

## Author to Author with Mindy Friddle

**The Author: Larry Baker**

**The Book: *Athens, America* (First Coast Books, \$24.95)**

The idea for Larry Baker's novel, *Athens, America*, came about several years ago during his second term as a city councilman in Iowa City. "One night I got a call from the city manager informing me about a police shooting," he said on a phone call recently from his home in Iowa. The event soon escalated into a controversy that tore apart the college town. "The tragedy was merely a springboard to a larger political debate about how a community should be governed," Baker said. "I saw a lot of genuine grief, but also a lot of hypocrisy and political posturing, a lot of political arrogance. Looking at that year in Iowa City history, I saw a story. The trick was finding the characters to personalize those issues."

Baker found the characters. The resulting novel, *Athens, America*, tells the story of a small college town divided by opposing political factions over the death of two teenagers in a police car chase gone bad. Baker will be appearing at The Open Book in Greenville on Tuesday to publicize the novel, which was published last March by First Coast Books, a small independent publisher in Florida.

Baker's first novel, *The Flamingo Rising*, was published by Knopf in 1997 to critical acclaim, and was a *Los Angeles Times* Notable 100 selection. Hallmark bought the movie rights. The television movie process was "a very frustrating process," Baker said. "Hallmark treated me very well. I just wasn't happy with how the movie was directed." Yet he admits that grouching about the movie version of his first novel "is a great problem to have." The income from the movie rights allowed him to retire early and devote himself full-time to writing.

However, Knopf declined to publish his second novel. Despite stellar reviews and movie rights, *The Flamingo Rising* did not sell as well as the large commercial publisher had hoped. Now, nearly a decade later, and with a new novel published by First Coast Books, Baker said he's discovered the publishing world has changed. Book review space in newspapers has shrunk. The Internet, especially "blogs," are crucial to get the word out about a book. Baker now takes an active role in helping his publisher publicize his novel. His book tour will take him through the Carolinas and Florida in the next week.

Building grassroots readership with old-fashioned touring and networking certainly doesn't hurt, Baker said. "You sell your personality as much as your book" on book tours he said. Those skills may come in handy this fall when the novelist runs for his third term on the Iowa City Council.

*Mindy Friddle is the author of the novel "The Garden Angel" (St. Martin's Press/Picador.) Visit her website, [www.mindyfriddle.com](http://www.mindyfriddle.com), for more information on writing and publishing.*