



Community Voices

After 25 great years, Beale Library deserves a big shindig

Maria Rutledge

Twenty-five years ago, the citizens of Kern County eagerly welcomed the opening of a bigger and better equipped central library — the “new” Beale Memorial Library at 701 Truxtun Ave. The 127,000-square-foot facility featured a landscaped atrium with a pool fountain, an auditorium complete with audiovisual equipment and seating for 300 people, art pieces by famed California artists and many other features that made it the envy of the rest of the Central Valley. On March 30, 1989, Fresno Bee columnist Jim Wasserman wrote, “I’ve just stumbled across the finest, most beautiful county library in California, maybe even the nation, and it’s not in San Francisco, Santa Monica or Los Angeles. It’s in Bakersfield.”

Fast-forward 25 years. Its mode of service delivery has changed with the inclusion of electronic services and resources, educational toys for young children, and computer instruction, yet Beale Library has remained unfazed. It continues to be the place for lifelong learning, community connection and cultural awareness — a place that is free and open to everyone. What better way, then, to mark 25 years than to highlight this role by offering 25 programs?

From 1 to 6 p.m. Saturday, April 20, librarians, private individuals, community organizations and local establishments will provide a variety of learning opportunities, 25 to be exact, at the Beale Library. This half-day event will showcase community collaboration, inspire learning and provide creative fun for all.

The 25 workshops will be divided into five zones; each zone will feature five programs, one every hour on the hour. The Health & Wellness Zone, in the Beale Library auditorium, will include a tai chi class led by Dr. Sharon Zhang, meditation yoga led by Dr. Anil Mehta of Chinmaya Mission Bakersfield, a session on Ayurveda by Dr. Naina Patel, a session by Kaiser Permanente on understanding food labels and making smart food choices, and a presentation by Bike



Bakersfield on the joys and benefits of biking, bike safety, maintenance, routes and events in Kern County.

A host of fun and educational activities are also in store for families. The Family Zone in the Arkelian children’s room will start off with Terrific Tales Story Time by Children’s Librarian Sherry Wade, followed by a science activity led by the Kern Astronomical Society. Kids and parents will learn how a telescope works, how to make a planisphere and a sundial, and experience safe solar viewing. This workshop will be followed by the library’s version of the hit reality show “The Amazing Race.” The first five families to reach the finish line will each receive a prize. The Family Zone will also host a basic American Sign Language class by faculty members of Bakersfield College, and Lego creative play.

The northwest corner of the first floor will house the Crafts Zone and will introduce participants to interesting hobbies and crafts: beaded jewelry, recycled crafts to dress up your garden, scrapbooking, repurposing old denim jeans, and front-door wreaths on a shoestring. The projects completed by presenters in these workshops will be given away as door prizes.

Interested in the arts? Visit the Arts Zone in the Tejon Room on the second floor. There will be basic workshops on drawing anime and manga by artist Crystal Appleton, writing flash fiction by writer Suzie Wade, and guitar chords by Front Porch Music. Want to learn more about the sculptures and paintings housed at the Beale Library? Then, join the art tour with Vikki Cruz, curator of the Bakersfield Museum of Art. After that, explore *musica latina* via the Smithsonian Institution’s virtual exhibition, “Musica del Pueblo.”

Get the most out of the library’s 24/7 resource. The eLibrary Zone in the Gates computer lab will host workshops on how to use EBSCOhost for school research, access e-reference books, download e-books and e-audiobooks, search for grants and research your ancestry.

So, mark your calendar for April 20. Connect with people in your community, learn new things and discover the best deal in town! All workshops are free. For more information, call the Beale Library at 868-0745.

Maria Rutledge is the branch supervisor for the Beale Memorial Library.

Leonard Pitts SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

If you want to ‘walk a mile in someone else’s skin’ — listen

There are many things to say about Brad Paisley’s new song.

The country music giant is under fire for “Accidental Racist,” about a Starbucks employee who objects to Paisley’s Confederate battle flag shirt. The song, Paisley’s attempt to metabolize his conflicted feelings as “a white man comin’ to you from the southland” trying to pick his way through the minefield of race, has generated, well — feedback.

Rolling Stone dubbed it “questionable.” Gawker called it “horrible.” CMT News said it was “clumsily written” and singled out guest performer LL Cool J for an “inept” rap.

They are being kind. As several observers have noted, “Accidental Racist” brings to this difficult subject all the emotional and intellectual depth of a fifth-grader’s social studies essay. And let’s not even get started on LL’s rap, which inexplicably finds moral equivalence between a do-rag and that American swastika, the Confederate battle flag, an act of stupendous stupidity for which somebody ought to pull his black card.

But the song also fails in a more subtle, yet substantive way. Twice, Paisley speaks of the impossibility of imagining life from the African-American perspective: “I try to put myself in your shoes,” he sings, “and that’s a good place to begin, but it ain’t like I can walk a mile in someone else’s skin.” As if African-American life is so mysterious and exotic, so alien to all other streams of American life, that unless you were born to it, you cannot hope to comprehend it.

That’s a copout — and a disappointment. Say what you will about his song, but also say this: Paisley is in earnest. His heart — this is neither boilerplate nor faint praise — is in the right place. Credit him for the courage, rare in music, almost unheard of in country music, to confront this most thankless of topics. But courage and earnestness will net him nothing without honesty.

Every day, we imagine the lives of people who aren’t like us. Those who care to try

seem to have no trouble empathizing with, say, Cuban exiles separated from family, or Muslims shunned by Islamophobes. For a songwriter, inhabiting other people’s lives is practically the job description. Bruce Springsteen was not a Vietnam vet when he sang “Born in the USA.”

But where African-American life is concerned, one frequently hears Paisley’s lament: how a white man is locked into his own perspective. That’s baloney. Both history and the present day are replete with white people — Clifford Durr, Thaddeus Stevens, Eleanor Roosevelt, Leon Litwack, Tim Wise — who seemed to have no great difficulty accessing black life.

One suspects one difference is that they refused to be hobbled by white guilt, the reflexive need to deny the undeniable, defend the indefensible, explain the inexplicable. They declined to be paralyzed by the baggage of history. One suspects they felt not guilt, but simple human obligation.

One suspects the other difference is that people like Wise and Litwack rejected the conspiracy of blindness that afflicts too many white people, allowing them to see a 13.3 percent black unemployment rate and call it laziness or drug crime incarceration as high as 90 percent black and call it justice.

These people were honest enough to see what was there and call America on it.

If Paisley wants to “walk a mile in someone else’s skin,” it’s not that hard. You do it with black folks the same way you do it with anyone else. You drop your presumptions, embrace your ignorance and listen to somebody — preferably multiple somebodies — who is living what you seek to understand. You visit the museums and read the books.

It is vaguely insulting, this idea that there’s something about African-American life that

makes it more impenetrable than others. There is not. If Paisley finds this skin impossible to walk in, the reason is doubtless simple: He’s never truly tried.

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The preferred method of submission is by **email**:

opinion@bakersfield.com. Letters also may be **mailed** to Opinion Section, The Bakersfield Californian, P.O. Bin 440, Bakersfield, CA 93302; **faxed** to 395-7380; or **hand-delivered** to The Californian’s downtown office at 1707 Eye St. Submissions received by post, fax or hand delivery may be delayed by processing.