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Oconee County Library Puts on Inaugural FanFest

On April 2, 2022, the Oconee County Library, a member of the Athens Regional Library System, hosted its first-ever FanFest at the Oconee County Civic Center, located in Watkinsville, Georgia. With support from the Oconee County Library Friends, staff and volunteers hosted an admission-free day-long event that attracted over 350 participants and provided an opportunity for Oconee County residents to come together and celebrate in true “fest” style.

FanFest is a free event for all ages that brings together live music, guest authors and artists, a cosplay contest, gaming, vendors, food and more. The idea for FanFest came from James Mitchell, Branch Manager, and was created following the long-standing ComicCon tradition, but with a focus on all ages and showcasing local talent. What makes FanFest unique is that it features local authors, musicians, gaming organizations, vendors, food trucks, as well as local organizations, many of which are partners with the library system and represent the diversity of the northeast Georgia community.

The event took place at a local venue of a community partner, the Oconee County Civic Center, from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and included workshops, panel discussions, book signings, live music, and other activities. A portion of FanFest took place in the main hall, where vendors were situated and had room to display their books and products while conversing with attendees. Three music acts performed in the auditorium, including Rebecca Sunshine Band, Sacred Bull, and Razzi King, while food trucks and the Athens School of Arms sword demonstrations were set up on the lawn outside the Civic Center.



Flyer for the FanFest 2022 event

Local high school and university students were also involved. The University of Georgia Student Board Game Club ran a gaming table, and student volunteers from the Oconee County High School Beta Club greeted attendees and handed out event schedules.



Authors Will Smith (left) and Jacob Wenzka (right) posing with displays of their works

Featured guests and performers included the following:

- Joey Weiser, author of the Eisner Award–nominated *Mermin* series, as well as the popular graphic novel series *Dragon Racer*.
- Rebecca Sunshine Band, who perform fun and engaging music for kids and have been featured performers at AthFest Music and Arts Festival, Savannah Children’s Book Festival, and the Marigold Festival.
- Will Smith, creator of *Legacy A.D.*, an upcoming animated cartoon series and comic book about the adventures of Deacon Foster, a detective in Atlanta chosen by God to battle evil and uphold justice.
- Razzi King, Reggae Dancehall musician whose work is on both Rasculture Records and Echobass Records.
- Gonzoriffic Films, Athens’ feminst underground cinema collective that has been putting out films for 20 years; and many others.

Notably, the event held two acting workshops hosted by Toi Mekhi, a local actress who made her debut in the movie *Remember the Titans* as a featured extra and who has gone on to do theater, commercials, and teaching. Her latest

role is in the dystopian comic adaptation of *DMZ* on HBO Max which was released in early 2022.

In addition to these guests, Montu Miller, Shadebeast, Dragonstar Hobbies, Blacknerdninja, Jacob Wenzka, Autumn Deoliveira, David and Owen Barnes, Marlena Frank, Will Eskrigde, Momocon, Morbid Smile, and Painted Expressions Face Paint and Henna, tabled for this event.

The event also served as a season 2 wrap party for the *Classic City Vibes Podcast*, produced by the Athens Regional Library System, which features animated conversations with local musicians, visual and literary artists, and other creatives. A door prize consisting of donated merchandise from podcast guests was awarded to a FanFest participant at random who signed up to receive the Oconee County Library electronic newsletter.

For more information about FanFest, contact author Jessica Varsa, Adult Services Librarian, or James Mitchell, Branch Manager, at the Oconee County library.

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