



PRESS RELEASE

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Fitzwilliam Darcy is coming to Mandeville some 195 years after Mr. Darcy made his debut in the pages of Jane Austen's classic romantic love story, *Pride and Prejudice*.

In fact, Kerri Blache's vision is that several Mr. Darcy worthy gentleman will make their most enticing Victorian English dandified stroll across the amphitheater stage of the Mandeville Trailhead Cultural Interpretive Center on Feb. 16 as part of the Mr. Darcy contest during the first ever two-day Old Mandeville Jane Austen Festival. Judges will be looking for gentlemen! So, ladies let's honor those nice men we know!

The event, conceived by Blache and being organized by a group of volunteers who share an abiding fascination with England and the literature of Jane Austen, will unfold at several venue's in Old Mandeville on Feb. 16-17.

The core group of organizers invited by Blache to participate will become the founding members of the non-profit Old Mandeville Jane Austen Festival Inc. that is currently in the process of obtaining non-profit status by the state.

The overall mission of the festival is to "foster the fine art of letter writing," a motif common to the works of Jane Austen including *Pride and Prejudice* published on Jan. 28, 1813 and regarded as one of the greatest love stories every written and the first of what has become a genre of romance writing: the romantic comedy.

The festival will consist of three major competitions for which prizes will be awarded, according to Blache. One will be the judging of gentlemen in the *Looking for Mr. Darcy* contest from 12:00-12:30 and immediately following will be a costume contest *No Plain Janes* from 12:30-1:00 p.m. on Feb. 16 at the Trailhead. The other will be the "Perfect Love Letter Writing contest" in which entrants will submit in legible longhand 200 word letter on the topic of love.

All entries will be judged by the Master of Fine Arts Department at the University of New Orleans under the direction of poet/teacher Gina Ferrara of New Orleans.

There will be staged readings of the winning letters (first, second and honorable mention) and displays of the entries from 1:30-2:15 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 17 at the Dew Drop Social and Benevolent Jazz Hall on Lamarque Street in Old Mandeville. The Dew Drop is between Monroe and Madison streets on Lamarque and the Trailhead is between Girod and Lafitte streets, all in Old Mandeville.

Activities will begin at 9 a.m. Feb. 16 at the Trailhead where

pastries will be on sale and several vendors associated with the weekly Saturday Community Market will be dressed in period costumes and give demonstrations of crafts of the Austen era in England. Jane Austen era costumes are requested of artisans and festival goers alike! Other artisans wishing to participate can contact Donna Beakley at the Trailhead at 624-3147. Those activities will continue until the market closes at 1 p.m.

However, attention will shift one-half block south of the Trailhead on Livingston Street to the St. Tammany Parish School Board's Technology Center where New Orleans historians and Jane Austen enthusiasts Bill and Sally Reeves will present a "Meet Jane Austen" educational lecture from 10:15-11:15 a.m. Immediately following will be questions, answers and interpretations.

Activities will then return to the Trailhead for the Mr. Darcy contest.

Organizers are working with Old Mandeville restaurants to offer old English menu item during lunch for those attending the festival from 1:30-3:30 p.m. There will also an English style pub lunch and British ales offered by The Good Earth Market & Café (to reserve call (985) 674-4329, a Royal Regency Tea at Vianne's Tea Salon & Cafe, 544 Girod St. www.viannes.com reservations are required by calling (985) 624-5683 and Kickstand Café (985) 626-9300 www.kickstand.bz Other old Mandeville restaurants may be participating too!

From 3:30-5:30 p.m. on Feb. 16 festival goers can catch a Saturday afternoon Matinee of PERSUATION at the Technology Center, presented by WYES TV 12/PBS drawn from the current Masterpiece Theatre PBS series on Austen and her novels.

When that is completed, Pegasus Carriages will be waiting to offer carriage rides in Old Mandeville and stops at various restaurants offering cocktails and dinner.

Sunday activities will begin at noon at the Dew Drop with a "Letters from the Attic" display and a chance for fans to meet and greet each other. We are currently calling for letters to be displayed for 'Letters from the Attic'; if you have a letter you may consider sharing for display please contact Danna Acker at (985) 626-3827 for details!

From 12:15-12:30 p.m. students from the creative writing club at Fontainebleau High School will read a prayer selected from those written by Austen.

Next, a catered lunch will be served at the Dew Drop by Sheila Goodson and her staff at Kickstand Cafe on Lafitte Street across from the Trailhead. Orders for lunch must be made in advance by calling the cafe at (985) 626-9300 to get menu offerings and prices.

During lunch, noted New Orleans harpist Patrice Fisher will lead an ensemble of harpists who will entertain with Old English harp music. Some members will be from the Celtic Harp Ensemble in New Orleans and the Bayou Harp Circle in Lafayette as well as Northshore harpists.

There will be another short staged reading of Austen writing by the Fontainebleau students from 1:15-1:30 p.m. following by the announcement of winners and readings of the top love letters.

The organizing committee has secured corporate sponsors and they will be honored along with contest winners at a patron party from 3:00-3:30 p.m. at Vianne's followed by the festival's final event, a Royal Regency Dessert Reception from 3:30-5:00 p.m. at Vianne's., reservations required, (985) 624-5683. Live flute music of the era will

be performed during the reception by Les Ensembles. This final event is being sponsored by Glazer Companies of Louisiana.

Blache said there will be nominal fees for some of the Festival events. All events are open to the public.

Other events being worked into the schedule are displays of the winners from The Perfect Love Letter Writing Contest and "Letters from the Attic" at the Mandeville branch St. Tammany Parish library, immediately following the festival. Dance demonstrations of the age popularized in the works of Austen are also be included during the festival.

Complete schedule of events and entry forms for the Looking for Mr. Darcy and letter writing contests can be obtained at the official festival web site: www.janeaustenfestival.org they can be printed and mailed to Attn: Old Mandeville Jane Austen Festival, 544 Girod Street; Mandeville, LA 70448 or delivered by hand to Vianne's Tea Salon (same address) by the deadline of Feb. 8th 12noon. A New Orleans delivery location has been secured at WYES TV 12/PBS, 111 Veterans Blvd. Heritage Plaza Bldg Suite 250; also 12noon. Letter Writing Contest Winners will be posted on the web site.

The festival organizers and co-founders consists of Blache, Bill and Sally Reeves, Danna Acker, Richard Boyd, Frank Stansbury, Tracy Blair, Gina Ferrara, Julie Egle, Diane Rosiere and Shirley Patron.