

Publishers Weekly

Gift Bookstore Heading to the Hamptons

BY CHANNING JOSEPH -- 1/13/2003

Thanks to John Brancati, most recently v-p of Rizzoli Publishers and a longtime Rizzoli bookseller, the posh resort village of East Hampton on Long Island, N.Y., can expect a major new bookstore to open this coming March.

Although the floor plans for the 2,000-sq.-ft. East End Books have not been finalized, Brancati has leased the space and anticipates that construction will be done within six weeks.

The store will carry books on art, gardening, lifestyle and interior design, along with a limited selection of national bestsellers and world music. "The main thing is that I hope it will be the choice for people who want to buy a book for a gift," Brancati told *PW*. "There's a lot of emphasis on books for reading, but there's nobody emphasizing giving books as gifts."

East End Books' distinguishing feature will be combining the accoutrements of a typical retail bookseller with those of a contemporary art gallery, putting on a monthly showcase selling original art featured in the books it carries.

The first artist to be presented is children's book author and illustrator Stephen Huneck, who is most highly acclaimed for playful stories, sculptures and woodcuts portraying his Labrador, Sally, as well as the somewhat unusual "Dog Chapel" that he built in his hometown of St. Johnsbury, Vt., as a shrine for pet owners to commune with their deceased animals.

Brancati is financing the whole venture himself, betting much of his life savings on the expensive undertaking. He expects East End Books' start-up costs to be around \$200,000, including inventory of about \$100,000. Given that East Hampton has only about 25,000 permanent residents, Brancati anticipates visitors to the popular vacation spot will be a steady market. "More and more people are going [to the Hamptons] for long weekends year round," he said. "It's very affluent. And it's a very 'arty' community with lots of people who read."

Based on his 32 years of experience in book sales, Brancati is confident he knows what the public wants. Starting in the stockroom of a Rizzoli bookstore, he worked his way through the ranks as a salesman and a buyer to a general manager, finally landing a place as vice-president of the publishing house. A salesman at heart, Brancati didn't feel the lifestyle of a vice-president was a very good fit for his disposition. "I didn't find it as personally satisfying as working in retail," he said, citing the stress of the job. "It's like being on a treadmill, except you don't lose any weight." Brancati said he missed being "on the floor" and "the interaction with the customers and the connection with the books as physical objects."

As a longtime Hamptons homeowner, Brancati thought a store like his would do well even with the solid competition of Book Hampton, an independent retailer, and Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, a dealer in rare books. Brancati doubts there will be much overlap in sales between his store and Glenn Horowitz. As for Book Hampton, he added, "Certainly, I will be a competitor, but I hope to be a friendly competitor."