

One City. One Campus. *One Community.*

River's End: A Bridge Between Communities

By Eli Kubilus, Creative Writing and English Double Major

Since its establishment in May 1998, the locally-owned river's end bookstore in Oswego, NY has made it its goal to cultivate lasting connections with the local community and SUNY Oswego's campus community. Long established on the corner of the West Bridge and First Street intersection, river's end is thoughtfully staffed with an amiable group of individuals, each uniquely talented in their own respects —outside of sharing a love for literature—who are committed in their mission to nurture a relaxed, convivial environment for all inhabitants of Oswego's community.

The bookstore came into vision when founder Bill Reilly, alongside his wife Mindy Ostrow, fell in love with Oswego and relocated from New York City upon Bill's retirement from his position at *Newsweek*. Originally an outsider himself, Bill understood both the novel awe of visiting the Great Lake town and the special intimacies of residing in it year-round. It wasn't long before he realized the need for a community space, especially one that nourished relationships between Oswego locals and out-of-towners, to create a firmer sense of togetherness and support the city's growth. Bill and Mindy, aided by the efforts of their many dedicated employees — several being interns and alum from the SUNY campus — have excelled at supplying this hub in the 25 years since its opening.

Though Bill and Mindy have recently retired, river's end lives on through their son, Emil Christmann, and his wife, Megan Irland, who hold the same zeal and dedication towards the bookstore's founding intent. While visiting, I had the opportunity to speak with current owner Emil alongside Zach Blaszk, a SUNY Oswego alum and employee of the bookstore since January 2022. Emil shared that the aim of the business has always been to serve Oswego's community beyond literature and the economy, detailing how people often come in for recommendations on places to eat or to ask directions. Zach reiterated this sentiment, stating: "My favorite thing to see are the regulars. We have one who comes in every day to chat and pick up the newspaper he always pre-pays for at the start of the week. The other day he brought in a piece of cake for us to share... It's really great to have that connection and strong sense of community." I experienced this hospitality and communal connection firsthand during my trip to the store, when an employee recommended I visit a new locally-owned business nearby. These sorts of interactions are not only important on an individual level but work to encourage people to integrate with and support the town's community.

Emil emphasized that while some locals may not regard students as residents of the town, river's end has always seen SUNY's campus and its students as an integral part of the community.

"Growing up, the campus was always there... At river's end, we don't want the students to feel like outsiders." This value shines clear in the multifaceted nature of the bookstore's relationship with campus, as well as through observing the interactions between Emil and the SUNY student/alum employees. Not only does the business frequently employ SUNY students and alumni, but it also partners with school organizations and allows them to hold events there, such as the release party of the student-run literary magazine, *The Great Lake Review*. Furthermore, listening to Emil detail the personal hobbies of his employees, such as their love for music or art and seeing the interest in which he regards them, it is immediately apparent that he genuinely cares about them. This, partnered with the community ties built between these employees and locals through the bookstore, establish river's end as a vitally influential facet to bring the community of Oswego together as a whole.

river's end bookstore



The River's End Bookstore and SUNY Oswego

Zachary Blaszk, Music Major

Emil Christmann, The River's End Bookstore

