

Turtle Creek Books to Close; College to Transition to Online Retailer

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On July 16, the Beloit Daily News reported that Turtle Creek Books, the Beloit College Bookstore located at 444 E. Grand Avenue in downtown Beloit, will be closing at the end of the academic year. Since 2000, Turtle Creek Books was managed by Barnes & Noble, while the building that housed it was rented by Beloit College. For the Fall 2020 semester, the college will be moving course books and supply kits online through the virtual college bookstore Akadémos.

“When Beloit College first moved its bookstore downtown in 2000, it was part of an effort to rejuvenate downtown Beloit,” the college said in a statement sent to the Beloit Daily News. “The work of the whole community has brought this to fruition. Downtown Beloit has never been stronger, which makes now the perfect time to see this space repurposed into something that will further benefit the entire community. This decision comes after many years of consideration and evaluating many different options for our bookstore,” the statement continued. We are thankful for our 20-year partnership with Barnes & Noble College. And per the contract, Barnes & Noble was given a one-year advance notice about the cancellation.”

According to Stacie Scott, Vice President of Finance and Planning and Treasurer for Beloit College, links to course books will be available online through the Portal with direct links to books underneath each course description. Akadémos will provide “different levels of pricing [including] new, used, ebook, or market-place... with price comparison” for textbooks and course books across sites like Amazon. Purchasing books earlier will decrease the shipping cost, and if purchased “around a week in advance and if [the student] spent forty-nine dollars or more, then shipping is free,” Scott told The Round Table. Akadémos is currently used by over 16 colleges and universities, including Lawrence University, Central College, Roanoke College, and the University of Oklahoma.

This new system would increase shipping to the Beloit College Mail Center, which Beloit College President Scott Bierman acknowledged, saying the Mail Center was “involved” in the meetings about the closure of the bookstore. Stacie Scott also said the increase in shipping “won’t have much of an impact because a lot of students already order books online.” Scott added that Beloit College plans to provide “additional manpower” to the Mail Center because “we don’t want to burden them, or have a long line of students waiting [for their books].”

With the closure of Turtle Creek Books comes the closure of their apparel and school supply sections. Scott clarified that “the supply kits” required by some courses would become available via Akadémos, as well as “art supplies that any art class requires,” Bierman said.

The college is currently looking for an on-campus location where Beloit-themed apparel and merchandise can be sold. “The good news is we have until the end of the academic year to make some of these changes,” Bierman told The Round Table. “We’ve not yet sorted out what physical space on campus best serves the complicated needs of a retail space.” Scott will be forming an “on-campus committee that includes a faculty member, some staff, [and] a couple of students that will kick off its works after midterm break,” Bierman said. The goal of the committee will be to make a decision on where to sell apparel on campus.

The previous location of the Beloit College Bookstore, before its move to downtown Beloit in 2000, was the Java Joint. Bierman said that the current plan for Java Joint is to leave it open after the opening of the Powerhouse. Bierman said that Java Joint will remain a “student hang-out space” with coffee still being sold, “but maybe not all the options that currently exist, at least through the next academic year and most likely beyond that.” Bierman added, “We want to make sure we’re cautious about important spaces for students that we want to privilege as important for students.”

The bookstore, although managed by Barnes & Noble, was rented by Beloit College, and cost the college “around one hundred and forty thousand [dollars] a year,” Scott said. “And that’s after the rebate we got from Barnes & Noble... and that consisted of the leasing space and everything that was associated with that; the leasing, the utilities, the insurance, the taxes.” One of the main considerations for the college for closing the bookstore “was the cost of books,” Scott said, adding that she “heard from a student [representative] on the evaluation committee that students would go to the bookstore as a first year and then after that start ordering online, and a lot of that had to do with what students perceived as affordability, or the cost of the books.”

Bierman told The Round Table that the college knew they were losing money on the building, “but wanted to make sure that we could understand, as best we could, the impact on the students, and Stacie’s task force... discovered that other schools that were using firms like Akadémos. The student response was really positive.”

With the closing of Turtle Creek Books, the closest available retailer of bestselling books for citizens in the Beloit area will be Books-A-Million, located in Janesville Mall, or Barnes & Noble, located in CherryVale Mall in Rockford, each located 25 minutes away from campus by car. The Downtown Beloit Association told the Beloit Daily News that they look “forward to working with the property owner to promote the space for future business ventures... Downtown Beloit has few vacancies and we are confident this space can attract a unique concept that will fit in well with the character of the area.”

Sources: Beloit Daily News