

Writer's Fest: Build it in the desert and they will come

Betty Francis Special to The Desert Sun

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Opening night at the Rancho Mirage Writer's Festival drew "the thousand smartest people in the Desert" according to founder Jamie Kabler. *Gregg Felsen/Special To The Desert Sun*



Rancho Mirage Mayor Dana Hobert, David Bryant, Jamie Kabler at last month's Rancho Mirage Writers Festival. *Gregg Felsen/Special To The Desert Sun*

Upon seeing the overflow crowds at every venue, my observation was that this Rancho Mirage festival might need to move to the Palm Springs Convention Center, but there were no "seconds" to my suggestion.

The major advantage that this festival has in common with the desert's other rapid-growth events is that every minute was meticulously organized and welcoming. Even the parking valets and security guards were courteous and friendly. And the credit for that lies squarely with RMWF's founder, **Jamie Kabler**, and his faithful sidekick, **David Bryant**.

One example, as described by Bryant, was the meeting space. "We've been working on this nearly full time since last November" he said. We knew space would be tight so we planned things down to the last inch, we even used tape measures on a dozen different chairs to find the ones that could squeeze in a few more guests."

Kabler's reputation for endless energy and getting things done went up yet another notch. He also repeatedly thanked EVERYONE, including The Rancho Mirage City Council members, Eisenhower Medical Center, The Annenberg Retreat at Sunnylands, his own board of directors, his original co-founder Susan Rosser, the hard working steering committee, volunteers and Angel concierges.

The "bible" of the festival was a bound, 40-page schedule of events, designed by **Rachel Horwitz** which kept every one of those thousand smartest people in the loop.

ENDLESS JOYS

The Friday lunch was spectacular. The library's front parking lot was turned into a sunny picnic ground with bright yellow, orange and green umbrella tables and chairs. The 1,000 festival participants enjoyed a laughter-filled lunch as thousands of cars streamed by, just a few yards away, on busy Highway 111. I wonder how many of those gawkers realized that on one side of the street they were seeing a group that has sold over 200 million books while, on the other side if they looked up, they might well see a couple of bighorn sheep on the rocky slopes above. Ironically, that was the day it started snowing on the East coast.

A total of 20 writers conducted a full session and 20 more participated in short talks and discussion groups. Famed funny-men **Dave Barry** and **Ron Leiber** regaled the audience at a discussion narrated by The Desert Sun's **Bruce Fessier** during the day. Later, **Lee Child** told his story of being fired at 40 then writing his first of 20 **Jack Reacher** novels selling over 100 million.

Dave Barry was introduced by the Desert's funniest man, **Miles Berger** who is now the opening act for **Dave**. Berger bills himself as a "Sexologist" and was as funny as Barry. **Debbie Green**, the fest's executive producer, is now booking him for parties. Barry's return to the festival was through the generous support of Angel **Jan Salta**.

BIG TIP: The date for next year's RMWF is Jan. 28-29, 2017. Passes go on sale March 1st so make sure you have signed up on the website www.rmwritersfest.org.