

[Interviews](#)[Articles](#)[Columns](#)[Reviews](#)[Culture Vultures](#)[Gallery](#)[Archives](#)

Retailer's Corner Special

Free Comic Book Day Roundtable

by [Marcia Allass](#)

With the date and books announced, Free Comic Book Day 2004 is full steam ahead. Breaking cleanly with the established tradition of the event happening in May, this year FCBD is to take place on July 3rd, to coincide with the opening of the *Spider-Man 2* movie. As with the past two years, there has been a lot of buzz surrounding FCBD, but this year some aspects of the event (such as the chosen date, the need to link with a movie event and one or two of the proposed free books) seem to have generated a lot of discussion on the internet.

I wanted to find out how retailers feel about Free Comic Book Day and about the plans for this year's event, both in terms of their own store, and in terms of the specifics of the national event. So I contacted a selection of retailers from the US and abroad with questions about the event. I found their answers both enlightening and varied — and I hope that our readers will too.

*Free Comic Book Day seems to have almost universal appeal to retailers, even though they structure the day individually to best suit their store. The enthusiasm for the day is not surprising, since it was the brainchild of a retailer in the first place (Joe Field of **Flying Colors Comics**, Concord, CA.), and is one day when it can truly be said that retailers, publishers and distributors work closely together to achieve a goal. It's a great chance to pick up new readers, and the free comics on offer plus the happenstance of tie-ins with major*

movies have been perceived as ready-made marketing gold. So I asked a selection of retailers what impact they thought FCBD has had on both the industry and on their individual stores since the event launched in 2002.

It was no surprise that most of the retailers on our panel were overwhelmingly positive, and many had found that the event pulled in new customers.

Matt Price (Speeding Bullet Books and Comics/Ricochet Cafe, Norman, OK): It's helped to get new blood into the stores by using the best tool there is to promote comics — the comics themselves. We have had very strong traffic on the previous two FCBDs, and even above-average sales, even though the sales on that specific day aren't the real goal. I think it's a good promotional opportunity.

Cynthia Puttkammer (Galactic Quest, Lawrenceville, GA): FCBD is an excellent way to attract new readers and help us focus on national promotions. We've had great success with it.

Calum Johnston (Strange Adventures, Halifax, NS, Canada): FCBD is like any other event; you get out what you put in. I am very impressed with the overall acceptance by most publishers to embrace Free Comic Book Day. The first FCBD was a huge success as was last year's. It's begun to gain some level of awareness in the mainstream. We've already had some calls about when the next Free Comic Day is taking place.

I think we, as an industry, must maintain FCBD as an annual event; to shout about what makes comics fun and enjoyable and endeavour to get people of all ages to try some comics, especially kids, our industry will not only survive, but thrive.

ATOM! (Brave New World, Newhall, CA): As an industry, it's given us not only a single day to focus our varied efforts to bring comics to the forefront, but it's also given us a new perspective on our collective ability to make comics shine on its own without the gimmicks that we've relied on in the past. As a store, it's given us column-feet of free publicity in

our local press, a new way to find new customers, and in previous years, a way to celebrate our store's anniversary.

Gib Bickel (The Laughing Ogre, Columbus, OH): It's really hard to gauge the long term impact, but no event has brought anywhere near the civilians that come in on FCBD.

Christopher Butcher (The Beguiling, Toronto, Canada): In regards to the store, our participation in the first Free Comic Book Day was very limited, mostly down to the very ... specific ... choices of books the first time out. We genuinely believe that **Spider-Man**, **Star Wars**, and **JLA** aren't really comics that need any sort of concentrated promotion, and the silver level books generally didn't have much promotional weight behind them (**Queen & Country** being the exception). Comic book stores, and the comic industry as a whole, have enough of an image of "a place to buy superhero comics for children and the socially "maladjusted"" that we really didn't feel comfortable promoting that impression in a particularly vociferous manner.

The second time out, we decided to be more pro-active by catering the event to our needs. **Alternative Comics**, **Slave Labor**, **Image Comics** and **Oni Press** were nice enough to put out a solid, diverse assortment of books that we felt comfortable promoting to the mass market. We have nothing against superhero books for children ideologically, but when that's the only image being represented it gets to be a bit of a problem. By producing a wealth of diverse and attractive products for FCBD, it allowed us the ability to hedge some of the better-constructed traditional material like the **Batman Adventures** book or **Donald Duck Adventures** and not have "tradition" being the only face we were presenting to the public. We further diversified our offerings by contacting publishers directly to pass out material that was more in-keeping with our product mix and ideology (namely, manga and art comix). **Gutsoon!** (Publishers of **Raijin**), **Tokyopop**, and **Drawn & Quarterly** were happy enough to provide us with promotional material, and aside from **Peanutbutter & Jeremy**, those were the first items to fly off the table. Finally, we turned Free Comic Book Day into something of a "street festival", by inviting numerous local creators like

Bryan O'Malley (***Lost at Sea***), Scott Chantler (***Days Like This***), Chip Zdarsky (***Prison Funnies***), Kagan McLeod (***Infinite Kung Fu***), and ***Batman Adventures'*** Ty Templeton to come out and do sketches for people and talk about comic books right out on the street and sidewalk in front of the store. It allowed us to really integrate more effectively with our neighborhood, and reach out to more folks than the people who might be at the store on a Saturday anyhow.

I think the most important effect that FCBD has had on the industry is the notion that not a one of us, particularly retailers, is completely powerless. Conventional thinking held for a very long time that advertising to the mass-market was neither economically viable or worthwhile. I really respect Joe Field for bucking the opinions of the "experts" and going ahead and creating a successful event. Taking from Joe's example, I would hope that any retailer who is currently unhappy with Free Comic Book Day as it is being run or presented would learn from Mr. Field's example and use these resources to craft an event that works for them.

Brad Bankston (Austin Books and Comics, Austin, TX): When the day is held in May, there is a definite "kick start" to summer. The last two years brought us a great number of new faces and provided us a strong summer (which is normally not as strong a sales season). I have heard similar comments from a number of other retailers. The day seems to have had a substantial positive impact on the industry.

Brandon Huigens (Samurai Comics, Phoenix, AZ): FCBD has been an amazing experience all around! We've been able to reach out to the community and really educate new readers about comics. We've also, as a very indy friendly store, been able to introduce our long-time customers and subscription holders to new creators and titles. We stay open on weekends longer than any other comic shops in Phoenix, until midnight, so we've got people coming in all day and night, picking up books and meeting our staff. It's a wonderful time for everyone involved, and it really rallies the comics community. We order plenty of all types of books, so we can give them out year round to all the children and new readers that frequent our store as well.

Brian Scot Johnson (Khepri.com): FCBD is what a retailer makes of it. For some, it's a rousing success; for others, an utter failure. The FCBD concept, on paper, is absolute gold. Its execution? That's where we get into some of the lesser metals; those willing to mine and refine the ores will find great riches. Those unwilling, well, they won't.

Ian Gould (Ace Comics and Games, Brisbane, Australia): I want to say it's been positive. We've given away a bunch of comics and exposed people to a lot of titles they wouldn't normally look at, but it's hard to point to any specific benefits directly resulting from the event. (Although it does tend to be one of our biggest comics sales days for the year.)

I think too it's helped us at a store level when some of our competitors weren't taking part or were limiting people to one free comic each, requiring a purchase to get a free comic or even selling (!) the **Marvel** FCBD books on the grounds they were going to be collectable.

James Sime (Isotope, San Francisco, CA): Free Comic Book Day is a terrific idea, and it has definitely been ramping up since its inception. As a retailer it's always exciting to see a bunch of people who don't normally read comics coming out and getting themselves some. Without a doubt the strongest sales pitch our industry has to offer non-comic readers is the comics themselves, and FCBD is a great way to get those comics into the people's hands. It's also a valuable marketing "hook" that retailers, publishers and **Diamond** can all rally around and help promote the industry as a whole, which I think is vital for industry growth. The positive impact of FCBD is absolutely being felt already and from where I'm sitting it's only going to get better the more years we put into it.

As far as the impact on my business is concerned, it can be counted by a Free Comic Book Day register jam packed with cash from an influx of non-regular consumers, and it can be counted the months following the event as those people keep returning looking for more comic book entertainment. At the **Isotope** FCBD has proven to be very successful! And for me,

personally, it's heartening to see an annual industry-wide event when everyone works together. That's always nice.

Dan & Katie Merritt (Green Brain Comics, Dearborn, MI): We here at **Green Brain Comics** embraced the idea of FCBD from the start, as it is a great way to get quality comics into the hands of the people. When we participated in FCBD 2002 the response was incredible, resulting short-term in one of our best sales days since we bought the store in 1999. Long-term, it has resulted in very positive growth in our business, and on some of the titles that were represented.

FCBD 2003 again topped our previous sales records, and the books offered helped to increase sales of their related series long-term. Overall, this has proved to be a very beneficial event, that we plan to get behind every year.

Rory Root (Comic Relief, Berkeley, CA): For the industry, I believe it's one of the best ways we've had to do outreach. One of the realities of comics is that while we have such an incredible diversity of products right now to offer readers of all ages and of all styles; unfortunately, if you ask Johnny or Josie on the street, he or she would answer that comics are superhero stories for 10-14 year old boys. And that's not **Comic Relief's** demographic. And it's never been the direct market demographic. And though superheroes are a large part of what sells in the majority of comic book stores; they're a much smaller part of what's actually available in the top ten percent of stores i.e. the few well-merchandised comic stores. **CR's** Fiction & Literature Section exceeds our Superhero Section by about double the amount of bookshelves. Our Manga Section equals and is starting to exceed our Superhero Section. Our Underground Section equals it; our Media & Comic Strip Section are both about half the size of the Superheroes Section. I've left out Art & European books and any number of other categories I won't bore your readers with. By the way; we carry every superhero trade in print, and hundreds that are out of print too. But superheroes, though they are what receive the lion's share of attention, and has the general mind share of the public, is a small part of what we have to offer as an industry. And one of the really nice things about Free Comic

Book Day is those people who are attracted in to get a free book, though they'll see the "gold" providers — the bigger publisher's superhero issues — there for the offering, they'll also be exposed to other books that they may not have read, or books like **Archie** and the **Disney** books, that they've forgotten; things from web sites like **Keenspot** or publishers like **Oni** and **Alternative Press'** fine offerings, which allow for a more diverse readership to grow for our industry than, I think, the general public perceives is possible.

For **Comic Relief**, FCBD has been good because with 35,000 students up on campus, we have a great deal to offer them, but a lot of people are pretty sure they know what a comic book is. And if you're sure a comic book is only funny animals, or only superheroes, or only something else you wouldn't enjoy; what's the chance of you going out and buying one? So the ability to hand out free books; get them up into the dorms, get them in to people's hands, find older readers whose love of comics has perhaps atrophied, or been subsumed into other fields of endeavor or other forms of reading, and get them exposed to what's current in the industry today is very important.

I also think ... some fans' perception of Free Comic Book Day ... they think of this as a time to go in and get a new book from **Marvel** or **DC**, and I often hear complaints on web sites about the offerings being reprints of classic favorite stories of the past. I don't see Free Comic Book Day as a giveback day to our fans. That's what all the conventions are for. That's what 364 days a year in the store are for. This is the one day that I would like to see the entire industry of comics focused on outreach. And with outreach, if you haven't read the story — it's new to you. So whether it's a reprint of a classic story or a new book, it shouldn't matter if you've never read it before. Go discover a new favorite. And pass it along!

Comic Relief, and how Free Comic Book Day works for us, is a way for us to outreach into our community: to work with libraries and other schools, mostly Cal., and to bring in new people who are interested in this wacky world of comics they've heard a few things about, but they've never quite got the impetus out to go down and buy a book.

I think that pervasive fanboy desire for first printings or new stories is fairly important to resist; because every time I look at one of the web sites, there's somebody complaining about "how dare they reprint ***Ultimate Spider-Man***? I already have that." Well, take another book. Try something different, please. And I think sometimes some of the storeowners have the same philosophy — they think that Free Comic Book Day is for their current fans. And if you want to hold a comic fan appreciation day, go ahead. But that's not *this* day. And there's a lot of things you can, and should do, to give back to your current fan base as a shop — signings, parties, just having a well-run, clean, well-lit place for comics — are all things to give back to your current readership. But to give current fans a free book (which by the way the stores do pay for,) isn't necessarily what I think we need to be doing to show people that comics have entertainment value.

Joe Ferrara (Atlantis Fantasyworld, Santa Cruz, CA):

The impact has been tremendous. Our store sales were double a normal Saturday the last two years. More importantly, we had hundreds of first time visitors that had a wonderful time in our store — an experience you can't put a value on. Comic books now represent a little bigger piece of the entertainment industry pie because of this event. It has raised the overall awareness of comics, not only as fun and entertaining but also as a literate art form.

Lee Hester (Lee's Comics, Mountain View, CA): Free Comic Book Day has had a positive impact on the industry. It is a great event that gets a lot of favorable publicity. Its a fantastic concept, because it focuses attention on comic book stores and the comic books they sell. With movies such as *Spider-Man* and *Punisher*, comic stores sometimes get the run-off, which I love too, but Free Comic Book Day is centered around us. Each year FCBD has been covered in almost all of the newspapers in the Bay Area, and many radio and TV stations as well. I try to do my part by contacting my friends at the ***Metro***, ***Mercury News*** and ***Wave Magazine***.

So, what impact has FCBD had? It has a continuing positive effect. It gives **Lee's Comics** a good day of sales, since 500 people visit each of our stores, located in Mountain View, and

San Mateo. Some of these people have never read a comic before, and will start the habit. Others have fallen out of it, and will re-start. Parents will pick up comics for their kids, introducing them to this wonderful art form. It's a real pleasure to man the free comic book table outside the store, and watch the cars pulling up all day. I love to see the families come pouring out to get their free comics. I see a lot of smiles, and happy people. It puts a good face on the industry.

Chris Powell (Lone Star Comics, Texas): FCBD, through the incredible hard work and commitment of the FCBD Committee, publishers, creators, and retailers, has led many new and lapsed fans to visit our stores. We have seen hundreds of new customers at each FCBD, many of them making a purchase on that first visit and making repeat visits afterward.

Even those retailers whose stores have not directly benefited from the event were positive about the benefits for the industry as a whole.

Robert Scott (Comickaze & AFC Studio, San Diego, CA): Not much impact on either, yet but I believe that there is a foundation being laid that will change that in the not to distant future. That foundation lies in getting the industry looking (mostly) in one direction, forward and forging co-operation in an exercise of common good.

Chad Rivard (Emerald City, Clearwater, FL): I think FCBD is a good idea for the comics industry, and I believe it has brought some new readers to a lot of stores around the country. It has not had much of an impact on our store, unfortunately. We had a decent, but not spectacular, turnout at FCBD1. Despite a more aggressive effort to bring people to FCBD2, we had a poor turnout. We gave all the local public and high school libraries a donation of comics from our back issues with flyers promoting FCBD within a month of the event, but it seemed to have no effect.

Stephen L. Holland (Page 45, Nottingham, UK): Let me first emphasise that I, like so many others, couldn't be more impressed with Joe Field, FCBD's instigator and organiser. He

came up with such a bold and radical idea, that publishers would have laughed it right out of the room, were he not such an excellent salesman. This is its third outing, and each time the scale has grown. It is the most extraordinary accomplishment for which Joe deserves a new and possibly one-time-only category of Eisner Award. I am in awe, and I'd like to make it clear that nothing I go on to say about the concept itself or its implementation detracts from the quality of left-field thinking involved in the concept; or how much we all owe Joe in having such inspiration and determination in the first place, whether the concept ends up being a watershed in comic book readership, an excellent idea which needs fine-tuning, or simply worth a shot.

Certainly **Page 45** has done nothing on this scale for the industry, or other retailers. We've given away trade secrets to those few who want to follow suit, and campaigned for a different approach to selling comics, like stocking a diverse range of trade paperbacks (TPBs) in a clean, adult environment, without the presence of adolescent sci-fi toys and mardy shop assistants playing Gameboys behind the counter. I even spent seven years badgering Nick Parry-Jones at **Diamond UK** into providing a re-order service that works. But we've done nothing like this, and I think anyone who even contemplates criticising Joe for what amounts to a huge generosity of time and intelligent marketing, is being nothing less than ungrateful.

So:

I confess I don't know what impact it's had on the industry at large. At least not in terms of bringing in newly devoted comicbook readers. It may have, it may not. Personally I've found the content of the primary releases to be embarrassing. Apart from ***Ultimate Spider-Man #1*** in the first year (and we did sort-of join in for the first year) I cannot believe that anything the deal breakers offered would do much but confirm the wider population's perspective that comics were illiterate drivel for twelve-year-olds with arrested development. There's been plenty of good material offered by the secondary bunch, but it's been my understanding that for the first two years at least you've had to order the beef-burgers in order to acquire the steak. Once

more the corporations bully themselves into the limelight to the detriment of those who might actually make a difference.

However, that doesn't mean it hasn't made a difference elsewhere, because although we weren't convinced it was a viable use of our time and resources (we opted out for the second year), other retailers have different shops, different locations and perhaps a different target audience than ourselves (twelve-year-olds with arrested development, perhaps). Our target audience is the Real Mainstream, the average man and woman on the street who've been coming in and buying hundreds of copies of works by Jeffrey Brown, Craig Thompson, Chris Ware, Alan Moore, John Porcellino, Vasquez, Dirge, Ennis, Ellis, Gaiman, Miller, or even Millar and Bendis. All of whom are at the top of their game, and hardly represented by **Image's *Tombraider!*** If **DC**, for example, had decided to go with something by one of their writers rather than monkeys, we'd have been far more interested.

One impact it's most certainly had is in bringing so many publishers together in an effort to do something, and the importance of this cannot be overestimated. Evidently we have an incompatible aesthetic to what they've delivered, but the sheer co-operation involved, and **Diamond's** extraordinary commitment of time and resources, is a monumental move forward for which I have nothing but respect and applause. I've forgotten to mention **Diamond** until now, but I think both the first imaginative leap of faith they made, all the manpower they have subsequently devoted to these events, and all the money it must have cost them, is stunningly impressive.

Respect.

*The 2004 event is to take place on July 3rd, to coincide with the opening of the Spider-Man 2 movie. This is an interesting result, since both previous FCBDs have been in May, and have never previously coincided with a national holiday. I know that date of the event is decided by retailers themselves via a ballot from **Diamond**, and so I wanted to find out if the benefits of the movie tie-in outweighed the possible downside of trying to raise extra trade on a major*

US vacation day. In addition, there has been some division on internet message boards about the free titles which publishers have announced. To find out more about these issues, I asked our panel of retailers if they were happy with this year's choice of date and whether they were impressed with the selection of comics on offer from publishers.

Most of the retailers we spoke to felt that the selected date of the 2004 event was not the best choice, but were determined to make the very best of it. In general, the response to the books on offer was mixed.

Matt Price (Speeding Bullet Books and

Comics/Ricochet Cafe, Norman, OK): I think the timing is a little suspect. While many are excited about the second *Spider-Man* film, the Fourth of July weekend is a tough weekend to draw traffic, since so many people have holiday plans. Plus, we've already seen a little confusion among customers who are expecting FCBD in May, as in the last two years. The industry has conditioned them to look for it in late spring, and it's disappointing we're losing that advantage. That said, we'll do our best!

I think there is a good mix of books this year. It seems as if every year, there have been a wider variety of books, and I think that's a good thing for fans and for potential new readers. While I appreciate **DC's** efforts in promoting its all-ages line on FCBD, I hope in the future **DC** may do more books, in order to promote its **Vertigo**, **WildStorm**, **DC Universe** and kids' lines. However, there looks to be an excellent mix of comics covering a variety of genres and styles.

Robert Scott (Comickaze & AFC Studio, San Diego, CA):

The timing of the event couldn't have been worse and it was allowed to be railroaded through without enough discussion of the merits of lack thereof, for each date. Unfortunately it seems that a majority felt the need to disrupt consistent scheduling for FCBD in favor of tying it to a movie release causing two problems. One, as alluded to earlier, it disrupts consistency of scheduling, leaving retailers and patrons unable to plan for future events. Two, the date chosen is the day before July 4, a day which is often part of a three-day

weekend spent with families at the beach, camping, off-roading and other events which will be extremely hard for us to counter-program against.

Chad Rivard (Emerald City, Clearwater, FL): I would rather have FCBD at the same time every year, so I'm not happy with the date being moved this year. It will be good, though, to give out thousands of the **Spider-Man** comic at movie theaters for *Spider-Man 2*. It's just that it really doesn't have much to do with FCBD — that should still be in May, then **Marvel** could have offered a "free" **Spider-Man** comic for July also.

Overall, there are good books being sent out this year. It seems that an **Ultimate Spider-Man** comic would have been more effective than the **Marvel Age Spider-Man**, however. The Ultimate line will have eight trade paperbacks out to sell to potential new customers by FCBD, and it's being written by one of the best authors in comics today. Also, there's not much to lead potential new readers to after giving them **Teen Titans Go #1**, other than the next few issues of the series. It seems that maybe something like an issue of **Batman: Hush**, along with available soft covers of the story by FCBD, would have been a better draw for new readers (they could also then be led to the Jim Lee **Superman** issues too). In addition, it seems that DC might have done well to add a **Sandman** comic for potential adult readers. One great self-contained Neil Gaiman story would be a wonderful tool for leading new readers into the ten volume **Sandman** series. Again, I'm happy with the books that were offered — I just think that there might have been even better books offered.

Calum Johnston (Strange Adventures, Halifax, NS, Canada): The timing of the event, no. I wish the main FCBD was going to be on the first weekend in May again. I think we should make an effort to have it be a regular annual event on or about the same time.

I am still having a Free Comic Book Day on Saturday, May 1st. It's called Free Comic Book Day: Part One. I've got about four thousand comics gleaned from our racks and back-stock as well as comic donations from customers and friends

such as artist Steve McNiven and writer J. Torres. On May 1st, there will be racks of comics that folks can browse through and take some for free. On the second part of Free Comic Book Day, I'll be giving out the regular FCBD comics.

As for the books being sold to us (not sent out), I am disappointed with some of the offerings and very impressed with others. I wish **Marvel** had chosen a different title. **Marvel Age Spider-Man** just isn't very good and hasn't proven to be too popular with the kids here. **Runaways #1** or a stand-alone issue of Straczynski's **Spider-Man** would have been preferable. Or a reprint of an issue of **Ultimate Spider-Man** starring Doc Ock to tie in a bit closer to the film. I'm glad the **Crossgen** book was canned, but I do wish they would consider replacing it with an issue of **El Cazador**. Pirates are the new monkeys! **DC's** choice is a good one, I think. **Teen Titans Go** has proven popular with readers here and the cartoon is still going strong. **Clone Wars** is a solid choice for **Dark Horse** as well. The series is on TV here and the DVD will be out soon. I would like to see **Archie Comics** not try to do a "special" story that involves comics as that is not what you get in **Archie** comics. I think they would do better with a reprint of several short stories that reflect what **Archie Comics** offers. A 32 page comic could have a story with Archie and the gang, a little Archie story, a new manga style Sabrina story and a Sonic story. No need for new stuff, just remind folks what they do best and introduce readers unfamiliar with **Archie Comics** to what they have to offer. **Gemstone** does it right again with a Mickey story and an Uncle Scrooge story. Hit 'em with your best stuff. The **Image** sampler could be cool so long as there are actual stories in the comic and not just a collection of pin-ups. I'm very glad to see **Invincible** being included in the anthology as it is one of my favourite comics as well as being damn good. The other FCBD offerings I am looking forward to are **Reggie-12** from **Highwater**, **Oni's Love Fights/Everest**, **Slave Labor Stories**, **Top Shelf Tales** and the books coming from **About Comics**, **Adhouse**, **Alternative**, **Astonish**, **Dork Storm**, and **Renaissance Press**. I'm sure there will be other good ones, but the ones I noted will likely be my favourites not only for quality of comic stories but for being able to get the reader interested in the comics presented within.

ATOM! (Brave New World, Newhall, CA): Yes and no. I think that in previous years, we've made a lot of ground toward teaching our community that FCBD was the first weekend in May. The move of the date has lost some of that momentum for us, but given us two dates to promote and an opportunity to try something that's been in the promotional notebook for awhile. As far as the books go, they seem okay. I would love to see each publisher make more than one title available so that we could use FCBD to showcase our diversity, but we're getting there.

Gib Bickel (The Laughing Ogre, Columbus, OH): I'd prefer keeping to a regular May weekend. I'd like to avoid holiday weekends due to the travel many people do. We need to bring new people in and make regulars of them. I think it's harder when people are travelling.

Like any year, there's a lot of books I'm excited about, and some that disappoint me. But, I'm sure every publisher is putting out what they think is their best effort to impress the customer.

Christopher Butcher (The Beguiling, Toronto, Canada): While we weren't in favor of the July 4th weekend date (and its particular allegiance to a singular comic book publisher), we'll just do our best to craft an event that works for us. If that means a reduced time and financial outlay this time around, so be it. We have access to tons of very inexpensive promotional material here with no "sell-by" date on it. We'll be able to use the books here to supplement promotional events for the rest of the year or further, and in the end that's fine with us.

As to the books themselves, it appears that the gold-level sponsored titles are largely licensed or media-tie-in books, which is unsurprising but not really where we want to put our promotional efforts. We're much more interested in promoting comics as it's own medium (particularly to the general public), and while it's nice to have a "familiar face" or two hanging around to hook the most-reluctant reader, in the end it's about quality and diversity for us. To that end, the selections from **Adhouse, Alternative Comics, Del Rey Manga, Highwater Books, Oni Press, Silicon Times'**

Delicious Seasons book, and the **Slave Labor** and **Top Shelf** books look to be the most attractive and most useful for us in terms of promoting a wide array of the quality comics that we support to a wider audience. Even then though, the number of available titles this year is much larger, and I am concerned that the flood of new titles, particularly from new publishers with no back catalogue is going to dilute the sales of the better, established companies. I just hope that sales across the board are sufficient to ensure publishers can still participate

Brad Bankston (Austin Books and Comics, Austin, TX): Not at all. July 4th weekend is perhaps the worst possible timing for this event.

The mainstream books really don't look that inspiring and the indy books are a mixed bag. In all, this seems to be the weakest selection of books in FCBD's brief history.

Brian Scot Johnson (Khepri.com): Timing — Absolutely not. For 2 years, FCBD was a May event. Tied to **Marvel** movies at the start of summer, yes, but a May event nonetheless. So this year, when we had a real opportunity to stand on our own two feet, as an industry, we paused, we blinked, and ... we decided to coat-tail *Spider-Man 2* in July.

FCBD will never truly be ours until we make it our own. If we continue to play the role of Hollywood's red-headed step-child, we will continue to have cheap cigarettes extinguished on our forearms. FCBD should be a May celebration of our art form, not a rotating reminder that a movie is now in theatres.

Selection — yes and no. Some of the small press sampler/anthology books are brilliant; some Silver sponsors are even providing multiple offerings! But a couple of the Gold sponsors' offerings don't thrill me; I mean, just sending a book back to press with a FCBD logo on it? C'mon, give us new material

Dan & Katie Merritt (Green Brain Comics, Dearborn, MI): The date that received the most votes was not our first choice, it wasn't even our second choice. We strongly believe

that this event can stand on it's own, without a movie tie-in. Having said that, no matter what the date is, we will utilize the materials that are being made available to us. And FCBD 2004 will be bigger and better than any before.

Rory Root (Comic Relief, Berkeley, CA): As to the books being sent out this year, and the timing? The timing I think is awkward. I believe we've made a couple of mistakes with Free Comic Book Day. One, I do believe a lot of people assume that what we're looking at FCBD as a movie tie-in event. And I believe it's Free Comic Book Day, not Movie Tie-in Day. And one of the problems with that perception is that a lot of comic fans, a lot of comic professionals, and a lot of comic retailers are insecure in their hobby, in their pastime, in their livelihood, in the artform. They seemingly come off a bit embarrassed about what it is we're doing. So tying it in to movies adds legitimacy, in their minds. I think they're missing the boat.

This is, Free Comic BOOK day, celebrate the medium! Not the licenses and tie-ins.

If there is a *Spider-Man* movie, or a *Batman* movie, or a *Hellboy* movie, we can tie into those movies just fine. People know that those are comic book events. Strange as it may seem to some, but the best movie tie in **Comic Relief** has ever been associated with, was when the Crumb documentary played down at the UC Theater, a block from our store, for two weeks. And when *American Splendor* and *Ghost World* were in the theaters, those were properties that came from comics but for the most part people weren't aware that they were comics, or they had been aware of them but hadn't read them in years, or hadn't sought them out in years, and the movies — like *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, however awkward an adaptation that film was — provided a certain legitimacy to some fans, a spur to go forth and seek out those books; to find out what the original material was about; and experience what magic the creators had captured.

The timing of the event this year is awkward for us *not* because it's tied into a *Spider-Man* film but because it's held during the Fourth of July weekend, and that's traditionally

the school's summer vacation time, since we're a half block from the University of California, Berkeley campus, and there's 35,000 students, and 15,000 staff and professors and TAs and janitors — those people are all on vacation for the most part. There are summer classes, but ... funny thing ... on July 4th weekend, which is often a four or five day weekend, they're going to be off at the lake, or seeing fireworks, or having a family picnic. I'm fairly sure that this is a very awkward weekend for us, and for many comic stores, and I think those stores who are tied around colleges, or those stores who have a large family presence, are going to have a hard time merchandising to people who aren't there.

As to the books being sent out this year? I think they're fine. The one book that wouldn't have played particularly well in Berkeley was **American Power**, and it's been cancelled. I always look for a little bit more diversity in the product, but I'm comfortable with what we have, and with what we can supplement from our own stock and from vendors we work with who bring a few other surprises to people on that day.

Joe Ferrara (Atlantis Fantasyworld, Santa Cruz, CA): I'm not happy with the timing of the event this year. It will be fine for me because Santa Cruz is a destination for holiday crowds and the local theater that will be playing *Spider-Man 2* is right around the corner. However, comic retailers who do not share at least one of these advantages are facing a bleak weekend. Many shops close on the July 4th weekend because business is so slow. They will have to spend more to advertise the event to get anyone in their shops.

I like the books being offered. I think it's a great cross section of what the industry has to offer.

Lee Hester (Lee's Comics, Mountain View, CA): I don't think that the timing of the event was well thought out this year. I realize that the retailers voted on it, and chose July 3rd. I think that the majority chose unwisely, and that perhaps they bowed to the pressure that **Marvel** was bringing to bear. At one point, **Marvel** even threatened to pull out if they didn't get their way, although they backed away from that stand later on. I hope that next year we make a wiser decision. I think we should pick a date, and

stick to it each year, making it a tradition. Trying to coat-tail on the newest super hero movie seems like a bad strategy to me. Doing FCBD as a movie tie in has favored **Marvel Comics** each year. This promotion should highlight and benefit all publishers equally. This event should be bigger than any one publisher.

As for the books, I like some, but not others.

Speaking of **Marvel**, I think the choice of **Marvel Age Spider-Man** is a weak one. I understand that this series will soon be cancelled. We should be promoting things that are a little more solid. I do like the fact that it's a Spider-Man book. The public has a great affinity for Spider-Man, We need a good all ages Spider-Man title!

The **Dark Horse Star Wars: Clone Wars Adventure** looks good. This should prove to be popular. **Archies** are always popular here, and I appreciate the fact that they are doing a new story with a comic shop theme. How about a **Simpsons** comic from **Bongo** featuring a new Comic Book Guy story? **Mickey Mouse** from **Gemstone** is also much appreciated. These are really the kind of all-ages crowd-pleasing comics that FCBD should center around.

I have to wonder about some of these other "Gold Sponsors". **Beckett Entertainment** with its **The Ballad of Sleeping Beauty**, is a brand new company. The material here looks a little iffy. **Duel Masters** from **Dreamwave** has not yet caught on here. Despite the fact that the show is a hit, the **CSI** comic from **IDW** has not caught on here. My ideal for a free comic on the "Gold Sponsor" level is one that has the potential to appeal to the masses.

As for the "Silver Sponsors" the **Astonish Comics** sampler looks good, as does the **Slave Labor Stories**. The manga titles should appeal to fans. The other titles should appeal to their niche markets.

Chris Powell (Lone Star Comics, Texas): The date that was chosen by voting retailers was not our first choice, but we anticipate good traffic and a successful promotion just as in past years. Most of the books being published this year

look fantastic and we'll be proud to promote them. Publishers are really showing the breadth of content that comics today offer, and there's something available for just about any potential customer. With a number of books that we feel we can target to children/young adults, we will continue to bring new fans into the fold so they can enjoy comics for many years to come.

James Sime (Isotope, San Francisco, CA): The timing of this year's FCBD has been something of a heated topic among comics professionals, due to a changing of the date to coincide with a *Spider-Man* movie that was ultimately moved to another date altogether. As a whole I think the retailing community kind of froze up in **Marvel's** headlights when they told us "do it this weekend or **Marvel's** not participating," and I'm a little disappointed by that. Comics sure as hell don't need a movie in order to be cool, and my store doesn't need a movie in order to be worth coming in to.

But even so, when it comes to the public perception of FCBD I don't think it's that any of that is a big deal. People aren't interested in comics because of silly industry politics, they're interested in comics because they're great entertainment. And as long as you're offering them free comics, they're going to come around looking for them ... and I'm going to be right here ready to greet them when they come in the door.

Some retailers feel unaffected by the proposed date, due to circumstance or geography:

Brandon Huigens (Samurai Comics, Phoenix, AZ): The event timing is perfect! Last year, we received tons of patronage after people viewed the first *Spider-Man* movie; this year, with the movie's expectations even higher, we expect the volume of customers to be much larger. Plus, since we stay open until midnight on Saturday, it benefits the store and all the customers. We frequently have people coming straight from the movie theatres to the store on Saturday night, asking about good comics to pick up, and we send them away with a huge stack of free books and tell 'em to come right back for more.

Stephen L. Holland (Page 45, Nottingham, UK): The timing is all geared towards the release of superhero films in the US. Timing in the UK was never a consideration, and that's entirely understandable given that the size of the market in the US, like the size of the country, is so much greater than that of the UK. In any case it would be irrelevant to us, since we're not chasing a superhero audience.

As to the books this year, the primary sponsors have once again produced unequivocal drivel for the day, which is odd since **Marvel** and **DC** have (for the first time in their history) both had some extremely intelligent writers working on their superhero fodder over the last five or six years. (You can forgive **Image**, because they've just lost their only decent book to **Marvel**.) The smaller publishers, on the other hand, are offering some real gems, as previewed in **Page 45**'s last e-shot — see www.page45.com for signing up.

Ian Gould (Ace Comics and Games, Brisbane, Australia): I'm one of the few people who actually *is* happy about the change. Here in Queensland the first weekend in May is the Labour Day long weekend. The July 4th weekend should actually work better for us.

I'm delighted at the range of all ages titles being offered by the major publishers. I'm sorry that **American Power** won't be coming out — I disagree with a lot of Chuck's politics but he's still an excellent action-adventure writer.

I'm also excited by the great diversity of titles offered by the silver and bronze sponsors. The **Del Rey** manga sampler will help both readers and retailers keep track of the flood of new titles and I wish other manga publishers would follow suit.

And, of course, **Slave Labour** features Evan Dorkin in **Slave Labour Stories** and the world can always use more Evan Dorkin.

Finally, I wanted to get a sneak peek at what our retailers have planned for Free Comic Book Day 2004.

Matt Price (Speeding Bullet Books and

Comics/Ricochet Cafe, Norman, OK): We plan on making it a big party and a celebration of comics. We'll have cake, and appearances by superheroes, and we hope to line up an artist to do sketches for kids and fans. We've tied in the event with the public library the last two FCBDs, giving books out at both our store and at the library, and we hope to do that again.

Robert Scott (Comickaze & AFC Studio, San Diego, CA): We are taking a more cautious approach on buying books but will be throwing a beach party BBQ with a DJ in order to try to lure folks still in town. In addition we will once again have local pros on hand to meet and greet attendees and sign autographs and will likely also have a one day sale and offer coupons encouraging attendees to return after FCBD.

Chad Rivard (Emerald City, Clearwater, FL): We have a possible newspaper contact this year, so we're hoping for some media coverage in our area for this FCBD. We will again send out press releases to all the local media, give away comics at the premiere of *Spider-Man 2*, and tell all of our regular customers to tell all of their friends and family about the event.

Cynthia Puttkammer (Galactic Quest, Lawrenceville, GA): We have Mark Brooks from *Marvel Age Spider-Man* fame doing a signing with many other artists and events. The entire shopping center will join in the days festivities. Spider-Man will be making an appearance and we'll have a private screening of the movie at the theater. We're really looking forward to all the fun. Most of the activities will be held at our Lawrenceville store.

Calum Johnston (Strange Adventures, Halifax, NS, Canada): I'm talking with another local comic shop about renting some billboard space to promote the July FCBD. Our staff is already booked for the day. FCBD requires about nine people working to take care of customers and restock the shelves. Advertising in the local papers, press releases, radio ads, posters and bag stuffers. Also having staff remind customers to bring their friends, tell their families. Word of mouth advertising can bring great results! And then we're going to give away thousands of comic books.

ATOM! (Brave New World, Newhall, CA): May 1st is the 14th Anniversary of **BNW**, so we will be having our own Free Comic Day to coincide with a big sale and general party. But, we are especially proud of our plans for the official FCBD. Because it is on Independence Day weekend, we are using it as an opportunity to celebrate all five of the artforms created in the United States with the Brave New World American Arts Festival. Not only will we be celebrating FCBD, but we will presenting our community with presentations of the other four American artforms: banjo, jazz, the mystery novel, and musical theater.

Gib Bickel (The Laughing Ogre, Columbus, OH): About the same as last year. Because of the holiday weekend, one of our slowest sales weekends of the year, we'll not be going above and beyond.

Christopher Butcher (The Beguiling, Toronto, Canada): Currently our plans for Free Comic Book Day 2004 are up in the air. While last year's event was an unqualified success, we remain unconvinced that the July 3rd date will allow us to draw enough staff, creative talent, or even customers (and potential customers) to make the event worth holding in the same way. Make no mistake, we're going to participate because any ideological differences aside, Free Comic Book Day is an incredibly important event for the industry as a whole, and one that's worthy of support. But at this point it looks as though our participation will be slightly more limited with the bulk of our free comics are going to support our promotions at upcoming literary festivals and non-comics related conventions where we'll be exhibiting.

Brad Bankston (Austin Books and Comics, Austin, TX): Order lower numbers than previous years but run the same amount of advertising. That would include an outdoor banner and an ad in the local indy paper in addition to flyers.

Brandon Huigens (Samurai Comics, Phoenix, AZ): We're, as we do every year, inviting several local small press creators to participate in FCBD by signing, sketching, and speaking about creating comics. It's a great way to introduce all comics readers to what's going on locally in comics, and it

gives a chance for aspiring creators to sit down and talk with people who are just a few steps ahead in the publishing world.

We're very proud to host local publishing guru and comics writer Brian Pulido, who'll be debuting his new line of horror books from **Avatar Press**. Again, it's important to involve our local comics creators because many new readers are just plain excited to talk to professionals, whether they work for **DC** or **Marvel** or self-publish black and white mini-comics, just as long-time readers are given a chance to sample new work that they don't normally pick up.

Brian Scot Johnson (Khepri.com): For the third FCBD in a row, **Khepri.com** will be taking comics to the people. For the second FCBD in a row, that involves a roadtrip and speaking tour.

Stephen L. Holland (Page 45, Nottingham, UK): Our plans are to order some comics from the non-primary sponsors and sell them at cost price, without ordering anything from the corporations.

Those are our plans. It's currently unclear whether we'll actually receive anything. Having contacted **Diamond UK** to ascertain whether we have to order the required number of copies of crap in order to receive something worth distributing (rather than becoming an official participant in FCBD, which we've no interest in), they hadn't a clue themselves. So we've ordered the good stuff and we'll just see if we're allowed anything, or whether the corporations' stranglehold on this industry really does go as far as preventing the proliferation of intelligent comics for intelligent readers.

Why are we selling them at cost price rather than giving them away? Are we just being mean? No, it's a decision based on experience:

When **Free Cerebus** was published, we campaigned hard. It increased the title's readership by precisely two. When **Cerebus Zero** was released at £1.25 we sold 600 over the period of a couple of months, which tripled the periodical's

readership in Nottingham and sold hundreds of TPBs on top of that.

Give something to someone for free and its perceived value is nil. Make someone pay a nominal fee, and they'll make the effort to read it, rather than pick it up then bin it.

Both **Dark Horse's** recent outreach programmes, offering **Conan #0** and the **Hellboy** reprint at a nominal cost, have likewise proved immensely popular, resulting in a substantial and diverse new readership.

Predictably enough — and we did predict it — none of **Marvel's** or **DC's** attempts have had produced more than a blip in sales for their titles or backlists. I don't know how many times I have to say this, but the market for superheroes is saturated, which is why we're not chasing that market. We're chasing the rest of the market, the 99% of the population who might conceivably be interested in something else, and since **Page 45's** sales have risen by an average of 10% per year for eight out of the nine years we've been open, I think we might just be on to something.

Ian Gould (Ace Comics and Games, Brisbane, Australia): We're hoping to have a creator appearance at our city store to tie in with a new title release but this is still subject to confirmation.

Our second store, **Comic Warriors** (in Annerley), will be putting on a swap-meet where people can bring their own books to sell and trade and will also be running demo **Heroclix** games.

Dan & Katie Merritt (Green Brain Comics, Dearborn, MI): First, we are going to throw the biggest party of the year. Free comics (heh!), free Jones Soda for the first 200+ folks through the door, and free entertainment supplied by local musicians The Smarties. And tables will be set up for a few of our local self-publishing pals to air their wares. This date will also be the second anniversary of our current location, certainly cause to throw extra streamers in the air. And finally, the street construction that is choking our local economy will be a thing of the past by July 3rd. All of these

elements coinciding on the same weekend will generate such a positive and powerful vibe, that all of the Metro-Detroit area will know the name of **Green Brain Comics**.

Rory Root (Comic Relief, Berkeley, CA): The store's plans for Free Comic Book Day are not completely finalized. We're just placing the orders this month for the books we'll be having on the day. We'll probably do pretty much what we did last year — outreach to the libraries and schools. Amanda Fisher, who runs **Muse Comics** in Montana, had an excellent suggestion of holding a contest between the schools to have the school that brings in the most newbies — new readers — to the store win a package of graphic novels for the school library. I think I'm going to borrow that fine idea from her.

We've often worked with the libraries here in their summer reading programs using comics from "Comics for Causes" (**Diamond**) and from **DC Comics** and **Viz Comics** to reward reader participation in the programs. Because Free Comic Book Day is a little early in the year for rewards for summer reading programs, we'll probably use this as some way to kick off that program for them. "Cover to Cover", which is the Berkeley's public library's multiple award winning summer readership program has partnered with us for the last seven years in building their brand for their event, and they're always happy to work with us when we have some opportunity to create feedback between the library and the store.

I think libraries, like Free Comic Book Day, do an awful lot to bring new readership into the fold. Again, if you were fairly sure you wouldn't like to read comics, but here it is for free in the library, and your friends are saying it's a good read, check it out. And one of the things you certainly find in libraries is people who like to read. So it's a good partnership for comics and for **Comic Relief**.

Also, through out the years, with Free Comic Book Day we've always had long-term customers — even brand new customers — decide to proselytize the shop and go out there and hand out flyers or bring a stack of comics over to a friend, to the local laundromat, or to a school. Last year, with the **Maharaja Donald Gemstone** reprint, several long-term

customers approached me and wanted thirty or forty copies each to hand out to friends, relatives, schools, and libraries near *their* houses, and though we normally limit people to one book each, if they were willing to pay the thirty-two cents it cost to get that book, we were willing to buy as many of them as they wanted. (The libraries and schools we paid for ourselves.) So I think it's something that, if fans want to get involved, there are certainly a number of opportunities for them to help the world of comics, and to help their favorite comic store do Free Comic Book Day even better than they already will.

Joe Ferrara (Atlantis Fantasyworld, Santa Cruz, CA):

We will concentrate on the books that will appeal to all ages — ***Teen Titans, Marvel Age Spider-Man, Mickey Mouse, Archie, Herobear*** and ***Star Wars***. the writer of the ***Star Wars*** comic, Hayden Blackman, will be in to sign them. We will give away a ***Spider-Man*** Heroclick to everyone who brings in a ticket stub from the *Spider-Man 2* film and have a grand prize drawing for an Alex Ross Spider-Man Lithograph. We will offer sale packs of ***Spider-Man*** back issues and let folks take their picture in front of a six foot tall Spider-Man statue.

We also partner with our local library.

Lee Hester (Lee's Comics, Mountain View, CA): I love Free Comic Book Day, and I will be ordering a large quantity of comics to give away. I think that the publishers should make the comics available free to the retailers. After all, these are free samples that we are giving away in order to get new readers for these publishers. One way to make Free Comic Book Day free for the retailers too would be to provide these books to us in quantities in proportion to our **Diamond** orders. Extra copies could be available to us at a nominal charge. I don't think it's right to ask comic dealers, the most undercapitalized segment of the marketplace, to pay for this promotion. I understand that some of the smaller publishers are undercapitalized as well, but I think that the larger "Gold Sponsors" at least should be able to shoulder the cost of this. It's a proven winner, and a wise investment.

Normally, July 3rd would be about the worst possible day to

choose for Free Comic Book Day. Since July happens to mark **Lee's Comics'** 22nd anniversary, I will be celebrating FCBD with a big sale. It will be our first one in nearly a year, so I expect to achieve fantastic results. I am more excited than ever about Free Comic Book Day.

Chris Powell (Lone Star Comics, Texas): We will be partnering with elementary, middle, and high schools to promote the event to students. We will also be distributing promotional flyers in over thirty movie theaters throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth, TX. area and other entertainment retailers which will allow us to target older teens and adults. We will have at least one or two creators touring the stores for signings that day, as well. Last, but not least, we will be contracting with a PR firm we've used in the past to help us attain television, radio, and print publicity and some mall appearances. These are all strategies that we have used in prior FCBDs, and have been very pleased with.

James Sime (Isotope, San Francisco, CA): Last year was so successful at getting people in the door, making them thrilled about comics, and bringing them back for more that I'm going to do exactly what I did last year. Jam-pack the store with cool comic book creators, hand out fistfuls of free books, and blow everyone's minds with how amazingly cool the San Francisco comic book scene is. It's hard not to get pumped up about comic books when the people who make them are hanging out and having a blast talking about comics, showing people what they love, giving advice to would-be creators, and sitting at the drafting table making more comics before your very eyes.

Free Comic Book Day 2004 ... I'm definitely looking forward to it!

I'd like to thank the following retailers/store managers for taking time out of busy schedules to participate in this roundtable.:

Ian Gould, **Ace Comics & Games**, 121-123 Queen Street, Brisbane, 4000, Queensland, Australia

Joe Ferrara, **Atlantis Fantasyworld**, 1020 Cedar St., Santa Cruz, CA 95060 (www.atlantisfantasyworld.com)

Brad Bankston, **Austin Books and Comics**, 5002 N. Lamar, Austin, TX 78751-2318 (www.austinbooks.com)

Christopher Butcher and Peter Birkemoe, **The Beguiling**, 601 Markham Street, Toronto, Canada (www.beguiling.com)

ATOM!, **Brave New World**, 23566 Lyons Ave #103, Newhall, CA 91321 (www.bravenewworldcomics.com)

Robert Scott, **Comickaze & AFC Studio**, 5525 Clairemont Mesa Blvd., San Diego, CA 92117-2342 (www.comickaze.com)

Rory Root, **Comic Relief**, 2138 University Ave, Berkeley, CA 94704 (www.comicrelief.net)

Chad Rivard, **Emerald City**, 2475-L McMullen Booth Rd., Clearwater, FL 33759 (www.emeraldcitycomics.com)

Cynthia and Kyle Puttkammer, **Galactic Quest**, 3370 Sugarloaf Parkway Suite D7, Lawrenceville, GA 30044 (www.galacticquest.com)

Dan & Katie Merritt, **Green Brain Comics**, 13210 Michigan Ave., Dearborn, MI (www.greenbrain.biz)

James Sime, **Isotope - The Comic Book Lounge**, 1653 Noriega St., San Francisco, CA (www.isotopecomics.com)

Brian Scot Johnson, **Khepri.com** (www.khepri.com)

Gib Bickel, **The Laughing Ogre**, 4258 North High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43214 (www.thelaughingogre.com)

Lee Hester, **Lee's Comics**, 1020-F N. Rengstorff Ave, Mountain View, CA 94043 (www.lcomics.com)

Chris Powell, **Lone Star Comics**, Texas (www.mycomicshop.com)

Stephen L. Holland, **Page 45**, 9 Market Street, Nottingham, NG1 6HY (www.page45.com)

Brandon Huigens and Mike Banks, **Samurai Comics**, 5024 N. 7th St., Phoenix, AZ 85014 (www.samuraicomics.com)

Matt Price, **Speeding Bullet Books & Comics/Ricochet Cafe**, 614 N. Porter Ave., Norman, OK 73071 (www.speedingbulletcomics.com)

Calum Johnston, **Strange Adventures Comic Bookshops**, 5262 Sackville Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada (www.strangeadventures.com)

LINKS TO VISIT

[Official Free Comic Book Day Site](#)



[Join the discussion at the Tartsville Message Boards](#)

[Send us your thoughts!](#)

[Home](#) | [Features](#) | [Columns](#) | [Culture Vultures](#) | [Report Card](#)
[Tart Store](#) | [Indicia](#) | [Contact](#) | [Archives](#)

© [Sequential Tart](#), 1998 - 2004