and how owner Liz Decker makes them feel so snug. Then, of course, they go on to tell about the everchanging selection of fiction, non-fiction, mysteries, children's books and classics.

In late summer, Decker and her husband, Jeff, were among the inaugural tenants in Armory Marketplace, where the town's Department of Economic Development transformed the Bel Air Armory garages that once housed military vehicles into incubator retail stores.

Lifelong book lovers whose collection filled much of their home and several storage

spaces, Decker say an incubator business allowed them to jump-start their dream of opening a retail used bookstore. They can occupy the Armory Marketplace store for up to three years while streamlining their business plan and learning the tastes and trends of local booklovers.

Decker takes pleasure in creating a sense of a community in the store. "I was a military brat and moved frequently," she says. Until she married Jeff, who is a Harford County native, "I never really had a hometown." She encourages people to settle in and take the time to read and write.

Nicole Bengel of Forest Hill frequently spends her lunch hour at Caprichos Books.

"It's small, intimate and quiet. You can go there to write papers, go there to read. Liz's dog, Bitsy, is often in the store," she says.

Bengel also belongs to the shop's Murderino Book Club, based on the podcast "My Favorite Murder."

Mark Debelius, a local piano teacher who often walks from his nearby home to look for

classics, also likes to linger.

"In the afternoon, the sun pours into the front windows and it becomes a wonderful sunroom," he says.

Stock turns over frequently. Caprichos Books accepts donations of books in almost any condition for store credit. Decker donates damaged books to local craftspeople who use what's salvageable to make literary-themed jewelry, journals, bookmarks, framed art and other crafts, also sold there.

Caprichos Books offers a small, but growing, selection of new books as well as a book-buying service to local book clubs. The store also recruits volunteers (including children) to review advance copies of books for use by publishers and book-related websites.

Caprichos Books is available to small groups and clubs for meetings or networking events. The store hosts author appearances, children's programs and book-themed celebrations as well.

"Used bookstores are being opened by a new generation of booksellers," says Decker. "They provide a lot more for the community than just book sales. People want to come together again."

CAPRICHOS BOOKS

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