

## WNYBAC: A New Chapter

by Mark Norris

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The past few weeks have been a particularly busy time for Rich Kegler and Carima El-Behairy, founders of the nonprofit Western New York Book Arts Collaborative (WNYBAC). Along with running their business, P22 Type Foundry—an internationally known, locally based computer font company—and raising two children, Rich and Carima have accepted the daunting challenge of renovating a downtown building and bringing a major conference to the area.

However, the couple seems positively exhilarated by the recent flurry of activity, particularly with the unveiling of the WNYBAC's permanent home, during Typecon 2008, an international typography conference held in Buffalo, July 15-20.

The ink is still fresh on the mortgage for the new Book Arts Center, located in the former Slotkin's department store at the intersection of Washington and East Mohawk streets, but the space is already taking shape. "We've chosen to stay in Buffalo," says Kegler, wiping plaster dust from his hands and looking around the building's now exposed first floor. "There's lots of really great things here, but there's also a lot people who grumble and say, 'Nothing's going on.' This is our chance to do something instead of saying, 'Wouldn't it be great if someone else did something.'"



Richard Kegler and Carima El-Behairy (photo by Rose Mattrey)

For three years, the WNYBAC has been quietly "doing something" for those with an interest in the printed form. Indeed, by hosting a series of bookmaking and print-related film screenings, workshops, and speakers, WNYBAC has been effectively sustaining and reviving interest for the printing arts in Buffalo.

Still, in a time when the notion that print is dead flows freely through cyberspace as accepted fact, one must wonder if book arts is simply a niche market or, worse, simply a cover for those with an interest in self-publishing.

“The resurgence and interest in the handmade and the tactile, from the indie-craft movement to scrapbooking, are all reactions to the computer where you can’t penetrate the surface,” says Kegler. “You can make all of these really cool things, but you’re not really touching them. There’s a lack of connection.”

### **Typecon 2008, July 15-20**

WNYBAC has partnered with the Society of Typographic Aficionados (SoTA) to bring Typecon 2008 to Western New York. An annual international conference that gathers some of the biggest names in typography, design, and printing together for a series of lectures, workshops, and tours, previous conferences have been held in Seattle, Boston, and New York. Pre-registration for the conference is required, but many of the events are open to the public. For more info, visit [typecon.com](http://typecon.com).

Some conference highlights:

#### **Tuesday, July 15, 8pm**

Hallwalls Cinema—Type-themed “Pecha Kucha Night”—an evening of mini-presentations from design legends and rising stars.

#### **Wednesday, July 16, 9pm**

Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum, North Hall—An Evening with Stefan Sagmeister: Things I Have Learned in My Life So Far. The world famous designer and creator of album cover art for the likes of Lou Reed, the Rolling Stones, and David Byrne shares his wisdom.

#### **Thursday, July 17, 8pm**

University at Buffalo, Center for the Arts—Opening Night Extravaganza, featuring Dutch design innovators NLXL.

#### **Friday, July 18, 8pm**

Albright-Knox Art Gallery—A lecture with German typographer and designer Erik Spiekermann, the co-founder of FontShop, the first mail-order distributor for digital fonts.

#### **Friday, July 18, 11pm**

Creating connections and creative collaborations is what the WNYBAC is all about. For its new headquarters, the group is preparing workspace facilities to be used by local high schools and colleges. In essence, WNYBAC is hoping to both educate the community and stamp out the “print is dead” theory one finely crafted letterpress edition at a time.

Along with a first floor museum, gift shop, and café, the Book Arts Center will contain rooms for printmaking and papermaking, offices for non-profit organizations, and a conference room for local businesses. Students from local colleges will be encouraged to use the center’s unique collection of hand-operated presses and extensive lead type archive.

“It’s always important for students to understand the beginnings of typography,” says Tony Rozak, associate professor of Visual Studies at the University at Buffalo. “There’s always that idea that whenever you work in a technology, you always go back to the older one to refresh the hands-on experience. There is a particular quality of beauty to metal type on paper which you can’t replicate in any other way. It instills a craftsmanship that is wonderful.”

Kegler and El-Behairy have already partnered with local high schools for after-school opportunities and field trips. While the building is still being renovated, the educational component of the Book Arts Center is firmly in place.

With this proposed influx of students, and a permanent home located in close proximity to the downtown public library and near public transit lines, the Book Arts Center promises to be a vibrant location for learning and artistry.

“It’s not only self-expression, but also literacy promotion,” says El-Behairy. “You can’t set up type without knowing how to read. You have to read what you’re doing and then translate it backwards to create a print copy. It helps promote the language skill that seems to be lacking and promotes the written word.”

While the idea of a self-sustaining print resource center seems novel, many major cities around the country currently host such businesses. The wildly successful Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) was just one example that the WNYBAC founders used as a business model. “They renovated three empty warehouses and turned it into a major

! Mohawk Place—Odiorne, the Seriffics, and ! draw,” says El-Behairy.  
! Etaoin Shrdlu.

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However, the success of MCBA alone was not enough to convince Kegler and El-Behairy to move forward with their venture. Ultimately, it was the fact that Buffalo’s rich printing history was on the verge on being forgotten and needed to be extended that inspired the couple to take on the challenge.

“At one point, we looked at moving out of Buffalo, but we decided, ‘Buffalo is a great place to live, let’s make it a little better,’” says El-Behairy. “Buffalo has such a great arts community, and this has been coming for a long time. It was just time for this to happen.”

For more info, visit [wnybookarts.org](http://wnybookarts.org).

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