



Camp! The Bronte Junior High Cheerleaders recently attended UCA Cheer Home Camp. The squad, which includes Bethany, Jaycee, Audrey, Kynlee, Landry, and Olivia, received a gold ribbon for their sideline and cheer and another gold ribbon for their dance routine. They also received a trophy. Jaycee and Olivia (above) were also chosen as All-American Cheerleaders.



Avenue shop might best be described as clutter comfortable.

Old West memorabilia, like strands of early barbed wire, are on display. Nose around long enough and you see the citation from True West Magazine, which in 2020 named the Cactus as the nation's best Western history bookstore, or even the Texas Readers' Club membership certificate that a young Cochran received back in his elementary school days. But it's the musty aroma of old books wafting along the narrow aisles and the wiry, balding man behind the front counter that are the primary lures.

The shop owner always has time to talk about books and bygone days.

In an era when many bookstores—independents to nationwide franchises—have lost the battle with the internet and disappeared, the Cactus Book Shop serves a niche that allows it to endure and prosper. Even at 83, Cochran is in touch with today's technology. He maintains a website, and his electronic catalog goes out monthly to customers in 28 states. The phone rings steadily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays with requests from seekers and sellers.

It is, however, the walk-in customers Cochran most enjoys—particularly when they represent a new generation of history lovers.

"Not long ago," he says, "a lady and her 14-year-old home-schooled daughter came in and shopped for quite some time. When they came to the checkout counter, the girl had an armload of books, which I assumed were for her mother. Not so. The girl, having recently developed an interest in Texas history, had picked the titles. That did my heart good."

An avid reader since those childhood days when his mother would regularly drive him to visit the public library, Cochran is a man who knows the secrets hidden in the pages

of the volumes he sells. Pressed to recommend his favorite book on Texas history, he suggests Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans, fellow Texan T.R. Fehrenbach's lyrical 800-page history lesson. "Without Texas," the late San Antonian author wrote, "there would be no American West." Cochran, who has done his homework, agrees.

Western author Patrick Dearen has been a regular since Cochran's store opened. "Felton and his store have been an invaluable asset to me over the years," says the winner of a Spur Award, which recognizes distinguished writing about the American West. "I've also done a great deal of research at the Midland Nita Stewart Haley Memorial Library, using books their archivist has purchased from Cochran."

All Texas history seems to run through this storefront.

"J. Frank Dobie once said that there have been more books written about Texas than any other state in the U.S.," Cochran says. "It is a subject that is so diverse that it offers something for everyone."

For instance, among his books that customers can't seem to get enough of are those focusing on the Big Bend. "We are a stopping place for those en route to the region," he says.

If a particular book you're seeking is not among the estimated 12,000 volumes crammed along the shop's floor-to-ceiling shelves, Cochran will try to find it. "Today," he says, "the hunt for that rare title is the biggest thrill." For that reason, he remains on high alert for estate sales and is on a first-name basis with numerous rare book collectors who might one day decide the time has come to sell their books.

Sometimes, he says, easy-to-sell treasures come from the most unusual places. He recalls a phone call a few years ago from the sister of Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Larry McMurtry, informing him that she had several valuable books she was interested in selling.

Aware that her brother operated a major bookselling business in his hometown, Archer City, Cochran asked why she hadn't offered her books to him. In

most colorful language, she explained that she was seriously unhappy with her famous sibling and not inclined to speak to him. Now, after 29 years of

bookselling, Cochran says it's not unusual to buy a book from someone whose grandfather he originally sold it to.

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- Another 2 Ring - Call for Additional Firefighters
- 3 Rings - Tornado Warning
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