

Lancaster author shines at small press

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ThisWeek Contributor



Justine Wittich

Genre fiction author Justine Wittich, a Lancaster resident, has found a creative home with Five Star Publishing, a small press whose focus is the library market.

"I'm having fun," she recently told *ThisWeek*, "writing whatever type of story grabs my imagination -- romance, suspense, mystery, historical settings."

Family Matters, the author's latest from Five Star's Expressions line, is already garnering praise. Harriet Klausner of AllReaders.com described the novel as "a bewitchingly strong suspense story." Susan Lantz of America Online's Romance Fiction Forum wrote, "*Family Matters* will keep you on the edge of your seat. There is no letup in the action until the surprising ending." With its DEA agent-hero and Mafia widow-heroine, the book's plot is a far cry from Wittich's southeastern Ohio life.

"*Family Matters* is a flight of imagination for me," the author explained. "I simply started with the idea that this woman was in hiding and found a body. Then the 'what if' questions I asked myself simply amazed me. Miraculously, they fell into place!"

Wittich, who wrote her first romance in high school, held a variety of jobs in journalism and radio before selling her first novel.

"Even as a little girl, I was always going to write books," she said, smiling. "Silly me, I thought writers were so scarce that publishers fell at their feet in delight."

Avalon Books, her first publisher, is another small press that targets libraries.

"Avalon books don't contain any swearing or sex scenes, and many libraries watch this carefully," the author said. "Five Star publishes a wider range of fiction with far fewer restrictions on content."

One of the benefits of working with a small press is feeling part of a creative family. This is something Wittich -- whose own family includes her husband Pete, her Columbus-based daughter Mariana, and her two allergy-prone cats -- can appreciate.

"Five Star is published by Thorndike Press, the large-print people," she said, "and every year they have Author Day, where everyone with a book out that year is invited to Thorndike, Maine, for a tour of the facility, lobster and blueberry pie for lunch, and then a mass book-signing for the people who work there. I've been twice, and it's marvelous to meet the people who do the actual production of your book."

Wittich has seven books in print, including the historical romantic suspense novels, *Chloe and the Spy* and *The Shocking Miss Shaw*. She's spoken on writing at Ohio libraries and is an active member of Central Ohio Fiction Writers (COFW), the local chapter of Romance Writers of America.

The author will be joining best-selling romance author Stella Cameron and others at two open-to-the-public book-signings connected with COFW's annual conference in October.

"The romance genre is probably responsible for keeping many women sane," Wittich said. "Focusing on the conflicts and relationships in a romance can take readers' thoughts away from overwhelming worries in their own lives."

As always, she looks forward to meeting fans at the Oct. 2 and 3 multi-author book-signings.

"Romance readers are the nicest people in the world," she said.

What: Justine Wittich, author of *Family Matters*, will sign copies of her romantic suspense novel at two multi-author book-signings.

When & Where: Saturday, Oct. 2, from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Radisson Hotel Columbus-Worthington (7007 N. High St., Worthington) and Sunday, Oct. 3, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Upper Arlington Barnes & Noble book store (3280 Tremont Road, Columbus).