

Entertainment & Life

## **Rossville family hopes to make NOTO bookstore successful with customer relationships, community connections**

**By Savanna Maue**

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Andrew Howard and his family are not librarians, baristas or artists.

They are a family of readers who took an interest in the NOTO Arts and Entertainment District and have a passion for keeping local bookstores alive.

“We actually began the process for opening the store in February,” Howard said. “But it’s been an idea I’ve wanted to pursue for much longer.”

Andrew Howard, along with his mother, father and brother, Donna Schultz, Scott Howard and Rain Schultz, officially opened Round Table Bookstore, 826 N. Kansas Ave., on July 5 for the First Friday Art Walk.

The store features new and used books, gifts, a small coffee bar and artist lofts for creators to work and sell their creations in the store. Howard said he and his family talked with other local bookstore owners and coffee shops for advice, and after taking a tour of NOTO with executive director Tom Underwood, the family was sold.

“We knew as soon as we wanted to open a bookstore that NOTO was where we wanted to be,” Howard said. “And we were lucky enough to find a location we liked. We loved the localness of it and the diversity of NOTO, the history, and everything else.”

There’s a certain stigma to opening a business with your family, but so far Howard said it has been going well. While they may have their own individual tastes in books, Howard said the biggest debate has been which new books to select for their readers.

“One nice thing is at the end of the day we know no matter how much we may fight, disagree or argue we’re still family, and we’re going to be there,” Howard said. “It’s kind of a nice safety net.”

The Howards and Schultzes live in Rossville, and all work full-time jobs in addition to opening the new business, which was another reason Andrew Howard said NOTO was the ideal location. Currently their hours are nights and weekends, which allow the family to operate the store around their regular schedules.

The Round Table’s hours are 4 to 8 p.m. Thursday, noon to 8 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays. Howard said they are open to adjusting the times based on customers’ needs.

Among their shelves of new books, the Round Table’s used section is also steadily growing, Howard said. The store will accept any type of book, and for ones in resellable condition, Howard said they offer 50 percent of the resell value in store credit. This can be used for gifts, food or book purchases.

“I will take anything you want to donate,” Howard said. “I will take it and store it for later rather than see them get recycled or thrown away or anything else. Even if it’s a book in bad condition I will use it for decoration or crafts. I never want to see books thrown away. And the store credit, we just have to look at them and if we’re going to put them back on the shelf to sell to people I want them to be of a certain quality.”

In the first month of business, Howard said he hasn’t seen a particular trend come through with Topeka’s book buyers. They have sold everything from cookbooks to joke books, he said, and are constantly adding more to fill their nearly 1,700 square-feet of space.

When asked how the store plans to compete with larger retailers and online book-buying sites, Howard said he and his family hope to create customer relationships and community connections — human interaction that is missing from online sales.

“You really don’t go to Amazon and have a 30-minute discussion with someone about books or have them expand your horizons on genres you might be interested in,” Howard said. “I mean — this is everyone’s complaint about

Amazon — but they're not doing things like discounts for teachers, or having reading days with local grade schools, or letting a chess club meet in their store. So I think that's just our two biggest things, giving back to the community and building those relationships.”

Once they are more established, Howard said the store also plans to offer monthly open mic nights, Dungeons & Dragons meetups, and a monthly book club.

For more information, visit the Round Table Bookstore [Facebook page](#).