

Of pandemics and penning novels

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Public libraries offer their communities plenty and they will offer even more when the Maryland Libraries Together series returns April 1 with two major statewide virtual events that explore the COVID-19 vaccine and Latin identity.

“I think it’s going to be great,” Robyn Truslow, Calvert Library’s public relations coordinator, said. “Calvert’s a small system and we can only do so much, so if we partner across the state so much more can happen. It’s been something I’ve been wishing for a long time.”

“We are really excited about the Libraries Together programs,” Laura Boonchaisri, St. Mary’s County Library’s marketing and communications coordinator, said. “It’s great that we are able to pool our resources across the state to bring interesting programs to our customers.”

A news release stated the Maryland Libraries Together, which features events hosted by individual libraries and available to all, is a “collaboration to engage communities in enriching educational experiences that advance an understanding of the issues of our time.”

“Ever since the pandemic hit it really threw a wrench in everyone’s operations, and a big part of that was our programming,” Erin Del Signore, Charles County Public Library’s marketing and communications coordinator, said. “So this is a way for libraries across the state to share resources and broaden and widen access to different resources such as speakers that maybe the larger systems could pay for that the smaller systems couldn’t. It has really created a way for libraries of all sizes across the state to partner on a variety of programs.”

A COVID-19 and vaccine information session, which will be held 5 to 6:30 p.m. Thursday, April 1, will consist of a discussion of the COVID-19 vaccine with health professionals.

“The information session is also a really important discussion right now,” Boonchaisri said. “Hopefully it will help our customers to be able to find trustworthy and useful information so they can determine the facts surrounding this very timely topic.”

Viva Latino: Own Voices Writers in Conversation will be held 7 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, April 1, and feature award-winning contemporary Latin American writers who will discuss their perspectives on the importance of own voices narratives in providing representation for readers.

The program offers Latino and non-Latino Marylanders an opportunity to learn about the diversity of the Latin American community, as represented in literature and poetry.

The panel, which is presented by the Charles, Frederick and Prince George's libraries, will consist of National Medal of Arts Winner Julia Alvarez, National Medal of Arts Winner, Inaugural Good Morning America Book Club author Angie Cruz, American Book Award Winner Reyna Grande, U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera and moderator Lupita Aquino.

"They're huge authors and the writing itself is beautiful, so I'm super excited that we can expose and offer this opportunity for our community," Truslow said. "We don't have a lot of books out there that are written by and feature diverse authors so it's important for us to celebrate them."

"I think all of the panelists are going to bring great insight into the topic," said Boonchaisri, who added she was particularly interested in hearing from Grande, whose novel "The Distance Between Us" was the One Maryland One Book title a few years back.

Del Signore said she was excited to see Alvarez since she recently read one of her books, but added that "honestly they're all great and we're all really excited, beyond thrilled, to do this."

The panel is presented by the Charles, Frederick and Prince George's libraries, which collaborated in November to organize a talk by author Phillipa Gregory.

"We just thought it was a really great opportunity to bring some really notable, well-known authors to talk about it and also highlight

some of their work,” Del Signore said. “As a little bit of a smaller system, being able to pull resources for these types of programs is really important for us.”

Truslow said the series is a “free opportunity to access top-notch authors.”

Both series are free, but registration is required.

For more information or to register for the COVID-19 vaccine presentation, go to www.prattlibrary.org.

To register for the Viva Latino event, go to [MDLibraries0401.eventbrite.com](https://mdlibraries0401.eventbrite.com) or <https://mdlibraries0401.eventbrite.com>.