

Opening the book on affordable housing

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Bookstores are a pleasure dome for curious minds. They house an infinite amount of information, mostly in brightly colored book form. In RiverRun Bookstore in downtown Portsmouth, owner Tom Holbrook has introduced a new genre to his shelves: affordable housing literature. Every two months, the bookstore will feature information about a non-profit organization or agency working to create affordable housing in and around the Port City. At the end of the two-month period, Holbrook will donate 2 percent of his sales to the featured organization.

“It’s not really about the money. The money is not nothing, but it’s more about awareness. And we want as many people as possible talking about this issue,” Holbrook said. He believes that a lack of affordable housing is threatening Portsmouth’s unique character and economic viability. “It affects arts, social services and it affects retail. If you can’t live in the town you work in, that’s really terrible, and that’s pretty much where we’re at right now,” he said.

RiverRun has partnered with United Way of the Greater Seacoast to administer the program and funnel the donations. Information will be available in tri-fold brochures in the store. Every two months, Holbrook will rotate an insert in the brochure, which will detail the work of one organization. With each purchase, the cashier will also provide customers with a one-page informational sheet about the program and the issue of affordable housing. **The Housing Partnership** will be the first organization featured in RiverRun’s “Business Building Community” program.

Over the course of a year, Holbrook estimates the program will generate around \$20,000 for the featured organizations.

“If the program works without breaking us, we’ll pick a different issue each year,” Holbrook said. Some of the other organizations that will be featured include the Workforce Housing Coalition, Fair Tide of Kittery, United Way of the Greater Seacoast, Crossroads House and the Seacoast Interfaith Hospitality Network.