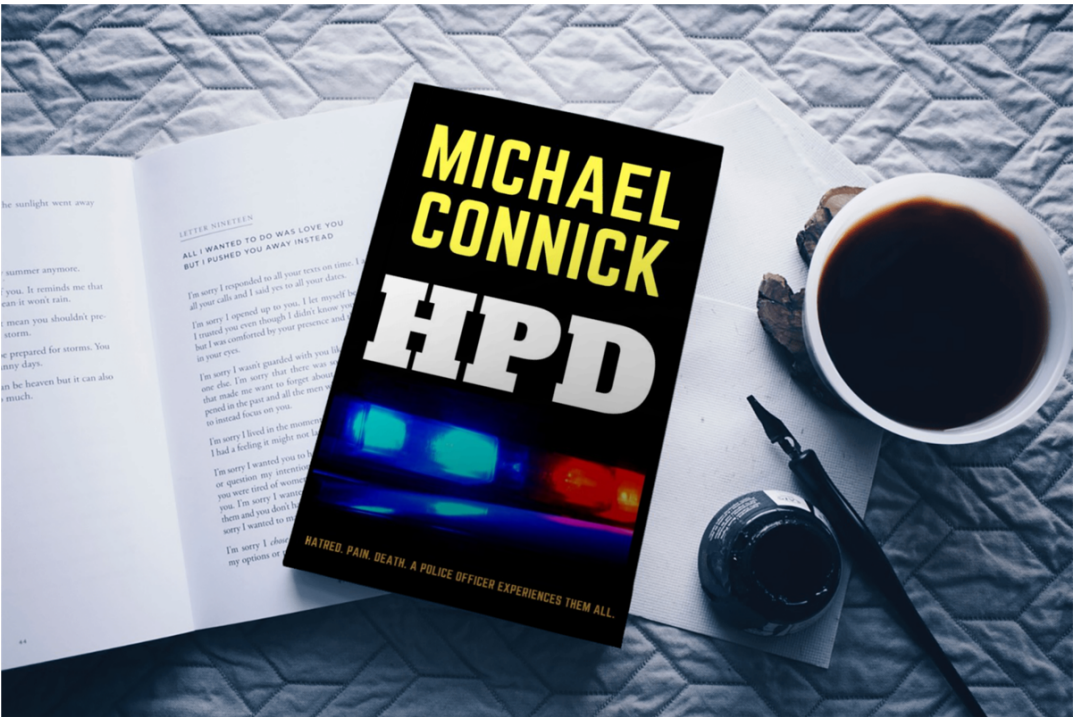


Ashland area has role in new crime novel

LEE WARD | THE DAILY INDEPENDENT 14 hrs ago



Michael Connick's book "HPD," as well as his spy novels, "Trapped in a Hall of Mirrors," "Funhouse Mirrors" and "Afghan Mirrors," are available from Amazon in paperback or Kindle formats. Paperbacks also are available from the Books-A-Million website and The Inner Geek in Huntington. He will present a read Wednesday at Cicada Books in Huntington. For a personally inscribed copy, visit michaelconnick.com.

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ASHLAND Local author Michael Connick's latest book was a challenge, he admits.

"'HPD' was more of a stretch for me since all of my experience with law enforcement was definitely secondhand," the 72-year-old Huntington writer said.

His previous Cold War spy novels drew on his experiences working as a civilian employee with the U.S. Navy at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Dahlgren, Va.

The novel is set in Huntington, with a crucial character who lives in Ashland.

Q: How did you get the idea for this book?

A: I have been involved in handgun competitions for many years. The specific type of contest I compete in is called “action pistol.” It’s the closest type of competition to being in a real gunfight and involves shooting on the move, engaging multiple targets, reloading on the move, shooting around barriers and shooting from awkward positions — all against a timeclock. Law enforcement officers who want to bring their shooting skills up to a high-level often compete in this sport. Thus, over the years, I’ve come to know many of whom I met in the competitions or in training sessions.

What I quickly learned from my associations with them is that cops love to tell stories and they have some great tales to tell. Only a minimal amount of encouragement is required to get them to tell fascinating stories about their lives on the job. Over time, I had collected quite a few and thought they would help to create a very realistic crime novel. I was also getting a real feel for the day-to-day life of a cop.

So, I decided to write a police procedural/crime novel/mystery and weave the stories and experiences I’d picked up into the book. It would be set in my hometown of Huntington and I’d try and make the city itself something of a character in the book.

In addition, I shared my project with some local police officers who answered all my exhaustingly detailed questions on such trivia as proper radio procedure. One of them even read early sections of the book. I asked him to review it with the eye of a serving HPD officer and honestly tell me about anything that seemed inaccurate or differed from the real life of a Huntington cop.

“HPD” is the result and I’m quite happy with it. I think it’s as authentic a tale as I can manage. Many of the incidents, my protagonist, a Huntington patrol officer named Ethan Miller, encounters are based on real incidents. Of course, there are parts completely made up by me, but all of them are as close to being realistic as I could manage. I’m something of a nut on authenticity in my fiction.

Q: Have you ever been in law enforcement yourself?

A: No. I worked with the intelligence community and the Department of Defense, but I have never been a serving police officer.

Q: How long did it take to write?

A: In the past, my spy novels have taken me four to six months to complete. This was due to the fact that I had actually worked with the intelligence community and didn’t have to do all that much research. “HPD” took me a full year to write, in addition to the years I had spent collecting the stories from cops that make up many of the incidents in the book.

Q: How did the HPD receive the book?

A: I actually don't know. I gave an advanced copy to Chief Dial, but never got any comments back from him. It's only been out for a few weeks now, so it's really too early to tell what HPD officers may think of it. I think it is a pretty positive representation of the department. It was never my intention to bash the HPD in any way. Perhaps because it's written from the perspective of a patrol officer, the upper management of the department isn't portrayed all that positively, but every one complains about their bosses, don't they?

Q: You talk about alcoholism in a way probably most would identify with, but especially cops. Why did drinking figure so prominently?

A: One thing I've become aware of in my relationship with cops, especially street cops like my protagonist, is just how draining the job can be. Over time the world turns into just cops and (expletive). Street cops deal with people at their worst, day after day. No one ever calls the police to tell them how great their life is going.

A logical response to this isolation and constant pressure is to seek some kind of relief, and alcohol is one of the most socially acceptable ways of providing it. The "Choir Boys" sessions mentioned in the book really happen, and not just in Huntington. I ... didn't set out to feature alcoholism in the novel, but it just evolved that way as the pressures of the job and his marital difficulties increased on Ethan. It just seemed to be a natural progression and added to the arc of conflict that the story evolved into.

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