

The sound of clanging pots reverberates in the entryway of the Park Avenue bookstore. A line of hungry readers snakes its way around bookshelves awaiting their turn to place a food order or buy a book. It's a simple transaction lasting a mere minute.

Or at least that's how it would go if you weren't at Story & Song Bookstore Bistro owned by the boundlessly benevolent Mark and Donna Paz Kaufman.

Warmth and community exude from the couple who have called Amelia Island home since 2002. Each person walking up to the counter is another opportunity to make a connection over books, art, the island and other mundanities of life.

On the surface, their affable demeanor might seem per-formative, but it's real and it's unwavering in everything the Kaufmans do. Their passion for this community is evident in their endeavors. Just this year, the bookstore owners self-published "Amelia Island's Happy Places: The Insiders' Guide" – a new book highlighting the places and things most endearing to this community.

"We invited an author from Jacksonville who wrote a very simple book of 100 things to do in Jacksonville. Very simple book, straightforward, no illustrations, just text. And we thought, are there 100 things that you could do here?" said Donna Paz Kaufman on the book's origins. "We started counting our blessings. Our staff all ended up pitching in."

The couple started seriously entertaining the idea of making a book just after the pandemic caused widespread lock-downs around the world.

"It was a good project for us during COVID. We're grateful, and we acknowledge that we're lucky when people are in lockdown in major cities," Donna Paz Kaufman said.

With an outline assembled, the Kaufmans started enlisting photographers to bring out the unique visual qualities of Amelia Island. The pair also reached out to author Wilma Allen as they needed someone to oversee the whole operation. Stepping in as main writer and chief editor, Allen helped the Kaufmans bring their selection of Amelia Island's beloved nature, history, creativity, recreation and philanthropy to life through a series of vignettes and personal testimony.

"We didn't create this book to get more people to move here. We created this book for those of us who live here and the people we love who visit us so that if you put this in your spare bedroom and you went to work, then your guest could have stuff to do for the day," Donna Paz Kaufman said. "We really wanted it to be non-commercial – although we plugged plenty of businesses in here, the boat rides and kayaking and all of the rest – but we didn't want to do a traditional travel guide that looked at restaurants and hotels. People do that online. We wanted something that was more thoughtful and about really love and enjoyment."

"The phenomena is that people who move here, they want to bring the best of what they left behind, but leave the worst of it behind. I think that's why since the time we've been here, you've seen the creation of a dozen festivals, and they're all because of the passion that one individual had to make this thing a reality," Mark Kaufman said.

Through Song & Story's own imprint, Park Avenue Press Amelia, the Kaufmans printed just 250 copies, which sold out almost immediately and in turn led the couple to print another 250 copies. No more. No less.

"The financial side of publishing is intriguing because what a lot of people do is they will publish 1,000 or 2,000 copies of a paperback book because printing-wise, you can get the cost way down if you're going to a commercial printer. But unless you know how you're going to sell them, you've got a storage issue for all those books," Mark Kaufman said.

When asked what their personal favorite “happy place” is, the Kaufmans merely shrug and purse their lips. What follows is a silence broken up by a few contemplative hums. This isn’t the product of ambivalence. They just simply don’t have one. All of these inclusions have been their happy place at one time or another.

However, there is one chapter that leaves a big impression on the Kaufmans.

“One of the chapters that I like best and I like how we named it – Volunteering and Belonging – because everybody who relocates or comes into a new chapter in their lives wants to know where to go, how do I help out? How do I become part of the community? I love that about this place. There have been people and all the nonprofits doing major fundraisers, and they’ve been successful. Somehow, people will rise to the occasion and stand on a committee and go get funds and do creative things to help life for everybody here,” Donna Paz Kaufman said.

Copies of “Amelia Island’s Happy Places: The Insiders’ Guide” are available at Song & Story Bookstore Bistro for \$16, a drop in the bucket when you start quantifying the memories gained from these local gems.

And it’s a perfect excuse to meet Amelia Island’s friendliest duo. Win-win.

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