
Last Friday, booksellers from Pennsylvania to Washington, D.C., gathered at the Nassau Inn in Princeton, N.J., for the second annual Bookazine Kids Spring Arrivals Event. For the first time, the New Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association acted as joint sponsor.

The day started with round table discussions and a menu of topics. Eileen Dengler, NAIBA’s executive director, told the group that this would be a test run for a format NAIBA plans to use at its fall conference. The association will set up executive round tables to encourage discreet discussions--bookstore owners in one room, frontline booksellers in another, staff in another--with "agendas specific to their needs." Though attendees included people from general stores and even a mystery store considering getting into children's books, the theme and focus of the day's discussion was children's books. Each table had a moderator, and booksellers were given a table number when they arrived.

The day began with the round table discussions, followed by lunch. Afterwards Bookazine's Heather Doss presented her picks of the spring lists. Then authors and artists Daphne Grab, Daniel Kirk and Lizabeth Zindel presented and signed ARCs or finished copies of their new books.

Round table discussions ranged from how to run efficient and profitable school events in the store, to the advantages of coupons versus frequent-buyer discount cards, and also the best software for managing inventory and for sending out mass e-mails to customers. At her table, Margot Sage-EL, owner of Watchung Booksellers, Montclair, N.J., talked about what she learned at the ABA's Winter Institute concerning how AMIBA (the American Independent Business Alliance) works and talked about that organization's suggestion that the bookstore, as the community's center, should lead the shop-local campaign. Stephanie Anderson, assistant buyer at Moravian Book Shop in Bethlehem, Pa., discussed the challenges of getting teens to come to the store; as an alternative, she has organized IM chats between YA authors and teens, posted the transcript in her blog, bookavore, and asked publishers to send signed book plates in connection with the event.

Seasoned round table participants, such as Hannah Schwartz, owner of Children's Book World, Haverford, Pa., would have preferred having each round table assigned a topic, so booksellers could explore the topics that interested them. However, Schwartz liked that, in several instances, the owner and book buyer from the same store were seated at the same round tables, "The idea of working with owners and book buyers together is a good idea. I think we serve each other's interests better," Schwartz said. Similarly Sage-EL said, "You do benefit sometimes from talking to someone else in another capacity. I remember years ago meeting someone in receiving at Politics & Prose. We came back and changed a lot of our procedures as a result of that conversation."

Some booksellers expressed a wish to have mingled more with others not assigned to their tables. Those new to the discussions gleaned a great deal from the veterans, such as how to run a book fair or how to keep customers coming back. As Politics & Prose children's manager Dara La Porte put it, "I think you always learn the most when you're talking to other booksellers. You may not find out the thing on the agenda, but you might find a nugget you weren't necessarily looking for." For her, it was finding out about Constant Contact, the program for large e-mailings. For Schwartz, it was hearing about a title from Heather Doss that, she decided after Doss's presentation, she had not ordered in a high enough quantity. Sage-EL enjoyed hearing the authors speak, and though she sees a lot of reps and was familiar with many of the books in Doss's presentation, she appreciated that Doss picked out the debut authors and artists.

As attendees lined up for lunch, some were raving about new books they'd read, and others were continuing issues-related discussions begun during their round table conversations. All in all, there was something for everyone.--Jennifer M. Brown