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In which children's booksellers ponder all things literary, artistic, and mercantile

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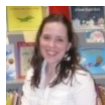
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So You Want to Start a Festival, Part 1



Meghan Dietsche Goel -- September 29th, 2017



Tweet



This time of year is when this job gets fun! They say March roars in like a lion, but around here, it's definitely September (although you can forget about the whole going out like a lamb thing). In September, the whirlwind of school event planning blends into book fair planning blends into holiday catalog production blends into the winter/spring buying season blends into the phenomenon known as the Texas Teen Book Festival.



I've been lucky enough to be a part of the [Texas Teen Book Festival](#) (formerly known as the Austin Teen Book Festival) since librarian Heather Schubert brought a group of interested parties together in her middle school library in 2009. Nine festivals later, that experiment has turned into a really special affair that brings together 4000 readers annually to celebrate books and offer wide-ranging discussions about life, the universe, and pretty much everything.

Supporting a festival takes a large team, so my biggest piece of advice for launching a book festival is always the same: Build the best team you can. Our planning committee brings together a lot of different strengths into one collaborative, dedicated group. Aside from our committed BookPeople team, the planning committee that has come together over the last almost-decade includes the experience and savvy of the Texas Book Festival; the teen-centric approach of festival director and school librarian Shawn Mauser; the PR instincts of local librarian and book blogger Jen Bigheart; and a crew of hospitality and volunteer coordinators, PR interns, and more.

Serving as the festival's program director since the beginning, it's my (really fun) job each year to work with publishers, authors, and programming partners to make sure our schedule is as dynamic, interesting, and organized as it possibly can be before thousands of readers and educators, authors and sponsors arrive. From keynotes, panels, and conversations to workshops, costume contests, and activities, we're always thinking about how to do more and do it better.

But through the flurry of details and logistics, it's so important to keep the focus on the kids at the heart of our mission. Perhaps the most successful and rewarding sponsorship collaboration for me personally has been developed with Delacorte Press. Through the generosity of publisher Beverly Horowitz who I sat next to at a memorable dinner in 2015, we just wrapped up our third annual writing contest. Three teen writers win the enviable opportunity to receive personalized writing critiques and encouragement from Delacorte editors, professional advice that's hard to come by as a young writer. We set a high bar, requiring 9,000-14,000 word excerpts + full novel synopses, and I have been blown away by the caliber of what we receive. These Texas teens are truly talented, and as much as I love every part of our festival, watching them walk across our stage to the cheers of some of their favorite authors is the best moment of my whole day. (Yes, I cry every year.) I know for sure that I'll see some of their names in print one of these years.

This year, we were lucky enough to offer a second writing contest with We Need Diverse Books, inviting kids from traditionally under-represented backgrounds to contribute essays about why we need more diverse books. We got a fantastic response, and 30 winners are coming to a reception with WNDB COO Dhonielle Clayton and WNDB Team Member I.W. Gregorio along with authors, publishing folk, booksellers, and librarians from diverse backgrounds to talk about how young people can get involved in the book industry and make their voices heard. Dhonielle and Ilene are also sticking around to offer educator sessions, q&as, and open booth hours to interact with readers throughout the day. I can't wait to see this new partnership in action.

Now that we're about a week out from the big day on October 7, our core planning team met at St. Edwards University today to map directional signage, banners, and volunteer stations. So what does our festival look like one week out? Well, it's shaping up! 40+ authors have been scheduled; tents, stages, sound equipment, and food have been ordered; traffic and security plans are in the works; signage is (mostly) at the printer; exhibitors and sponsors have been confirmed; and the schedule for our brand-new interactive programming tent has been locked down—just in time to get into our festival programs. We're on our way, and we're getting excited!

Oh, I just got an email. Does someone have an extra cooler for the author party? Stay tuned for the riveting answer to that and more in part 2.



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