

# Kepler's launches in-store movies-by-mail venture

■ Test collaboration with Peninsula video store to showcase eclectic movie collection.

By David Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

An experiment involving Kepler's Bookstore and a nearby video store could create a new subscription model for mail-order movies: rent them from a network of mom-and-pop video stores.

During the current trial run, MovieCrazy.com, a startup based in Palo Alto, has enlisted a video store in Mountain View to rent movies and TV shows through a computer kiosk located in Kepler's, or online.

The set-up is intended to attract customers loyal to independent bookstores and video stores — and anyone with eclectic tastes — by providing them a way to find both mainstream and rare items while patronizing their preferred type of merchant.

"It's a perfect combination," said Mr. Nguyen in an interview with the Almanac. "Everyone wins. The store wins, the customer wins, the community wins."

Underlying this scheme is a concern for the commons. Mr. Kepler said he sees local merchants as vital to a community's character. Chain stores and malls, he said, threaten local charm with volume pricing and huge inventories, but they also extract money from within the community.

This concern is common to small businesses, whether in Menlo Park or Kansas, said Mr. Nguyen. With MovieCrazy, people will find the online convenience of a big rental company and the personal service of a small business, whether it's

down the street or in the next state, he said.

Given the uproar when Kepler's closed its doors last year, it's clear, Mr. Kepler said, that local residents value the city's character. "I think the only challenge that Menlo Park has is how to take that desire and create a downtown that people want to come and shop in."

The MovieCrazy collaboration "is an opportunity for us, as a community and the merchants in the community, to do something different," he added.

A Kepler's kiosk would be just the beginning. The goal at MovieCrazy is to enlarge its network to include video stores from across the nation, said Mr. Nguyen.

The Internet Movie Data Base states that 363,000 movies have been theatrically released. Not enough of them are widely accessible, Mr. Nguyen said.

As independent bookstores have acquired an online presence through Book Sense, so might small video stores, run on a shoestring, leverage the network of MovieCrazy, he added.

MovieCrazy may have an edge in its discounts. The regular monthly rate for three DVD movies is \$16.99, but a year's subscription lowers it to \$13.75.

Mr. Nguyen, 44, has bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from Brown University, and a master's in business from Cornell University. His career in product marketing and sales includes a stint at IBM and Massachusetts-based medical database



Tan Nguyen, president of MovieCrazy.com, exercises a rent-movies-by-mail kiosk in Kepler's Bookstore. The Almanac/David Boyce

company PhaseForward, which he helped take public.

### Eclectic collection

In the 1960s, Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin directed "Salesman," a documen-

tary about the real-life experiences of a group of door-to-door Bible salesmen in the Mid-West. Reviewers praise the movie's wit and the anecdotes exchanged when the salesmen meet.

Netflix offers five of the 35

films by the Maysles brothers, but "Salesman" is not among them. It's not available from Blockbuster, either. It is in the collection at MovieCrazy.com.

For more information, go to [moviecrazy.com/gift/keplers](http://moviecrazy.com/gift/keplers). ■

## Doll Project drawing aids local hunger program

Three "dream dolls" await the winners of the annual Doll Project drawing to benefit the Ecumenical Hunger Program.

Each doll comes with a trunk and complete handmade wardrobe, including a bridal gown, party dresses, sports outfits, ethnic outfits, coats, sweaters and nightwear. Each outfit also comes with accessories. For example, the ice skating costume comes with skates; the bride's gown has satin shoes trimmed with pearls. Clothing was sewn by volunteers Bridget Morgan, Gail Reed, Chris Kurtz, and Nancy Hughes.

Dolls from past years have become collector items, says project founder Luanne Malk-

mus of Woodside.

Tickets for the drawing at \$5 each, or five for \$20, are available at Calla in Menlo Park, where one of the dolls is on display. The drawing will be held Saturday, Dec. 23.

The doll project was started seven years ago by Ms. Malkmus, a volunteer for the East Palo Alto-based Ecumenical Hunger Program. She got the idea for a doll drawing from growing up in Stockton where a local charity raffled off a doll, complete with fabulous wardrobe, every year.

Over seven years, the drawing has raised more than \$100,000 for the Ecumenical Hunger Program. For more information, call Ms. Malkmus at 851-7879.

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