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Life

Amos Walker's creator talks books, movies at Dearborn Heights library

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DEARBORN HEIGHTS — Novelist Loren D. Estleman has a great respect for libraries.

"I try to make library appearances as much as I can. Back when I was starting out, people couldn't find my books in bookstores. I usually directed them to libraries to prove to them that I was a published author. With libraries, you're pretty sure that the audience has read your work," said Estleman, 59, who appeared Thursday evening at the Caroline Kennedy Library in Dearborn Heights.

Estleman — who lives in Whitmore Lake with Deborah Morgan, his wife and fellow author — spoke to a crowd of 40 to 45 people on a variety of topics, including writing and movies.

"He was very engaging and humorous. Everyone had a great time. He had people laughing... a real laid-back personality," said Mary Howard, supervising librarian.

Estleman recently released his latest book "Burning Midnight" (Tor-Forge \$25), starring his most famous character Amos Walker. This is the 22nd book featuring the hard-boiled private investigator out of Detroit, who debuted in 1980's "Motor City Blue."

"Amos is a 1930s throwback. It's a nice contrast when you take an anachronism like him and put him against the modern-day realistic background of Detroit and watch the fireworks. No one had done a hard-boiled detective in Detroit before," explained Estleman.

In "Burning Midnight," Walker is hired by John Alderdyce, a cop with whom he has a history — a lot of which isn't good — to find Ernesto Pasada, who is the brother-in-law of Alderdyce's son. Ernesto, a 16-year-old-boy, is trying to join the ranks of Maldados, one of Detroit's most powerful Mexican gangs. Walker tries to get him out of the gang life and finds himself in the middle of a gang war between the Maldados and the Zaptistas in Detroit's Mexicantown.

Walker is also battling a Vicodin addiction after being shot in the leg several books ago, along with his usual vices: nicotine and alcohol.

"(Walker) has to chase an adolescent I don't know how many blocks... I just kept rewriting that scene and kept making it a longer and longer chase. He has to be pumped up on Vicodin to do it. Afterwards, of course, when feeling the aftereffects, he has to (take) Vicodin as well. I've given him that challenge to deal with, along with all the others," explained Estleman.

In his long career, Estleman has won four Shamus Awards, five Spur Awards, and three Western Heritage Awards. In 2002, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in human letters from his alma mater, Eastern Michigan University, from where he graduated in 1974. To date, he has written a total of 70 novels.

"I cringe away from numbers like that," he confessed.

His 70th novel, "The Confessions of Al Capone," is slated for a 2013 release.

"It takes place in two periods: In Chicago in the 1920s when Capone was at the peak of his power, and it takes place in Miami in 1944 after he's been released from prison. It has to do a young man who's working undercover for the FBI, posing as a priest, trying to get information from Capone from his still-active associates in the mob. Of course, it has implications — legal and moral — for the young man."

Estleman is hard at work on the next Walker novel, but offered no details about it. Asked how Walker has changed since 1980, Estleman stated: "He's older, maybe a little fatter, not quite as prone to being such a wiser-cracker. He's a bit wiser, I think. He's just matured as I have very much the same way: a little older, a little fatter, a little wiser."

Lee E. Meadows, a management professor at Walsh College and author of the Detroit-based Lincoln Keller mysteries, cites Estleman as an influence and a mentor. In fact, in Meadows' "Silent Suspicion," Keller mentioned he knew Walker.

"Loren Estleman is the quintessential voice heard above the thunder that rumbles along the streets of Detroit," says Meadows. "I consider him the model for the rest of us to emulate. Lincoln Keller could not exist had there been no Amos Walker."

Visit Estleman on www.lorenestleman.com.

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