

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

ORLEANS WHOLE FOOD STORE

Emporium of a bygone era

Don Krohn and Janis Brennan own the Orleans Whole Food Store, as well as Main Street Books. The couple is dedicated to offering organic produce, seen in the cooler behind them. Inside their shop you'll also find everything you'd expect to find in a health food store, and a few items that'll surprise you.



PAUL BLACKMORE/CAPE COD TIMES

BY BARBARA RAVAGE

There's a 1910 photograph by H. K. Cummings hanging in the Orleans Whole Food Store of a solitary house with a horse and cart parked out front. A sign above the door reads: "Davis and Chase Apothecaries."

Today, the house – its gingerbread trim painted red, white, and green – is sandwiched between the stores of Main Street and tiny Parish Park. When you walk up the steps, cross the timeworn wooden porch, and turn the brass doorknob, you enter a space that looks, sounds, and smells like history.

It was probably built around 1890, says Don Krohn, who owns the building and runs the store along with Janis Brennan. On Tuesdays, Janis says, a dentist saw patients in an office above the apothecary. Some time after that, it was the parish house of the Federated Church of Orleans – hence the name of the abutting park. More recently, it was a coffee shop, a bookstore, a craft shop, and an art gallery. "So it's a good building. It's had a lot of good tenants," says Janis.

With bare wooden floors that creak underfoot; the front doorway and walls plastered with notices of local

events; tidy rows of balms, lineaments, and personal care items; bins and barrels of grains, nuts, beans, and granola; shelves stocked with organic groceries, additive-free baby food, and eco-friendly cleaning products; a book room that shares space with a machine that churns out fresh peanut butter; and a fragrance that's a welcoming mélange of herbs, spices, natural bath and body products, and homemade soup cooking in the small kitchen in back, it has the cozy feel of an old-fashioned general store. Indeed,

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the spirit of the emporium of bygone days inhabits it far more than today's natural food supermarkets like Whole Foods, with which the store has no connection.

Against the rear wall, past the refrigerated cases packed with juices, sandwiches, wraps, and salads prepared daily, and all manner of ingredients for cooking at home, is a cooler full of organic fruits and vegetables. "That's something we're really committed to," Don says, so the store sells only certified organic produce. They buy locally when they can, from Tim Friary's Cape Cod Organic Farm in Barnstable, among others.

The store carries an extensive selection of unrefined oils and both brand-name and store-packed flours, grains, beans, and seeds. Breaking down and repackaging items they buy in bulk is labor intensive, Don says, but it allows them to get and pass along better prices. Besides, "things seem to taste better because they're fresher."

In addition to the expected vegetarian and vegan fare, the store is a mecca for people seeking gluten-free and wheat-free flours, baked goods, and other foods. It's a good place to look for solutions to many special food needs, such as lactose intolerance and allergies to additives and dyes.

"We have all the things you'd expect to find in a natural food store," Don says, "but we also try to come up with things you wouldn't expect." That includes a cornucopia of gift and novelty items, books, cards, seed packets, candles, and a smattering of items made by local craftspeople.

The extensive stock of homeopathic, naturopathic, and ayurvedic remedies, and vast range of supplements echo the building's apothecary past. There's no question these alternative and complementary products have become a mega-industry, but Don is scrupulous about the rules. Largely unregulated by the Food and Drug Administration, manufacturers are nonetheless limited in the specific health claims they can make.

Quickhits

Food for the body ...

Orleans Whole Food Store
46 Main St.
Orleans, MA 02653
508-255-6540
www.orleanswholefoodstore.com
(under construction)

... and the brain

Main Street Books
508-255-3343

"We try to be a full-service resource, to provide what people want, but we don't push things, and we don't prescribe," he says. Employees will answer questions and refer customers to references on natural healing among the books the store carries. "A lot of people already have a recommendation from a doctor or practitioner and come in asking for something specific." If the store doesn't have it, they'll try to track it down and special order it.

The Orleans Whole Food Store is very much a reflection of its owners, who started the business shortly after they moved to Orleans in the 1970s. Neither of them had a business background – Janis holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Chicago and Don a law degree from Harvard, though he's never practiced – so they just made it up as they went along.

The couple was living in Cambridge when they decided they wanted a simpler, more rural life. Don was a milkman in Chelsea and Janis a social worker at Kennedy

Memorial Hospital in Boston. "Strange as it sounds now," Don says, "it seemed like it would be cheaper to live on the Cape at the time." Don knew the area well. His parents had a house in East Orleans and he'd been coming here for years. As for what they would do to make ends meet, they figured "it would just fall into place," Janis recalls. They had a large yard and garden, where they grew vegetables. They considered getting goats and



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DON KROHN, CO-OWNER
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STORE

PLEASE SEE **ORLEANS**, PAGE 14

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Orleans

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doing subsistence farming. Don drove the school bus, ferrying the town's children to elementary, middle, and high school. Then they opened the store, mostly because they couldn't find the kind of food they like to eat. As Don puts it, "things just evolved."

Their two daughters, Thea and Zoe, grew up here, attending Orleans schools before going off to Exeter. Their first jobs were at the family store. Thea graduated from Brown and is now at Stanford Medical School. Zoe is in her senior year at Brown.

Civic involvement is a big part of Don's life. He served on the town planning board for a number of years, and was instrumental in crafting the architectural review bylaw, which is designed to retain the historic character

of the business district. He was the founding president of the Orleans Improvement Association. Their first big project was putting in the brick sidewalks that give Orleans center its distinctive look. The association also maintains the plantings in town. "The focus of the improvement association has been to make sure the village center remains vibrant," Don says, observing that strip malls and shopping centers on the periphery of small towns can be damaging to Main Streets. "But downtown has to hold up its end of things. I think downtown Orleans works." Don was also a founder and president of the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School, one of the first charter schools in Massachusetts.

Janis is a more private person. Her life revolves around family and the great outdoors – especially kayaking and hiking. A Chicago native, she came east for Woodstock and "just kind of stayed," she says. She met Don when they were both living in Cambridge. The first time she set eyes on Cape Cod was while visiting Don's family. "I had never seen or even imagined anything as wild and beautiful as this," she says.

And then there's reading, which Janis does a lot of, both for pleasure and as the buyer for Main Street Books, the couple's newest venture. Tucked

into an addition to the building that was there when they bought it, the bookstore opened in April 2004. It has become a must stop for anyone who thinks it's a wonderful thing to have a walk-in bookstore on Main Street where you can actually touch books, turn the pages, and talk to people who know and love reading. It takes moxie to open an independent bookstore these days, but because they own the building and because, they insist, Orleans is a town of readers, Janis and Don are optimistic about its future.

One of the books you'll find in both stores is called "In the South of France," a luscious collection of color photographs saturated with

the essence of that storied region. Both photos and text are Don's work, and they chronicle a time when the family lived in the tiny village of Brissac-le-Haut, perched on a hillside in Languedoc. The Cape Cod Museum of Art will host an exhibition of Don's photography – taken

on his travels in France, Bosnia, Croatia, and Ireland – running from August 25 through Columbus Day 2009.

In the back of the Orleans Whole Food Store is an old grain mill, a hulking iron device with granite grinding stones. It's still used when customers want coarser, custom stone-ground flour. Don pats the white elephant affectionately as though it were a mascot. The Orleans Whole Food Store is open seven days a week year round, providing an anchor for the community just as its historic building provides a link with the town's past.

About the author

Barbara Ravage moved to Cape Cod from her native New York City in 2000, after the youngest of her children went off to college. She considers heavy doses of ocean air and Cape light the best cure for empty-nest syndrome. A graduate of Barnard College, she is the author of nine books, including a biography of Rachel Carson for middle-school students and "Burn Unit: Saving Lives After the Flames," which explores the history and science of burn treatment. She balances her writing life with yoga, karate, and pottery. After years of making do with two summer weeks on the Cape, her favorite part about living here is that she's already home.

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JANICE BRENNAN, CO-OWNER
ORLEANS WHOLE FOOD STORE