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***An Evening with the Authors* gets fans up close with bestselling writers; event supports SWFL Reading Festival**

Fort Myers, FL, Jan. 23, 2023 – The Lee County Library System offers book-loving fans a chance to meet and mingle with Southwest Florida Reading Festival authors during “An Evening with the Authors” fundraiser 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday, March 3, at the Edison Restaurant & Event Center. Paid reservations are required for this opportunity to dine with and discover more than 20 Southwest Florida Reading Festival authors during a 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.

“This really is an unforgettable opportunity for fans to meet the authors before our big festival,” said Melissa Baker, festival coordinator and programming/community outreach manager for the Lee County Library System. “The dinner is a personal gathering with the writers and without the crowds that festival day will bring. Our guests have a chance to interact with the authors and quite likely learn fun facts, too.”

Proceeds from “An Evening with the Authors” benefit the Southwest Florida Reading Festival, a free, all-ages outdoor event in downtown Fort Myers where fans may listen to and meet a diverse line-up of bestselling authors, explore the latest in books and technology and participate in crafts and activities. 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 and food truck vendors. Several adult author presentations also will be livestreamed through the festival’s mobile app “SWFL ReadFest,” available at the App Store or Google Play.

The 24th annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival will be held 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 4, on the Fort Myers Regional Library campus, 2450 First St. The author lineup features bestselling authors for adults, teens and children, including Newbery Award winning youth writers Meg Medina and Lauren Wolk. Featured teen authors include Florida Teens Read fantasy writer Kalynn Bayron and historical fiction crossover novelist Ruta Sepetys. Adult authors include Kristan Higgins, Alka Joshi and thriller writers such as Kendra Elliot, Joseph Finder, Gregg Hurwitz and Melinda Leigh. With more than 20 authors to choose from, there is something for everyone at this annual event.

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 that promotes reading, literacy and library services, visit www.ReadFest.org to make a secure online donation. More information is available at www.ReadFest.org or by calling 239-533-4832.

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The complete author list and short biographies are below.

Adult Authors

Kendra Elliot has sold more than 10 million books and is a recurring Wall Street Journal and Amazon top ten bestselling author. She also is an International Thriller Writers’ award finalist.

Joseph Finder is the New York Times bestselling thriller author of fifteen suspense novels, including “Judgment,” “The Switch” and “Suspicion.” He introduced private spy Nick Heller in “Vanished,” an instant bestseller, and his novels “High Crimes” and “Paranoia” have been adapted as major motion pictures.

Kristan Higgins is The New York Times, USA TODAY, Wall Street Journal and Publishers Weekly bestselling author of more than 20 novels, which have been translated into more than two dozen languages and have sold millions of copies around the world.

Gregg Hurwitz is The New York Times #1 internationally bestselling author of 23 thrillers including the “Orphan X” series. His novels have won numerous literary awards and have been published in 33 languages.

Alka Joshi is the New York Times bestselling author of “The Henna Artist” and “The Secret of Jaipur” with the third book in the trilogy “The Perfumist of Paris” releasing in March. “The Henna Artist” is being adapted for an upcoming Netflix series.

Melinda Leigh is a #1 Wall Street Journal and #1 Amazon bestselling author. Her books have sold over 12 million copies and she has garnered numerous publishing awards, including nominations for an International Thriller Award and two RITAs.

Annette Chavez Macias is the author of the novel “Big Chicas Don’t Cry,” which weaves together Mexican-American culture from the perspective of four cousins as they navigate love, loss and the meaning of family. Annette also writes romance under the pen name Sabrina Sol.

Sarah MacLean is The New York Times bestselling author of romances translated into more than 25 languages, a romance columnist and the co-host of the weekly romance novel podcast, “Fated Mates.”

Vanessa Riley writes historical fiction, mystery, and romance set in the Georgian, Regency and Victorian eras featuring multicultural communities and strong sisterhoods.

Deb Rogers is the author of the debut novel “Florida Woman.” She is an award-winning blogger and was a national producer of the storytelling series “Listen to Your Mother.”

Jennifer Lonoff Schiff is the author of the popular “Sanibel Island Mystery” series and the novels “Tinder Fella” and “Something’s Cooking in Chianti.”

Kids Authors

Alexandra Alessandri is the award-winning author of “Feliz New Year, Ava Gabriela!,” “Isabel and Her Colores Go to School” and the middle grade novel “The Enchanted Life of Valentina Mejía,” a February 2023 release.

Alda P. Dobbs is the author of the historical novels “Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna” and its follow-up, “The Other Side of the River” Her debut novel received a Pura Belpré Honor and is a Texas Bluebonnet Master List selection.

Terri Libenson is the New York Times bestselling author the popular middle grade series, “Emmie & Friends.” She is also the award-winning cartoonist of the syndicated daily comic strip “The Pajama Diaries,” which ran in hundreds of newspapers internationally from 2006 - 2020.

Meg Medina is a Newbery award-winning and New York Times best-selling Latina author who writes picture books, as well as middle grade and young adult fiction. Her latest work is the Newbery Medal winning and Kirkus Prize finalist “Merci Suárez Changes Gears.” The daughter of Cuban immigrants, she now lives in Richmond, Virginia.

Heidi E.Y. Stemple is the author of more than forty-four books and numerous short stories and poems, mostly for children. Her works include books co-written with her mother, and bestselling author, Jane Yolen.

Lauren Wolk is best known for the New York Times bestselling and Newbery Honor-winning “Wolf Hollow,” its sequel, “My Own Lightning,” the Scott O’Dell Award-winning “Beyond the Bright Sea” and “Echo Mountain.”

Teen Authors

Kalynn Bayron is the New York Times and Indie bestselling author of the young adult fantasy novels “Cinderella Is Dead” and Florida Teens Read title “This Poison Heart.” Her latest works include “This Wicked Fate” and the middle grade paranormal adventure “The Vanquishers.”

Meg Medina is the author of the young adult novels “Burn Baby Burn,” a Kirkus Prize finalist, “Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass,” which received the Pura Belpré Author Award and “The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind.” She is also a Newbery Medal winning children’s author.

Nina Moreno is the author of books about disaster Latinx teens and tweens chasing their dreams, falling in love and navigating life in the hyphen. Her books include YA novels “Don’t Date Rosa Santos” and “Our Way Back to Always” and her middle grade titles “Join the Club, Maggie Diaz” and “Pack Your Bags, Maggie Diaz” releasing March 2023.

Ruta Sepetys is an internationally acclaimed, #1 New York Times, bestselling author of historical fiction. Published in over sixty countries and forty languages, Sepetys’ books are read by both teens and adults worldwide. Her books have won or been shortlisted for more than forty book prizes and are currently in development for film and television.

Rebecca Ross writes fantasy novels for teens and adults. She is the author of “The Queen’s Rising” duology, standalones “Dreams Lie Beneath” as well as “Sisters of Sword & Song,” forthcoming “Divine Rivals” duology and adult duology, “A River Enchanted.”