

# GULF & MAIN

ARTS + CULTURE + BEAUTY + FASHION

**SouthWet  
FLORIDA**

*Our Water World*

**WRITE STUFF**

SWFL Reading Fest

**GOING BLUE**

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Forward**

**TERVIS  
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*Florida Grown*

**HOOKED**  
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*Florida's Fishing Celebrities*

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# SOUTHWEST FLORIDA READING FESTIVAL

Big turnout expected, meet the authors, the write stuff

**W**hat started as more promotional has evolved into a huge event.

The Southwest Florida Reading Festival in March brings popular writers and lit fans to Fort Myers, this year to a downtown park, as the Harborside Event Center is undergoing refurbishment. Among a dozen or so prominent writers, the 2017 lineup includes Colin Campbell (*Free Days With George*), the Charmed Amish Life series writer Shelley Shepard Gray, the Texas romance writer Lori Wilde and others in teen and children genres. Writers read from their work, participate in panels and mingle.

The festival hosted in 1999 by the Lee County Library System was to promote literacy and to celebrate reading and literature, says festival coordinator Margie Byers. But almost from the beginning, something clicked, especially when significant writers such as David Baldacci, Nelson DeMille, Meg Cabot, Carl Hiaasen,



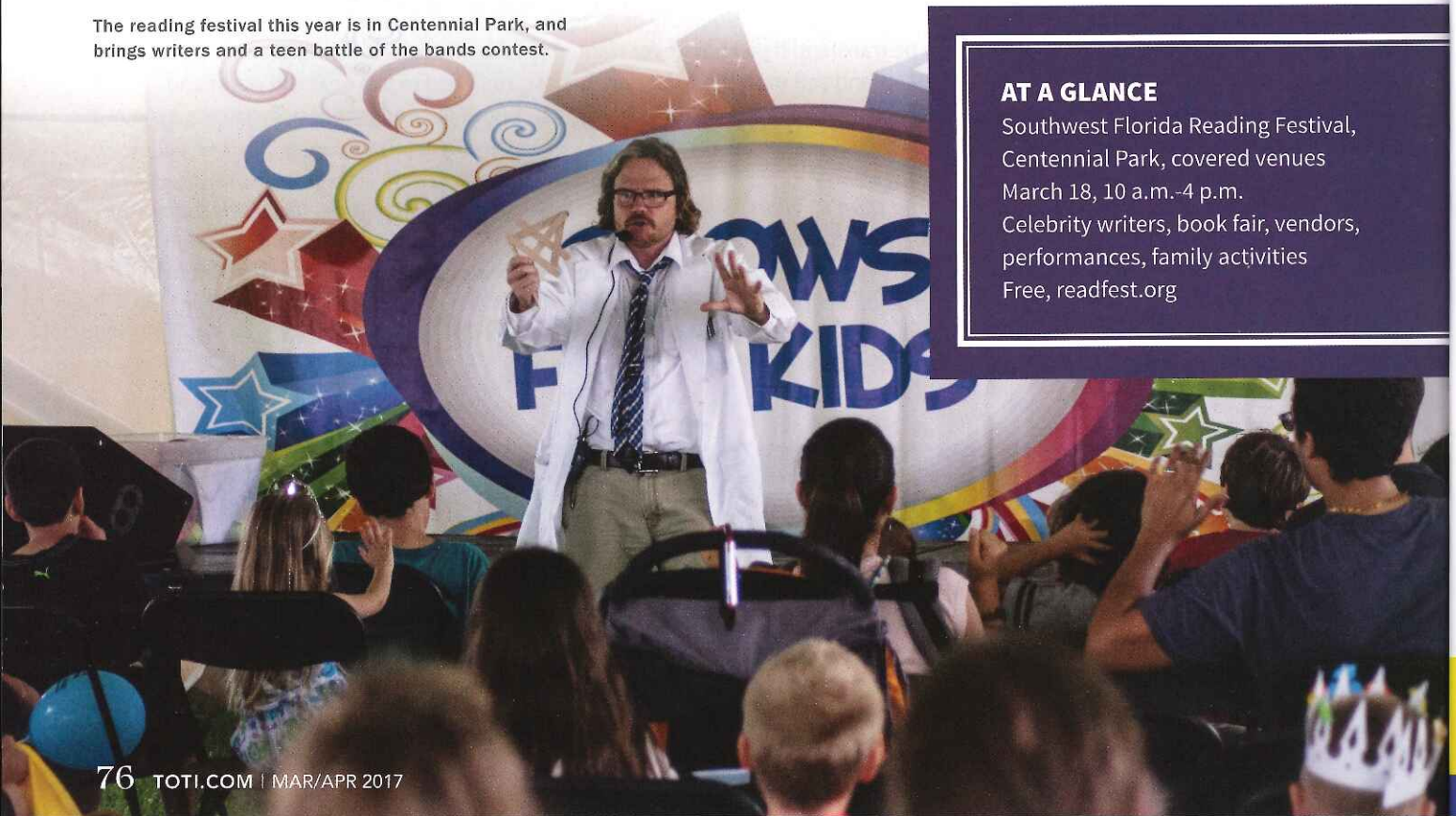
*The free event is great for writers at the top of their game, or those on the ascent.*

Michael Connelly, Dennis Lehane, Debbie Macomber and others appeared. R.L. Stine's fans in 2010 wrapped around Harborside to meet the famous *Goosebumps* writer.

The festival also allowed local writers such as Jeff Lindsay, Randy Wayne White and Robert Macomber to meet readers, a bonus for those of us in Southwest Florida. The modern event also has an evening with the authors on that Friday, an aspiring student-writer contest, and a battle of the bands competition for kids ages 13-19 on festival day.

Byers expects some 20,000 visitors at the one-day festival in Centennial Park. The free event on March 18, she says, is a great for writers at the top of their game, or those on the ascent. Readers "looking for something new, this is the place," she says.

The reading festival this year is in Centennial Park, and brings writers and a teen battle of the bands contest.



## AT A GLANCE

Southwest Florida Reading Festival, Centennial Park, covered venues  
March 18, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.  
Celebrity writers, book fair, vendors, performances, family activities  
Free, [readfest.org](http://readfest.org)

