

JOE

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This fall, the tour will expand past the Pacific Northwest — he has tours scheduled in North Carolina, Georgia and Colorado, with more being added.

It helps that 'Rebels of the Kasbah,' his first of the series, is in more Battle of the Books contests than any other book in America.

"North Carolina is the big one," he said. "They have the biggest Battle of the Books contest of any state, including Oregon."

"That was totally unexpected," he added. "I don't even know how they got the book."

His favorite stops, however, are in Hood River.

"I love being involved with the local community, doing talks at May Street, Hood River (Middle), Wy'east," he said. "It's really fun being involved with the local schools,

the local teachers, the local kids. I've toured all around the state, all around the country, and what we have in Hood River is very special, in terms of the kids and the attitudes."

O'Neill has been a writer "since elementary school," and he minored in creative writing at Washington State University, where he graduated with a major in international business in 1991. (His day job? CEO and founder of Waquis, a mortgage processing center located in Sri Lanka.) "Rebels of the Kasbah" wasn't his first book, but it was "the first thing that I've written that I think is really good and am really proud of," he said. "It just flowed and came together on that book. Now we're in the third book. It's been a process — the stuff you write when you first start out is pretty bad, but then you refine the craft."

"Kasbah" took him four years to write and nine revisions; the second, "Wrath of

Author reception

Waucoma Bookstore is hosting local author Joe O'Neill on May 16 for the release of the third book in his "Red Hand Adventures" series, "Legends of the Rif," from 1-3 p.m. The author reception and book signing will also include signed posters for young fans and a treasure hunt with prizes.

The event is free, and all ages are welcome. Waucoma Bookstore is located at 212 Oak Street in downtown Hood River. For more information, call 541-386-5353 or visit www.waucoma-bookstore.com.

the Caid," took two, and "Legends" only one.

"It's easier when you're writing a series because you understand the plot structure, the flow, the narration, the characters," he said. "It all becomes very familiar, so it's easier to jump back into that world."

He's working on another book, about a fictional Ore-

gon town, which he's finding more difficult "because you have to create the characters and the setting — there's a lot more refinement when you start a brand new book."

But that doesn't mean the Red Hand Adventure series is over with "Legends." His fourth, "Thieves of the Black Sea," is almost complete and has a slated release date of April 2016.

"I honestly don't know how many books will be in the series ... I suppose until I get tired of writing them and there's no sign of that happening anytime soon," he said. "Each time I sit down to write the 'Red Hand Adventures,' it's like being transported to a distance time and place and visiting old friends."

To research the books, which are set in a land and time far removed from 2015 Oregon — 1912 Morocco — O'Neill goes abroad "once or twice a year," he said. "Last year it was Nepal and Sri Lanka and this year it will be

Istanbul and perhaps France and even Morocco for the fifth book."

Research consists of "learning about the history and culture as well as scenery," he said, "trying to capture the texture, feel, smells, and sounds of a place to give the book added accuracy and depth. A lot of it is walking around, studying architecture, eating local cuisine, talking to people, and just being an observer."

He calls the books a family affair, as wife Kirstin has done all of the art design. Her covers, specifically, helped get the book into Barnes and Nobel, which is practically unheard of for a small, independent press such as his.

The Barnes and Nobel buyer "looked at the books covers and said, 'these are

some of the best book covers I've ever seen,'" O'Neill said.

The two started Black Ship Publishing (blackshipublishing.com) about four years ago, and he feels it was a "really smart decision," as it's allowed him to retain the copyrights. They have national and international distribution through Perues, and as such, his books can be found in Canada, England and Australia in addition to the U.S. Foreign markets — France and Germany — are in the works for the next year or two.

"It's been a fun process, learning along the way, making mistakes, saying, 'I'll never do that again,' and moving on," he said.

To learn more about the Red Hand Adventures series, visit redhandadventures.com.



Photo by Kirby Neumann-Rea

PATIO EXPANSION

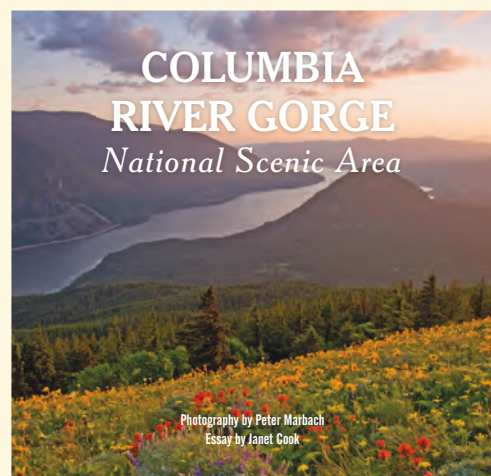
Concrete Cowboys owner Josh Green, left, and Brian Dunn complete the pour Thursday on the expanded patio at Kickstand Coffee Kitchen, formerly 10 Speed. Owner Nick Hardin said more changes are in the works: he'll expand the café and add a service counter by adding an annex to the east. 10-Speed Roastery will move into the annex, which will also house offices for 10 Speed owner Brian McGeeney and Hardin. Dirty Fingers Bike Repair shares the south half of the building, at 13th and State streets. Green formed Concrete Cowboys about a year ago to focus on his favorite sphere of work, concrete.

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Wines of the Gorge

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