

# OUTLOOK 2004

27TH 'Visions of our Changing Community'  
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Section  
**BB**

## Mom-and-pop firms seek niche in big box world

By HEATHER LYON

Opening an independent bookstore when others are closing across America is brave or crazy, or both. But I believe in Chico, and our ability to support family businesses.

Businesses like Collier Hardware, Shubert's Ice Cream and Candy, Kat's Meow and Lulu's Fashion Lounge are inspiring examples of independent stores surviving in the "big box" era.

Lyon Books and Learning Center is proud to be a part of such a vital downtown.

How will we compete with the big boxes? Well, of course, our inventory is smaller, but our strategy is to focus the selection very carefully to reflect the personality of downtown Chico: fun, eclectic and smart without being snobbish.

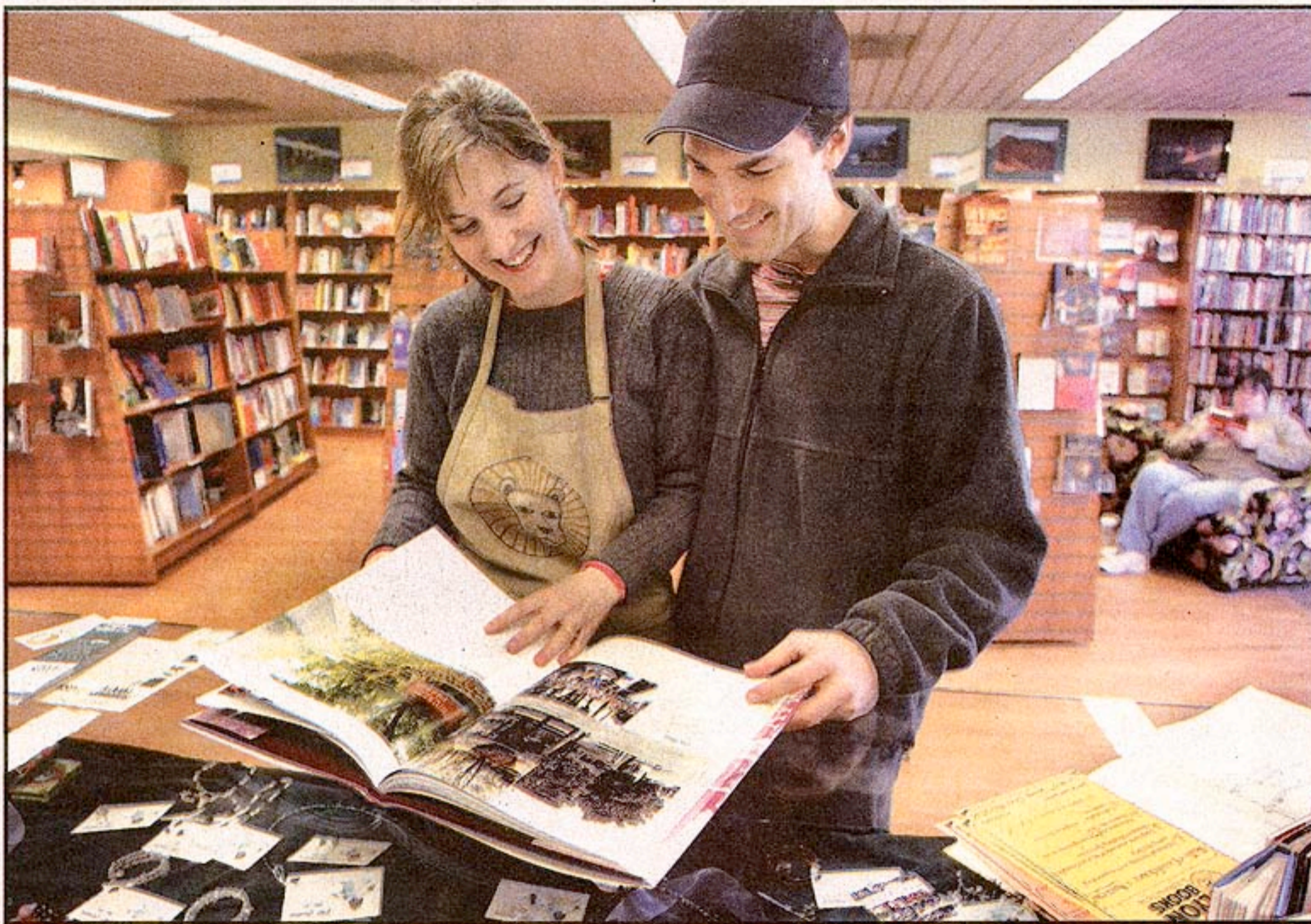
We also offer more service than the self-serve chains. Every customer gets a friendly greeting, and a free cup of coffee. We help people find what they're looking for, and we're ready with suggestions if they're not sure.

We have a homey atmosphere that isn't impersonal or overwhelming. Our tutoring center attracts bookstore customers, and our bookstore adds tutoring customers.

It is difficult to compete with large chains because they have huge advantages in buying power. They pay less for everything in their store than we have do. And in spite of their superior profit potential, they return less to our community.

A recent study in Austin, Texas, "Economic Impact Analysis: A Case Study, Local Merchants versus Chain Retailers," showed that for every \$100 in consumer spending at Borders, the total local economic impact — money re-spent within the community — is about \$13.

In contrast, the same amount spent at a local independent bookstore yields \$45 in local economic



Heather and Aaron Lyon are owners of Lyon Books in downtown Chico.

Ty Barbour  
Enterprise-Record

impact, more than three times as much.

Small businesses do have some advantages. We can get to know our customers, so we're better able to know what they really want. We make all of our buying decisions right in the store, not at some headquarters back east. We don't have to answer to stockholders who want short-term profits, so we can take a long-term perspective. And we have the strong support of other small businesses, locally and nationally.

We carry as many books, cards and gifts as possible from local or independent publishers and vendors. They're grateful for the business, and our dealings can be informal and mutually

beneficial. We choose locally owned service providers, and they return the favor by shopping in our store.

Another advantage that we have is our people power. We have a bright and eager staff and family members who volunteer their time. With a starting pay 30 percent higher than our big-box competitor, we're able to attract an especially talented and loyal staff. Our regular customers are also part of the team and help us with book reviews, word-of-mouth promotion and great suggestions.

And once in awhile a celebrity like Garrison Keillor comes along who wants to support the

### Heather Lyon

owns Lyon Books and Learning Center with her husband, Aaron. Heather, 36, is also a certified public accountant.

underdog.

Every day our customers say, "Thanks for being here — we've really needed a bookstore downtown."

I call that success.