

## Fact and Fiction

**M**arvin J. Nodiff retired from his community association law practice in St. Louis, Mo., in 2014 after more than 30 years on the job, but he's kept plenty busy since. He recently released his fifth novel, *HOA Gobsmack!*, which takes a peek at what happens when populism invades community associations. Nodiff is a founding member of CAI's College of Community Association Lawyers and has served on the CAI Board of Trustees. He's an expert on drones and priority liens and is the recipient of several CAI honors, including the 2016 Distinguished Service Award. His novels, all centered around fictional community association attorney Joshua Fyler, capture the adventures of community association living in a humorous and engaging style.

—Interview by Daniel Brannigan



### How did you end up in community association law?

In law school, I took an independent study with a state legislator who needed help working with the Uniform Condominium Act. I ended up testifying at umpteen legislative hearings. When I started practicing, legislators began referring constituents to me.

### Do you miss the law practice?

Attorneys are still reaching out on occasion to bounce questions off me, and that's fun. I enjoy working with them and analyzing the issues, such as priority liens and drones. But there are parts I don't miss, such as the crazy attorneys on the other side and stubborn clients.

### Where do you draw your inspiration for the novels?

There are a lot of different inspirations and drivers. Some of the cases and characters are based

on actual experience, but they've become composites. I get a lot of great input from my fellow community association attorneys.

I like to start with issues that are on the horizon, like drones and cybercrime, and ask "What if?" questions. I want to make the novels entertaining and informative.

### Do you see yourself in Joshua Fyler, the main character in all your novels?

He's handsome, smart, and a complex personality. He doesn't resemble me at all.

### Can we expect the series to continue?

I'm working on the next installment now. We have such an abundance of material in community associations. It's a renewable resource.

### How did your novelist career come about?

About 20 years ago, a manager I worked with was lamenting about some difficult cases and conflicts. She said, "You can't make this stuff up. Someone should write a book." I took it as a dare. I hadn't thought about creative writing before then.

### What's the most valuable piece of advice you can give community associations?

There's a professional responsibility, especially for managers and attorneys, to keep learning. It's not enough to be right and accurate on a particular issue, but you've got to be able to communicate that to inform and persuade. You have to be skilled at communication and well-versed on the dynamics of group decision-making. **CG**

» Read an extended version of this interview at [www.caionline.org/cg](http://www.caionline.org/cg).

### What's your story?

If you or someone you know in the community association world has an interesting background or a good story to tell, let us know. Send ideas and recommendations to *Common Ground*, 6402 Arlington Blvd., Suite 500, Falls Church, VA 22042. Email: [commonground@caionline.org](mailto:commonground@caionline.org)