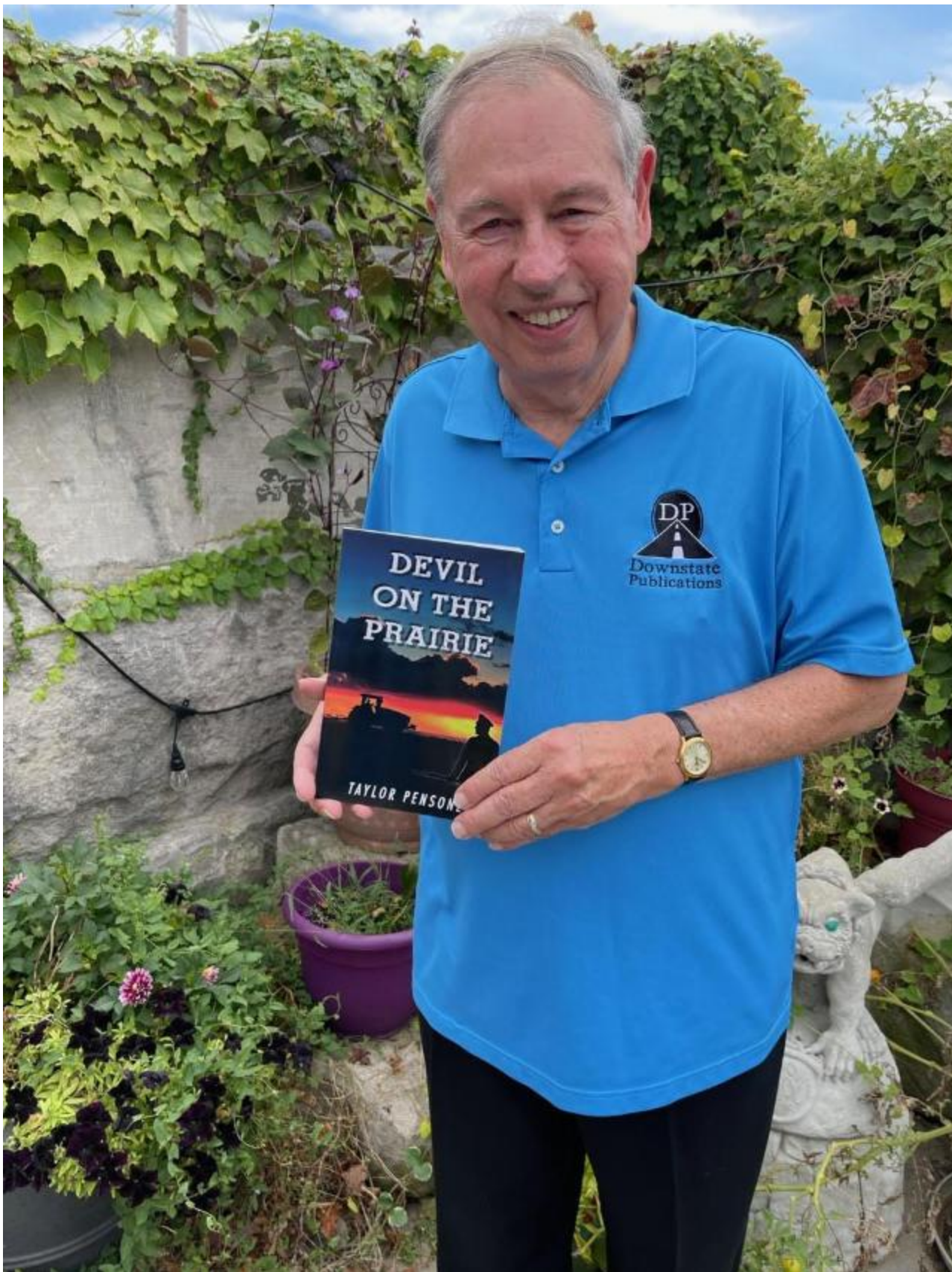




Veteran Statehouse Reporter And Local Author Releases New Mystery Novel, Third In A Trilogy

by Tom Emery
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As a veteran political reporter, Taylor Pensoneau placed a premium on accuracy and realism. Now, as an accomplished fiction writer, he is doing the same.

Pensoneau has just released *Devil on the Prairie* (Downstate Publications: \$18.95), an intricately written mystery novel that captures readers with its suspense and numerous sidebars. The fast-moving work weaves real-life locales throughout the Midwest to provide a sense of place, and create a realistic tone.

“Many of the scenes from the book are set in real places in southwestern Illinois, St. Louis, and elsewhere,” remarked Pensoneau. “I visited a lot of those places in my youth, and in my work in journalism.”

Pensoneau, who lives in New Berlin, IL, was a top political writer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in the 1960s and 1970s. He was based at the Illinois statehouse for much of his time with Post-Dispatch, but covered some of the seminal moments in national political history, including the Watergate hearings.

He later produced a string of acclaimed political biographies, including portrayals of Illinois governors Richard Ogilvie and Dan Walker. Pensoneau also created works on southern Illinois gangsters, including the Shelton Brothers and Charlie Harris, which have proven wildly popular with readers.

Today, Pensoneau is enjoying a reinvention as a skilled novelist. “I had written nothing but nonfiction, and I wanted to try my hand at fiction writing,” he mused. “I just wanted to experience more freedom to write, to develop characters, and introduce fictional realism.

“I don’t have the fire in my belly to handle nonfiction anymore,” he laughed. “It requires so many interviews and so much research, and I just don’t want to do it anymore. With fiction, I can sit right here in my office, and do almost everything that’s necessary.”

Devil on the Prairie is the third installment in a trilogy that follows Jake Brosky, a brusque investigative reporter for the fictional St. Louis World. The book follows *The Summer of ’50* and *Falling Star*, both of which were well-received by readers. In *Devil on the Prairie*, Brosky is driven to find the murderer of two acquaintances, and ties the deaths to a Nazi war criminal living on the Illinois prairie – hence the name of the book – as a farm implement executive. Brosky’s determination as a researcher and investigator combines with his hard-nosed persona as he seeks to expose the Nazi and bring him to justice.

Though he introduces numerous characters in a wide array of scenarios, Pensoneau manages to tie up all loose ends and provide a clear outcome. The narrative takes the

reader across Illinois and the Midwest, as well as to the Spanish Civil War, the Holocaust, and the nation's capital while dealing with political, business, and social themes.

“This book was a chance for me to write about one of those Nazi monsters, and I take personal pleasure in seeing them tracked down, both in fiction and in real life,” said Pensoneau. “Many of the subjects in the book are ones that I’m personally interested in, and wanted to capture those in my narrative.”

Pensoneau is often asked if he sees himself in Brosky, and he replied “Yes, though not literally. Brosky’s story is something of a taste of mine in my role with the Post-Dispatch, although I approached my job differently than Brosky. Like Brosky, I never took a lot of situations at face value, because you can’t when you’re dealing with politics, like I was.”

“Brosky is two-fisted and drops the hammer on people, which was not like me,” laughed Pensoneau. “I always tried the velvet touch. I was more straightforward than he is, because he resorts to devious tricks to get what he wants.”

Pensoneau is currently working on a fourth novel with Brosky as the main character. Despite his success in fiction, Pensoneau says that he is still mastering the craft.

“I like the way you can manipulate people and situations in fiction,” he remarked. “You can create characters, and make them whatever you want them to be, good or bad, inquisitive, or anything. “The power you have in writing fictional characters is truly remarkable.

I even have the power to kill them off, and that’s a lot of power,” laughed Pensoneau. “Fiction challenges your imagination. Writing books like Devil on the Prairie is a lot more fun than writing nonfiction, at least in my experience.”

The book is available by emailing downstatepublications@mchsi.com or by calling 217-488-7709.

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