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## Another LLLC Distinguished Speaker Series Sell-Out Event

By Lou Fancher



David Sedaris Photo provided

You can call Lafayette's Senior Community Library Manager Vickie Sciacca a stalker, but you can't call her for tickets to the upcoming Distinguished Speaker Series event on May 7 at the Orinda Theatre. The Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation's presentation of author and humorist David Sedaris has been sold out for weeks.

But that doesn't mean there aren't ample opportunities to get in on what has become a hot ticket item, with distinguished authors and thought-leaders filling the program's calendar. People discovering the series too late to enjoy Sedaris' talk can snare tickets for the coming lineup: Arabella Bowen, editor in chief of Fodors Travel, May 19, and "Passion for Paris" chronicler David Downie, May 29.

Sedaris is the author of "Barrel Fever and Holidays on Ice," and is best known for his collections of personal essays, "Naked," "Me Talk Pretty One Day," "Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim," "When You Are Engulfed in Flames," and his most recent bestseller, "Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls." He is a frequent contributor to the New Yorker and BBC Radio 4 and has been nominated for three Grammy Awards for Best Spoken Word and Best Comedy Album. There are 7 million copies of his books in print.

"I've been trying to book him for over three years," Sciacca says. "I've been working with his agent, Steven Barclay, but the problem has been that some years, Sedaris only travels one month out of the year. Prior writers' series I ran had a set-in-stone calendar slot, so it never timed out right."

With the Distinguished Speaker series, launched in 2011, Sciacca has the flexibility to adapt to a desired presenter's schedule. Even so, she says Sedaris will fit two events into his 24-hour visit to the Bay Area.

"He'll finish the other event, be driven here, do a sound check, and begin signing books before his talk. I suppose he'll eat dinner while signing books after the event," Sciacca says.

Petaluma-based Barclay says it's hard to explain the rigors of a book tour for a high-demand author like Sedaris, his most-requested client. "If you are not on a plane or train or in a car or checking into a hotel or onstage or doing a signing, there is virtually no time," Barclay says about the 40-cities-in-40-days tour that includes Orinda.

Sciacca says she's thrilled to include Sedaris in a series that has seen continued popularity since it started with a sold-out appearance by the late Louis Zamperini, World War II prisoner of war survivor, Olympic runner and the subject of Laura Hillenbrand's book, "Unbroken," now also a

feature film. Past speakers include Dave Eggers, Rick Steves, Cheryl Strayed, Joyce Maynard and others.

"Sedaris has a tremendous sense of humor and presence. He's courageous about what he says and has so much wit, you can't help but be delighted," she says. "He's also incredibly generous to his readers and will sign everybody's books."

Perhaps the best way to illustrate Sciacca's points - and the feverish fans sweeping up Sedaris tickets - is a short story from Rusty Barnes, CAL Performances public relations associate. Sedaris' Fall 2014 CAL Performances appearance in Berkeley also sold out rapidly.

"The audience response was overwhelmingly positive," Barnes says. "David graciously participated in a book signing after his talk, and the line to meet him wrapped from the corner of the mezzanine in the lobby around the entire cafe seating area and down both staircases." (A considerable distance, roughly equivalent to a football field.)

Barnes recalls one person asking Sedaris to write something inspirational in her book.

"In true David Sedaris fashion, he wrote: 'Don't die today,'" Barnes says.

Sedaris selects the work of a new or lesser-known author to introduce to audiences during his tours. In Orinda, Blake Bailey's "The Splendid Things We Planned" (Norton) will get the male equivalent of an Oprah recommendation.

Sciacca says the series is an opportunity for people to connect with an author in an in-depth way that bookstore appearances do not often allow. Often, she's struck by the authors' generosity and lack of superego.

"Dave Eggers has been one of my favorites," she says. "His style is so unassuming. Working with him, he never asked for anything. He was just humble, grateful to have the recognition in the community."

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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