

Small world of 'Lit'

By Mike Corrigan
Staff Writer

In a world of twittering and surfing and reality TV, is there a place anymore for reading and for literature? For thought-provoking writing, and for the marketing of same? For — good gracious, hide the children! — *poetry*?

Geoff Gronlund thinks so.

And that place is called Main Street.

"One of the reasons my wife and I settled here, and started this shop, is because Bridgton still has a coherent downtown. We can see it's trying to build off that. We hope we're a part of bringing it back," said Geoff. "I really believe the arts and culture are a major factor in rebuilding downtowns. We believe in Bridgton. We've had some rough stretches, getting established, but we're still here."



GEOFF GRONLUND, outside his Main Street shop, efg books.
(Corrigan Photo)

Those who believe in both small towns and poetry might be branded hopeless romantics by a cynical world, but the fact is they're *hopeful* romantics. As believers, the Gronlunds have a three-pronged local approach to literature and the arts. They think their projects dovetail well with other local stores

and organizations, such as the excellent small bookstore just down the street, Bridgton Books, and the several area art galleries. "The more the merrier," Geoff said in his shop, efg books, Sunday, as he prepared for his next big local event.

And that event happens this efg books, Page 8A

Focus: efg books

(Continued from Page 1A)

Saturday from 5 to 8 p.m., a reception honoring the publication of a fine art, letterpress limited edition publication, *Water*, by local poet George Erikson. There'll be conversation, catered food and a chance to look over and buy the finely-produced book, designed by Gronlund himself and printed by Dunston Press.

The limited edition title is distributed by another Gronlund venture, nine points publishing, which may also undertake chapbooks, and broaden to fiction and nonfiction titles, at some point.

Another of the family's projects is efg books itself, which not only sells new and used books of literature, poetry and the arts, but also hosts a fine art gallery in a small space at the rear of the shop, where this month's exhibit features work by Chris Erikson, the poet's wife. She is a painter and printer and he, once the first director of the Maine State Alliance for the Mentally Ill, is now a sculptor and poet.

It's not a two-family art movement, despite this recent happy confluence of Gronlunds and Eriksons. (Geoff's wife Angela coordinates the gallery.) There is plenty of networking going on, and more planned. For example, the shop will host regular poetry readings, the first Thursday of every month, starting in September, organized by Jim Leavitt of Sebago, who hosted poetry reading in the Bay Area for nearly a decade. Local and invited poets will read at these events; you can sign up on the website.

The letterpress limited edition book — Gronlund said more titles are to come through the same printer — and the scheduled readings are only the latest manifestations of the muse to crop up on Main Street. For two years, Geoff Gronlund has been editor, publisher and promoter of his own small literary magazine, *Omphalos*, which has featured the work of Maine poets Gary Lawless, Martin Steingesser and local writers Jonathan Weld and Sharon Abbott, and many others.

"*Omphalos* is growing," Gronlund said Sunday, with some satisfaction. "We are almost sold out of the latest edition, and that is a first for us. I am also hearing from poets from around New England. I spend a lot of my reading time now with manuscripts and submissions. My wife gets to read a lot more than I do, these days."

And if their several projects aren't enough, Angela and Geoff also have two young children to keep them busy. Ezra and Sylvie, both under three, haven't had time to live up to their rather literary first names, but give them time.

Literature and Bridgton

Raising a growing family is a labor of love; raising the bar for fine arts and literature probably falls into the same category.

How did all this come about?

Geoff isn't exactly sure. This wasn't the blueprint. He

and his wife both went to school for the fine arts, and they ran their own fine furniture firm. That's how they started in Bridgton, with Gronlund's Furniture, in fact. But marketing and production became so much more a part of the deal than creativity and craft, that they gave up on that business a few years ago.

But here they were, already in town, having moved up from Raymond in 2002, and they loved the atmosphere and the people and they wanted to run a business. A bookstore became the choice. Maybe it was fated, somehow.

Originally from central Pennsylvania, Geoff spent a couple of years making pilgrimages to Ithaca, N.Y. "I spent a lot of time in four or five great bookstores there," he said. "The thought entered my head then about how cool it might be to run a bookstore someday. But it was never really a dream, not any sort of a real plan."

Nevertheless, the old Kroot storefront makes a beautiful bookshop. Like everything else the Gronlunds undertake — "Do it right, if you're going to do it at all," Gronlund says, and grins, knowing he is sounding a bit like everyone's senior advisor, or maybe mother — the store is tastefully executed. The same can be said for *Omphalos*, and certainly for the limited edition book, *Water*. Even the associated websites (see below) are crisply-presented and attractive.

The fine arts effect comes from nature as well as nurture. "I really became interested in poetry as a teenager," Gronlund said last week. He cites West Coast poet Gary Snyder as a major influence on his thinking and his approach to life and choices, and efg books features many titles from Lawrence Ferlinghetti's famous City Lights press. He also credits James Laughlin's New Directions with being an influence. Geoff has always just liked all things San Francisco, confessing to being an urfan of the Grateful Dead. Kerouac, Ginsberg, most of the Beats appealed to him; from pursuing that passion, he discovered modern poetry in general, and then pre-modern, all the way back to William Blake; and from there, well, literature, the arts, every Muse that ever walked the Earth, Geoff Gronlund was tracing those footsteps...

So, he and his wife are not in their projects lightly. All of their work has a similar focus, and a serious intent. Geoff said this week that they want to do original things, and they hope they can encourage artists in the Lake Region and in Maine.

Today, Main Street Bridgton; tomorrow, the world? Well, why not? All they need is an audience, and some support. That audience is growing. And, Geoff said Sunday, "I can't tell you how grateful we are for all the people who have told us they really support and appreciate what we're trying to do. I really think we're here to stay."

The bookshop, publishing company and related information can be found on the Web at efgbooks.com, and clicking on sundry venture-titles, or linking to related sites. Or visit the bookshop, right on Main Street beside TD Banknorth. This Saturday's book reception is from 5 to 8 p.m.