

# Bookstore owners start new chapter with help from SCORE and SBDC

STORY / LORI JOHNSTON + PHOTO / BYRON SMALL

The story of FoxTale Book Shoppe has some of the same elements as the chick-lit that will fill beach bags this summer. Three self-described “ferocious readers” meet, become best friends, and turn their love of books into a business. ¶ The plot thickens when they decide to open an independent bookstore as readers are



← Karen Schwettman (left), Jackie Tanase and Ellen Ward met while taking a writing class and turned their love of literature into a small business.

entering into the era of e-readers and buying from behemoths such as Amazon.com. The end of this true story, set in the Atlanta suburb of Woodstock, Ga., hasn't been written yet, but FoxTale Book Shoppe successfully opened, in 2007, and has experienced 30 percent growth in the past five years.

That's the CliffsNotes version, though.

Karen Schwettman, Jackie Tanase and Ellen Ward met in 2000 in a writing class at Kennesaw State University. Schwettman (an interior designer), Tanase (a paralegal) and Ward

(who owned an ad agency) desired a creative outlet. On a trip to Denver in 2006, Schwettman and Ward visited Tattered Cover Book Store, an indie bookstore with multiple locations.

“We loved it so much. We started thinking, ‘Oh, wouldn't it be cool that we could have a bookstore?’” Schwettman says.

They made notes on a napkin, plotting out the next chapter in their lives. Schwettman and Ward asked Tanase to be involved in the venture. On Feb. 14, 2007, they signed a lease on a building in downtown Woodstock. Schwettman and Ward

had just turned 50.

“We wanted to just be outrageous and different,” Schwettman says.

The Small Business Development Center at Kennesaw State provided assistance including materials about how to create a business plan. The trio also sought help from the Atlanta chapter of SCORE, a non-profit resource partner of the Small Business Administration that provides free advice for small businesses. SCORE volunteer Hooper Wesley provided his expertise, reviewed their business plan, and offered encouragement.

“He just got excited for us and said, ‘This is going to work.’ He gave us suggestions and things he would do it if was his business,” Ward says.

Wesley introduced the trio to Charles Green, then-president of Sunrise Bank in Atlanta. Armed with their business plan and wearing their signature fedoras, they sought a loan for the business.

“We figured we were either going to make complete fools of ourselves or we would be successful. We were successful,” Ward says.

It didn't hurt that Green had served as a member of SCORE's advisory board for the Atlanta district and was an author (his books include “The SBA Loan Book”). He remembers the FoxTale owners offered a viable plan to be a community-focused, event-driven bookstore. The business plan was full of person-to-person marketing ideas, says Green, who consults with small business owners and bankers.

“It wasn't just books as a commodity. They were really selling reading and reading events and learning events,” he says. “They made it a gathering place for people who read.”

The women each contributed their own finances for a loan.

Soon after the store opened, the recession, coupled with the growth of e-readers, presented challenges that could have forced an early ending to their story. Instead, they focused on becoming a destination for readers and authors.

The store typically has at least six author visits a month (authors are not compensated), plus classes and workshops, author appreciation days and children's programs that include story

## WHY THE FEDORAS?

On a trip to Charleston, S.C., the trio bought fedoras in a hat shop, and discovered that people on the street smiled at them and gave them compliments. That's when they decided the fox on their store logo should wear a fedora. Schwettman says the fedora shows that they are sassy, fun, comical, daring, mysterious - and with signature style.

times and summer camps.

“We know how to make people feel at home, whether you're an author or just somebody off the street,” Schwettman says.

FoxTale revenue has grown 30 percent from 2008 to 2012. Revenue dipped in 2011, but 2012 gross sales reached \$224,000, up 12 percent from 2011.

In 2013, FoxTale projects a 10 percent increase in revenue. The holidays are huge: November and December comprise about 30 percent of its annual sales.

A growing business sector is selling books for authors during festivals and events outside of their shop. Its most successful event was in December, when FoxTale sold more than 400 copies of books by Buddy Valastro, known as TLC's “The Cake Boss.”

As the only employees, the owners have divvied up duties: Ward handles marketing and events; Schwettman focuses on merchandising, finances and décor; and Tanase plans children's activities and even enjoys cleaning, down to the toilets.

The owners say being persistent and tenacious business owners, while also listening to each other, are essential to success.

“We can talk to each other about the future of the business without worrying about hurting each others' feelings,” Tanase says. “If we see something that needs to be changed or massaged, we talk about it and make it work.”

Ward adds: “At the end of the day, we're still best friends.” ■ *Lori Johnston is a freelance writer in Atlanta.*

+  
founded in  
**2007**

+  
employees  
**3**

+  
'12 gross revenue  
**\$224**  
**THOUSAND**

FOXTALE BOOK SHOPPE

OWNERS  
KAREN SCHWETTMAN, JACKIE TANASE, ELLEN WARD

ADDRESS  
105 E. MAIN ST. #138, WOODSTOCK, GA 30188

770-516-9989

WEBSITE  
FOXTALEBOOKSHOPPE.COM