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## **21st Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival celebrates the power of reading**

Fort Myers, FL, Jan. 24, 2020 – More than 20 acclaimed and best-selling authors are coming to Fort Myers to talk about their books and meet fans at the 21st annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival Saturday, March 7, from 10 a.m.- 4 p.m., on the downtown Fort Myers Regional Library campus, 2450 First St.

The Southwest Florida Reading Festival has a diverse line-up of nationally recognized authors for adults, teens and children. This free, fun event is loved by attendees who come back year after year. The fans attend to hear and meet best-selling authors, participate in contests and activities and find the latest and greatest in books, technology and accessories. In addition to author appearances and autographing sessions, there will be food truck vendors, storytelling programs, arts, crafts, youth writing and coloring contests and a free book for every child and teen.

“The festival invites popular authors to participate by sharing their real life experiences, thought processes and the evolution of their characters,” said Lee County Library System Director Mindi Simon. “It is fascinating to hear the story behind the story.”

In addition to the daylong community event, Lee County Library System hosts a number of preview events at library branches leading up to the festival. Among the activities offered this year are book signings at various branches by New York Times best-selling authors Mary HoneyB Morrison, Chris Pavone, Peggy Rowe and Lisa Unger in addition to a Local Author Day featuring numerous independent authors at the North Fort Myers Library Saturday, Feb. 29 from 1-3 p.m.

The highlight of the preview events will be *An Evening with the Authors* fundraiser March 6 from 5:30-8:30 p.m. at the Marina at Edison Ford, 2360 West First St. in Fort Myers. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet and mingle with this year’s festival authors while enjoying a buffet dinner overlooking the Caloosahatchee River. Tickets can be purchased online at the Reading Festival website [www.ReadFest.org](http://www.ReadFest.org) through Saturday, Feb. 15.

The lineup of award-winning authors scheduled to attend the festival includes adult authors Jennifer Chiaverini, Lincoln Child, Michael Koryta and Erik Larson, as well as youth and teen authors Kate Messner and K.A. Holt. The complete list of authors can be found at [www.ReadFest.org](http://www.ReadFest.org).

“We are really honored to share these authors with the community and provide readers and fans the opportunity to meet the writers personally and learn more about their work,” states festival organizer Melissa Baker. “This year we have an incredibly diverse mix of writers. We are proud that our festival lineup reflects the diversity in our community.”

The Southwest Florida Reading Festival is free and community-supported through donations, sponsorships and grants. To help ensure the continuation of this free community event, please visit [www.ReadFest.org](http://www.ReadFest.org) to make a secure online donation. More information is available at [www.ReadFest.org](http://www.ReadFest.org) or by calling 239-533-4832.

### **ABOUT THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA READING FESTIVAL**

The Southwest Florida Reading Festival is a family-friendly event that celebrates books and the written word. The Festival began in 1999 with the goals of emphasizing the importance of reading and bringing the finest literary talent to Southwest Florida. Now in its 21st year, this free festival has grown in popularity and averages 10,000 book-loving attendees annually. Some of the past authors include Sue Monk Kidd, Susan Mallery, R.L. Stine, Janet Evanovich, Nelson DeMille, Jeff Kinney and hundreds more.

The Reading Festival’s objectives are to promote reading and literacy, increase awareness of the library’s programs and resources and foster partnerships between the Lee County Library System and the community. It is also an opportunity to share with the community the available resources and services at their local Lee County libraries with a library card. The Reading Festival aims to build a literate community by encouraging children to develop an interest in reading independently, which fosters an increase in vocabulary and improved writing skills. For more information, go to [www.ReadFest.org](http://www.ReadFest.org).

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**Author list and short biographies follow; photos available upon request.**

**Adult Authors**

**Jack Carr** is a former Navy SEAL who led special operations teams as a Team Leader, Platoon Commander, Troop Commander, Task Unit Commander, Operations Officer and Executive Officer. He is the author of “The Terminal List” and “True Believer.”

**Jennifer Chiaverini** is the author of several acclaimed historical novels and the beloved “Elm Creek Quilts” series. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the University of Chicago, she lives with her husband and two sons in Madison, Wisconsin.

**Lincoln Child** is the author of “The Forgotten Room,” “The Third Gate,” “Terminal Freeze,” “Deep Storm,” “Death Match” and “Utopia,” as well as co-author with Douglas Preston, of numerous best-sellers, most recently “Old Bones” and “Verses for the Dead.” He lives in Florida.

**Sonali Dev** writes Bollywood-style love stories that let her explore issues faced by women around the world while still indulging her faith in a happily ever after. Her books have been on NPR, Washington Post, Library Journal and Kirkus Best Books of the year lists.

**Mark Greaney** is the author of nine novels in the “Gray Man” series, including “One Minute Out,” his latest release. He has written or co-written seven Tom Clancy Jack Ryan novels and is also the co-author of the 2019 military thriller “Red Metal.”

**Michael Koryta** is the author of 14 novels, including “How It Happened,” “Rise the Dark,” “Last Words,” “Those Who Wish Me Dead” and “So Cold the River.” A former private investigator and newspaper reporter, his latest release is “If She Wakes.”

**William Kent Krueger** is the author of “Ordinary Grace,” winner of the Edgar Award for best novel as well as 18 Cork O’Connor novels, including “Desolation Mountain” and “Sulfur Springs.” His latest release is the standalone novel, “This Tender Land.”

**Erik Larson** is the author of “The Devil in the White City,” “Dead Wake,” “In the Garden of Beasts,” “Thunderstruck” and “Isaac’s Storm.” His books have been published in nearly 20 countries and sold over 9 million copies. His latest is the February 2020 release, “The Splendid and the Vile.”

**Jenn McKinlay** is the author of several mystery and romance series including the “London Hat Shop” mysteries, the “Library Lover’s” mysteries and the “Happily Ever After” series. Her work has been translated into multiple languages in countries all over the world.

**Mary HoneyB Morrison** is the author of 25 fiction and two nonfiction books. Also writing as HoneyB, female empowerment is the primary focus in all of her works. As a public speaker, motivator and host of the HoneyB Morrison show, Mary encourages women to become their best.

**Chris Pavone** is the author of “The Expats,” which won the Edgar and Anthony awards for best first novel, “The Accident,” “The Travelers” and, most recently, “The Paris Diversion.” He was a book editor for nearly two decades and lives in New York City with his family.

**Lisa Unger** is the author of 17 novels including “The Stranger Inside.” In 2019, she received two Edgar Award nominations, an honor held by only a few writers including Agatha Christie. The Edgar-nominated “Under My Skin” is also a finalist for the prestigious Hammett Prize.

**Susan Beckham Zurenda** has won numerous fiction awards and published stories and essays in many literary magazines. Her debut novel, “Bells for Eli,” releases in March 2020. A former English teacher, Susan manages media relations for Magic Time Literary Publicity.

## Children’s Authors

**Kamilla Benko** spent most of her childhood climbing into wardrobes, trying to step through mirrors and plotting to run away to an art museum. Now, she visits other worlds as a children’s book editor. She is the author of the “Unicorn Quest” trilogy and “Frozen 2: Forest of Shadows,” which bridges the events of Disney’s animated movie and its sequel.

**Monica Brown, Ph.D.,** is the author of “Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos,” “Waiting for the Biblioburro/Esperando al Biblioburro,” “Marisol McDonald Doesn’t Match/No Combina,” and the “Lola Levine” chapter book series. Her books have been featured in The New York Times, The Washington Post, on NPR and received two Américas Awards and a Christopher Award.

**Karina Yan Glaser** is the author of the middle grade books “The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street,” “The Vanderbeekers and the Hidden Garden” and “The Vanderbeekers to the Rescue.” She is a contributing editor for Book Riot and co-host of the “Kidlit These Days” podcast.

**Kate Messner** is the author of “Breakout,” a 2019-20 Sunshine State Young Readers Award winner. Her other titles include picture

books like “Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt,” novels like the February 2020 release “Chirp,” the “Fergus and Zeke” easy reader series and the “Ranger in Time” chapter book series. Her March 2020 release is a nonfiction book titled “Tracking Pythons: The Quest to Catch an Invasive Predator.”

**Zachariah OHora** is the illustrator of the best-seller “Wolfie the Bunny.” His debut as an author, “Stop Snoring Bernard!” won the 2011 Society of Illustrators Founders Award and was the 2012 State of Pennsylvania Department of Education One Book. His other works include “No Fits Nilson!,” “My Cousin Momo!,” “The Not So Quiet Library” and his latest release, “Niblet & Ralph.”

**Sara Varon** is a graphic novelist and children’s book author/illustrator. Her works include “New Shoes,” “Odd Duck,” which was selected by Kirkus Reviews as one of the Best Children’s Books of 2013, “Bake Sale” which was named a YALSA Great Graphic Novel for 2012 and “Robot Dreams” which was on Oprah’s Kids’ Reading List in 2008 and selected by Publisher’s Weekly as one of the 150 Best Books of 2008.

### Teen Authors

**Sara Holland** is the author of “Everless” and “Evermore.” She graduated from Wesleyan University and worked in a tea shop, a dentist’s office and a state capitol building before heading to New York to work in publishing. Her latest is the March 2020 release “Havenfall.”

**K.A. Holt** is the author of several middle grade novels in verse including “Redwood and Ponytail,” “Knockout,” “House Arrest” and “Rhyme Schemer” along with several more middle grade novels including “From You to Me.” Kari Anne’s first picture book, “I Wonder,” debuted in 2019.

**Alexandra Monir** is the Iranian-American author of the novel “The Final Six” and its sequel “The Life Below,” releasing in February 2020. She has published four other young adult novels, including the time-travel romance, “Timeless.” Alexandra was recently selected to write the first YA novel about DC Comics superhero Black Canary for the “DC Icons” series.