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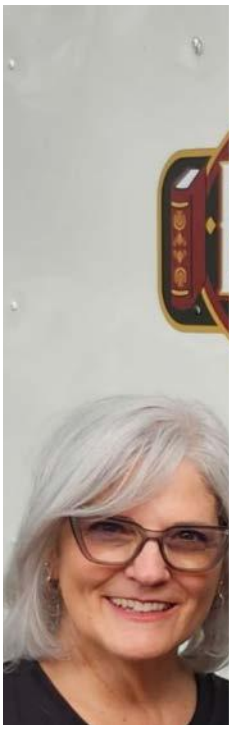
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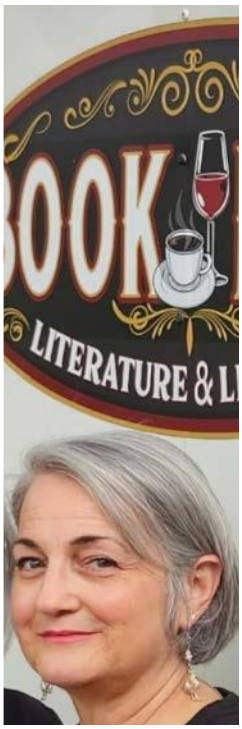
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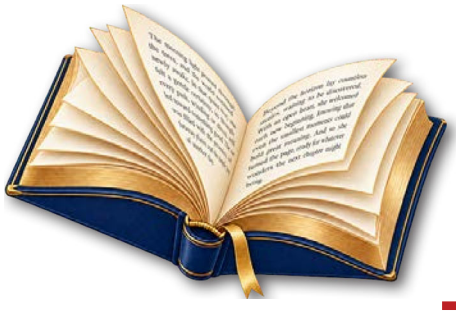
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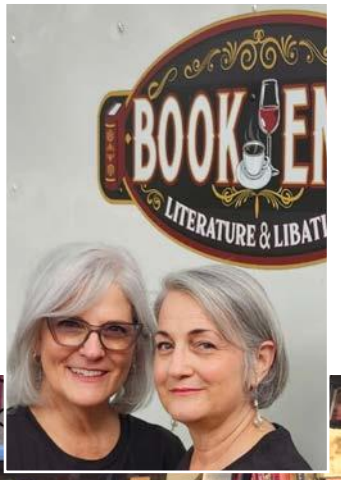
books

Between the pages and behind the spine

Turning The Page: Two Sisters Build Bookends in Ybor City

DEBORAH BOSTOCK-KELLEY

For Laurie and Teresa Rodriguez, opening a bookstore seemed simple: find a property in Ybor City, renovate it, fill it with books and open the doors.



Instead, they bought a historic cottage and quickly discovered that "just putting some paint on it" was nowhere near enough. They launched a mobile bookstore, became regular vendors at local markets and spent three years building relationships with the community while working toward their brick-and-mortar dream.



Now, Bookends is open.

And during Women's Business Month, the story of how these two sisters built their business is also a story about what happens when women entrepreneurs have a community willing to invest in them.

Bookends recently received a $5,500 in-kind grant from Working Women Foundation, Tampa Bay Metro and The Write One Creative Services. For the sisters, the support represents something they have never had in their business.

"This will be the first time that we've actually had any paid advertisement," Laurie said. "It just wasn't in our budget."

That may sound small. For a small, independent bookstore, it isn't.

And it is not the first time the community has invested in Bookends. The sisters also received grants from the City of Tampa and Hillsborough County to help restore their historic Ybor City building. That support helped them tackle the substantial work required to bring the old structure back to life while preserving its character.

Now, the $5,500 in-kind grant is helping with something different: getting the word out about the business they worked so hard to build.

For three years, the sisters relied on word of mouth, community events and the growing audience they built one customer at a time. The mobile bookstore and their presence at the Ybor City market were originally intended to be temporary marketing strategies while the permanent store was being completed.

"Initially, the mobile unit in the Ybor market was just to get to know people in the community and get them ready to come to our brick and mortar," Teresa said.

They launched the mobile bookstore in 2023, never expecting it would become a three-year endeavor. Laurie was working full time while the sisters operated the business at night and on weekends.

"It was very overwhelming. There's a lot of work," Laurie said. "And, you know, sometimes, depending on the day or the time you caught me, I might say, Oh, my God, this is a mistake. Why are we doing this? There are moments of that. But then it passes."

Then came the building.

Their vision for a relatively straightforward renovation collided with historic preservation requirements, commercial construction standards, contractors and city approvals. What looked like an old building needing cosmetic work turned into a much larger project to bring the property up to code.

They replaced and upgraded portions of the building's infrastructure, addressed requirements that came with converting the space into a commercial business and made repairs while preserving the historic character of the property. Every improvement came with another

requirement, another inspection or another decision about how to bring an old building into the modern world without stripping away what made it special.

"It wasn't easy, any part of it. Getting our permit, working with the contractors, nothing was easy," Laurie said.

They also experienced what they believe was the added challenge of being women overseeing male contractors.

"I felt many times that if we were men things would be different," Laurie said.

The sisters found they had to be present, ask questions and keep a close eye on the work. At one point, a contractor began removing the building's historic windows and placing them in a pile to be hauled away. Another contractor working on the historic facade happened to stop by and rescued the windows and their weights.

"If you're restoring a historic building, you have to be very careful who you get to work on your team," Teresa said.

Their experience also reinforced something else. "The majority of people that have helped us have been women," she said.

Bookends finally opened its doors in July 2026, not because every detail of the original vision was finished, but because the community was ready.

People had already been peering through the windows. Then they started asking if they could come inside. Then they started asking if they could buy something.

"We weren't even open," Teresa said. "And then it got to be so many people. We're like, you know what, we just need to post some hours."

So they did.

The bookstore is still evolving. The kitchen has passed inspection and will eventually offer coffee and food, while beer and wine remain part of the longer-term plan. But the heart of Bookends is already there.

And the calendar is filling, too. Bookends is hosting the kinds of events the sisters envisioned from the beginning: author talks and book signings, poetry readings, book clubs, tarot readings, craft nights and other community gatherings. The store has already welcomed local literary events, including a reading and book signing.

The sisters are also bringing their own personalities into the programming. Laurie, who has long handled the baking and food side of Bookends, is looking forward to pairing food with the books featured in the store's book clubs and creating menus and treats inspired by whatever readers are discussing. It is a natural extension of the bookstore's original "Literature & Libations" concept, where books, food and conversation share the same table. Teresa is taking on more of the administrative work that keeps the business moving behind the scenes.

Future plans include using the outdoor space for readings, parties and other gatherings, giving the bookstore another way to bring people together beyond its shelves.

It is a place built around books, history and community, and one the sisters want to be welcoming to everyone who walks through the door.

That heart is partly rooted in the sisters' own family history.

Their great-grandparents came to Ybor City, with most working in the cigar factories. One great-grandfather opened his own plumbing business and became the second licensed plumber in Hillsborough County and the first Hispanic plumber to receive a license.

The sisters grew up hearing stories about their family's life in Ybor City and watching the neighborhood change.

"We kind of did that," Laurie said of opening their own business. "We came and we were just kind of carrying on that tradition."



For Teresa and Laurie, keeping that history alive is part of Bookends' purpose.

They use the store to introduce customers to pieces of Ybor City history, including the lector, the reader who traditionally read aloud to cigar workers as they rolled cigars. Even the bookstore's logo carries that history.

"We want to keep it in people's minds," Laurie said.

There is another family tradition at work, too: entrepreneurship without necessarily having every answer mapped out in advance. The sisters have built Bookends by listening, adapting and trusting their instincts.

That doesn't mean they have done it alone.

Over the past three years, they have built connections throughout the community, partnering with local businesses and organizations and

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And to every reader who opens this book, you are now a keeper of this legacy.

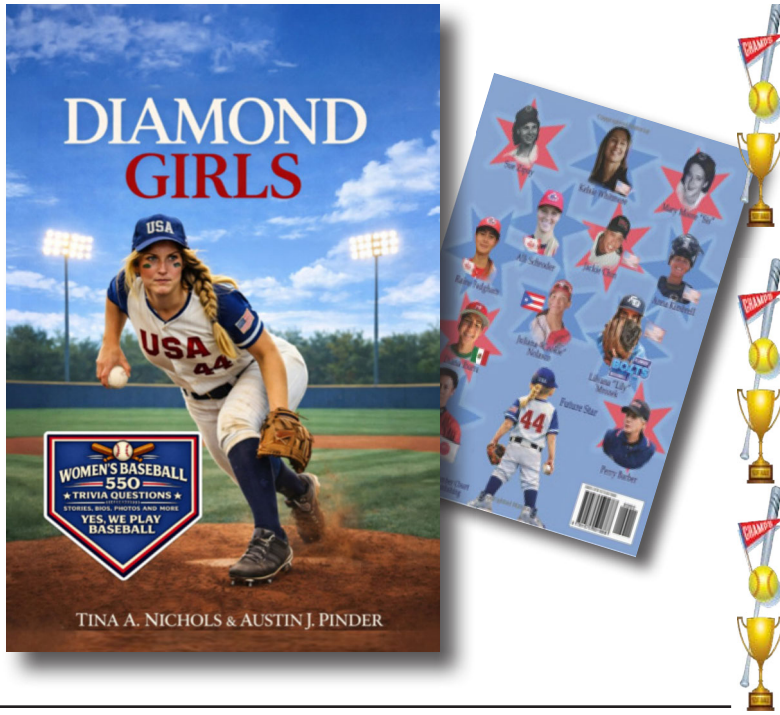
Let the questions challenge you and the stories stir you. When you read this book, you'll feel the heartbeat of a movement: one swing, one pitch, one story at a time.

Tina's journey does not stop with this book. She has also published a coloring book, suitable for all ages, entitled Diamond Girls: Her Turn at Bat. Her next steps on her writing career include a sequel to Diamond Girls focusing on more international players and the stars of the newly formed Women's Professional Baseball League. She is also working on her memoir, Concussion Girl, in which she will describe in detail her struggle overcoming the devastating effects of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and honoring the doctors who literally saved her life. She will educate the reader on preventing and recognizing TBI and the latest techniques in treating this injury.

Tina's book can be found on Amazon at: https://www.amazon.com/s?k=diamond+girls+by+tina+nichols

Follow her on Facebook at:

https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61567504765159 and https://www.facebook.com/tina.nichols.9615



BOOKENDS

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participating in events at places including Centro Asturiano, E4 Ybor Saturday Market, Gasparilla Distillery, BarrieHaus Beer Co., Newman Cigar Company, The Commodore, Corner Club, and The Women's Creative. They got their start at 610 Brewing.

"We're out there in the community and talking to everyone and making connections," Teresa said. "And it has paid off."

The $5,500 in-kind grant from Working Women Foundation, Tampa Bay Metro and The Write One Creative Services gives Bookends an opportunity to take those connections beyond word of mouth and social media.

Teresa has already seen how a single social media post can bring customers from across the Tampa Bay area. Videos shared by customers and influencers have sent waves of visitors from Riverview, Wesley Chapel and Pinellas.

"I feel like this grant is going to reach a different audience," she said.

That is what the sisters hope the next chapter will bring: more people discovering the store, more customers finding their way to Ybor City and more opportunities to grow the business they have spent years building.

But the meaning of the grant goes beyond advertising.

For Laurie, receiving the support offered something even more personal.

"You start out on this journey and then you're standing there thinking, oh my God, what did I do? I don't know what I'm doing or there's that moment when you feel you're completely on your own," she said. "And so, I think this is great. It's like, wow, I'm not alone. There is somebody there to help."

That may be the most powerful part of Bookends' story.

Two sisters started with a bookstore they could picture, a building they loved and a mobile bookshop they never intended to need for three years. They kept showing up. They kept learning. They kept building relationships.

This is a story about women building a business, but also about what can happen when a community makes room for women entrepreneurs to build, grow and succeed.

As Laurie puts it, there is still so much they are learning.

"Because there's so much you don't know you don't know, so much you don't even realize you need to know."

The sisters are still figuring it out. They are still opening boxes, putting up displays, planning events and dreaming about what Bookends can become.

But now the doors are open.

People walk in. Families come in. Neighbors stop by. Readers discover something new. Authors and artists have a place to share their work. Book clubs gather. People linger over books and conversation. And Bookends is becoming the kind of place the sisters wanted it to be from the beginning: a welcoming, inclusive space where everyone can find a story, a seat and a sense of belonging.

After three years of building, adapting and showing up, the sisters have created something that goes beyond a bookstore. They have created a place where people can pause, browse, connect and feel like they belong.

And maybe that is the best measure of what they built.

A customer walks through the door, takes a breath, looks around and lets out that little sigh that says: finally.

Because when Laurie and Teresa were asked how they want people to feel when they walk into Bookends, their answer was simple.

"Like they're home."

Learn more about BOOKENDS on Facebook and Instagram: BookendsYbor. BOOKENDS is located at 2208 E. 2nd Ave., Ybor City 33605.



Hours of operation are Sunday 11 am - 2 pm, Monday and Tuesday closed Wednesday and Thursday 12 pm - 6 pm, and Friday and Saturday 11 am - 9 pm.