

# R/M

*The Magazine of Rancho Mirage*



**JAMIE KABLER**  
*Literary Visionary*

**A LEGACY REBORN**  
*The History of the  
ANA Inspiration*

**TOP OF THE  
MORNING**  
*Breakfast in  
Rancho Mirage*

JAMIE KABLER

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# A Man of Many WORDS

Rancho Mirage Writers Festival founder Jamie Kabler – aka “Jamiopedia”  
– uses his far-reaching love of books to bring authors and readers together.

*by* DANIEL VAILLANCOURT / *photography by* MARC ROYCE

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**D**ESERT CITIES HAVE THEIR FESTIVALS. Films unspool in Palm Springs, music and dates rock Indio, hot air balloons fly high over Cathedral City, food and wine flow in Palm Desert, and art appeals in both Indian Wells and La Quinta. In our fair city, thanks to Rancho Mirage Writers Festival founder Jamie Kabler, it's all about scribes and their oeuvre.

"It had to be the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival," Kabler says. "I live here. I wanted Rancho Mirage to get the recognition. I would not have done it in any other desert city."

Kabler conceived his brainchild in 2012 while attending the Sun Valley Writers Conference, arguably the largest and best known American event of its kind. The minute the idea sparked, he turned to partner Helene Galen — what did she think? "I know Jamie's talent, I know what he can do," Galen says. "He's extraordinarily brilliant, his memory is exceptional, and he loves to read. Put all that together and you have a writers festival." After a breath, she adds: "That he'd be taking in a million dollars by the fourth year? That I didn't believe. But he has."

Galen is referring to the 200 "angels" Kabler has recruited — to the tune of \$5,000 per — to help support the festival. That's a big jump from 2014, when Galen and five other founding angels contributed a total of \$30,000 so that 400 readers could sit in one room at the Rancho Mirage Public Library and witness Kabler's freshman literary honor roll. The numbers for 2017 testify to the event's remarkable growth: 50 authors, 1,000 readers, five rooms — plus evening sessions presented by host hotel Omni Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa.

"It allows us to give our authors the best honorariums, so we get the best speakers, and it keeps our ticket price down," says Kabler of his 200 philanthropists' generosity, noting that 80 percent of the festival's budget is subsidized by them while the remaining 20 percent is funded through the sale of \$400 reader passes. "As I reach out to writers, I say, 'It's the only festival in January where you can wear shorts and come and enjoy yourself.'"

The authors aren't the only ones having fun. "What's very exciting is that people come up to Helene and me all year long and tell us that the festival has become the best thing they do in the desert," says Kabler, who is himself not only a contributing angel (and then some) but a maestro who supplies his

year-round services gratis. "It's very reassuring, because I choose the books. I choose the speakers. I didn't know if my taste would jibe with the taste of the readers, but it has. Our emphasis is on history, biography, memoir. I said four years ago, 'It's really a festival for very smart people who want to have a good, engaged conversation,' and that's what we've tried to do."

Reader confidence in Kabler's programming is so unflinchingly high that passes for the January event sell out the previous March within hours of going on sale. It's no wonder, with 2017 participants like U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer (*The Art of Tough: Fearlessly Facing Politics and Life*), Steve Jobs physician Dr. David Agus (*The Lucky Years: How to Thrive in the Brave New World of Health*), transgender activist Jennifer Finney Boylan (*I'll Give You Something to Cry About*), presidential granddaughter Susan

Eisenhower (*Mrs. Ike*), and National Book Award-winner Evan Osnos (*Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China*) among far too many other best-sellers to mention. There are also panels, like "TV Is Better Than Movies," "Are Our Hospitals Killing Us?" and "Natalie Wood: Reflections on a Legendary Life," plus keynote addresses by the likes of Pulitzer Prize-winning humorist Dave Barry and Hollywood royal Robert Wagner. It's all quite the embarrassment of literate riches. "Our writers say we have the best readers, and we do," Kabler maintains. "They're so discerning they won't settle for second best. I spend a year trying to match their expectations with a roster of the best writers in the world."

The founder is quick to add that none of this would be possible without the members of the Rancho Mirage City Council as well as the Rancho

Mirage Public Library, its director David Bryant, and its staff. "They're critical to the success of this," he says. The affection and respect are mutual. Bryant, who deems the festival one of the great events of the Coachella Valley, states, "It's become the largest book and author program in any public library in America. It's added a significant intellectual cachet to our beautiful resort city and confirmed our library as a 'house of ideas.'"

"We've broken through," Kabler concludes. "Obviously, we've done something right. We do everything with the idea that it should be the best, and I'm really proud of that." As for the readers who regularly approach him to express their gratitude, to say how much the festival means to them? "That means a lot to me. It's changed my life. It's given me a great mission." *R M*



RACHEL HORWITZ



**THE AUTHORS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES HAVING FUN**

Clockwise from top left: founding angel Helene Galen, founder Jamie Kabler, and Diana Fisketjoh; author Dave Barry; the packed crowd at Helene Galen Auditorium at Annenberg Center EMC; actor Laurence Luckinbill, Kabler, and actress Lucie Arnaz; author Lee Child and Mary Lou Solomon; executive producer Debbie Green and Kabler.

