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## SOKY Book Fest's return welcomed

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Illustrator LeUyen Pham draws a dinosaur for Luke Smith (front left), 5, on Saturday for the family at the Southern Kentucky Book Fest at the Knicely [bgdailynews.com](http://bgdailynews.com).

photos by Grace Ramey/[photo@bgdailynews.com](mailto:photo@bgdailynews.com)

**MORE INFORMATION**

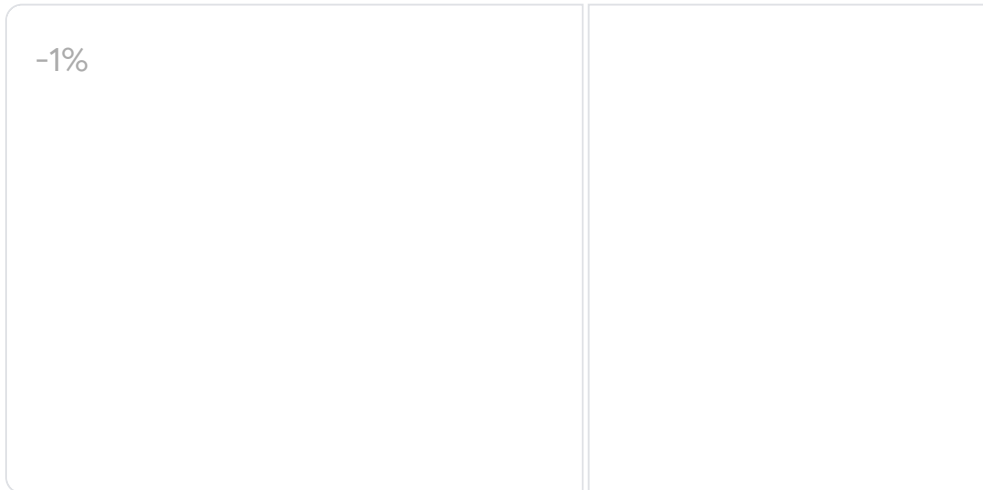


'Books are not dying': 20th Book Fest draws crowd despite missing headliner

+14 SLIDE SHOW: SOKY Book Fest returns with over 60 authors, illustrators featured

Charley Grace was toting a hefty shopping bag Friday, but her mood was light.

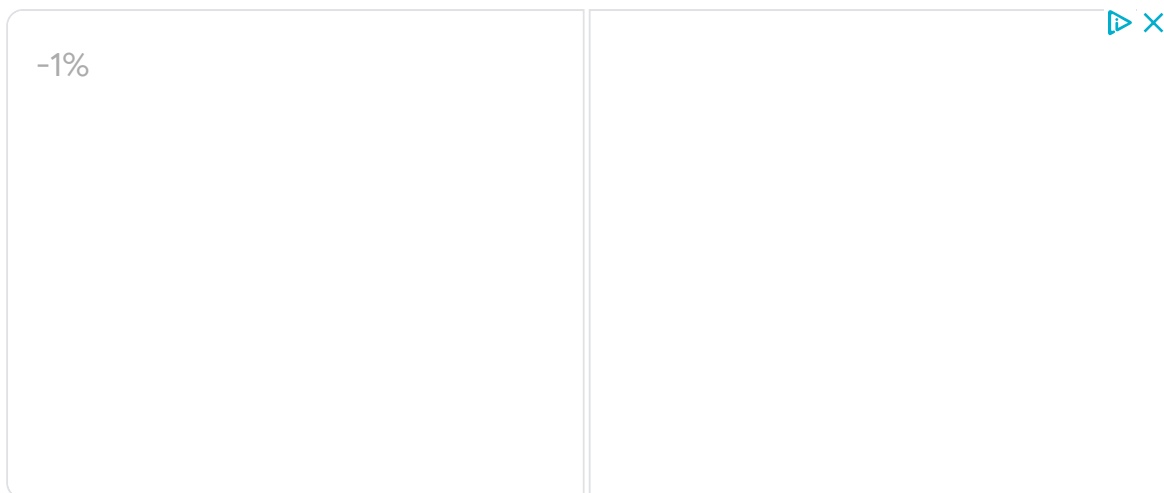
“When I walked into the room and saw so many books, I was instantly happy,” said Charley, a junior at Bowling Green High School who was browsing titles and schmoozing with their creators at the Southern Kentucky Book Fest. “The opportunity to talk to authors was amazing.”



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Charley’s enthusiasm was shared by many at the book fest that started with a children’s day Friday and concluded with a main event Saturday that featured more than 60 authors and illustrators meeting and greeting book lovers at the Knicely Conference Center.

It was a bibliophile's dream, one made all the more enjoyable because this 22nd SOKY Book Fest had been delayed for a couple of years by the COVID-19 pandemic.

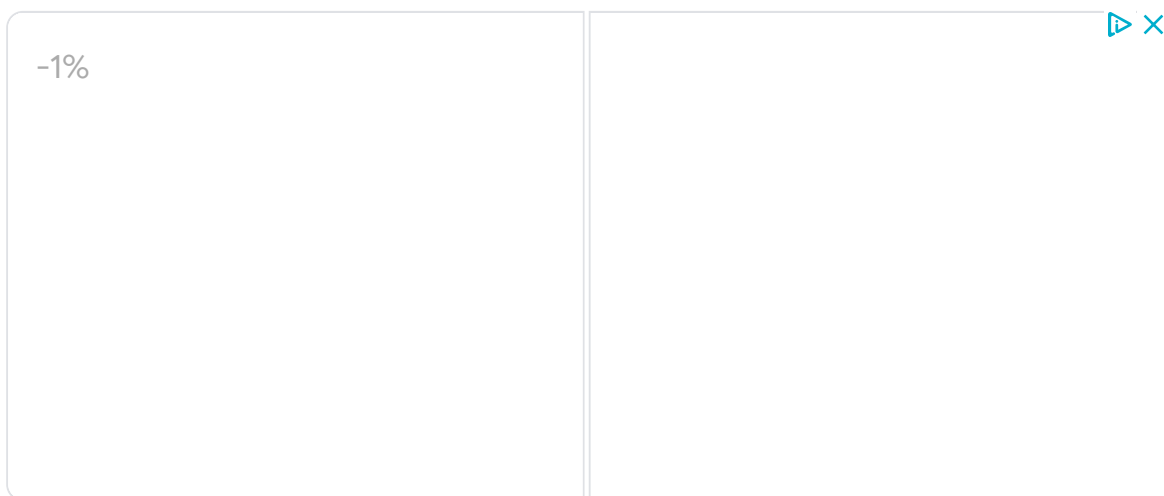


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“We were just a couple weeks away from the book fest in 2020 when we had to cancel it,” recalled Lisa Rice, director of the Warren County Public Library that sponsors the book fest in partnership with Western Kentucky University and Barnes & Noble. “The authors were excited to be in front of people again.”

Rice herself was pleased to see the turnout for the event, particularly Friday's children's day, when busloads of youngsters like Charley

came from Warren and surrounding counties to meet authors and buy their books.



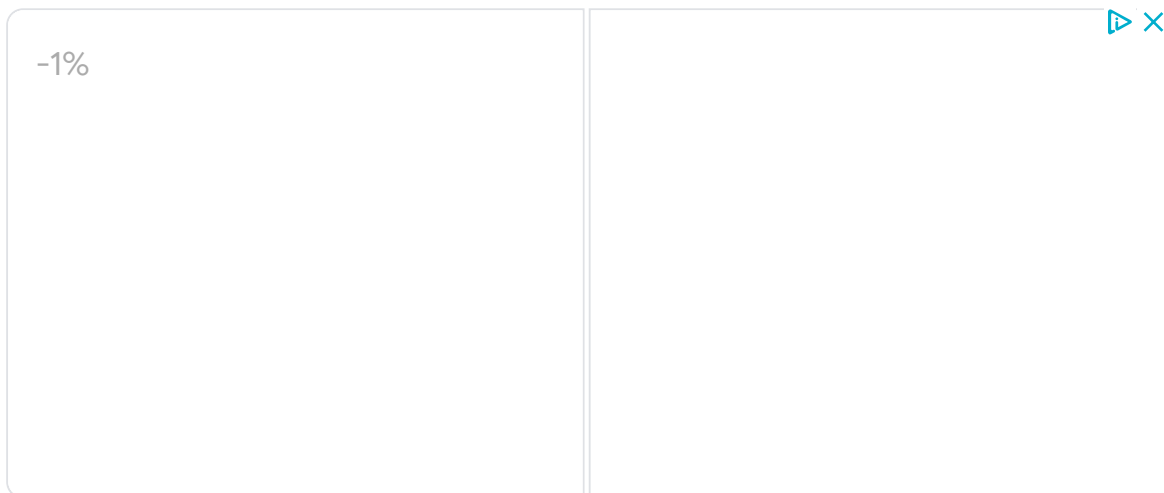
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“We were very pleased with children’s day,” Rice said. “It was the second-highest attendance we’ve had in my 20 years. Our community is very creative, and they love events like this.”

That was evident Saturday, when nationally known writers like thriller-novelist Brad Taylor (“End of Days” and “Ghosts of War”) and children’s author Vashti Harrison (“Think Big, Little One”) mingled with local writers like David Bell and Tonya Matthews.

Bell, also a professor of English at Western Kentucky University, welcomed the chance to meet readers

and rub elbows with other writers  
Saturday.



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“Writing is a lonely, solitary business,” said Bell, author of “Cemetery Girl” and “Kill All Your Darlings,” among others. “It’s sometimes hard to realize that there are people out there actually reading the books.

“This is a great one-stop place and a great way to meet readers and talk to them one-on-one, especially this year since it has been two years without a book fest.”

Matthews, a Warren County native and author of “Treasure Atop the Mountain” and “Roxie Applesauce,” likewise embraced the opportunity to meet readers again.



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“I think people were ready to get out,” Matthews said. “Attendance has been good. The most exciting thing for me about being an author is meeting the readers.

“The interaction and feedback really does energize me to keep going.”

Another author with local ties, Debbie Dadey, said events like the book fest “get me out of my shell and help me know what kids are interested in.”

A WKU graduate and former teacher, Dadey said sales of her “Bailey School Kids” series exceeded her expectations during Friday’s children’s day and left her with only a few titles Saturday.

“I was selling them so fast I couldn’t keep track,” said Dadey, who has co-authored with Marcia T. Jones on 61 “Bailey” books.

Many visitors to the book fest on Saturday came seeking out particular titles.

Bowling Green resident Doug Depp proudly displayed a copy of “The Cemetery Road Murders,” a true-crime book written by Wes Swietek and said he planned to attend a true-crime panel discussion with Swietek and other writers.

“I like true-crime stuff and enjoy watching TV shows about it,” said Depp. “I’ve been wanting to read this book. I heard it was going to be here, so I came to pick it up.”

Rice said this year’s book fest was scaled back a bit from past events because of lingering COVID-19 concerns, but she was simply happy to see the writers come together again.



“This event has meant a lot to me personally,” Rice said. “You become close to a lot of people.”

Rice recalled her first SOKY Book Fest, when a young eastern Kentucky writer named Silas House was there with his first book.

“He has become one of Kentucky’s premier writers now,” Rice said of House. “You get to see the growth of the writers. I’ve made such good friends.”

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## Kentucky Launches New Cars Used Less Than 50