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# Famous 'author' kicks off Flagler Reads program

BY MARK ESTES, CORRESPONDENT

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PALM COAST -- Reports of Mark Twain's appearance in Flagler County were not greatly exaggerated.

Twain, portrayed by Dave Ehlert of Branson, Mo., was at the library to kick off the 10th annual Flagler Reads Together. The Friends of the Library of Flagler County chose "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" for this year's month-long literary event.

"Mr. Twain" began his lecture with a few humorous insights into his family tree, which according to him even included lawyers and swindlers, although he admitted that the family often could not tell them apart. He then deigned to quote another American writer.

"A man named Ernest Hemingway said 'American literature can be summed up in one book by Mark Twain The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.' "

Staying in character, Ehlert delighted the crowd with the storyteller's personal history and opinions, including quite a few acerbic comments of the traits and characters of such samples of humanity as politicians, lawyers, doctors and newspapermen. He concluded the nearly two-hour lecture with a dramatic reading from Huckleberry Finn, a scary tale, and a short question and answer session.

Ehlert has performed as Samuel Clemens in the guise of Mark Twain for five years, but may be better known among visitors to Branson for his impersonations of Elvis Presley and other musical superstars. He has performed as the "King" since 1967.

"I got drafted into playing Twain," Ehlert said. "I have a theater in Branson and we rent out time slots for different performers. A fellow came wanting to do Mark Twain. We got everything ready and did all the marketing and at the last minute he had to bow out. So I had about 48 hours to go online and get all the quotes I could lay my hands on and weave a story around Twain's life and those quotes."

Since that time his Twain has evolved into a more in-depth performance relying on considerable research and with the help of a grant he has offered the program to libraries across the country. To date he has performed Twain in 30 states.

"I read the original autobiography which he dictated to his publisher," Ehlert said. "I haven't had a chance to pore over the new one, but what I saw has confirmed my suspicions that he pretty much named names that he declined to confirm earlier."

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County Commissioner George Hamms, right, gets into a conversation with Mark Twain impersonator Dave Ehlert on Thursday at the Flagler County Public Library. (N-J | Mark Estes)



Mark Twain, as portrayed by Dave Ehlert of Branson Mo., discusses his book, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," on Thursday at the Flagler County Public Library. (N-J | Mark Estes)

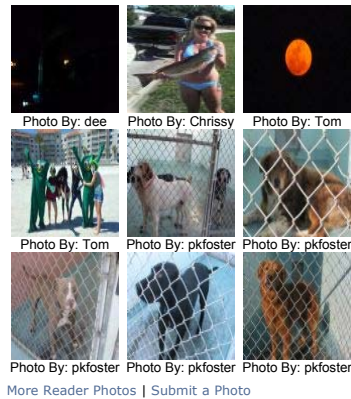
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The new Twain biography influenced the selection of Huckleberry Finn for this year's Flagler Reads Together.

"When we started getting the publicity about 2011 being the 100th anniversary of Twain's death and the publication of the autobiography, we thought maybe we ought to do a classic again," Friends' President Terry Jones said. "We decided to do Huckleberry Finn."

For those who missed Mark Twain's first appearance, all is not lost.

"We have twin Twains," Jones said. "On March 11 we will have an afternoon with Mark Twain as portrayed by Don Runk from St. Augustine."

The Friends have a full month of Twain-related programs scheduled, including a screening of the 1939 movie "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" starring Mickey Rooney and the Ken Burns PBS Special on "The Life of Mark Twain." A river cruise on the Intracoastal Waterway aboard the Hurricane Queen out of Gamble Rogers State Recreation Area in Flagler Beach on March 30 has already sold out.

Festivities will wrap up with a concert by Hungrytown, a folk music duo of Rebecca Hall and Ken Anderson from Vermont at 4 p.m. March 25. All the events are free.

"Reservations are requested for the concert due to limited seating," Jones said. "We will be serving a Missouri dinner of turkey chili, Ozark pudding and corn bread, and we don't want to disappoint anyone."

For a complete list of the programs during Flagler Reads Together go to [flaglerlibraryfriend.com/events/fol/events.htm](http://flaglerlibraryfriend.com/events/fol/events.htm).

#### If You Go

An afternoon with Mark Twain, 2 p.m. Friday. Portrayed by Don Runk, meeting room.

· "Huckleberry Finn" with Mickey Rooney, 2 p.m. March 14, meeting room.

· "The Diaries of Adam and Eve" performed by The Storytelling Sims, Wayne and Jane, Flagler Beach Library, 315 S. 7th St.

· Ken Burns PBS special on "The Life of Mark Twain," 2 p.m. March 18, meeting room.

Flagler Book Club discussion of the book, 3:30 p.m. March 23.

· Finale of FRT with concert by Hungrytown, folk music duo, Doug Cisney Room, 2 p.m. March 30.

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