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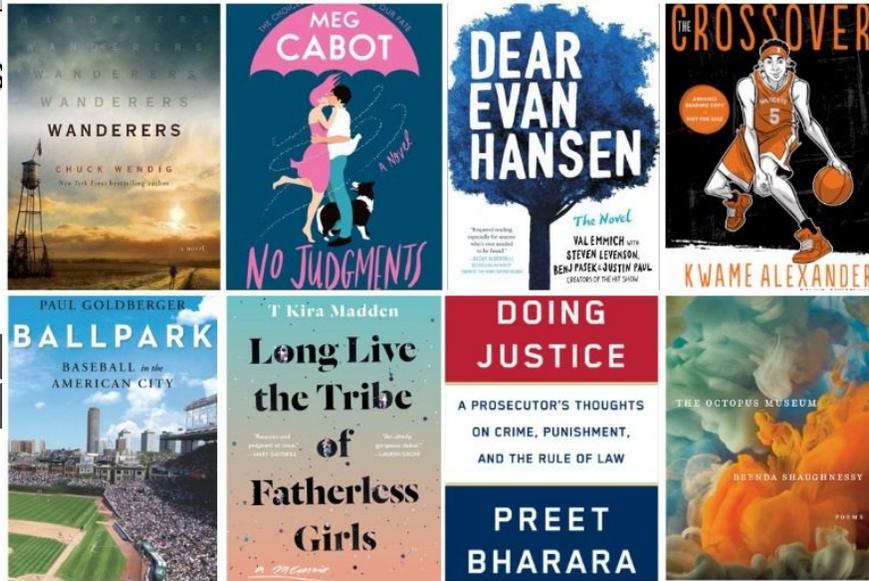
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Morristown Festival of Books Turns a Page

The rapidly growing event, which marks its sixth year October 11-12, will boast interactive events, 50-plus authors and more.

By [Marlaina Cockcroft](#) | | October 8, 2019 | Appears in the [October 2019](#) issue

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The Morristown Festival of Books marks its sixth year October 11-12 with new, interactive events and its first paid director to oversee it all.

“To be able to work on this is such an honor because it was so well established and so well run,” says Rachel Barry, a publishing-industry veteran. The festival has grown from less than 2,000 attendees in 2014 to more than 8,000 last year, and from around 20 authors to 50-plus this year. Previously, it was an all-volunteer operation.

Barry, a Madison resident, describes the caliber of authors taking part as “amazing.” Those talking about and signing their books will include Meg Cabot, Chuck Wendig, Kwame Alexander and keynote speaker Preet Bharara, the former federal prosecutor and author of *Doing Justice: A Prosecutor’s Thoughts on Crime, Punishment, and the Rule of Law* (Knopf).

Sponsorships and grants keep most of the festival free. There is a fee for the keynote (\$55, \$25 students), as well as two new ticketed events. Book Club Girl Lunch, a meet-and-greet lunch with four authors, costs \$30. Pitchapalooza, run by Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry of Montclair—aka the Book Doctors—will close the festival and give 25 authors a chance to pitch their books to a panel of experts—and the audience. Pitchapalooza tickets are \$20; pitching is free.

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The Kidfest area will include face painters and balloon animals, plus a collection of kids' books by diverse authors. Penguin Young Readers will quiz kids in preparation for the 2019-2020 National History Bee, and the all-ages *Star Wars* event will feature members of the 501st Legion in Stormtrooper gear.

Many of the authors are new to the festival, including Val Emmich, the Jersey City-based actor,

singer/songwriter and author. His latest novel, *Dear Evan Hansen* (Poppy), is based on the hit Broadway musical of the same name. Emmich says the show's creators wanted a book that could reach teenagers who might not make it to Broadway. "The book," he says, "really complements the show."



Val Emmich Courtesy of the Morristown Festival of Books

Emmich thinks there are many reasons why *Dear Evan Hansen* resonates with so many people. "I feel like the overall message of the book and the show is that you're not alone in your loneliness."



Ame Dyckman Courtesy of the Morristown Festival of Books

Picture-book author Ame Dyckman is making her second appearance at the festival. In the Lawrenceville resident's latest work, *Dandy* (Little, Brown), a daddy lion tries to yank a dandelion from his "perfect" lawn, but is foiled by his daughter. Dyckman says "real-life dandelion wars" in her old neighborhood inspired the book.

Dyckman finds the festival itself to be inspirational. "I love meeting readers of all ages, but it's a magical moment when kids at book festivals realize books are created by real people," she says. Festivals, she adds, help "entire communities to celebrate literacy, creativity and spending quality time together."

On October 11 at 7:30 keynote Preet Bharara will speak at the Mayo Performing Arts Center, 100 South Street. Festival events are 10 am-5 pm October 12 at locations along South Street.

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