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BOOKS

SUNDAY
PLUS

'Divorce ranches,' Hoffa and witchcraft

Author series arrives in October

Special to Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Big changes are afoot with the Author Spotlight Series, which expands to three events headlined by best-selling writers and hosted by the Friends of the Library of Collier County. The three intimate talks and book signings in October, November and April are a chance to meet the authors while helping the nonprofit Friends group raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for Collier County's public libraries. This year, a special discounted series ticket is available exclusively to members of the Friends. (Details are in the info box.)

The 2025-26 Author Spotlight Series will feature:

- **Sarah Penner**, a Southwest Florida favorite whose latest romantic, supernatural novel is "The Amalfi Curse," on Thursday afternoon, Oct. 9;

- **Lew Paper**, the acclaimed author of several nonfiction books, turns to fiction-based-on-fact for his novel "Legacy of Lies," about the still-unsolved disappearance of labor leader Jimmy Hoffa, on Thursday afternoon, Nov. 6; and

- **Rowan Beaird**, whose debut novel "The Divorcées," which is set at a 1950s Reno, Nevada, divorce ranch, was praised by People magazine as a "rol-

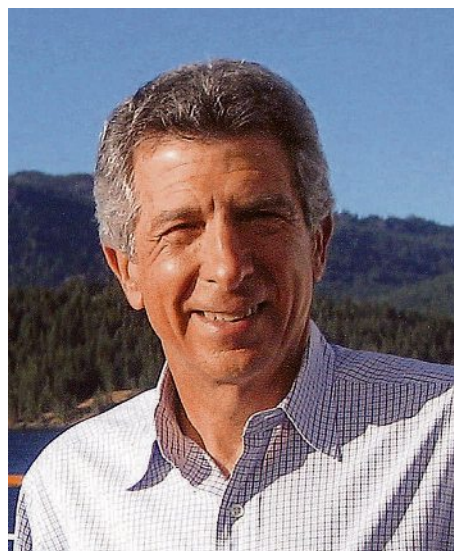


Sarah Penner, author of "The Amalfi Curse," will speak on Oct. 9, in the Author Spotlight Series of the Friends of the Library of Collier County, at The Norris Center in Naples. LINDA FOOTE/PROVIDED BY VICKY BOWLES

licking thriller," on Thursday afternoon, April 9.

Events are held at The Norris Center, the former longtime home of the Gulfshore Playhouse, located at the southern end of Cambier Park near downtown Naples.

The members-only series ticket to all three events is \$150, a significant savings over buying an individual ticket to each speaker. Seating will be general admission, and tickets are selling quickly. Each talk will be followed by a Q-



Lew Paper, author of "Legacy of Lies," will speak in the Friends of the Library of Collier County's Author Spotlight Series on Nov. 6 at The Norris Center in Naples. JAN PAPER/PROVIDED BY VICKY BOWLES

and-A and a book signing. (See info box for details on dates, times and all ticket prices.)

Author Sarah Penner returns

Sarah Penner, who was the very first Author Spotlight speaker when the series launched in 2022, returns in October to kick off this year's expanded series. She's now published three best-selling novels — "The Lost Apothecary," which sold over 1 million copies worldwide, "The London Séance Society" and, earlier this year, "The Amalfi Curse."

Known for her exotic locales and for weaving the occult and mysticism into her compelling plots, Penner has set "The Amalfi Curse" along the Italian coast, in Positano and that "other" Naples.

With a rumbling Mount Vesuvius in the background, Penner's dual timeline

Friends of the Library's Author Spotlight Series

What: Author lectures that are a fundraiser by the Friends of the Library of Collier County

Where: The Norris Center, 755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples

When: All events begin at 2 p.m. and book signings follow each lecture: **Sarah Penner**, Oct. 9; **Lew Paper**, Nov. 6; and **Rowan Beaird**, April 9

Cost: A special offer only for current members of Friends of the Library of Collier County is a series ticket to see all three authors for \$150. Otherwise, single tickets are \$55 for each lecture for current members of the Friends; \$65 per lecture for nonmembers. All seating is general admission. Friends memberships begin at \$40/year and also provide exclusive access and discounts to many other programs throughout the year.

Purchase tickets and become a member:

Go to <https://collier-friends.org/>. If events sell out, a waiting list will be kept. Email Marlene Haywood, the Friends' Program Director, at mhaywood@collier-friends.org or call 239-262-8135.

features a modern-day archeologist trying to recover a cache of jewels her father spotted at the bottom of the Mediterranean off Positano shortly before he died. Then, looking back to the 1820s, the novel introduces the Amalfi Coast's beautiful and compelling red-haired "strega del mare" — sea witches — who used their spells to whip up the sea and protect their village from pirates and criminals.

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BOOKS

SUNDAY PLUS

Ronson

Continued from Page 17E

But the lack of planning became Ronson's first opportunity to play DJ at the age of 10.

Having sat with Jones in their home studio, Ronson understood the language of digital sound meters, tape machines, and knobs and faders, as well as the importance of reading the room.

All it took was Jones to say, "Mark, go put something on," and young Ronson rifled through cassettes, including Taj Mahal and Robert Cray, before finding the perfect wedding song: Eric Clapton's "Wonderful Tonight."

As he watched the new couple slow dance to Clapton's love song, Ronson had one thought: "For the first time in my life, I knew I'd done something right."

Ronson worried about his 'chemical escape'

Ronson's stretch of crate-digging in New York clubs, including the Den of Thieves, Roxy, Palladium and Life unleashed the exhilaration of getting a crowd to dance in the hours most people were sleeping.

Whether spinning De La Soul and underground hip-hop or mixing AC/DC with Biggie Smalls, Ronson both reveled in the auditory stimulation with fellow vampires and slipped into the dangers of too many dark rooms. Light, for night people, was "kryptonite to good vibes."

Ronson realized he was treading dangerous territory by "mixing drugs like cocktails" and recalls the night he "took heroin by accident" because no passed bag of powder was ever questioned.

Gigs at the after-hours club Save the Robots and the Chelsea nightclub Tunnel "drove me to chemical escape," Ronson writes, citing a night he mixed ecstasy with cocaine. His chest immediately tightened and his

arm went numb.

"Could I be having a stroke at 20?" he remembers thinking. Friends drove him home and tended to him during the episode, which caused Ronson to contemplate his burgeoning addiction.

"I was lucky that somehow I never got completely swallowed up by those currents, as some did," he recalls.

Ronson recalls an intimidating Sean 'Diddy' Combs

The New York club scene also attracted major names who might waltz into the building with their crew and Ronson summons stories about being in rooms with Prince (no Michael Jackson was allowed on the playlist), Biggie Smalls ("like a visit from the pope"), Jay-Z (an "assured, magnetic presence") and Aaliyah (whose giggle was "warmer than the LA sun").

Ronson's gig at the El Flamingo produced a visit from a then-ascendant hip-hop producer known at the time as Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs, who strode in "wrapped in white fur" and wearing shades.

"He scanned the room like a CEO inspecting a failed local branch and cocked his head at me as if to say, 'Puff Daddy's now in your ... little party. You're welcome.'"

Ronson hustled to play music he thought would please the intimidating figure — Frankie Beverly, Chaka Khan, and Mary J. Blige.

As Ronson spun, Puff Daddy (aka the Sean "Diddy" Combs, who's awaiting sentencing in a Brooklyn detention center) walked to the DJ booth and waved a \$100 bill at Ronson "like I was meant to park his Rolls."

Ronson politely demurred the money twice until Combs barked at him with an expletive to take the money.

As Ronson remembers, Combs' energy "transformed dead rooms into pure revelry." But also, "something in that power hinted at combustion."

Books

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Low Paper offers Hoffa mystery novel

The second Author Spotlight speaker, Low Paper, presents a mystery of a different kind in his novel, "Legacy of Lies," which imagines what really happened that day 50 years ago when controversial labor leader Jimmy Hoffa vanished in a Detroit suburb. Hoffa has never been found, and no one has confessed to killing him or disposing of his body.

Reviewers called Paper's speculation about Hoffa's fate captivating, masterful, intriguing and creative. "Legacy of Lies" was named a finalist for Best Thriller by the National Indie Excellence Awards.

Paper, a retired Washington, D.C., attorney who now lives in Naples, is known for his nonfiction books such as "In the Cauldron: Terror, Tension, and the American Ambassador's Struggle to Avoid Pearl Harbor" and "Perfect: Don Larsen's Miraculous World Series Game and the Men Who Made It Happen."

Beaird debut novel made 2024 best-of lists

Closing out the series in April will be Chicago-based writer Rowan Beaird with her entertaining debut novel "The Divorcées," which landed on numerous best-of-the-year lists for 2024. Her second novel, "Tenderness," will be published in June 2026.

For "The Divorcées," Beaird takes us back to the 1950s, when women had few ways to escape an unhappy marriage. One way out was to establish temporary residence at a Reno, Nevada, "divorce ranch." There, Beaird's heroine, Lois, spends her days riding horses and flirting with cowboys — until a new ranch resident opens her eyes to the possibilities of an independent life on her own terms.

Reviewers praised the novel's "age-



Rowan Beaird, author of "The Divorcées," will speak as a part of the Author Spotlight Series of the Friends of the Library of Collier County, at The Norris Center in Naples. PROVIDED BY VICKY BOWLES/FAITH KELSEY PHOTOGRAPHY

less themes" and the "poignant coming-of-age story," calling it "moody, sexy and mysterious."

Attending the Author Spotlight Series at The Norris Center is an opportunity to spend the day in Naples' Fifth Avenue South district, enjoying lunch and shopping before or after the event.