



GRIFFIN



50 Years with Left Bank Books: Honoring Kris Kleindienst

By Abby Wojcik

The Central West End's favorite bookstore celebrated its owner, Kris Kleindienst, for her 50 years with Left Bank Books and the Left Bank Books Foundation. Many gathered for the ceremony to honor Kleindienst and share stories of her remarkable impact on the St. Louis community, literary network and lasting relationships over the years.

Mayor Tishaura Jones presented Kleindienst with a proclamation declaring July 27, 2024 "Left Bank Books Day" in the City of St. Louis.

"It is very important to give people flowers while they are still here," Jones said.

The testimonies shared about Kleindienst from her neighbors, colleagues and friends made it known that she is a multifaceted

"rock star" of a bookstore owner. She is a gifted writer, gardener, bird watcher, vegan chef and a track-and-field gold medal winner at the 1994 NYC Gay Games.

In her years working at LBB, Kleindienst has brought in national and local authors while radically expanding the store's selection on women's studies, LGBTQIA+ themes and African-American writers. She is renowned for being a fervent advocate and activist, particularly for the queer community.

"Her values have been tested again and again, but she's forged Left Bank as the home for literacy and justice for all," said Dr. Frances Levine, former president of the Missouri History Society.

Ruth Kim, a longtime donor to the LBB Foundation shared a memory of Kleindienst diffusing a heated situation when an armed man rushed the stage during a book talk. Kim recalled Kleindienst fearlessly putting herself between the author and the intruder without hesitation, and peacefully returning to the program.

"This store is a rare gem, and to the great benefit of all of us in this community, Kris protects it fiercely," Kim stated. "In challenging situations, Kris focuses not on her own ego or stature, but on the best outcome for everyone involved in that situation."

Kleindienst was 15 when her family moved a block away from the original LBB at the corner of Skinker and Delmar Boulevard, just five months after its opening in 1969. She became a co-owner in 1977 and sole owner in 2021.

"I never intended for this to be my forever job," Kleindienst admitted. "Why did I keep *this* day job? You are why I kept this job. Yes, I own the store, which mainly means I'm the one who the banks will come after. But I've been entrusted with this incredible responsibility as a steward for a place that keeps our stories. I'm humbled by this responsibility, even on days when it feels like I mostly break down boxes and fend off loan-sharks. Because this is not really my store, it is the community's store. Everything I do is in



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service to you."

Kleindienst continued, "I want everybody to come into this store and be met where they are now and supported to get wherever they need or want to be: whole, hopeful, joyful, seen, safe, wanted and loved. That is the job of a bookseller."



Left Bank Books owner Kris Kleindienst reflects on 50 years with the organization.

On the Wall



Artist Jamie Bonfiglio stands in front of a new mural on the side of the MADE building at 5127 Delmar Blvd., part of the Delmar Maker District. The artwork is part of the Lifelines Mural Contest, a global art initiative funded by NASA. Lifelines engages local artists to create murals that reflect how satellite data and tools are helping communities become more resilient by enhancing food security and inspiring the next generation of STEM innovators. The mural was unveiled July 19 during the district's monthly Third Friday event.

PAGE 3

Bob Duffy reviews sculpture by Mark di Suvero

PAGE 6

CWE pedestal moves to Villa Duchesne

PAGE 11

The Muny history Part 2