MARCH 2025

CASA COASTER

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Who will he kill next?

Author pens Florida thrillers in the north tower amidst poolside distractions

"I play tennis, I play golf and I write novels"



MYSTERY MAN

Add crime thriller novelist to the list of Casa Costa's most accomplished residents. At 29 books and counting, Tom Turner of the north tower pivoted from flipping high-end homes to publishing murder mysteries based in Palm Beach County.

Born in New Hampshire and raised in New York City, Mr. Turner spent years vacationing in Palm Beach before eventually settling here in the summer of 2023. Over the years, he has lived in many iconic Southern towns – Charleston, Savannah, Palm Beach, Delray Beach – and each has served as the setting for his novels. The most popular series begins with Palm Beach Nasty. Published ten years ago, it kicks off with someone hanging from a banyan tree. Each installment (18 so far) features Detective Charlie Crawford, a homicide cop from Manhattan who transferred to the upscale Florida town and investigates the wealthy and dangerous.

The author's professional journey began when he dropped out of college at age 20 and bought a bar in Vermont. Years later, he got his degree and a job at a top advertising agency on Madison Avenue before he caught the real estate bug.

Mr. Turner married and made millions building and renovating nearly 30 homes on Long Island and Jupiter Island in the 2000s as the economy surged. But he was left with too many unsold mansions when the Great Recession hit in 2008, and the crash wiped him out.

He was drawn to Charleston's charm after attending a wedding there and he relocated. He arranged smaller real estate deals and wrote his first novel. He found a literary agent who specialized in crime novels who sold it to a major publisher and Mr. Turner earned a 20% royalty of its retail sales – the standard rate for authors in traditional publishing.

"I immediately embraced self-publishing," he said. "It once had a bad reputation, but the numbers are much more lucrative for authors." For a majority of books since his first experiment, he uses independent experts to edit, design cover art and publicize, and then sells digital and paper copies on Amazon, keeping 70% of sales. He recently hired voice actors to create audiobooks of his collection.

"There are no barriers to writing

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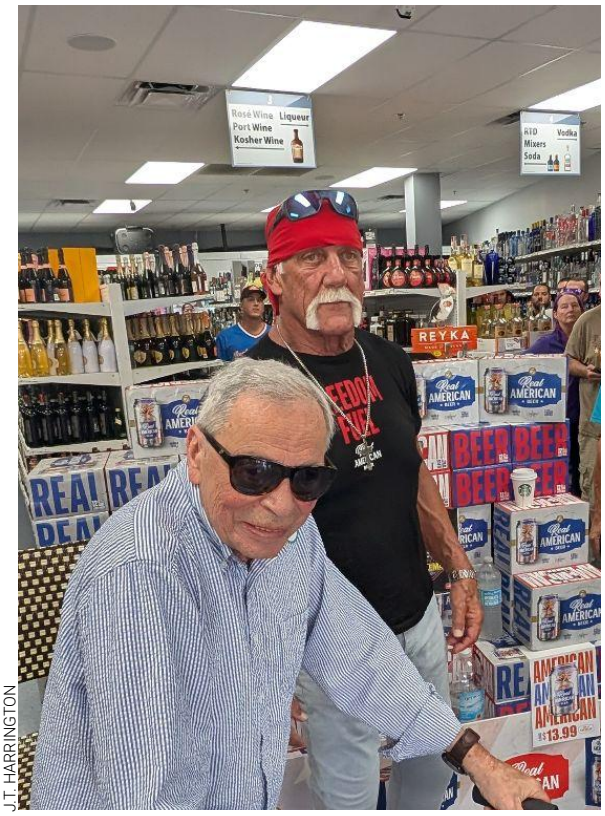
Legends unite



J.T. HARRINGTON

BOYNTON-MANIA RUNS WILD: Donnie Mann, the nonagenarian pro wrestling fan from the south tower, ventured to a liquor store in West Boynton Beach on Feb. 19 to meet Hulk Hogan and buy an autographed 12-pack of the retired athlete's new brand of beer.

INSIDE

CASA COASTER INVESTIGATES
What happened to the Mangrove Nature Park? **A6**

Tom Turner thriller debuted at No. 1

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these days," he says. "Anyone can be an author, which also means most of the stuff out there is crap."

But not just anyone has Mr. Turner's dedication to his craft. He follows a strict writing schedule, working on his MacBook Pro six to seven hours a day. He admits to being eagerly distracted during his writing sessions by bikinis at the Casa Costa pool or otherwise: "If someone calls me to go golfing, I go," he said.

> In Tom Turner's Palm Beach, for every hedge fund billionaire and art dealer, there are more con artists, snipers and gangs.

When he moved to South Florida, he joined the St. Andrews Club, which is 2 ½ miles south of Casa Costa. "That's all I do: I play tennis, I golf, I write novels. I wake up looking forward to writing. It's not a job."

Despite the do-it-yourself approach, Mr. Turner has developed a loyal following. He releases new books during prime time in South Florida to take advantage of the larger in-season population. In his latest novel, *Palm Beach Rogues*, a gang of thieves targets Palm Beach's wealthiest residents. It opened as Amazon's No. 1 mystery/suspense title and No. 3 police procedural; a month later it was still in the Top 30.

He already has six more completed novels ready to release, and he's deciding which one is next. Mr. Turner revealed to the *Casa Coaster* that one of them opens with an HOA president lying face down in the condo's pool. The author promised that the plot wasn't inspired by any recent experiences, but chuckled and noted that Casa Costa is his first foray into condominium living.

"People ask me if they should read the books in a certain order," he said. "My publicist tells me to recommend in the order they came out, but I think my writing has gotten better, so I say there's no right sequence. Each story stands on its own, even though the main characters are the same."

Mr. Turner grew up reading the American classics, plus works by well-known Florida-themed novelists like John D. MacDonald and Carl Hiaasen. He says readers are drawn to the Palm Beach landmarks and restaurants he incorporates.

Mr. Turner, now single, has two daughters living in New York City, one grandson and a granddaughter on the way.

His deep knowledge of law and order comes from watching *Law & Order*, as well as from conversations with police officers along the way, bringing authenticity to his thrilling plots. Sometimes he names characters after real-life friends (with their permission) and his villains are often composites of people in the news.

"The bad guys are never based on one person, so I don't get sued," he said, pondering. "Actually sue me – I'd love the publicity."

His brand of pulp fiction is nuanced while the crimes, victims and suspects are colorful: so far, a Russian oligarch, a pro football player, a double-homicide at Mar-a-Lago, a brutal realtor killing spree, a former porn king, a gambling addict, a deathly plunge from a penthouse and a sex cult. In Mr. Turner's Palm Beach, for every hedge fund billionaire and art

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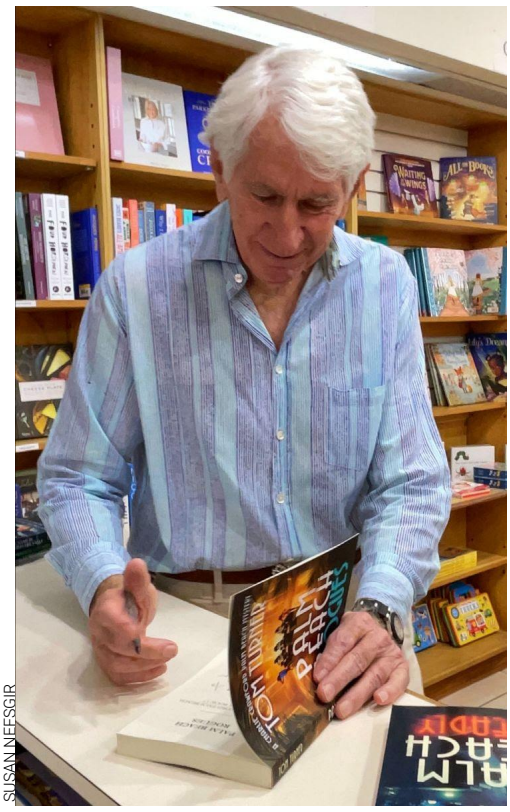
J.T. HARRINGTON

FLORIDA MAN KILLING IT: Primarily writing in his second bedroom in the north tower (above), mystery novelist Tom Turner has developed a loyal fanbase. In January, he signed books at The Palm Beach Bookstore (below).



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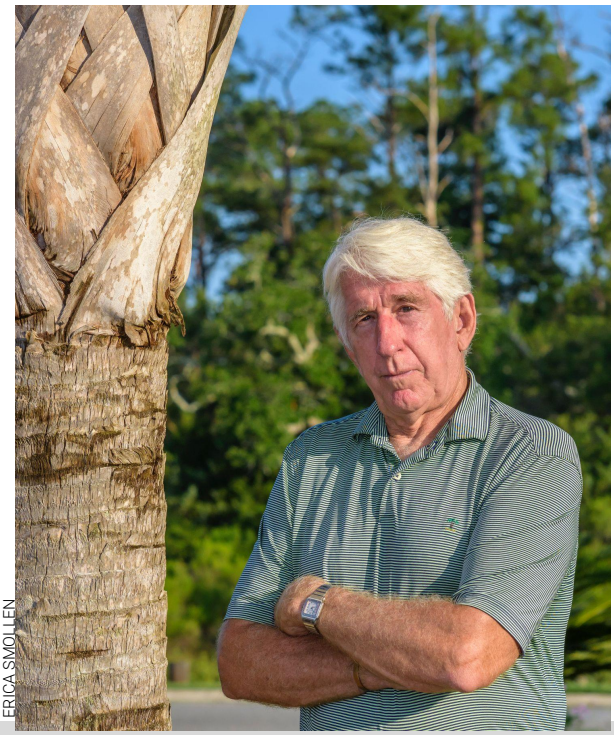

ERICA SMOLLEN

Turner kills on the golf course too

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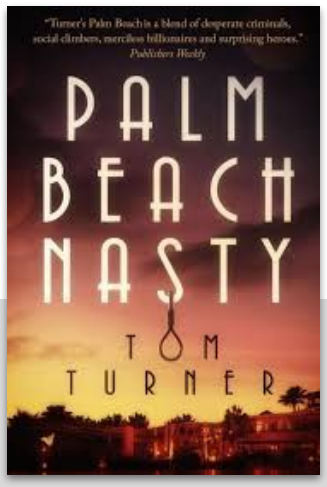
dealer, there are more con artists, snipers and gangs.

Two years ago, Mr. Turner set the story 20 miles south of his typical scene and published *Delray Deadly*. A young retiree finds his friend shot dead by an unseen sniper on the fifth hole of a golf course, propelling him to investigate the darker corners of Atlantic Ave.

In Delray Beach, Charlie Crawford wasn't on the case, and the author's publicist suggested that he stick to the mean streets of Palm Beach, where his readers crave the next installment. Twice Mr. Turner has been close to locking in a television adaptation for his stories; a city ban on shooting film within Palm Beach killed the latest one. Readers note that his compelling characters and dialog-heavy exposition would translate well to the screen. CC

Visit TomTurnerBooks.com



Interrogate the crime thriller author on April 14.

The Social Committee has organized a book read of *Palm Beach Nasty*, the thriller that started it all, culminating in a "Meet the Author" session on **Monday, April 14** in the club room. The evening offers a chance to dive into the world of juicy crime fiction, ask the author questions about his writing process and gain insight into the mind behind the gripping stories. Make a certain impression and Tom Turner might make you famous!

Get the book on Kindle free till March 24. RSVP for the event at *casacostabb.com/events*

LETTER TO THE PUBLISHER

New mayor faced tough questions, wants more

During my campaign, I met with dozens of communities across Boynton Beach, but the residents of Casa Costa stood out. Your questions were some of the most thoughtful, well-researched and, frankly, toughest I faced.

Whether you voted for me or not, I'm here to serve you with the fresh perspective our city has desperately needed. I look forward to sitting down with your group again at your next invitation.

Thank you for challenging me. I won't let you down.

REBECCA SHELTON
Ms. Shelton was elected mayor of Boynton Beach for a three-year term this month.

CASA.COASTER.NEWS@GMAIL.COM

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

EST. 2022

CASA COASTER
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SOUTH FLORIDA'S
#1 POOLSIDE AMUSEMENT

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CASACOSTA SOCIAL

CONDO BITES



Faux Gras

2 cups chopped onions, sautéed to caramelize (really close to being burnt)

4 hard boiled eggs

1 cup chopped walnuts

1 cup peas, well drained

Salt (to taste)

1. Put everything into a food processor
2. Blend it all together really well to look just like real chopped liver

When I was asked to share a recipe, my first thought was, "I don't really cook that much." But I remembered the vegetarian chopped liver I brought to a recent neighborhood gathering – the one that disappeared quickly and got so many compliments.

I first made it for a plant-based spin on a classic dish, without losing the savory flavors that make the original so beloved. A blend of vegetables, nuts and seasonings, the dish brings comfort and nostalgia, especially during Passover, when tradition is front and center.

If you're looking for a flavorful, meat-free alternative to a classic, this one just might surprise you! – Roberta Mann

Poolside mingling becomes official event series

We're kicking off a new monthly tradition – a relaxed evening with neighbors on the last Thursday each month at 5 p.m. starting March 27.

Connect, laugh and build lasting friendships on the pool terrace – whether you're a long-time resident or you just moved in. RSVP and bring your favorite beverage.

BOYNTON BEAT

Rebecca Shelton elected mayor in decisive victory

Boynton Beach citizens voted Rebecca Shelton into city hall after her polished campaign for better transparency and cleaner streets. She never mentioned the issue, but she is the first female mayor in city history.

By winning 56% of votes cast, Ms. Shelton avoided a runoff with fellow candidate Court McQuire, who garnered just over half the votes she earned at 28.4%.

The motivation to avoid a costly runoff was among the topics the mayoral candidates discussed at a 90-minute interview held in the club room last month. The *Casa Coaster* later endorsed Ms. Shelton as she lives seven blocks away and also agreed with us to find a meaningful role for Mr. McQuire, whose passion and business savvy the event organizers admire alongside Ms. Shelton's.

She succeeds Ty Penserga, who won three years ago by a similar margin. Term limits barred him from running this time around.

Voter turnout was 11.7% and Ms. Shelton won the majority by 330 votes, underscoring the outsized influence of an engaged electorate in local politics.

Candidates Golene Gordon and David Merker won 12% and 3.6%, respectively. *CC*



JOHN BATTISTA

MEET THE PRESS: Last month Rebecca Shelton answered 90 minutes of questions on FPL, a shuttered mangrove park, red light cameras and decades-delayed downtown development.

MR. B'S NEIGHBORHOOD



Boynton Beach and its surrounding areas feature a variety of parks and walking trails that showcase Florida's natural beauty and rich diversity. Each park offers a chance to connect with nature and each path tells its own story, from the rich ecosystems of the wetlands to the quiet beauty of native scrub.

As the community continues to grow, these trails remain timeless havens for those seeking tranquility and natural wonder.

Wakodahatchee Wetlands



KIM SENG

Nearby Delray Beach offers a peaceful retreat into nature. Opened in 1996, this 50-acre site was transformed from former wastewater site into a thriving wetland habitat. Part of the Great Florida Birding Trail, a ¾-mile boardwalk winds through diverse ecosystems, allowing visitors to observe herons and egrets, as well as turtles and fish in their natural surroundings.

Each day, the county still pumps two million gallons of 90% treated water into the Wakodahatchee Wetlands. This water is free of organic contaminants but still contains excess mineral content, which is naturally purified by the plants and algae, then released into the surface water supply. Whether you're an avid birdwatcher, simply enjoy a quiet walk and want to see from where your water comes, Wakodahatchee provides an up-close look at Florida's wildlife. *CC*

CASA COASTER INVESTIGATES

A case of a disappearing mangrove park

For years our family enjoyed walking in Mangrove Nature Park. About six years ago the park was closed, much to our disappointment. I contacted both the city and the church who owns the land, and they blame each other. I am writing the *Casa Coaster* in hope that your excellent investigative journalism may shine a light on this unfortunate stand-off while the citizens of Boynton Beach have lost access to a great park, and St. Mark Church has lost revenue for the past six years. – *Randy Johnson*

We researched this subject and brought it up to the candidates at the debate we hosted prior to the mayoral election. A summary of the transcript tells the story:

The city developed the park in an area owned by our neighbor, St. Mark Church. It included a 1,900-ft. boardwalk, restrooms and kiosks meandering through the trees and along the Intracoastal. The city had planned the project since 1987, and didn't open it till 1997. They signed a 30-year lease with the church for $10 per year, then spent $1.3 million to build it, some of which was paid by the county and state.

When the lease set to expire, the church offered a lease extension to the city, but asked $1,000 per month, a large increase from the original deal. City officials also estimated the pathway needed $1 million in repairs, and they wanted a longer lease than the church would offer. Negotiations broke down and the Mangrove Nature Park closed. In January, the city announced plans to spend $750,000 to remove the boardwalk.

And so, over nearly the last 40 years that Boynton has been working on the park, it was open to the public for barely half of that time. If it needed a million-dollar repair job, it must have been neglected. Reviews on Yelp suggest that the park was poorly maintained on the city's watch; one review notes "a lot of trash thrown in the mud everywhere."

After millions of dollars spent, we have nothing except continuing expenses for a closed park and a large bill to remove a mess from the leased property.



Understandably, none of the candidates had an easy solution for this mess that one of them would inherit.

Candidate Court McQuire blamed the breakdown on "no communications" between the church and the city manager. He relayed a conversation with a church official who accused the city of letting the boardwalk deteriorate "by design," allegedly in the hopes that the church would give the land to the city.

Rebecca Shelton, now mayor, remembered walking her dog in Mangrove Nature Park but it had challenges like "random people and trash." She said it will be "one of the first things I deal with because it's an environmental issue and also wasted dollars for no use."

Following the election, Ms. Shelton

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relayed the city's current gameplan.

The deputy city manager confirmed that, in accordance with a December deadline, the city is removing the existing restroom building and boardwalk that is constructed with steel now corroded beyond repair.

But now early plans are to recreate a nature walk on city-owned land slightly south. One design connects a new boardwalk with the existing pathway at the end of Boynton Beach Blvd. The city official promised to seek public comments soon. *CC*



We love a good mystery.
Can we solve yours?

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