

Arnold-Imperial
LEADER

'Once a week but never weakly'

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Love you, Grandma

Local author stars 104-year-old grandmother in zombie novels

By Laura Marlow
For the Leader

Brian King of Imperial has spent the last two years writing about zombies, all the while honoring the memory of his beloved grandmother.

King, 45, who writes under the pen name E.E. Isherwood, is preparing to release the sixth book in his "Sirens of the Zombie Apocalypse" series on Amazon.com. His grandmother, Marie King, who died Aug. 10, 2014, at the

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Reprieve

Boundary dispute has four families at odds with Fox C-6

By Kim Robertson
For the Leader

A handful of Barnhart parents got a shock last week when Fox C-6 School District officials told them they had been sending their children to the wrong school and needed to enroll them in the Dunklin R-5 School District instead.

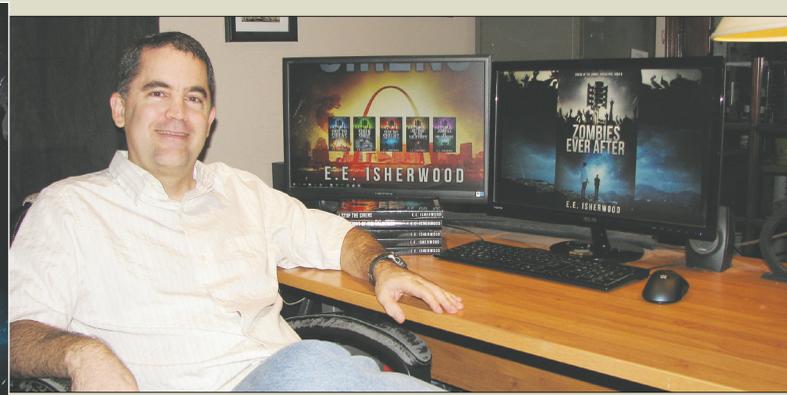
For now, the families have a 45-day reprieve, but they don't know what will happen after that.

The worst part about the news, the parents said, was getting the phone call on Aug. 16, the day before the students were set to return to school.

Four families, with a total of five children enrolled at either Antonia Elementary or Seckman High schools, got those calls, and while the parents were upset by the news, they said it hit their children even harder.

Tiffany and Rocky Tucker said their

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At top, Marie King, who died in August 2014 at the age of 104, was the inspiration for one of the main characters in a book series about zombies written by Brian King (E.E. Isherwood), at right.

More vehicle sales tax ballot issues are ahead for voters

By Kevin Carbery
For the Leader

Voters can expect another round of ballot measures, perhaps in April 2017, to keep collecting local sales taxes revenue on vehicles bought out of state.

Although voters countywide as well as in nine cities already have approved the continuation of their "titing taxes," also called "use taxes," 10 emergency response entities that also charge sales taxes will be obligated to ask voters to approve similar measures or face a loss in revenue.

Those entities include Jefferson County 911 Dispatch; five ambulance districts – Big River, Joachim-Plattin, Rock Township, North Jefferson and Valle; and four fire protection districts – Rock Community, High Ridge, Antonia and Hillsboro.

The largest of those entities, 911 Dispatch, which takes in the entire county except for the towns of Festus, Pevely and Herculaneum, stands to lose \$283,247 per year if the tax is not renewed, based on 2015 figures from the Missouri Department of Revenue.

See TAX, Page 17



Ted Howell photo

Bring on the eclipse!

In preparation for the solar total eclipse that will occur in August 2017, the Herculaneum Total Solar Eclipse Task Force held an event marking the one-year countdown to the event on Sunday. Trying out their protective sunglasses that will allow them to view the eclipse are Ryder Braddy, 3, Owen Dallas, 3, and Weston Braddy, 7, all of Festus. For more, see Page 2.

Taking a stand for
LIMITED GOVERNMENT

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Self-publishing: How it's done in the digital world

Author Brian King says it's not difficult these days for a writer to simply publish his or her work.

Much harder is getting readers to buy in and to stay engaged for the long-term, he said.

"It's actually easy to get published on Amazon," King said. "You sign up for an author account and you're kind of just dumped into this system where you have to upload your files. It takes about 24 hours for (a manuscript) to work its way through until it shows up in the store."

Amazon does not charge for the service although the company will take a 30 percent cut of any sales.

King said it's prudent to spend extra money for things that will enhance his product.

■ **Editing:** King works with editor Gerald Swick of Nashville to hone his manuscripts for publishing.

"People are going to be paying for this (his books), and I don't want to rip them off," King said.

Swick said editing translates into readability.

"The advantage to self-publishing is that you aren't required to go through the editorial process – but that can also be a disadvantage in terms of quality," he said. "Brian has chosen to do it (have an editor), so he puts out a product that is high quality and very readable."

■ **Cover art:** "The foundation for any sale is the cover. If you have a lousy cover

you can just forget about it," King said. "A lot goes into it. It has to be correct for the genre. It has to be fresh and grab attention."

"I originally went to press with my own cover. Then I quickly figured out it was totally worth the \$100 or \$150 to pay an artist to do it. All six (book covers for his "Sirens of the Zombie Apocalypse" series) were done by the same artist. They're intended to look very similar; the sirens carry over on every cover."

■ **Online enhancements:** "A real key piece in marketing on the Amazon site is the feature that lets your book show up in the 'also boughts' of more popular writers," King said. "You can also join with another author to do a boxed set. And a lot of the indie publishers put out a newsletter."

■ **International sales:** "I was contacted by a Turkish publisher who said he saw my books were trending," King said. "They bought the print rights to the first five, which is all I had published, for something like \$300 for each title. I've talked with some of the name authors in my genre, and they've gotten pretty much the same deal."

■ **Alternate media:** "The first (book in the series) will soon be an audio book on

audible.com," King said. "That's owned by Amazon, and they offer the format in just about every Amazon listing. You post a sample of your writing, narrators audition for it, you choose the narrator and away you go."

Narration costs \$250 an hour, and it takes about 10 hours to do one book.

"You can either pay the narrator up front, so you don't have to share royalties, or you can split the proceeds with them," King said. "I paid up front, a seven-year contract. Audibles sell for \$20 and I get eight bucks of that, so if it turns out to be big, I have seven years to make the cost back."

King said it is vital to establish and maintain a relationship with

readers.

"I feel like, as an independent author, the best way to build an audience is to present a multi-book series," he said. "People read the first, if you price it low enough, and you get them invested in the world you create. That's what you need to get above the noise on Amazon."

King works to expand his contacts in the business.

"My goal is, every week I want to be in front of a new audience," he said. "I do interviews on websites, I've done a couple

of podcasts, this interview."

King also maintains his own website, www.zombiebooks.net, and can interact with readers there.

He said one frustrating aspect of marketing his work is a lack of data.

"Amazon's consumer side is great, but the producer side is very spartan," King said. "I really can't track my sales. I get a check every month, and a report showing which books sold on which day. But I don't know if the sales came from my Facebook marketing, my podcasts, whatever. I can't solve for that variable right now."

Swick said he thinks King has a bright future as a writer.

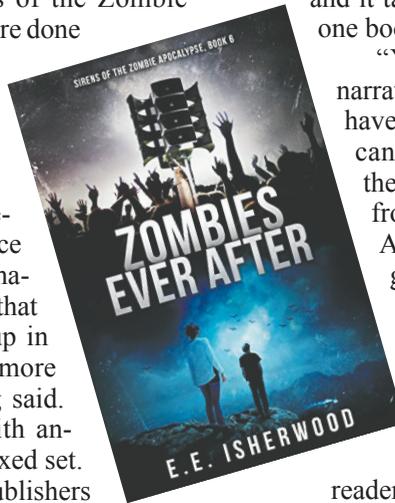
"He keeps them turning the pages, and that's the bottom line," Swick said. "I tell my (web magazine) writers, 'This is the web. It's the home of short-attention-span theater. You have to grab them right away.'"

King said the stigma once attached to the "independent" label is fading.

"Now, being an independent writer is almost a badge of honor," he said. "There are people moving a lot of books on Amazon, and at a really attractive price point."

"If a traditional publisher approached me, I would much prefer that. I would never turn it down. But I'm not going to go out and try to get a publishing deal from a big house. Frankly, I don't need it right now."

-- Laura Marlow



Zombies: Grandmother provided inspiration for county-based series

Continued from Page 1

age of 104, provided the inspiration for the main character in the series, set in a zombie-overrun Jefferson County and St. Louis in the not-too-distant future.

King estimates the first five books in his series have sold 20,000 copies in print or e-book form since the first was published late last year.

Gerald D. Swick of Nashville, editor of King's "Siren" series, said he's impressed with the number of readers King's books have attracted so far.

"He has found a niche for himself among zombie fans and he keeps turning out the books on a rapid schedule," Swick said. "I think that's why he's having such success."

King's original intent in writing the story was personal amusement, not publishing. "I was working at the time, so it was a part-time thing," he said. He self-published the first book in December 2015.

"You put something out there and, of course, you hope it'll sell," he said. "But you really don't expect it to. The first month wasn't much, but it snowballed from there."

Sales picked up for the next two books, published in January and February.

"When they started to sell, I thought, 'Wow, I gotta write some more!'" King said. "The next two were published in April and June, and I realized there could be a chance to make a living by writing."

King's information technology job was downsized early this year and he took the plunge into full-time writing, which he finds far more fulfilling.

"At the end of the day in IT, you don't feel like you've contributed to the world," he said. "Nobody cares if you move some files on a random server."

You write what you like

King grew up in south St. Louis County and went to Vianney High School. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Missouri in Columbia, then went to work in the information technology field. He and his wife of 17 years, Julie, have two children: Gabriel, 10, and Katie, 7.

"I never wrote anything, as far as stories go, until 2014," King said. "I just one day woke up and decided I wanted to write something."

It made sense that he would write in the fantasy and science fiction genre, especially post-apocalyptic fiction.

"Most of my life I've read that stuff," he said. "'Earth Abides,'" a 1949 novel by George Stewart, is probably my favorite book, and an inspiration for the titles I've read over the years."

It's also the source of his pen name.

"The main character is named Isherwood Williams," King said. "The E's are the initials of my two grandfathers, Elwin and Elmer."

Swick said that, although he has edited traditionally published books for many years, King's was his first e-book editing experience.

"But the process is the same," Swick said. "You've got to have a good story and you've got to tell it in a way that makes people turn the pages, whether that's with their fingers or electronically."

Books' action based in county

King's first effort was a 6,000-word short story.

"The catalyst for me to write the original piece was the passing of my grandmother," he said. "I wanted to do a tribute, so of course I put her in a zombie situation! I loved the story, loved the character I created."

The story, later expanded into King's book series, follows a 15-year-old boy who must flee St. Louis with his 104-year-old great-grandmother in the midst of a mysterious zombie plague.

"The Arch is the staging area for people fleeing the zombies," King explained. "They escape into Jefferson County, where they meet up with an Arnold cop who becomes a minor character. The boy is heading to his home in Barnhart, because he wants to basically hand off Grandma to somebody else."

He enjoys finding new places to

stage action.

"I'll be driving around in Jefferson County, and I'll see a spot and say, 'Oooh, that's where they need to come.'"

King said he explores themes that resonate with him as a father.

"Writing these books is like putting my philosophy on paper," he said. "The boy has moral dilemmas, the kinds of things my kids will have to address – like respecting authority figures, dealing with the media."

"I didn't want to write 'Teen boy grabs gun, slays zombies' – I think it's more interesting to have the back story about his motivations."

King said post-apocalyptic stories actually have an uplifting aspect.

"I don't read and write these (stories) because they're depressing. I do it because, in spite of everything, the human spirit of these characters can overcome just about anything and still retain their humanity."

Making it as a writer

King said he tries to stick to a daily writing schedule. His wife, a former veterinary nurse, takes care of her ailing father a couple of days a week, and he is in charge of his kids at those times. Otherwise, he puts full-time effort into his writing career.

King also participates in online

Zombies: King sticks to schedule

Continued from Page 16

forums and writers groups. "I believe I'm honing my craft, putting my work out for critique," he said. "There's a formula for writing a good book, and a lot of it is just practice."

At the moment the family's only income is from King's book sales. He said he gets about 70 percent of the purchase price. On Amazon, digital versions of his books cost \$3.99, while paperbacks are \$12.99.

"Amazon is very nebulous in what constitutes a sale," he said. "It's not like in a bookstore, where you can say you moved X number of units. What you actually make depends on a lot of factors. You never know what your next month's sales will be."

King said he feels poised at the edge of success.

"I want to get to a point where I don't worry about where my next paycheck will come from," he said. "There's a floor that has to be met when you have a family. That's why I'm not planting my flag on the 'author' hill just yet."

King's books are listed on Amazon.com in the science fiction/fantasy category.

"I have the series sketched out to nine books, but if people enjoy the characters and their adventures, I don't see there needs to necessarily be an end."



Brian King, upper left, and his children, Gabriel and Katie, posed for a four-generation photo on New Year's Day 2014. Standing at right is King's father, Thomas King. Sitting between the children is Thomas' mother and Brian's grandmother, Marie King, who died in August 2014 at the age of 104.

King's advice for other aspiring authors sounds like a Nike slogan. "Don't be one of those people who say, 'One day I will write a book.' Just do it," he said. "Write a story about your trip to the store."

Although he has a living to make, King knows he shouldn't focus too much on the bottom line.

"The key to being a writer is to love writing. If you're just doing it for the money, it will quickly become boring."

Tax: Votes may come in April 2017

Continued from Page 1

ment of Revenue.

"It's a significant part of our (\$3.9 million) budget," 911 Dispatch Chief Travis Williams said. "It's not a new tax. (The potential ballot issue) just levels the playing field. It puts our auto dealers (in Missouri) at an unfair disadvantage."

911 Dispatch officials say they have begun talks with officials from the other agencies to see if all would pursue placing their questions on the April 2017 ballot.

If that happens, some residents may be asked to vote as many as three times in one day to continue the taxes.

Residents in Arnold, for instance, would be faced with similar propositions by the 911 Dispatch as well as for the Rock Community Fire and the Rock Township Ambulance.

The tax affects people who buy vehicles, trailers, boats and outdoor motors from anyone who is not a dealer licensed in Missouri.

Currently, all buyers pay the sales tax rate that is in effect where they live, but the taxes on out-of-state purchases, or from individuals, will expire in April 2018 unless voters agree to continue them.

The titling sales tax was in place for more than 65 years, but was declared unconstitutional by the Missouri Supreme Court in 2012. The court ruled that the tax could only be assessed by entities that had

voter approval for them.

In 2013, the State Legislature put the tax back into effect, but required that residents be given the opportunity to vote on the issue by November 2016. That deadline was extended earlier this year through November 2018.

Emergency response entities say they have the same issues as county government and municipalities, who feared the loss of revenue if the vehicle sales taxes were discontinued.

For the four county fire districts with a sales tax, the Missouri Department of Revenue reported the following revenue in 2015 from the vehicle tax: Rock Community (\$90,699); High Ridge (\$50,173), Antonia (\$31,214) and Hillsboro (\$3,995).

"There would be an impact," Hillsboro Fire Assistant Chief Brian Gaudet said. "Of course, \$4,000 a year doesn't sound like much. But over a 10-year period, that could be \$50,000 to \$60,000."

Among ambulance districts, Joachim-Plattin collected \$68,890 from the tax in 2015, followed by Rock Township (\$48,412), North Jefferson (\$43,208), Big River (\$38,166) and Valle (\$10,627).

Valle Chief Jesse Barton said he believes his district stands to lose even more money than that.

"We're looking at losing almost \$20,000," Barton said. "That's one of our office staff. We could lose a person over it."

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