

# VIVANT

## Section D



Publishers Rhoda Faust, left, and Dawn Dedeaux meet for the first time at recent autograph-signing party.

STAFF PHOTO BY BEVIL S. KNAPP

# They turned over a new leaf

By SHARON LITWIN  
Staff writer

**R**hoda Faust, owner of the Maple Street Book Shop, and Dawn Dedeaux, former editor of the New Orleans Museum of Art's Arts Quarterly magazine, have taken on the risks and thrills of one of the most unpredictable businesses there is — publishing.

Not only was each woman's decision made independently, they didn't even know each other until they met at an autograph-signing party for author S. Frederick Starr's new book, "New Orleans Unmasked," the result of Dedeaux's first venture into the publishing world.

As proof that there's plenty of room for both of them, Faust and Dedeaux have chosen works to publish that are completely different. For Faust, it is two works by Walker Percy; for Dedeaux, the book of gentle vignettes about New Orleans by the president of Oberlin College.

Entering the unpredictable world of publishing would seem to be a natural next step for both women, though. For Dedeaux, whose experience editing Arts Quarterly led her to crave the opportunity for more regional exposure, the choices were to leave New Orleans and edit materials for another museum, leave New Orleans and join a publishing house, or stay here and open her own.

"There was no other business I really wanted to go into," she says. "Yet I still loved New Orleans and felt so very com-

*In separate moves, two local women, one the owner of a book store and the other a former magazine publisher, have taken on the risks and thrills of one of the most unpredictable businesses: publishing.*

mitted to it. So I decided, instead of working for a publishing house outside New Orleans, I'd create one here. I really just had this feeling it would work; almost like a vocation."

Financing the venture was not easy. There were some very definite ups and downs, including a shaky early beginning involving the Louisiana World Exposition. Dedeaux had planned, she says, to use the profits from a series of world's fair prints and posters to start her publishing business. But even though the first print of the Wonder Wall was a success, LWE didn't purchase the remainder of the series in anything like the quantities she had anticipated, she says.

Still, Dedeaux says, even though that whole episode was a painful one, it was not without some positive aspects.

"I learned a lot about business and really quickly," she says. "I'd always been a brave, daring soul with a spirit that said, 'If you want to do it, you can do it.' But the experience with the fair really tamed me. . . . On the other hand, it was a way to get a very quick education."

Regrouping after the fair, Dedeaux

decided to create an advisory board for her venture. Most were friends. One was Fred Starr, former vice president of Tulane University and a great fan of the Crescent City.

"He told me about a series of essays he'd been working on about New Orleans," Dedeaux says. "It just made sense for it to be the first book I published. While I'm not singularly interested in just New Orleans books — I want to do national and international works as well — it just seemed right to publish that particular book in New Orleans."

But raising the capital for it was much more difficult than Dedeaux had imagined. Concerned that the book would be controversial and provocative, many New Orleanians were loathe to put their money into it, she says.

"I was able to raise only one-third of the budget. It took two years to complete the project and to do it, and I had to come up with the remainder of the money myself."

A deal was made with architect/artist Franklin Adams to create the inside artwork and with artist George Schmidt

to use a reproduction of one of his Mardi Gras paintings on the cover.

Now that "New Orleans Unmasked" is on the store shelves, Dedeaux is looking to future plans. One will involve working with the 1986 Vancouver world's fair as consultant for an American architectural firm wishing to publish a limited-edition commemorative book. But, she says firmly, she's going into that venture with a completely new perspective on dealing with world's fairs: "This time around I'm going to make sure there are up-front guarantees for advance orders."

And she has other plans, as well. "In addition to the Vancouver project, I'm negotiating to produce a book associated with the Napoleon exhibition coming to the Louisiana State Museum in 1987," she says. "And I'll be working on an anthology of 19th-century writers in collaboration with Fred Starr."

Rhoda Faust is trying to keep her new publishing house from being too big a gamble, too. Searching for manuscripts by well-known authors that can be published in limited editions is her way of doing it.

A second-generation bookseller in the city, Faust grew up working with her mother, Mary Stuart Kellogg, and her aunt, Rhoda Norman, in their Maple Street Book Shop. She doesn't recall the after-school chore with particular affection. "In fact, I hated it," she says.

But a couple of college years away from the shop, followed by a period she

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describes as "hippie years making sandals on Decatur Street," and then a six-month sojourn on Okinawa gave her the distance she needed to return with a different perspective on selling books.

"My mother and aunt wanted to take a vacation," she says. "And when I came home, I realized my place was in the shop." In 1970, Faust bought out her mother and has been running her shop on Maple Street ever since.

Her interest in publishing was really piqued, she says, when two of her friends, writers Chris Wiltz and Marigny Dupuy, talked about how discouraging it was that all local writers had to go to Northern publishers in order to be published.

"They thought that was a sin," Faust says. "And they felt with my business experience and my contacts, I would be a natural to

start something here. I thought, well, let's start big. So I called Walker Percy.

"He was so very supportive. He said he would reread his own first work with an eye to publication, and then told me to go read Loyola University's New Orleans Review, which had excerpts of John Kennedy Toole's 'A Confederacy of Dunces.'"

The work so impressed Faust that she contacted Thelma Toole, the late author's mother. They hit it off immediately. Faust tried to raise the necessary funds to publish the book but, like Dedeaux, ran into difficulties with that first effort. Louisiana State University Press, also negotiating with Percy about a manuscript, expressed interest in "A Confederacy of Dunces." Rather than hold up publication of Toole's work, Faust stepped aside.

Faust says that she and Thelma Toole then discussed the future publication of John Kennedy Toole's first book, "The Neon Bible." But after Mrs.

Toole's death in 1984, the book became a part of the estate and its publication rights are now the subject of litigation.

Undaunted, Faust regrouped. She incorporated herself as Faust Publishing Company and attempted to interest investors once again.

"But after a year of being no good at raising money, I realized it's because I hate it," she says. "So I decided to do my own publishing on a shoestring. It's probably because, in fact, I don't really want any investors breathing down my neck."

Faust's first product is a small volume by Walker Percy titled "Diagnosing the Modern Malaise." Each of the 250 limited-edition, clothbound volumes is handmade by Lord John Press, a small press in California. And each is signed by the author.

Thus far, Faust has not placed the volumes in book stores. "I'm trying not to go through dealers with this book," she says. "In fact, the only store other than mine carrying the book is Walker

Percy's daughter's shop in Covington. I'm trying to sell directly to collectors through advertising.

"It's hard work that way. It means me sitting in front of the television watching 'Barnaby Jones' every night addressing labels. But it's straight profit, and it is fun."

Faust's next project is the publication of another speech by Percy. "It's the speech that was given on the occasion of the inauguration of the Eudora Welty chair at Millsaps College," she says. "Eudora Welty has written an afterword and will sign it along with Walker Percy."

Faust has plans to publish other works including those of Linda Hobson and Ellen Gilchrist. But right now she's moving slowly, pleased with what she's accomplished thus far.

"Once collectors see the books they really want them," she says. "They really are gorgeous and, I have to admit, I am proud of them."