

Board Games are Back, and Owen Sound is a Player!

Submitted by Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area

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Gaming is a universal hobby, and the presence of a dedicated game store in downtown Owen Sound is testament to that fact. This is Billy Bishop and Tom Thomson country, where adventure tourism, hiking and fishing are common diversions. Even so, Scenic City Games has a robust business selling board and card games, including family board games, strategy games, card games, and of course trading cards. But they also have several shelves of gaming merchandise, figures and gaming accessories in their downtown Owen Sound location. Geoff Barclay and Cindy Dietz, both passionate gamers themselves, recognized that there was a gap locally for board and card games, and put plans into motion to open a store of their own. Geoff explained, "At the time, Owen Sound had the hobby shop, and an educational toy store which offered some games... but there wasn't a store supporting the board and card game enthusiasts of the region." Together they ventured to open their own store in June of 2010 at 953 2nd Avenue East, just beside Carney's Lane. "In the beginning we were both working, and running the store. Coming into the shop after a full day of work, and staying up late to run the business took its toll on us." Geoff remembered. Along the way they learned many lessons, and tweaked the business to suit not only their customers' needs, but their needs as well. "We are really fortunate that our business has grown enough to support us both working full time at the store."

Additionally, the store also boasts a dedicated gaming space with five tables at the back of the store. It is worth applauding their decision to provide so much gaming space in such a prime location. The store offers customers the opportunity to try out board games before they purchase them, and of course hosts tournaments and events throughout the year. Geoff shared with me that they support a loyal group of Magic players (a trading card game) who come together twice a week. "There is something so much more communal in sitting down, face to face, to play a board or card game with a group of people." In this day and age of remote gaming and social media, it is no wonder that the trends in this industry are showing growth across the board (no pun intended!) every year. And this band of merry-gamers in Owen Sound are strong and growing!

Small town game stores are always a pleasure to visit. In large cities the game stores often become specialized in order to better define themselves relative to the competition. But a small town game store often serves a huge geographical range and has to be everything to everybody, so you never know what you'll find inside. Geoff remarked that he has people drive in from distances like Wiarton and Port Elgin, and of course serves many tourists through the busy months of June, July and August. The couple are actively involved in the local gaming scene, and their enthusiasm for the store shows in conversation with them. Plus they can talk shop about almost any game they carry.

Owen Sound can be a fairly laid-back town and this personable store takes on that ambiance by offering a very relaxed and intimate atmosphere. I enjoyed hanging out for a while and talking shop with co-owner Geoff. When I asked him where he saw the business in the next five years, he looked around his shop and simply stated that he hopes it continues to grow and that more people learn about Scenic City Games and come out to visit the store. He did also discuss working on marketing, updating the website, and possibly hosting more tournaments and weekly games in the future. Aesthetically, Geoff and Cindy are hoping to update some of the décor, “freshen up” the old building, and perhaps work on the façade. It should also be noted that it has an easy to find and accessible storefront location right on the main street.

This is a store that serves a unique market in the region. If you are in downtown Owen Sound and need to get your game on.... hands-down - this is the place to go!



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