

Latest novel is Blue Smoke

Nora Roberts tour brings her to Columbus Oct. 3

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During the past 23 years, an average of 21 of her novels have been sold every minute.

If you place these books end to end, they would stretch from New York to Los Angeles 10 times. Her readers refer to her simply by her first name -- a designation normally reserved for rock stars.

And her fellow authors speculate, only half-jokingly, that this prolific publishing phenom is really an alien from an advanced civilization. She's Nora Roberts, and on Oct. 1 she kicks off a three-week book tour to promote her latest romantic suspense, *Blue Smoke*.

The Columbus Library's Main Branch is hosting the second stop on that 19-city tour, but the demand for seats was so overwhelming that reservations for the Oct. 3 book signing closed in just a few days.

Roberts' fans -- many self-proclaimed "Noraholics" -- inundated the library's RSVP line until the staff pulled the details of the event off the Web site. This reader response is no surprise to anyone who has ever enjoyed her books, including the futuristic thrillers she writes under the pen name, J.D. Robb.

Roberts said she's pleased to be signing at libraries, in addition to the traditional tour stops at bookstores and national retailers.

"Librarians are an essential and vital bridge to the reader," Roberts recently told *ThisWeek*. "As book lovers, librarians introduce readers to books every day. I think it's essential that librarians accentuate reading for pleasure and have a solid understanding, respect, even affection for popular fiction."

Creating novels that appeal to readers of different genres, including romance, mystery/suspense, science fiction, and fantasy, Roberts is familiar with the ability of commercial fiction to entertain and empower.

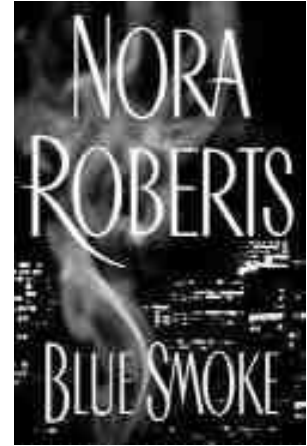
"Strong characters, or those who find their strength, are essential elements for me, as is the recurring theme that love -- in the end -- matters most," the author said. "My writing roots are in the very fertile field of the romance genre. It's very diverse in that it can and does absorb elements from every other area of fiction."

And the readership she acquired as a Silhouette category romance writer in 1980s continued to grow as she made the transition to longer, single-title novels. Starting with her first bestseller in 1991, the author has had 127 *New York Times* bestsellers for a combined 94 weeks at number one.

"You can't bottle wish fulfillment, but Nora Roberts certainly knows how to put it on the page," *The New York Times* praised.

Despite penning more than 150 books, however, she can't write fast enough to please her voracious readers.

Blue Smoke, her latest from Penguin Putnam, goes on sale Oct. 4.



Nora Roberts

"I wanted to use an urban setting with a small-town feel for a story that took a character through her childhood into her adulthood, with a background in arson investigation," Roberts explained. "I chose Baltimore and its delightful Little Italy section and was able to depict that neighborhood feel, the family ties, and I hope a good story about why choices made define who we are and who we become." *Blue Smoke* is already garnering raves."

"Builds to a breathless climax ... Roberts does it again with this fast-paced romantic mystery that's both steamy and thrilling," *Kirkus Reviews* commended in a starred review.

The author, too, has a remarkable collection of media kudos.

"When Roberts puts her expert fingers on the pulse of romance, legions of fans feel the heartbeat," *Publishers Weekly* wrote.

Roberts appreciates her readers, and launched her Web site (www.noraroberts.com) in 1996 to communicate with them. Today her site receives more than 80,000 visitors a month.

"I hear from young women and great-grandmothers, from men and from those in every profession," she said. "They want and expect a good story, well told."

A group of her readers created ADWOFF (A Day Without French Fries...), a message board named for one of Roberts' sayings. Fans of authors Ruth Ryan Langan, Patricia Gaffney, Mary Kay McComas, Lisa Scottoline and Sarah Strohmeier have joined in the chats at this site.

"ADWOFF [is] wonderful, entertaining, informative and just plain fun," Roberts said. She sends the free forum detailed journal entries when she travels.

ADWOFF participants often discover they have more in common than a love of good books. They just completed a two-week drive to raise money for Habitat For Humanity to help the Hurricane Katrina victims. Roberts pledged to match their total.

"Habitat For Humanity ... was one of my choices as well and an organization I respect very much," she explained. "The enthusiasm and the generosity, the commitment of the ADWOFFers in reaching out during this national crisis makes me incredibly proud to be a part of their community."

"On a second level, [the ADWOFFers] have sent out a call for books," Roberts continued, "which can be delivered directly to shelters or to my husband's bookstore, Turn The Page. Those sent to the bookstore will be shipped to various shelters."

The first stop on her *Blue Smoke* tour, Turn The Page is located in Boonsboro, a historic town in the rural area of Maryland the author calls home.

Fans often make multi-state treks to Turn The Page to buy her latest release before it goes on sale nationwide. Deborah Lanata, a Columbus crime scene evidence technician, is one such fan, having discovered Roberts through her J.D. Robb series.

"The first time I went to Nora's bookstore in Maryland, I went because I felt I had to thank the author in person for so many great hours of reading," Lanata explained. That led to friendships with other fans and many more trips.

"We go to Turn The Page every summer to help raise money for the Nora Roberts Foundation," she said. "Nora has brunch with us, which is held at her oldest son's restaurant just up the street from the bookstore. So it's really a friends-and-family event all around.

"I used to be one of those people who always said, 'I don't read those kinds of books,' meaning romance," Lanata said. "I prefer a good mystery ... mixed with a good romance. And no one combines genres better than Nora."

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