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'An Evening with the Authors' brings bestselling authors to dine with fans in support of SWFL Reading Festival

Fort Myers, FL, Jan. 26, 2022 – The Lee County Library System will offer booklovers a chance to meet and mingle with Southwest Florida Reading Festival authors during “An Evening with the Authors” fundraiser at the Edison Restaurant & Event Center from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday, March 4.

Pre-paid reservations are required for this opportunity to socialize with up to 20 Reading Festival authors during an Italian buffet dinner overlooking the Fort Myers Country Club. Tickets are \$75 per person and available for purchase online at www.ReadFest.org through Feb. 15.

In addition to the dinner fundraiser, five festival authors are each raffling off the chance to be named as a character in an upcoming book. Name a Character raffle tickets may be purchased during “An Evening with the Authors,” at the Southwest Florida Reading Festival and also online through midnight March 5. The authors participating in this fundraiser include M.E. Hilliard, Joe Ide, J.A. Jance, Sophie Jordan and Kate Quinn. Raffle tickets will be offered at one for \$10, three for \$20, 10 for \$50 and 25 for \$100. The drawing will take place Monday, March 7, with winners contacted later that week. All proceeds benefit the Southwest Florida Reading Festival. More details and the link to purchase raffle tickets online are available at www.readfest.org/events.

Proceeds from “An Evening with the Authors” and the Name a Character fundraiser benefit the Southwest Florida Reading Festival, a free, all-ages outdoor event in downtown Fort Myers where book-loving fans are invited to listen to and meet a diverse line-up of bestselling authors, participate in contests and activities and find the latest in books and technology. In addition to author appearances and autograph sessions, there will be a free book for every child and teen, storytelling programs, youth writing contest awards, arts and crafts, and food truck vendors.

The 23rd annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival will be held 10 a.m-4 p.m. Saturday, March 5 on the Fort Myers Regional Library campus, 2450 First St. The lineup of award-winning authors scheduled to attend includes adult authors Alafair Burke, J.A. Jance, Nathaniel Philbrick, Kate Quinn and Brad Taylor, along with youth and teen authors including Miranda Paul, Stacy McAnulty, Jenna Evans Welch, Alex Willan and Adrienne Young. The complete list of authors can be found by visiting the festival website at www.ReadFest.org or downloading the festival’s mobile app “SWFL ReadFest” at the App Store or Google Play.

For fans who prefer to enjoy author events virtually this year, festival organizer Melissa Baker said there will be livestreams of several of the adult author presentations during the festival and additional live virtual author presentations leading up to the festival. Authors offering online Q&A sessions ahead of the festival include Bonnie Kistler on Feb. 25 and Tim Dorsey on March 1. Information on pre-festival events can be found on the library's calendar of events at www.leelibrary.net/events. Livestreaming on festival day will be available within the mobile app and on the Lee County Library System’s YouTube channel. Details for livestreams and other preview events can all be found in the festival app.

The Southwest Florida Reading Festival is community-supported through donations, sponsorships and grants. To help ensure the continuation of this event, please visit www.ReadFest.org to make a secure online donation. More information is available at 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. It began in 1999 with the goals of emphasizing the importance of reading and bringing the finest literary talent to Southwest Florida. Now in its 23rd 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, Zane, R.L. Stine, Janet Evanovich, Diana Gabaldon, Nelson DeMille, Jeff Kinney and hundreds more.

The Reading Festival's objectives are to promote reading and literacy, increase awareness of library programs and foster partnerships between the Lee County Library System and the community. It is also an opportunity to share with the community the resources and services available at local Lee County libraries with a library card. The Reading Festival aims to build a literate community by encouraging children to read independently leading to an increase in vocabulary and improved writing skills. For more information, go to www.ReadFest.org.

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The complete author list and short biographies are below.

Adult Authors

Xio Axelrod is a USA Today bestselling author of award-winning romantic fiction. Xio grew up in the music industry and began recording at a young age. When she isn't writing stories, she can be found in the studio, writing songs or performing on international stages (under a different, not-so-secret name). She lives in Philadelphia with one full-time husband and several part-time cats. Visit xioaxelrod.com.

Alafair Burke is a New York Times bestselling author whose most recent novels include "The Better Sister," "The Wife," which is under production for a feature film and "The Ex," which was nominated for the Edgar Award for best novel. She is the co-author of the bestselling "Under Suspicion" series with Mary Higgins Clark. A former prosecutor, she now teaches criminal law and lives in Manhattan and East Hampton. Visit alafairburke.com.

Tom Cooper is the author of the novels "Florida Man" and "The Marauders." His short stories have appeared in the Mid-American Review, Gulf Coast, Boulevard, Smokelong Quarterly, and Oxford American. He has taught at Florida State University, Nicholls State University, the University of Central Florida, and the University of South Florida-Tampa. He holds a BA from Florida Atlantic University, an MA in Literature from the University of South Florida, and a Ph.D in Creative Writing from Florida State University.

M.E. Hilliard is a full-time librarian who started out in retail merchandising. After 12 years of mergers, consolidations and moves around the country, she went to graduate school and got a Master of Library Science degree. Originally from the Connecticut shoreline, she has never lost her love of quaint small towns, big cities and fashion, so she indulges that in her writing. A life-long lover of mystery fiction, M.E. currently lives and works in Florida. Visit mehilliard.com.

Joe Ide is of Japanese American descent. Growing up in South Central Los Angeles, Joe's favorite books were the Conan Doyle Sherlock Holmes stories. The idea that a person could face the world and vanquish his enemies with just his intelligence fascinated him. Joe went on to earn a graduate degree and had several careers before writing his debut novel, "IQ," inspired by his early experiences and his love of Sherlock Holmes. Joe lives in Santa Monica, California. Visit joeide.com.

J.A. Jance is The New York Times bestselling author of the "Ali Reynolds" series, the "J.P. Beaumont" series and the "Joanna Brady" series, as well as five interrelated Southwestern thrillers featuring the Walker family. Born in South Dakota and raised in Bisbee, Arizona, Jance lives with her husband in Seattle, Washington. Visit her online at JAJance.com.

Sophie Jordan is The New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of Avon historical romances for adults and young adult fantasy novels. A Texan and former high school English teacher, she also writes paranormal romance under the name Sharie Kohler. Visit her online at sophiejordan.net.

Nathaniel Philbrick is the author of six New York Times bestsellers including “In the Heart of the Sea,” winner of the National Book Award and the basis of the 2015 film directed by Ron Howard; “Mayflower,” a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in History and three books about the American Revolution, including “Valiant Ambition,” winner of the George Washington Book Prize. His most recent book is “Travels with George: In Search of Washington and His Legacy.” He lives on Nantucket Island with his wife Melissa and their dog Dora. Visit nathanielphilbrick.com.

Craig Pittman is a native Floridian, author and award-winning reporter. Born in Pensacola, he graduated from Troy State University in Alabama, where his muckraking work for the student paper prompted an agitated dean to label him “the most destructive force on campus.” After 31 years at the Tampa Bay Times, he now writes a weekly column for the Florida Phoenix and is co-host of the popular podcast “Welcome to Florida.” He’s the author of six nonfiction books about Florida, including The New York Times bestseller “Oh, Florida: How America’s Weirdest State Influences the Rest of the Country.” His latest release is “The State You’re In: Florida Men, Florida Women and Other Wildlife.” Visit craigpittman.com.

Kate Quinn is The New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction. A native of Southern California, she attended Boston University, where she earned a bachelor’s and master’s degree in classical voice. A lifelong history buff, she has written four novels in the Empress of Rome Saga and two books set in the Italian Renaissance before turning to the 20th century with “The Alice Network,” “The Huntress” and “The Rose Code.” All have been translated into multiple languages. She and her husband live in California with three rescue dogs. Visit katequinnauthor.com.

Shauna Robinson’s love of books led her to try a career in publishing before deciding she’d rather write books instead. Originally from San Diego, she lives in Virginia with her husband and their sleepy greyhound. Shauna is an introvert at heart. She spends most of her time reading, baking and figuring out the politest way to avoid social interaction. “Must Love Books” is her debut novel. Visit shaunarobinsonbooks.com.

Brad Taylor, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.), is a 21-year veteran of the U.S. Army Infantry and Special Forces, including eight years with the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta. Taylor retired in 2010 having participated in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. In 2011, Brad published his debut novel, One Rough Man, which was an immediate success and launched the Pike Logan series. Since then, Brad has written 15 New York Times bestsellers. He lives in Charleston, South Carolina, with his wife and two daughters. Visit bradtaylorbooks.com.

Children’s Authors

Adrianna Cuevas is the author of the Pura Belpre honor book “The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez,” “Cuba in My Pocket” and “The Ghosts of Rancho Espanto.” She is a first-generation Cuban-American originally from Miami, Florida. A former Spanish and ESOL teacher, Adrianna currently resides in Austin, Texas with her husband and son. Visit www.adriannacuevas.com.

Stacy McNulty is a children’s book author, who used to be a mechanical engineer and still dreams of being an astronaut. She’s written more than 30 books, including the middle-grade novel “The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl,” an Indie Bestseller, Sunshine State Young Readers award winner and winner of the Mathical Book Prize. Visit stacymcantly.com.

Baptiste Paul is the award-winning author of “The Field,” “To Carnival!” and “I Am Farmer: Growing an Environmental Movement in Cameroon.” His works have garnered many starred reviews from Kirkus, Booklist and School Library Journal. Several titles have been translated into multiple languages. He loves

writing stories inspired by his childhood in Saint Lucia and featuring words from his native language, Creole. Baptiste is a mentor for We Need Diverse Books and the co-author of several works with Miranda Paul, including their newest collaboration, "Peace." He lives in Wisconsin with his family. Visit baptistepaul.net.

Miranda Paul is the award-winning author of more than a dozen books for children, including "Speak Up!," "Right Now: Real Kids Speaking Up for Change" and "Little Libraries, Big Heroes," which features the story behind the Little Free Library movement. She is a founding member of the organization We Need Diverse Books, and lives with her family in Wisconsin. Visit mirandapaul.com.

Alex Willan grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where he was seldom seen without his sketchbook in hand. His love of drawing led him to earn a BFA in illustration from Savannah College of Art and Design. Alex has exhibited in art galleries and has painted murals, theater sets and squirmy kids' faces, but his true love has always been children's books. He lives in Chicago with his dog, Harley. Visit alexwillan.com.

Teen Authors

Isabel Ibañez was born and raised in Boca Raton, Florida, by Bolivian immigrants and spent the first part of her adult life in Orlando before she and her husband moved to the Blue Ridge Mountains. She is the author of two Bolivian-inspired YA fantasy novels, "Woven in Moonlight" and "Written in Starlight." In 2020, "Woven in Moonlight" was listed as one of TIME's 100 Best Fantasy Books of All Time. She is a contributing author in the YA Latin American speculative fiction anthology "Reclaim the Stars: 17 Tales Across Realms & Space." Visit isabelibanez.com.

Laura Taylor Namey is The New York Times bestselling author of Reese Witherspoon's YA Book Club pick "A Cuban Girl's Guide to Tea and Tomorrow," "The Library of Lost Things" and "When We Were Them." She is the winner of the Peggy Miller Award for excellence in young adult fiction. A proud Cuban American, she can be found hunting for vintage treasures and wishing she were in London or Paris. Visit laurataylornamey.com.

Jenna Evans Welch was the kind of insatiable child reader who had no choice but to grow up to become a writer. She is The New York Times bestselling author of "Love & Gelato," "Love & Luck" and "Love & Olives." When she isn't writing girl abroad stories, Jenna can be found chasing her children or making elaborate messes in the kitchen. She lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, with her family. Visit jennaevanswelch.com.

Adrienne Young is The New York Times, USA Today and Indie bestselling author of the "Fable" duology and the "Sky in the Deep" duology. She is a foodie with a deep love of history and travel and a shameless addiction to coffee. When she's not writing, you can find her on her yoga mat, sipping wine over long dinners or disappearing into her favorite art museums. She lives with her documentary filmmaker husband and their four little wildlings in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Visit adrienneyoungbooks.com.

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