

## Southeast Wisconsin Festival of Books Explores “American Stories”



El Conquistador Bilingual Newspaper

October 25-31, 2018

### **Southeast Wisconsin Festival of Books Explores “American Stories”**

By Silvia Acevedo

Readers and writers will gather to explore what constitutes an “American Story” the theme of the ninth annual Southeast Wisconsin Festival of Books. More than 70 authors are scheduled to attend the two-day festival, set for Nov. 2-3 on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee at Waukesha.

“Everybody has an American story,” says Debra Running, executive director of the UW-Waukesha Foundation, which organizes the event. “It’s not the same American story.”

In addition to some 30 panel discussions shining the spotlight on award-winning national and local authors, the festival features a cooking stage, art workshops, live music and food. Admission and parking are free, and you can find more information at [sewibookfest.com](http://sewibookfest.com).

Liam Callanan and Nick Petrie — two celebrated authors who call southeastern Wisconsin home — serve as the festival’s keynote speakers.

## Southeast Wisconsin Festival of Books Explores “American Stories”

Petrie, who wrote “Light It Up,” headlines a reception and conversation with Jim Higgins, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel’s arts and books editor. Scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 2, this is the festival’s only ticketed event, and ticketing options include receiving a hardcover copy of Petrie’s book.

Callanan’s keynote event, slated for 9 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 3, is set up as a Q&A session over coffee. The UWM professor of English recently published his third novel, “Paris by the Book.” It follows the story of a Milwaukee woman’s search for her missing husband, which leads to her unexpected new home and career in a Parisian bookstore.

Following the festival’s theme, authors are presenting on topics that are distinctly American, from Milwaukee’s ghost stories to Great Lakes water wars to immigration and racism.

Eloisa Gómez is author of “Somos Latinas: Voices of Wisconsin Latina Activists.” She collected 25 stories of Wisconsin Latina activists from the 1960s to early 2000s and detailed instances of their earliest brushes with racism, such as being turned away from homes by the parents of school friends or suffering harassment in stores and restaurants for speaking with an accent.

“If we don’t acknowledge that racism existed in the past, exists today,” Gómez says, “then we’re not telling the full story of who we are in this country. All of it. One hundred percent.

“These people weren’t being the rabble-rousers,” Gómez continues. “They were being confronted just by the nature of their Hispanic heritage. You automatically put yourself in their shoes.”

Other American stories include adventures down the Mississippi River explorations of memory loss among the growing elderly population, and American influence on entertainment.

Running says the festival’s goal since its inception was to draw the community to the two-year campus and highlight the institution’s authors. The festival has since become a boon to the local writing community as one of the few free events in Wisconsin that allows new writers to learn directly from scores of successful authors.

In past years, the festival drew critically acclaimed best-selling authors such as Kris Radish, author of “Run, Bambi, Run,” Nickolas Butler of “Shotgun Lovesongs” fame, and Christina Schwarz, author of Oprah’s Book Club pick “Drowning Rut.”

“We want to offer our community the opportunity to be exposed to all of these types of genres,” Running says. “We want people to come together, still find out about our campus, but just have an opportunity to see authors on topics they may not get to see, hear, or know about otherwise.

“There is something for everybody, if they are willing to take a look.”