

Tricia Siemens

Tricia Siemens is an independent bookstore owner in Uptown Waterloo who loves books, but more than that, she revels in the way they help people connect to one another.

Words Worth Books on King Street South has survived two economic recessions and the opening of Chapters, the chain-bookstore, largely because Siemens and her husband Chuck Erion, have created a haven for people who love to talk about books.



It started early, when Siemens began her author series in 1984, gathering residents to hear W.O Mitchell read. Years later she would invite such luminaries as Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies and Nino Ricci.

Hundreds of people showed up for these events.

“In a lot of cases, we don’t ask publishers for authors. The publishers phone us, which just amazes us still . . . Waterloo has been put on their radar.”

Then there are the Words Worth book clubs, the smaller gatherings of passionate debate and literary insights that the book store helps facilitate.

Siemens also served as the chair of the *One Book, One Community* programme. This popular local initiative brings together hundreds of readers who all read the same book and then talk about the book informally to friends, or gather for more structured events. To qualify for One Book, One Community the book must have been written by a living Canadian who is willing to visit and interact with readers.

In promoting the campaign, Siemens said: “It’s not about the sales. It’s about building the community through reading. If you see a person reading the book on the bus or in a coffee shop you can discuss it, or you can pick up a conversation about the book. It’s about taking reading, which is a solitary activity, and making it into a community event.”

By seeing the people who wander into her bookstore as more than just customers Siemens has become the largest independent bookseller in Waterloo Region. She and her husband chose Waterloo in 1984 as a prime location for a bookstore because of the two universities, and because no store of its kind yet existed.

Siemens and Erion had owned a bookstore in Mount Forest for seven years and were looking for the challenge of a bigger market. In the first nine months of business, the Waterloo store had sales of just over \$100,000. These days annual sales surpass the \$1 million mark.

In addition to owning the bookstore and raising three children, Siemens also served as a Waterloo city councilor for seven years starting in 1991. And like her approach to bookselling, her politics were all about community.

“I want the uptown to be a place where people will want to live and raise their children. I want to see business enjoy success in the uptown . . . In a city core, we all need each other to help us thrive,” Siemens said during one campaign.

While a councilor, Siemens found time to be involved with the city’s recycling committee and public library, and served on the boards of the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery and the Grand River Hospital. She also co-chaired the Laurel Creek Watershed Study and the Silver Lake Roundtable.

As a young girl in a family that moved frequently, Tricia Siemens learned from her mother the value of reading. The public library was the first stop each time the family moved. “My mother would get us library cards because she realized that even when you don’t know anyone, books are great companions. I grew up thinking of them as friends – as corny as that may sound.”

Photo courtesy of Tricia Siemens.