

# Bay State comic book shop gets ready for prime time

BY PETER FRANCIS  
THE EAGLE-TRIBUNE

HAVERTHILL, Massachusetts — Nestled away in a small, nondescript plaza on Primrose Street, Glenn O'Leary stands behind the counter in his store, eating a slice of pizza and marveling at his good fortune.

"If you were to have asked me 20 years ago if I would still be here, I wouldn't have known what to tell you," O'Leary said. "The landlord was skeptical and he'd only sign me to one year leases initially. He asked me, 'you can pay the bills with a comic book store?'"

He has. And then some. Since January 1993, O'Leary, 47, has owned The Comic Book Palace, a mecca for area comic book aficionados and the subject of a 2013 documentary he is hoping will soon become a multi-episode series through New York production company Olive Tree TV, which hopes to stream the series on Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime.

Compiled and edited by local filmmaker Felipe "Phil" Jorge after several months of hanging around the shop, filming O'Leary's interactions with customers, "Comic Book Palace: The Documentary" was a smash hit, and appeared in multiple local, national and international film festivals, winning several awards in the process.

After getting laid off from his job at Polartec in 2012, Jorge approached O'Leary about filming with his one-man camera crew at the one-man comic shop, a place which he himself had frequented as a kid.

"I told him I didn't want to make it like 'Pawn Stars' or one of these scripted reality shows. It's not a Newbury Comics — it's 'The Comic Book Palace,'" Jorge said. "It was like putting a kid in a toy store and saying 'buy what you want.'"

## A labor of love

Like O'Leary, Jorge, 34, is a Haverhill native who began

filming his documentary in August 2012 and continued until February 2013.

"I used to come in as a kid to buy 25-cent comics. I moved to Florida for four years, but when I came back, it was like the place had never changed, like it was frozen in time," Jorge said, remarking that the shop still has the same carpet from when O'Leary moved in, as well as the same faint smell of mildew.

"I thought he was a quack at first when he told me he was looking to do a documentary," O'Leary said of Jorge. "He said he wanted to do something on comics because he liked them as a kid. So he came in and just taped what was going on."

Long stereotyped as the domain of geeky kids and socially awkward middle-aged men, the world of comic books has exploded following the release of several blockbuster movies and the success of television programs, such as "The Walking Dead," a series which O'Leary said many people are unaware came from a comic.

"You don't see that stigma anymore. Doctors come in here, lawyers come in here, people who have respected professions," said O'Leary, who owns the entire run of "The Amazing Spider-Man" and still remembers his first Batman comic in 1975. "It's no longer just folks who live in their parents' basement. Women buy comics now. I always hoped it'd be this way."

A former grocery store clerk, O'Leary opened The Comic Book Palace with a dream and a massive inventory, composed of his own 50-box comic collection and several other boxes he purchased from another collector.

On a good day, O'Leary said he makes about \$1,000 from the sale of sports cards and fantasy trading card games, and \$500 from the sale of comic books. When he opened the store in 1993 though, it was a risk worth taking.

"If it didn't work out, I

knew I could go back to Market Basket," said O'Leary, who now resides in Plaistow, New Hampshire, with his wife, Annette. "But I didn't want to be a 40-something wondering what I could've done."

"Financially, I'd probably have been better off staying there," he said. "But I'm doing what I love."

## A devoted customer base

Over the two decades he has owned the shop, O'Leary has spread his love of Spider-Man, Daredevil and many other beloved characters to two generations of area comic book fans who have grown up in his store.

"I have customers who came in with their parents as kids who are now bringing their own kids in ... it's kind of crazy," he said between bites of pizza.

Standing in the shop with his son and nephew Thursday, Steve Melito of Salem, New Hampshire, said he lived near O'Leary growing up in Bradford and though they didn't know each other then, he is happy to give The Comic Book Palace his business.

"I started coming in six years ago when the store I used to go to, Collectors Coop, closed. It's part of my Thursday routine," said Melito, who works at night for a defense contractor in Nashua. "I was in the Navy and served eight years in Guam, so it was tough to get comics then."

An avid reader of The Avengers, X-Men and The Green Lantern, Melito said the shop's atmosphere is "pretty much the same" as shops he remembered visiting when he was younger.

"You have people who come in and can talk comics. If you haven't read a title in awhile, they can tell you what's going on," he said.

Melito estimates his personal collection to be around 35,000 books, and purchases between 10 and 15 books a week from the shop, while his 7-year old son, Cameron, helps O'Leary organize his shelves of baseball cards.

## EMDC to host business discussion

ELLSWORTH — Eastern Maine Development Corp. will host a panel discussion titled "Financing for Your Business — There Are Alternatives" 9-10:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 15, at Ellsworth City Hall in the Council Chambers.

A panel of experts will discuss traditional and alternative ways to finance your small-business expansion or startup.

This event is designed to assist small businesses looking for access to capital.

For information, or to register, call Cindy Lewis at 974-3223 or email clewis@emdc.org.

## Self-employment workshop offered

PRESQUE ISLE — New Ventures Maine (formerly Women, Work, and Community) will offer a free introductory business planning workshop 10:30 a.m.-noon Monday, March 21, at the Presque Isle CareerCenter.

The Introduction to Self-Employment workshop will walk participants through the pros and cons of owning your own business, show how to get started step by step, point out the major elements of a business plan, introduce resources available in Aroostook County and statewide, and help you decide whether self-employment is the right choice for you.

Men, women, couples and

all entrepreneurs who are interested in starting a business are welcome. Business owners who want a refresher on business planning, marketing, and financial cash flow planning are also welcome to attend.

Pre-registration is required, and there is no fee for the trainings.

## Bangor luxury units to be shown

BANGOR — 28 Broad Street Lofts will introduce the completion of its final three luxury units 5-8 p.m. Friday, March 25, in the historic Dakin Building on Merchants Plaza in the heart of downtown.

University of Maine students and faculty will present a curated selection of art during the event, which will be held in collaboration with Blaze, First National Bank, Orono Brewing Co., Woodman's Bar & Grill and Verve.

There will be raffles of gift cards and prizes. RSVPs are requested by sending an email to mbutler@28broadstreet.com or visit facebook.com/events/1741967226035557/.

## Ellsworth insurance agencies merge

ELLSWORTH — Two well-known names in the insurance business Down East have merged.

The Holmes Agency and Brown and Milliken Agency announced that they have merged, as of March 1, under the ownership of local busi-

nessmen Paul Tracy and Patrick Maguire, and will operate as Brown, Holmes and Milliken Agency at 67 Foster St.

The Holmes Agency began serving the Down East area in 1868, operating as The John E. and Herbert Fiske Agency, and has been in the Holmes family since it was purchased by Minnie Holmes in 1908. Blaine Holmes has served as president since 1987.

Brown and Milliken Agency was formed when the former Dwight Brown Agency merged with the former J.C. Milliken Agency in 2012. Both agencies had deep roots in the Down East region as well. Milliken started in Cherryfield in 1864, and Dwight Brown began in 1941 on Main Street in Ellsworth.

"Our similar ideals made this merger a simple choice," President Paul Tracy said in a news release. "We're pleased and humbled that Blaine Holmes feels we are the right people to carry on the tradition established by the Holmes Agency 148 years ago."

Blaine Holmes will continue as president of Grindstone Financial Group LLC, a group association of independent insurance agencies with 22 locations in Maine, of which Brown, Holmes and Milliken is a member.

The Holmes Agency staff will move over the next few months to the new location. The new agency also will also offer financial services.

For information, visit brownandmilliken.com or call 667-2516.

## Forum

Continued from Page C1

12/7/2015 on our blog), some points bear repeating. If a collector calls about an old debt, don't send money without question. Make sure the debt is really yours by having the collector detail the amount owed and to whom it is owed. Have the collector mail the details to you, and

get a physical location of the collector's place of business. If you do pay, send a check rather than sending funds by wire.

The FTC has published a list of companies that it has banned from further debt collection activities. You can see that list at ftc.gov/enforcement/cases-proceedings/banned-debt-collectors.

Next week, we'll take a closer look at some imposter scams.

Consumer Forum is a collaboration of the Bangor Daily News and Northeast CONTACT, Maine's all-volunteer, nonprofit consumer organization. For assistance with consumer-related issues, including consumer fraud and identity theft, or for information, write Consumer Forum, P.O. Box 486, Brewer 04412, visit <http://necontact.wordpress.com> or email [contactexdir@live.com](mailto:contactexdir@live.com).

Matthew Weed has joined Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems as senior vice president and chief strategy officer. He fills a position vacated nearly two years ago by Jerry Whalen, former vice president of business development at EMHS. Weed will be responsible for developing and implementing short- and long-term strategies; providing leadership and coordinate activities for the strategic planning committee of the EMHS board of directors, as well as select leadership steering committees and teams; and overseeing marketing and communications, community health and grants, government relations, and philanthropy. Weed received his Bachelor of Arts in political science at the University of Utah in 1982, and his Master of Business Administration at Brigham Young University in 1984. He held positions at Intermountain Health in Utah, including senior financial consultant and manager of costing systems; director of physician relations; assistant administrator; assistant vice president of strategic research and planning; assistant vice president of health care e-business; and director of strategy, planning and business development. A lifelong resident of Utah, Weed and his wife, Annette, have relocated to Maine.

## ON THE JOB

Kim Smith has joined Bangor Savings Bank as assistant vice president and Waterville branch manager. She is an active volunteer in Junior Achievement of Maine programs. She resides in Newburgh with her two children, Brady and Ella, and looks forward to serving the Greater Waterville area in her new role at Bangor Savings Bank.



Smith

Scott Simons, principal and founder of Scott Simons Architects in Portland, has been elevated to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects for making a significant contribution to design excellence in the profession at both the state and national levels. One of only three Fellows in Maine and only the seventh in the state's history to receive this honor, Simons has practiced architecture for more than 30 years. His firm created the award-winning design for the Portland Public Library, Casco Bay Ferry Terminal, and the Waynflete Arts Center. Simons was a founder and president of the Portland Society of Architects and is a member of the Board of Maine AIA. A resident of Freeport, Simons will be honored in Philadelphia in May at the national AIA convention.

To submit items for On the Job, please visit [bangordailynews.com](http://bangordailynews.com). Fill out the "News and Photos" form under the "Post News" button at the top of the home page and click "Publish" at the bottom when finished. Questions? Call Community Editor Julie Harris at 990-

Laboratory instrumentation manufacturer Fluid Scaring Technologies in Scarborough has appointed

## Ali Naqui

as chief operating officer to oversee the company's business operations. Naqui most recently served as corporate vice president and corporate officer responsible for Asia Pacific operations and the global water business for IDEXX Laboratories Inc. from 2006 to 2015. Be-



Naqui

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