



PRESS RELEASE

Full Circle: Downtown Belleville Businesses Unite After Fire to Keep Beloved Bookstore Alive

Belleville, Ont., Aug. 20, 2025—When a devastating fire tore through the upper floors of her British-themed store Paraphernalia Books ‘N’ Stuff this summer, owner Susan Chambers feared her 20-year business was lost.

But thanks to community spirit and a partnership with Stephen Licence Ltd. Bicycles and Hobbies, the beloved shop is beginning a new chapter.

On June 27, 2025—the day before Chambers’ 60th birthday—the ceiling of her Front Street store in Downtown Belleville collapsed after a fire raged on the upper floors.

“My birthday was June 28th, and then my mum passed away on Canada Day (July 1). I won’t forget my 60th birthday in a hurry,” said Chambers.

The blaze left most of her merchandise unsalvageable, destroying British food imports, 150 books, 132 puzzles, and 226 collectible tin signs.

In retrospect, she said it was a blessing in disguise. “I’ve done things (since the fire) that I’ve denied myself for 20 years,” Chambers said. “I’ve never had a summer off, really.”

While searching for a new home for her business, Chambers connected with Kevin Bongard from Stephen Licence Ltd. Bicycles and Hobbies. The family-owned business—now 107 years old—had once suffered a similar experience.

In 1972, a fire nearly destroyed the bicycle shop, forcing it to operate out of borrowed spaces—at Glenroy Creamery, for about a year.

The **DOWNTOWN** **18 DISTRICT 16**

“It happened to our family business 53 years ago, so I understood what Susan was going through,” Bongard said. “Our store is bigger than we need, and I knew her shop would be a great fit here. It’s come full circle.”

Chambers is grateful for the new, bigger storefront located inside the bicycle shop. “They’re just amazing people. They do things out of the goodness of their heart. That’s why they’re still standing after 107 years,” Chambers said.

“We can use her support and friendship in here,” Bongard said. “But I may have to barter some of my merchandise for some of her British food.”

[Paraphernalia Books ‘N’ Stuff](#) is gearing up to open from its 290 Front St. location in September, with a Grand Re-opening scheduled for October.

For more information, visit DowntownBelleville.ca

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About Belleville Downtown District BIA

The Belleville Downtown District BIA is focused on evolving the collective ambition of our business community, BIA members, and staff to embrace change and build a stronger, more vibrant downtown.