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## After 22 years, SOKY Book Fest coming to an end

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1 of 3



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The Warren County Public Library has announced its decision to end the Southern Kentucky Book Fest, with plans to refocus its efforts on a series of author events throughout the year.

Over the past 22 years, the library had partnered with Barnes & Noble and Western Kentucky University to bring the event featuring national and regional authors and related events to Bowling Green. The event has typically drawn thousands each spring.

“In the post-Covid world, three challenges led WCPL to rethink the model of only providing a one-day festival,” said WCPL Director Courtney Stevens. “One and primarily, many authors stopped traveling for events or raised their contract rates. Two, a major grant money source shifted. Three, Barnes & Noble Corporate is no longer investing in events like Book Fest, which means there is no longer a bookseller for the event.”

Stevens said that the local Barnes & Noble, however, did go above and beyond to rally for the continuation of the event.

“The library does not have the financial or staffing means to carry SOKY BookFest alone under the old model,” she said. “So, knowing how much our community loves books, we considered every aspect of the festival and broke each component into smaller, affordable events.”

Mixed reactions about the decision have appeared on the SOKY BookFest Facebook page, with most lamenting the end of the event:

“I’m sad to see the Book Fest end;” “So sad you decided to drop it;” “extremely disappointing;” “What a tremendous loss. It’s a shame.”

Stevens said she shares “the nostalgia of our community for the end of something beautiful, but something new and beautiful is on its way to you.”

“We will always be a community who celebrates authors and books, and Warren County Library will remain on the forefront of providing equitable entertainment by thinking outside the box, rebuilding despite challenges and pouring love through bookish opportunities into our county,” she said.

The first event, scheduled from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 21 at the Bob Kirby Branch, will be “Locally Made: Authors and Creators of Kentucky.”

“BookFest has always been a wonderful way to celebrate local talent,” Stevens said. “Former attendees of BookFest will be right at home with authors personalizing and signing books.”

An all-day event called “Back to Back Books” is scheduled for Sept. 21 at the Capitol.

“We have already secured authors Jamie Ford and Dr. Joshua Bennett and will be building panels and talks to be offered from the Capitol stage,” she said. “We partnered with One Roof, a venue two doors down from the Capitol, to host an author hall and signing area. Since we must handle the bookselling element, where BookFest brought in 80-120 authors, we will be working with 15-20 for the Author Hall.”

She said Children’s Day of BookFest will be replaced by the “Let’s Read” Author Series at the Capitol.

The library worked with the Bowling Green Independent School System and Warren County Public Schools to “craft a way to serve even more kids than we do at BookFest.”

From September through April, the library will bring established children’s authors to The Capitol during the school day. Schools will register their classrooms for the authors they want to meet.

“Let’s Read” series authors will be announced in August.

These three events/series have been planned in addition to the library’s year-long author and speaker series.

The Author Series, a monthly book talk at the Bob Kirby Branch, will include many national and local authors.

The Big Series, a monthly talk, includes authors and speakers such as Jim Cantore, Temple Grandin, Jeff Hammond, Zahi Hawass, Mireya Mayor, Kate Bowler, Sean

Dietrich and many others.

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**Ann Marie Dotson**