

Comic books big hit at Kotzebue

By MARGIE BAUMAN

KOTZEBUE—A line forms clear out into the hall every Wednesday as young readers come to check the new supply of comic books in Kotzebue's first bookstore.

While that may be somewhat of an irony to traveling utility consultant Keith Ragsdale, who opened the shop to provide the populace with something else to read, Ragsdale is pleased with the stir his shop has caused.

A huge order of children's books, shipped to him by accident, got things off to a roaring start.

Unaware that he had received the wrong order, Ragsdale had employes stock the shelves with everything from "Raggedy Ann" to "Little Tootle" and residents began snapping them up for their offspring.

The children followed in pursuit of comic books.

And, Ragsdale found, much to his surprise, that western novels are a big hit too in this predominantly Eskimo city of 2,400.

Ragsdale came to Kotzebue from Anchorage more than a year ago, to plan a functional, modern telephone system for the northwest area.

As he stayed in Kotzebue and his affection for the residents increased, Ragsdale was dismayed to find that there was nothing to read.

"There were guys with PhDs reading comic books," he said.

The reason was that this flourishing community, which has acquired a cable television system, modern hotel and several

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CHECKING OUT the new supply of comic books at Kotzebue's new bookstore are Harold Jessup, left, and Randy Walker, both 10. The shop got its big break when a book supply firm accidentally shipped in a large number of childrens books.

Photo By MARGIE BAUMAN

Kotzebue bookstore

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new stores in the past four years, had no bookstore.

So in February, Ragsdale's firm, RAI Associates Inc., rented space in the renovated Eskimo Building on the shores of Kotzebue Sound. By mid-March, they were open for business.

"The biggest draw in that bookstore is magazines," said Ragsdale, who said the shop carries everything from comics to Scientific America.

Just the other day, he said, he spotted two children outside the shop door.

"Let's go in and look at the comic books," said the first. "We were just in there this morning," his friend argued.

"Yeah, but maybe they got a new shipment in by now," came the reply.

As word of the bookstore spread, orders have even come by mail. Ricky Henry, 10, of Selawik, a community half an hour away by bush plane, wrote to request \$7 worth of comic books, advising that he'd return on the next plane those he had read before.

"Soon we'll need more floor space for greeting cards, records

and office supplies," Ragsdale said.

Meanwhile, he's also opened a bookkeeping and tax service behind the bookstore, to help local residents and businesses.

"We expect to provide a lot of help for fishermen," he said. "We're going to give customers a little book to log legally deductible expenses."

"Ninty-nine per cent of them are paying too much taxes," he said. By showing area residents how to keep good records of all legitimately deductible expenses, Ragsdale hopes to contribute in still another way to Kotzebue's enrichment.