

Rancho Mirage Writers Festival kicks off seventh year with Angel Night dinner

Dale Gribow Special to The Desert Sun

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In “A Tale of Two Cities,” Charles Dickens opened with “It was the best of times ...” Truly that describes the “Coachellafest for the mind,” also known as the 2020 **Rancho Mirage Writers Festival**.

At the seventh annual “**Angel Night**” dinner on Tuesday, Jan. 28, which proceeds the three-day festival at the Rancho Mirage Library and Observatory, 600 bibliophiles and members of the fourth estate attended. The 2020 theme was “The Election and the Anniversary of Women’s Right to Vote,” and guests were eager to soak up their yearly allotment of literary knowledge at the Super Bowl of Writers Festivals, which took place a few days before the Iowa Caucus.

Festival founder **Jamie Kabler** and his team — which includes **Debbie Green Miller**, **Deborah Dejah** and the library’s director **Aaron Espinosa** — plan the festival two years in advance, and their meticulousness showed in every detail. “Organized” best describes the event; attendees were greeted by a phalanx of valet attendants and Mariachis. Offerings were plentiful, with stations for coffee, pastries, water, mixed candies and ample boxed lunches. Writers and speakers were able to meet and greet, thus fulfilling one of the festival’s missions.

The mind-stimulating festival was made possible by Founding Angel **Helene Galen**, joined by Platinum Angels **Sherrie Auen**, **Catharine Reed** and **Harold Matzner**. These generous donors, in addition to other Angels, helped to underwrite the festival so that there was no increase in price.



Writers Festival founder Jamie Kabler smiles on the red carpet alongside Mary Hart, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Jon Meacham and Helene Galen at the seventh annual “Angel Night” dinner on Tuesday, Jan. 28. *Lani Garfield, Special To The Desert Sun*



Debbie Green Miller, the event's executive director, enjoyed a moment with Stewart Boxer, former Senator Barbara Boxer and writer Bret Stephens. *Lani Garfield, Special To The Desert Sun*

“The Rancho Mirage Writers Festival is an amazing opportunity to hear from dynamic authors on a variety of topics,” Reed said. “This year, we’re excited that the Auen Foundation’s sponsorship will make every presentation available online.” (For information, visit rmwritersfest.org.)

James Patterson, the world’s best-selling author and the literary equivalent of a rock star, graced the stage to the delight of the attendees. His presentation began the 2020 literary journey, where more than 1,300 readers were intrigued by presenters who rotated every 45 minutes with often seven diverse presentations daily.

Patterson was interviewed by journalist **Carl Hiassen**, and each shared their great sense of humor. Patterson opened, describing the desert as “a place where I am not the oldest in the room.” Patterson’s latest novel about Jeffrey Epstein, “Filthy Rich,” was one of several books gifted to attendees.

Some notables in the crowd were Angels **Patty Newman**, **G. Aubrey** and **Lori Serfling**, **Jan Salta**, **Bryn** and **Dick Debeikes**, **Bob** and **Wendy Goodfriend**, **Anne Holland**, **Marion Rosenthal**, **Edye Broad** and **Dan Clivner** and **Lori** and **Mike Milken**.

Dr. Barry and **Gale Hackshaw**, **Patty Newman**, **G. Aubrey** and **Lori Serfling**, **Bruce Fessier**, **Carol Scherger**, **Dr. Joe Scherger**, co-chair **Dr. Bart Ketover** and attorney **Steve Quintinalla**, who handles the festival’s legal work.

Some of the laudatory festival descriptions heard were from **Dave Barry**, who commented it was “the best writers festival in the universe.” **Bret Stephens** of The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal said: “The Writers Festival is the best of its kind and will soon be a landmark institution of the literate American culture.”

The festival pulsed with inspiring and diverse panels and conversations. Among the selections were “America’s First War” with **Dr. Lynne Cheney** and **Jon Meacham**; “Is America a Country at War With Itself?” with **James Fallows**, **Senator Jeff Flake**, **Karl Rove** and **Bret Stephens**; “The Fan and the Commissioner” with **Dr. Doris Kearns Goodwin** and **Bud Selig**; “No Safe Spaces” with congresswoman Jackie Speier; “The End of Alzheimers” with **Dr. Dale Bredeesen**, interviewed by Eisenhower 360’s Scherger; “Presidential Politics and the Media” with ABC’s **Dan Abrams** and “Happiness Revisited” by **Dennis Prager**.

If guests expected to be spoiled, they were not disappointed. Among those departing with smiling faces, from what surely will be the talk of the desert until next year’s event on January 26-29, 2021, were **Connie** and **Bob Lurie**, **Donna MacMillan**, **Mary Hart**, **Iris** and **Thom Smotrich**, **Bruce Konheim**, **Michael Landes**, **Sharon Davis** and former governor of California **Gray Davis**.