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today

DRAFT PICKS

John Holl's weekly column

appears on Wednesdays.

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'SWAMPS OF JERSEY'

Journalist pens political mystery set in N.J.

ERICA LAMBERG
CORRESPONDENT

WARREN — A natural disaster sets the scene for a political mystery in New Jersey.

In the new novel "The Swamps of Jersey," the tale incorporates themes of love, trust, deceit, crime, politics, social change and redemption wrapped in the shell of a police procedural.

The story opens at the end of a week-long tropical storm that wrecked Ironton, a distressed city, leaving a scene of flooded streets, collapsed homes, trees and power lines, shelters filled with displaced residents, and the mutilated body of a young woman in the Old Iron Bog.

Called to investigate is Detective Frank Nagler, who soon wonders if the dead woman is tied to another case he is probing, that of stolen money from city hall, and then, why leads keep pointing toward his former girlfriend who left town in a hurry.

"At the center are the questions that have sprung from events that have affected the United States over the past few years, all boiled down to the hard-luck streets of Ironton," author Michael Stephen Daigle. "The story is as much about Nagler's internal debate, and the debilitating impact of economic failure coupled with political corruption, as it is about the crime solving."

Daigle was a print newspaper reporter and editor for 30 years, starting his career at weeklies in Massachusetts and Maine, then graduated to a daily, the Morning Sentinel of Waterville, before joining the Bridgewater Courier News in 1991 as an assistant city editor.

He later joined the Daily Record, where he worked until 2011, covering municipal and county government, writing a column called "Morris People," and writing about housing, the environment, social issues and growth and development. Since 2011, he has been a freelance journalist.

He said his three-decade career as a journalist helped develop the skills and tenacity for writing fiction.

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Michael Stephen Daigle's new novel incorporates themes of love, trust, deceit, crime, politics, social change and redemption wrapped in the shell of a police procedural.

Former assistant metro editor of Courier News said journalism skills led to novel path.

YOUR TUESDAY TICKET TO TRAVEL



Monaco is a frequent destination for students studying abroad.

COURTESY OF JENNA INTERSIMONE

Jerseyans debunk myths about studying abroad



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"We just can't afford it," Darlene says, citing her daughter, Erin's, fervent interest in studying abroad.

This feels like the end of the argument, much to Erin's disappointment. Darlene knew that her daughter would have fun, make friends and visit remarkable places, as all parents want for their children. However, the sensible factors prevailed — if it wasn't the finances, it was the danger in being abroad, the absence of lasting benefits or the lack of academic vigor, that led to her decision.

Clearly, there are some misconceptions brewing, because none of these things are true. With semester-abroad application deadlines coming up at the end of December and into early 2015, this is worrisome.

As one of the .7 percent of New Jersey students to study abroad in 2012, I found that the ideas parents nurse concerning study abroad tend to be distorted, not to their own oversight but instead to the widely accepted notions on the international programs.

For families struggling to meet rising tuition deadlines each year, the idea of spending thousands of dollars for their child to meander across Europe for a few weeks seems unfathomable.

However, most colleges allow students to transfer their financial aid packages, scholarships and merit awards to an approved study-abroad program, including Rutgers University, possibly making living costs comparable to if the student stayed at their home college for the semester, especially if



Megan Holt of Bridgewater visited Lac de Sainte-Croix during her time studying in France.

COURTESY OF MEGAN HOLT



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housing costs are included in the international program or the program is hosted in a less-developed country.

Through my program at Monmouth University to Florence, Italy, I paid \$300 in fees on top of my normal tuition to study abroad. Robyn Asaro, assistant director of Study Abroad at Monmouth, said that she recommends that students looking to travel frequently on the weekends should bring an additional \$4,000 to \$6,000 for a semester program. But that's only for students who want to spend their semester that way — it's not a necessity.

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THE POWER OF NATURE

Horticultural therapy helps homebound senior's life

LAURA DEPRADO

The benefits of nature are indeed undeniable and the evidence based research to support exists. Studies support living near green spaces like parks improves long term well-being, and that spending as little as 20 minutes daily outside in fresh air boosts vitality, increasing physical and mental energy.

In May 2013 I received a call from a home-care agency which services seniors living at home in Somerset and

Hunterdon counties. The agency, Right at Home, was seeking my help with one of their senior patients, a then 86-year-old who resides at home. She was disconnected, disengaged, clinically diagnosed with depression, lethargic, genuinely uninterested, restricted to her home and wheelchair and reliant on live-in caregiver (provided by the agency), for all of her daily needs. All of her family members are deceased except for one niece,

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PHOTO COURTESY OF
LAURA DEPRADO

Client, 88, demonstrating planning in gathering rose petals for sachet, while flower arranging. The petals will dry in a champagne glass, as a "toast to flowers," as shared by the client, created a new use for the glass to celebrate fun in arranging and drying.