



DAVID SWANSON / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jerri Williams is shopping around her first novel, and will be leaving her job at SEPTA this month.

EX-FBI AGENT HAS NOVEL APPROACH

SEPTA spokeswoman Jerri Williams' first book, a fictional account of corruption, seeks publisher

BY DAN GERINGER

Daily News Staff Writer
geringd@phillynews.com, 215-854-5961

DURING HER 20 years as a crime-busting Philly FBI agent, Jerri Williams slogged through the city's smarmy swamp of sleaze, wondering whether the undulating underbelly of unsavory ooze was calling out to her: "Who needs job

security? Write your book!"

Williams, who just resigned from her second career as director of SEPTA Media Relations to embrace her inner ink-stained wretch full time, said her pulp-fiction passion has been years in the making.

Her first novel, *Pay to Play*, currently being shopped to publishers by her agent, is the story of a married female FBI agent — "It's not me in the book!" Williams

swore — who investigates Philly strip club corruption while being blackmailed by a one-night stand she hooked up with in one of the clubs.

During her novel's eight-year gestation, Williams consulted with FBI agents Vickie Humphreys and Cathy McAfee, who busted city Licenses & Inspections official Frank Antico — "It's not him in the book!" Williams swore — for extorting sexual fa-

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—JERRI WILLIAMS, author

vors and money from strip clubs.

Williams, who helped bust Philadelphia's \$350 million New Era Philanthropy Ponzi scheme in the 1990s, said her book was born during a 2007 FBI anti-terrorist training exercise in Guam, where the mock scenario required her to deal with the media after terrorists set off a radioactive "dirty bomb."

"I was there for a week," Williams said. "I didn't have to socialize with anyone. I could really work the drill and then, in my free time, instead of hanging out, I could stay in my hotel room and outline my book."

"By the time I left Guam, I had everything fleshed out."

She showed her first draft to former *Inquirer* reporter John Shiffman. They met at the Down Home Diner over coffee. Williams said Shiffman was brutally honest.

"I had written, 'They performed the sex act,'" Williams said. "He crossed it out and wrote, 'They f-----.' He told me, 'Oh, Jerri, you can't write a book and not get down and dirty and gritty and itchy.'"

"I thought I was a great writer because I was an FBI agent and I knew all these technical FBI terms," Williams said. "He told me, 'There's too much FBI s--- in here, too many acronyms. Nobody cares. This is supposed to be entertainment.'"

Williams left the Down Home Diner metaphorically bloodied but unbowed.

She went home, spent the next

few years of weekends and vacations rewriting, and birthed her first book.

"Everybody in SEPTA media relations knows all about *Pay to Play*," Williams said, "because I talk about it all the time. But they haven't read it."

Williams laughed. "It's not appropriate for me to say, 'Read my book.' Four of them work for me so what are they going to say, 'Your book sucks'? I don't want them to feel pressure to like it."

Although she's leaving on Nov. 25, Williams said she's had such an enjoyable second career at the transit agency that when *Pay to Play* finds a publisher, "I'm planning to have the book launch at SEPTA. I'll rent out the mezzanine and we'll do it right there."

Williams, 58, said she's come a long way from her early days "as a gun-toting, door-kicking FBI agent," but she's not mellow and she's not slowing down. While she's waiting for her first book to find hard covers, she's started her second novel.

She sees the roaring river of reprehensible behavior surging through the city, providing a pungent paradise of bent politicians, police and other vivacious violators of the public trust.

In Philly's never-ending wonderland of wrongdoers, Williams is liberated from the workaday world and she's got a license to thrill. ■

■ @DanGeringer