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A private eye goes public

By Aaron Wasserman awasserman@sentinelandenterprise.com



John Lajoie talks about his new book *Trials and Tribulations of a Real Life Private Eye* in West Boylston Monday afternoon. (SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / SARAH BRITAIN)

WEST BOYLSTON -- John Lajoie is a private investigator, but he does not duck bullets while driving. No dashing music accompanies his entrance into his office. He never sneaks into someone's home or taps anyone's phone lines.

Cinema and television have glamorized his career, but Lajoie insists he and his colleagues are not

international men of intrigue.

"I prefer to operate in the sunlight rather than in the darkness," the Sterling resident said in his West Boylston office, located in a modest white house along Route 12.

Lajoie published his first book, *"Trials and Tribulations of a Real Life Private Eye,"* in August to "separate the myth from the reality" of the private investigator's life, he said.

Still, Lajoie has earned some acclaim, having been named 2002's National Investigator of the Year by the National Association of Investigative Specialists.

The memoir grew out of an instruction manual Lajoie wrote several years ago, "How to Become a Professional P.I."

When he sat down to expand it 10 months ago, the personal memories flowed.

"I couldn't stop writing these anecdotes," said Lajoie, who founded Lajoie Investigations, Inc. in 1989. The business has grown from one employee -- Lajoie -- to 10.

"Trials and Tribulations of a Real Life Private Eye" presents a small dose of glamour, but focuses on the daily challenges every novice and experienced investigator must confront. It pairs the anecdotal material with practical advice on how to enter the field, how to develop a successful business and how to conduct an investigation.

Lajoie said he mostly takes criminal cases, including capital felonies. His firm also performs employee background checks for companies.

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He said his job is rooted in diligent research, compiling laboratory reports, taking photographs, recording witnesses' statements and writing reams of case notes. If he grabs the public spotlight from his legal or corporate clients, he said, then he is not doing his job correctly.

"My service is to provide information -- not to exonerate or inculcate, but to provide a true picture of the facts," Lajoie said. "I'm supposed to be an advocate for the client, but I'm out there to gather the facts in order to determine what happened."

Yet the work can't be completely dispassionate. Working for accused criminals can take a significant emotional toll, Lajoie said.

Even if a client is acquitted, Lajoie explained, there is still a victim, and that troubles him.

"I'm human. No matter what, there are emotions," he said. "But I try to keep my emotions in check because if you don't, you don't get the job done professionally, with credibility and confidence. I have to look at it professionally because if you were to look at it personally, you'd cry."

Lajoie said he is trying to publicize his book by beginning with local and private investigators' circuits. He promoted his book at the 2005 World Investigators Conference in Las Vegas last month, where he said he sold 62 copies. His next book-signing is on Oct. 22 at Tatnuck Bookseller in Worcester.

Hopefully a larger audience will arrive in the near future, he said.

"I'm hoping Oprah might find me," Lajoie said. "I'm trying to figure out how to do that."

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