



November 3, 2005

Author comes home to launch 'The Funeral Planner'

By D'Anne Witkowski

Michigan native Lynn Isenberg didn't mean to start a new business when she began writing her latest novel "The Funeral Planner." But after spending so much time and energy researching the funeral industry for the book, including attending the National Funeral Directors Convention, Isenberg realized she was on to something.

Maddy, the protagonist in "The Funeral Planner," is a young woman infused with the entrepreneurial spirit, yet plagued by very bad business luck. Things get worse when she learns of the death of her best friend.

When Maddy returns to Ann Arbor from Los Angeles to attend the funeral, she's struck by how impersonal the service is. While listening to the canned eulogy of a clergyperson who didn't even know her friend she hits upon her most promising business venture idea yet.

"She starts a business called Lights Out Enterprises and the story goes from there," Isenberg said. The business creates personal, customized funeral tributes for the pre-need market. Isenberg described it as "designing experiences for pre-need clients, not when you're dead and you need a funeral, but when you're alive and you're thinking about it."

"I have actually launched this business," said Isenberg. "I've actually followed in the footsteps of my protagonist."

But the book isn't just about business. "'The Funeral Planner' is about a woman who brings life to a dead business and in the process learns to live life by confronting her own grief," Isenberg said. "It deals with women struggling to find their own careers and at the same time looking for love and trying to put it all together."

The book, classified as "chick lit," has another interesting twist: Maddy is bisexual, a rare thing in a genre marketed mainly to straight women.

"I definitely wanted to be one of the first authors to write a chick lit novel with a bisexual character, so Madison Banks' lover from college plays a role in the story," she said.

Isenberg's first novel also has a bisexual protagonist, not to mention its own theme song written by Jill Sobule that can be heard on Isenberg's Web site. "There's more actually in the first novel with the character exploring her sexuality," Isenberg said. "She's more consciously aware of dealing with and trying to understand her sexuality. Because in the first novel that

character has her first experience with a woman during the course of the novel where in 'The Funeral Planner' it's not a big deal, she accepts that that's part of her history and it comes up in a very light way. But there is one moment that's really beautiful where she gets a lot of nurturing from her friend in a time of really deep grief."

Grief is what inspired Isenberg to write her latest book and what ultimately led to the book's spin off business and a collaboration with funeral director David M. Techner on "A Guide To Dealing With Loss."

"I approached the funeral director in Southfield, Michigan who buried my father and my brother, and my brother was gay by the way, and asked him to collaborate and write this series of grief guidebooks," she said. She called the experience "really liberating."

"First writing was a distraction from my grief, a way to avoid it, and then it became a way to work through it," she said.

Isenberg will be participating in the Detroit Jewish Book Fair on Sunday, Nov. 6 at 11 a.m. at the Jewish Community Center of Metro Detroit, 6600 West Maple Rd., West Bloomfield 48322. For more information visit www.jccdet.org/BookFair. "The Funeral Planner" Book Launching Party will be Monday, Nov. 7 at 6 p.m. at The Eagles Nest restaurant, 1368 Eagle Point Dr., Clark Lake, MI 49234. For more info call 517-529-9520. For more information on Isenberg's books and Lights Out Enterprises, please visit www.lynnisenberg.com and www.lightsoutenterprises.com.