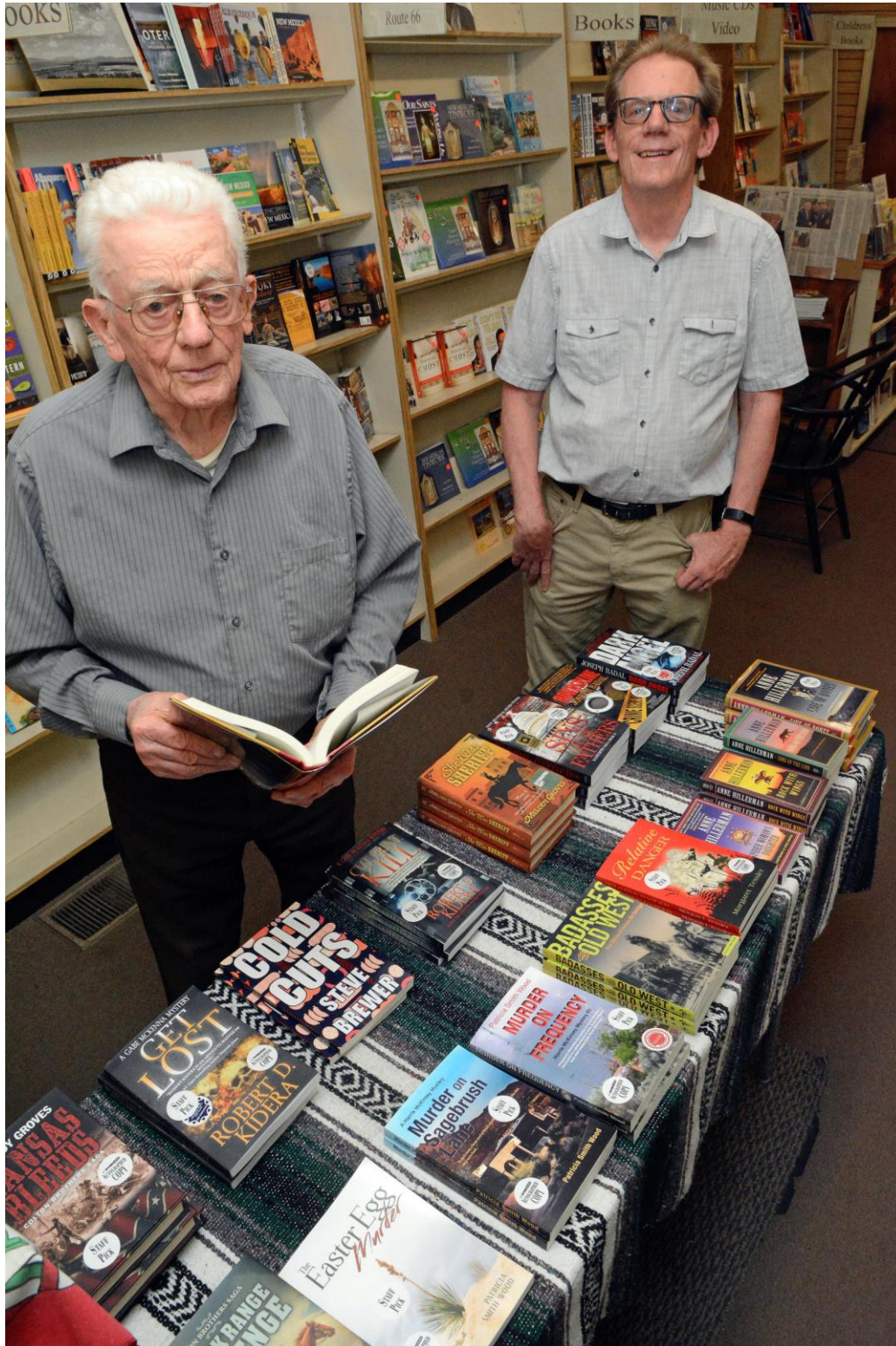


Book merchant Jim Hoffsis was a pillar of Old Town

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Jim Hoffsis, left, and his son, John, in Old Town's Treasure House Books & Gifts in 2018. Jim Hoffsis was known for reading the books sold in the store and talking enthusiastically to customers about them. (Jim Thompson/Albuquerque Journal)

If you walked into Old Town's Treasure House Books & Gifts on a day in the past two decades and lingered for a time with a volume, chances are Jim Hoffsis would soon be at your elbow to tell you anything you wanted to know about it — except how it ended.

“He was one of the most enthusiastic book salesmen I've come across in my life,” said New Mexico author Don Bullis, who did book signings at Treasure House over the years. “He bothered to read the books they had there, and if you had a question he could answer it. He would tell you things about your own book.”

John Hoffsis, Jim's son and Treasure House partner, said his father, a veteran of the Korean War, was especially eager to discuss military books.

“If he saw anybody looking at a book about (New Mexico Medal of Honor recipient) Hershey Miyamura or the Navajo Code Talkers, he would talk their ear off,” John said. “Talking to customers was his favorite thing to do, and he would especially gravitate to people with military connections.”

New Mexico author Slim Randles said he thought of Jim Hoffsis as the mayor of Old Town.

“He was the one who would go out and put up the flags (in Old Town Plaza) every day,” Randles said. “And he always had cookies at the book signings. He was a very good host.”

Jim Hoffsis, an Old Town fixture since 1974, died on Oct. 8. He was 93. Services will be at 10 a.m. Nov. 10 at French Mortuary, 1111 University NE.

Survivors include his son, John, and John's wife, Susan.

Paying tribute to war veterans

Hoffsis was born May 18, 1928, in Toledo, Ohio. He got an early taste of the Southwest as a member of the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Bliss, with headquarters in El Paso. John said his father volunteered for duty in the Korean War.

“He saw combat and got fired on, but was never in the thick of things,” John said. “He'd say, ‘I just did my time.’ But he said it was the defining time of his life. He got out of Korea unscathed, but he idolized those who had not been so fortunate, prisoners of war.”

John said that for a number of years his father went to White Sands Missile Range to take part in the annual Bataan Memorial Death March marathon — a tribute to those who suffered through the actual death march in the Philippines during World War II.

“He was one of the oldest people to complete the 14.2-mile course,” John said. “He loved going down there and talking to (Bataan) survivors.”

Hoffsis worked for the Chevron oil company from 1954 to 1974. For the last 16 of those years, he was a Chevron sales rep working out of places such as Albuquerque; Santa Fe; Casper, Wyoming; and Billings, Montana.

When he retired from Chevron in 1974, Hoffsis moved to Albuquerque with his wife, Joe Ann, and son, John.

‘He supported local authors’

“Dad had always enjoyed Albuquerque,” John said. “He wanted to have a business of his own. One day in 1974, he was walking around Old Town and he saw a for sale sign for Treasure House, a souvenir and jewelry store.”

He bought the business, which was located then, as it is now, at 2012 S. Plaza NW. Hoffsis was involved in the Old Town business community from the start. He was a past president of the Historic Old Town Property Owners Association and active in the Old Town Merchants Association.

It was Hoffsis who purchased the American and other flags that fly in Old Town Plaza, and it was he that ran them up the poles each morning and took them down each evening, until age and illness made that impossible. John Hoffsis has taken over the flag duty from his father.

“Dad cared tirelessly about preserving the cultural and historic integrity of Old Town and fought to keep it from looking trashy or touristy,” John said. “There was a time when someone proposed putting a Ferris wheel in Old Town, and Dad said ‘You got to be kidding me.’ Now, they allow neon signs in Old Town, but that would not have happened on his watch.”

Jim and Joe Ann retired from Treasure House in 1999, and John moved his books from another business into the store and rechristened it Treasure House Books & Gifts.

Joe Ann died in 2001, but Jim, although retired, remained a presence at Treasure House until recently.

“He supported local authors,” said Melody Groves, an Albuquerque writer of fiction and nonfiction. “If you were a local author you knew who to go to to sell your books. He read your books. It was nice to know he really cared.”

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