

The Philadelphia Inquirer

In Wildwood, residents and beachgoers are hooked on this bookstore

by [Tommy Rowan](#), Posted: June 21, 2017

When Kieran Linnane departed Galway, Ireland in 1987 for a summer trip, and landed on the sands of Wildwood, N.J., he decided to make the famed shore town permanent part of his life.

He returned a year later, and has been in the United States ever since.

Shortly after relocating, Linnane and his friend James Wright, a Kensington-native, drove across America selling things at flea markets.

"Eventually we started specializing in books," Linnane, 51, said.

They shed the clothes, picture frames and plastic toys, and began amassing boxes of books from all different genres and categories.

"When you start boxing everything up, you get confused, so it would be nice to just turn a key to a door," Linnane said. "So we thought we'd try it out for the summer in Wildwood."

In 1991, they opened up a small shop and then moved into their permanent home at 3405 Pacific Ave in 1997.

Twenty-seven years later, Hooked on Books is a shore town staple and this year's [Readers' Choice winner](#) for best local

bookstore.

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And to think, Linnane was originally an engineer.

He earned his degree from the University of Galway, and worked for a time at a small firm in the U.S. In the summer months, he operated the bookstore as a side job.

But after a few years, Linnane left the engineering firm and made Hooked on Books his full-time job. He chose the bookstore because of the people.

"I liked what I was doing and I was good at it, but just sitting at a computer all day you don't meet a lot of people," he said.

"Whereas, everyone who comes in here you have a conversation with them."

Below, Lianne shares how his shop has changed over the years.

As big-box stores like Barnes & Noble turn to coffee kiosks, do you feel you need to supplement the store's income with other amenities?

I would rather just do one store well than six branches and running around like crazy, you know? Some bookstores have become gift shops, and greeting cards, and we just do books. We're not selling music or coffee or anything.

Do you find it difficult fighting to stay relevant as devices such as Kindle and Nook become more prevalent?

It's cut into business a lot. Compared to 2010 we've seen a big drop off, but we just have to curb our expenses a little bit. I've cut down to the smaller warehouses from the larger warehouses in terms of storage fees. And I've cut down the employees we have. I just do more of the work myself. Amazon is taking the life out

of bookstores, and we get stores calling us all the time saying, 'We're closing down and do you want to buy our stock.' The past five or six years we've seen a lot of that.

What is the value of a paperback book over an electronic reading device?

I mean, do you really want to take electronics all the way down to the water? Some people do. Some tell me that they read books on their phones. It hurts my eyes just hearing about it. I associate the phone with playing with Facebook or something and not serious reading. And I think to a lot of people there is something nice about turning the pages of a book. It's a treat.

How does your location boost business, compared to say, a bookstore in a suburban strip mall?

What helps is that Wildwood is a shore town so you have a new influx of people every week and we have a really great selection that's incredibly organized. And we're used books so they're affordable, our books are around \$4 for a paper book, you know. And people when they're on vacation they might not have time to read all year but now's the time they do it and they won't just buy one book they'll buy a bag full. And next week there is a whole new group of people in town.

What keeps you going every day?

There's a whole bunch of people out there who don't read, but for those who do, we're here for them.

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