

Gallup Authors Festival draws about 1,200

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Link, Taylor among local authors at festival

With periodic rain a little in the mornings and part of the afternoons, the past weekend presented a prime opportunity to curl up at home with a good read. But bookworms, more than 1,000 strong, still crawled out to the Octavia Fellin Library April 8-9 for the second annual Gallup Authors Festival.

Some 1,200 attendees and just over 30 authors from around New Mexico gave brief lectures, signed books and transacted book sales on topics that ranged from aviation, poetry, entertainment, fiction and mystery.

Santa Fe-based Anne Hillerman, author of *Spider Woman's Daughter*, which won the Western Writers of America's Spur Award for Best First Novel in 2013, gave Saturday's keynote address.

Jimmy Santiago Baca, winner of the Pushcart Prize, the American Book Award, the International Hispanic Heritage Award and the 2006 Cornelius Turner Award, was the featured speaker April 8.

"Just fabulous, simply fabulous," Library Director Mary Ellen Pellington said. "This was enjoyed by everyone who attended."

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Not put on last year due to staffing problems, Pellington said, this year's festival was titled "A Celebration of Cultures" and took place at the main and children's branch libraries.

Hillerman, whose late father, Tony, was a renown mystery writer, is a food critic with the *Albuquerque Journal*.

She told those gathered of the importance of reading, noting that she spent some time in Gallup years ago writing and researching a book called "Tony Hillerman's Landscapes," saying she really didn't perfect her writing skills until after the death of her father.

"It's said that in order to be a writer, you first have to be a very good reader," Hillerman said. "I have a very warm place in my heart for libraries."

And attendees and writers were impressed with the prestigious event.

"This was one of the best festivals I've ever been to," Larry Greenly, a Pennsylvania native who wrote *"Eugene Bullard: World's First Black Fighter Pilot,"* said.

Greenly made presentations at the Children's Branch and at the main library.

"From top to bottom the entire festival was done the right way. You got to give the entire staff at the library a pat on the back."

Gallup's John Taylor, a retired instructor at the University of New Mexico-Gallup and attending the festival for the first time, wrote *"Looking for Dan: The Puzzling Life of a Frontier Character – Daniel Dubois."*

Taylor said the festival definitely lived up to its billing.

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“It’s something that everyone can partake in,” Taylor said. “It’s a very worthwhile venture.”

Laguna Pueblo’s Max Early, the 2015 Santa Fe-based Lannan Foundation Indigenous Writer-In-Residence Fellow, wrote *“Ears of Corn: Listen.”* The book garnered the 2015 Southwest Book Design and Production Award in poetry from the New Mexico Book Association.

“It’s always good to be among fellow book writers at a festival like this,” Early said. “I also sold some books.”

The festival, which was free to attend, was a regional draw, with some people coming as far away as the East Coast, Pellington said.

Bob and Gerry Jones from Albuquerque said they heard about the event from friends who live in Gallup. The couple said they’re acquainted with Greenly who they met years ago at a similar book festival in the Duke City.

“He is a very good writer,” the couple said. “We hope to return next year for the festival.”

Pellington noted that two years ago the combined attendance at both the main and children’s libraries was about 800. She said she couldn’t put a dollar amount on the quantity of books sold, but said “A lot of books were sold at the festival.”

The library does not get proceeds from festival book sales.

National Library Week began April 10, Pellington noted. She said she’ll probably hold next year’s festival around the same timeframe.

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