



Booked: Owner Jeffrey Segal at his Mystic Journey Bookstore in Venice.

## New Chapter For Spiritual Bookstore

Owner says niche focus on mysticism may bring second site.

Jeffrey Segal has done something few bookstore owners have managed to do in recent years: expand.

Segal owns the **Mystic Journey Bookstore** in Venice. And since he opened the store five years ago, he said that he's grown sales each year, topping the \$1 million mark last year. So, last summer, he moved into a larger building just up Abbot Kinney Boulevard.

And Segal is not done. He's now scouting out Pasadena for what would be his second location.

So what's his secret? How has he managed to avoid the

fate of other venerable independent bookstores in Los Angeles County that have closed in recent years, including Cliff's Books in Pasadena, Dutton's Books in Brentwood and Valley Village, and Williams Books in San Pedro?

Segal said the answer is two-fold: He's focused on a niche audience with a committed fan base, and he sells a lot more than books. Besides spiritual texts and writings, Mystic Journey sells crystals, tarot cards, meditation and yoga paraphernalia, and music. Along with book signings, the store features appearances by psychics and astrologers.

"We're the one-stop shop for those seeking spiritual information and products," Segal said.

Another metaphysical shop, Bodhi Tree in West Hollywood, closed in late 2011 and went online.

"They were a more traditional bookstore, whereas for us, books are only about 50 percent of sales," he said.

Segal, a former insurance defense attorney, launched his bookstore in fall 2008 as the financial crash hit. He was then 50 and had just come through a years-long battle against testicular cancer that had spread to his lymphatic system. He decided against chemotherapy and chose alternative therapies, including acupuncture and energy healing. After he became cancer free, he took out a \$100,000 home equity loan to open the store and now has a loyal following.

"Nearly every day, people come up to me and tell me how grateful they are that a store like this exists, given what's going on with bookstores today," Segal said.

— Howard Fine

## List Website Hopes It Has Your Number

Ranker takes Yelp-like ratings beyond just hotels, restaurants.

Want to find a good sushi spot in Santa Monica? Yelp has you covered. Looking for the best beach resort in Maui? You'll probably start your search on online travel portal TripAdvisor.

But what if you're seeking online ratings not related to restaurants or hotels? The folks at **Ranker** want their site to be your Internet source, whether you're trying to figure out the best dressing to serve with your salad or need help choosing a new rolling suitcase for a business trip.

The company's founder,

Clark Benson, describes the site as a "Yelp for everything else" that allows users to make lists that rank anything from breakfast cereals to TV sitcoms. It combines these crowdsourced votes into "Ultimate Lists" that could be used to settle bar arguments or help determine what movie you want to watch tonight.

Ranker recently moved into the top 200 Internet sites ranked by visits, with a monthly audience of more than 7.5 million. The company employs 24 people at its L.A. office and Benson plans to fill six more positions soon. Ranker just moved from an eighth-floor suite to take all of

the fifth floor of a Miracle Mile high-rise.

Benson, who describes himself as a list fanatic, saw a void in the market for a site that ranks things outside of food and lodging. He had sold an earlier L.A. Internet business, eCrush, to **Hearst Corp.** in New York in 2006, and seeded



Benson

his latest venture with \$1 million of his own money.

Ranker launched in 2009 but grew slowly until Benson made the decision to allow casual visitors to vote on lists without having to register or log in to the site.

"That changed everything," he said.

— Matt Pressberg

## Sound Plan For Biking Enthusiasts

15-year-old peddles mounted stereo device that holds iPhone.

Benji Miller found it tricky to use his smartphone while riding his bike. The 15-year-old just wanted to listen to music on his way to school.

The Santa Monica teen noticed other cyclists struggling to steer with one hand and hold their smartphones with the other. So he created a bike mount with a speaker attached into that can hold an iPhone. Bikers wouldn't have to carry their phones to listen to them while riding.

That was two years ago. Since then, he made a prototype and is now fundraising

on Kickstarter. He launched his company, **Allo**, this month. He's also getting help from his dad — a partner at an L.A. accelerator.

"I wanted to create something that would allow people to easily and safely use all the functions of their smartphone on their handlebars," Miller said.

He has raised more than \$13,000 of the \$24,500 he needs to produce the Allo bike speaker. A small group of private investors paid for the prototype, Miller said, but he declined to state how much.

The company was founded two years ago and has a staff of two that includes his father, **Ron**, chief executive at West L.A. law firm **Disability Group Inc.** and a partner at Westwood tech accelerator **StartEngine**.

The Allo is made to hold



Geared Up: Benji Miller with Allo audio device.

the latest iPhone model, which slides into the case from the top. It clips onto the handlebars and is powered by two AA batteries. Benji Miller plans a retail price of \$49.99.

— Subrina Hudson

## Lawyer Takes His Case to the Whisky

Mark Sullivan is a senior litigation paralegal for Century City law firm **Cox Castle & Nicholson**. He's also the firm's resident rocker.

Earlier this month, Sullivan led the firm's two-year-old band, **Castle of Rock**, in a battle of the bands charity event at the **Whisky a Go Go** in West Hollywood.

The band, formed at the urging of firm partner **Preston Brooks**, was up against five bands from other local law firms for the event, called **Law Rocks**.

Sullivan, 50, the band's lead singer, wore leather pants and belted out tunes, includ-

ing "Mr. Brightside" by the Killers. He performed with four other firm employees and his 20-year-old son,



Sullivan

**Alexander**, on the keyboard.

Sullivan, who gets most of his stage time in as band leader at his Torrance church, said he was thrilled to play with his co-workers to raise money for the **Western Center on Law and Poverty**.

"That night was really a lot of fun," he said. "Everyone was really into it because it was for charity."

The firm and its band raised about \$12,000 for the legal services non-profit in

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CHARLES CRUMPLEY

Koreatown and won second place for overall talent.

Sullivan said runner-up status didn't dampen the mood — he was just excited to have played on a stage frequented by many great musicians before him.

"Playing such a historic venue was an absolute treat as a musician," he said.

### Out of the Past

When **David Charles** isn't running ad agency **KesselsKramer** in Chinatown, he is moonlight-



Real Life: David Charles, left, and Gary Baseman. Charles is holding Baseman's signature art figure Toby.

ing as a filmmaker.

His latest work with contemporary L.A. artist **Gary Baseman** is expected to be released during the Sundance Film Festival next year.

The film, "Mythical Crea-

tures," is a documentary about Baseman's journey to uncover how his parents survived the Holocaust in the Ukraine.

Charles, 33, met the artist after working with him on another short film. After hear-

ing the story of Baseman's parents two years ago, he decided to make a documentary out of it — one that also weaves in animation and performance art.

The two have butted heads on the creative direction of the film, but Charles said they have respect for each other's opinion and a solid creative partnership.

"We are really passionate about making this film a new beginning of how the Holocaust is told for the future generations of the world," he said.

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