

A Glance Back



Our President Emeritus and Association Historian Toby Fesler Heathcotte welcomes you to revisit the Arizona Authors Association of days gone by. Here on these pages, we've captured a bit of our history, celebrations, and wonderful events. Most of all, we honor the people who have made the Arizona Authors Association what it is today.

1978

March 15, 1978: The Arizona Authors' Association is founded by Boye De Mente, Margaret De Mente, and David Rich and registered with the Arizona Corporation Commission.

April, 1978: Authors Day Event at Park Central Mall. Arizona Authors Association makes its first appearance.

May, 1978: First Regular Meeting held in a Westside hotel with 75 attendees.

August 18, 1978: Date of First Publication



Park Central Mall, where it all started!



Boye De Mente and Ben Carlin on the Half Safe, the amphibious jeep used to circumnavigate the globe. Boye joined the voyage from Japan to Alaska. The entire trek was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records and was featured in Life Magazine.

[Boye De Mente Biography](#)

[Boye De Mente Wikipedia Page](#)



1980s

"De Mente was chosen as the first president of the AAA by unanimous vote. In addition to inaugurating a monthly newsletter, he also took the lead in sponsoring spring and fall seminars. Speakers included famous authors, agents, editors, publishers and book distributors from around the country. By the end of its first year the AAA had over 400 members. The following year De Mente initiated an annual Arizona Literary Contest and the Arizona Literary Magazine." Quote from Mali Berger, former Secretary of the Arizona Authors Association.



Margaret De Mente served as the first Secretary of the Association, beginning in 1978, and continuing to serve both as Secretary and Contest Director through the early 80s.

David also recalled one of those famous early guest speakers, Zig Ziglar, a motivational guru whose meteoric rise earned him a place among the world's best-selling authors. One of Zig's famous quotes was, "You can get everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want." Another quote from Zig has been repeated for decades: "You don't have to be great at something to start, but you have to start to be great at something."

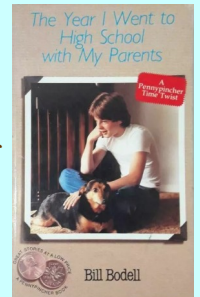
De Mente served as the president of the Association for the next seven years, through 1985. He also continued as head of his company, Phoenix Books/Publishers, and sold AAA members' books through all of the major American book chains and also abroad to chains in Australia, Europe, South Africa and Japan. Eventually, however, the urge to travel and write became too great, and he stepped down from his position as president of the Arizona Authors Association in 1986.



David Rich, author of many books and co-founder of the Arizona Authors Association, remembers the organization's first years. "Boye De Mente and I formed the AAA in the late 70s. I incorporated AAA as a

nonprofit with the Arizona Corporation Commission and wrote its first bylaws. We were an active organization with monthly seminars on many aspects of writing, with me presenting on legal issues ... We were one of the organizations featured in a publication listing the top civic organizations in AZ ... sometime in the 80s."

Bill Bodell, a Phoenix author who later retired to Tucson, became a board member of the Arizona Authors Association in 1989 and eventually served as its president. He is the author of *Immortal Spirit* and *Year I Went to High School with my Parents*.



Among David's many books are [RV the World](#) and [Antelopes: A Modern Gulliver's Travels](#). His Arizona Authors Association webpage is [HERE](#).

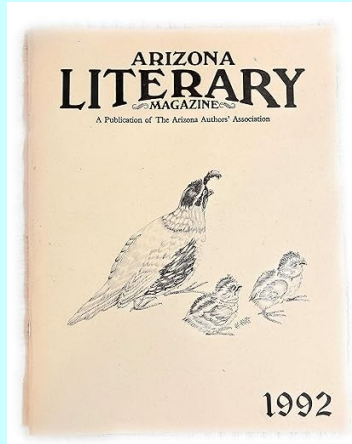


[Grand Canyon Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons](#)

1990s



Mary Westheimer



Gerry Benninger produced the Arizona Literary Magazine in 1992, when she was Contest Coordinator for the Arizona Authors Association.

Vijaya Schartz took over as President of the Arizona Authors Association in 1999 and remained president until 2005, when Toby Heathcotte assumed the position.



Vijaya's many book series' include [Blue Phantom](#), [Azura Chronicles](#), [The Chronicles of Kassouk](#), [Byzantium](#), [Curse of the Lost Isle](#), [Ancient Enemy](#), [Archangel](#) series and many more titles. You may find her Arizona Authors biography [HERE](#).

Although some of the records are lost from the earliest days following De Mente's departure, Bill Bodell served on the Board from 1989 until the mid-90s, part of the time as its president. Another Board member, Mary Westheimer, served for a time starting in 1994. Iva Lee Martin took over as president in April of 1995. Iva was the author of several stories included in the anthology [Chalkboard Dust: Twenty Six True Stories About Students As Remembered By Their Teachers](#). A long time teacher in the Phoenix public school system before turning to writing about her students, she lived in Phoenix. Her Vice President at the time was Sandra Harnagel of Scottsdale, who first earned that position in 1992. Her secretary was Jack Benninger, who also took office in 1992.

Gerry Benninger, Jack's wife, took over as president of the Arizona Authors Association in 1997; Jack remained as secretary. Gerry was born in 1942 in Colorado and worked as a freelance writer, poet, book editor, reviewer and teacher. She had a column in *Romantic Times Magazine*, a popular romance fiction magazine started in 1981. It ceased publication in 2018. Gerry was a graduate of ASU and the University of San Francisco; the latter is where she earned a degree in Theology at the age of 60.

Gerry withdrew from her tasks as president of the Arizona Authors Association in 1998 when she moved out of state, but remained on the Board until her death in 2005. She turned the Association presidency over to a friend who had no experience as an author. During that time, membership declined and the organization faced a rough patch. The Association did not file a report with the Arizona Corporation Commission, as was due each year in April. The bank balance in December of 1997 was over three thousand dollars; a year later it had plummeted to little more than a hundred dollars. For the first time, the literary contest had to be canceled and refunds given for entry fees.



Arizona Authors Association logo
from 1997

2000s

The most exciting change in the early 2000s was the introduction of the Arizona Authors Literary Awards Banquet for the winners of the Arizona Authors Literary Contest. The first awards banquet was held at the Sheraton Crescent Hotel on 27th Avenue and Dunlap in Phoenix (pictured, right). Vijaya Schartz presided over the festivities in her role as Arizona Authors Association President. Board members Toby Heathcotte and Yvonne Masters assisted her in presenting awards, greeting guests and handling reservations.



The dinner featured live entertainment and radio coverage from Debbie Neckel and Pam Eckert of BookCrazy Radio, KCTK 960 AM. BookCrazy radio, at the time, boasted over 100,000 listeners. Debbie, a former police detective who wrote a [book](#) about a famous Arizona murder that she had investigated, and Pam, a former Arizona Authors member, hosted their BookCrazy show every Saturday at noon. It featured well-known authors from around the state and the country. They recorded several of the Arizona Authors events during the early part of the 21st century. Jani Magruder, a longtime reporter for the *Arizona Republic*, said of the duo: "Debbie Neckel and Pam Eckert are doing for books what Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert did for movies."

In addition, reporters from *The Glendale Arrow*, *Sun Life Magazine*, and *Arizona Corridors Magazine* attended the event and featured it in their respective media the next day. According to our website at the time, "The video cameras rolled, the still cameras flashed, and the crowd wore sequins, silk, red and silver lamé, black velvet, jewelry and furs." On BookCrazy Radio the following day Cathy McDavid, a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling romance author, said there was, "a lot of talent in this contest!"



Contest winner Emily Cary with President Vijaya Schartz

For the first few years of the banquet, we always held them at the Sheraton Crescent on a Friday night. In 2004 we switched to Saturday nights and also switched venues. That year we occupied the Prime Hotel on Union Hills and I-17. The cost of a ticket at the Prime was \$35, payable at the door. It also featured media coverage, and current member Wynne Brown won a prize.

When BookCrazy Radio signed off for the last time in late 2004, it was distressing to Arizona Authors Association members since they were often featured. Vijaya Schartz hosted one of the most popular shows on that network, called *Author's Secrets Radio*. You may read a story about the demise of BookCrazy Radio [HERE](#).

In 2005 the Arizona Authors Association banquet was held at the Four Point Sheraton Hotel at Metrocenter, which featured early Christmas decorations. Current member Emily Pritchard Cary won a prize in the contest that year and was photographed with outgoing president Vijaya Schartz (below left). The next year, 2006, Toby Heathcotte took over as president of the Association. Toby and Vijaya are pictured together (below right) at the 2005 banquet.



President Vijaya Schartz and incoming President Toby Heathcotte, November 2005.

2000s



Toby and Vijaya at the 2007 Banquet

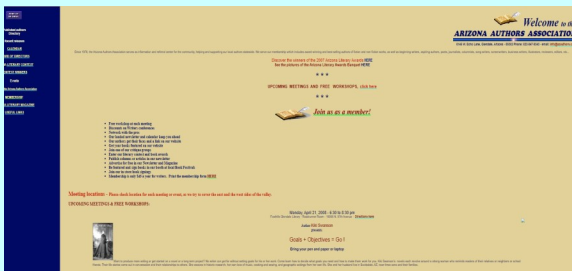


2007 Banquet Guests

Toby Fesler Heathcotte became president with an election in January, 2006. She led the group for the next decade through more changes and growth in the Association.

The next big change occurred when Toby collaborated with Linda Radke to create a brand new, professional website. It allowed members to create their own web page within the site, and also featured a forum, a calendar, and many other amenities found in professional sites. You may compare the old website from 2008 (top) to the one created in 2009, and see how much sleeker, easier to read, and modern the 2009 website was:

With the banquet and the website in place, Toby was able to increase membership and serve a diverse group of authors and editors. As she headed into the 2010s, she also encouraged more volunteers to serve in the organization. Here's a picture of one of them, Cherie Lee, who served in many capacities in the 2000s and 2010s, including a role as banquet photographer and editor of the Arizona Authors newsletter.





Arizona Authors Association

www.azauthors.com

December 2007 / January 2008

MARK YOUR CALENDARS
ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION
BRING A NON-MEMBER FOR FREE

West Valley
 Monday, Jan 9, 16, 23, 30, Feb 6 —6:30 to 8:30
 You Too Series—Details on Page 6
 Foothills Library, 19055 N. 57th Ave., Glendale
 623-930-3830

East Valley
 Monday, January 21—6:30 to 8:30
 Yearly membership meeting
 Three Ways to Publish By Sam Henrie
 Changing Hands Bookstore
 SW Corner of McClintock and Guadalupe, Tempe
 480-730-0205

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR MEMBERS

Above: Snapshot of the Arizona Authors Association Newsletter, December 2007-January 2008

The schedule has since changed to allow editorial staff to enjoy the holidays.

2010s

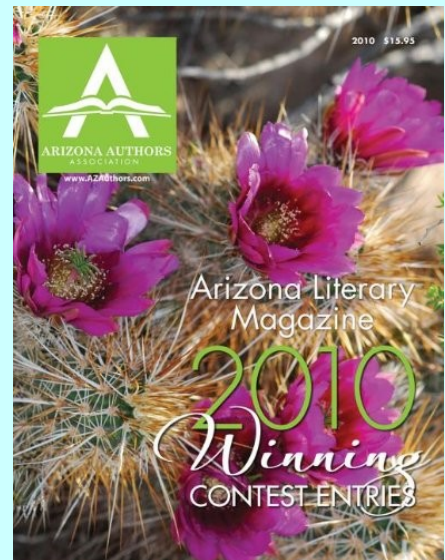


For the first time in 2015, Toby arranged to secure a table at the Arizona State Library Association Conference. Another event was the annual Tucson Festival of Books. Members were able to advertise their work in the Association's booth at very little cost. Such perks, expanded by Vijaya and expanded again by Toby, helped to retain members and make the Arizona Authors Association such

a valuable resource. Under Toby's leadership, she reported that the AAA secured "a grant from the City of Glendale to do a series of workshops with about a dozen writers, culminating in one by Diana Gabaldon."

It was during Toby's presidency that the newsletter saw its greatest changes. It switched from a paper newsletter snail mailed to all members to an online publication, thereby saving the Association thousands of dollars. Regular columns included President's Corner, Member Spotlight and Kathleen Cook's, The Inevitable Author. Ken Weene's column and his Open Mic events attracted more members. Book releases spanned a whole page in full color. Cherie Lee served as the Newsletter Editor. She learned to master Microsoft Publisher and put out a professional online product bimonthly, at a time when few others had the expertise to accomplish it.

The Arizona Authors Association website thrived under Toby's leadership and Vijaya's expertise as webmistress. The easy-to-use website boasted a welcoming and professional front page, a fully usable forum, and expertly designed members' pages which were easy to load and fully interactive. At the time of Toby's departure, the website, newsletter, and workshops were a few of the biggest accomplishments of the association. Toby left the presidency and the organization in good shape for the succeeding administration in January of 2016.



2010 Arizona Literary Magazine



2012 Literary Awards Banquet

Toby continued to author several books during her tenure. Her works include *The Alma Chronicles* series of books, *Out of the Psychic Closet*, *Backlight: A Fesler Family Chronicle*, and *Program Building*. In 2020 she edited and produced *Women Wronged*, a collection of stories from the women of the Arizona Authors Association. You will find more about her on her Arizona Authors web page [HERE](#).

Linda Radke's Arizona Authors Association Logo is seen here. —————>

It is now a copyrighted symbol of the Arizona Authors Association:



2010s

In 2016, Toby left the presidency when a new and relatively unknown president was voted into office. Later that year, Toby, along with past president Vijaya Schartz, editor Cherie Lee and future president Kathleen Cook, voiced concerns about the administration of Lisa Aquilina. This action prompted the new president to forcibly remove all four from the association where they had spent so much of their volunteer time.

After a tumultuous two years in which our website was taken down, our newsletter ceased publication, members were lost and funds inexplicably drained, Russell Azbill took over as president and immediately reinstated the four women. Toby became the Vice President and, at Toby's request, Kathleen Cook revived the newsletter, eventually turning it into the *Arizona Authors Digest*.

During the 2010s, we continued to do workshops at libraries across the valley. Patricia Brooks was a frequent presenter. She is seen here with her book, *Sick as My Secrets*:



Find out more about Patricia [HERE](#).

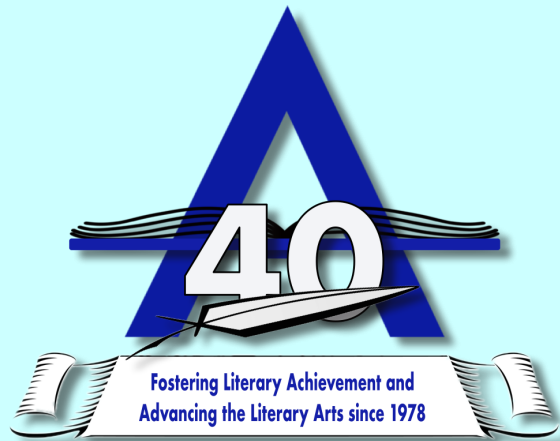


President Russell Azbill with former President Vijaya Schartz at the 2019 Arizona Authors Literary banquet.

Russell's book, *Darkest Hour*, is a fast-paced police thriller. His Arizona Authors Association web page may be found [HERE](#).

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Above: Here's a screen shot of the very first newsletter produced by Kathleen Cook after the chaos of the previous year. In the succeeding years, it expanded and was renamed *The Arizona Authors Digest*.



We celebrated our 40-year anniversary with an updated logo, while still retaining the book "A" that we know and love!

2020s



President Russell Azbill
2018-2021

Russell served as president during the height of the pandemic. For the first time in 2020, the annual banquet was postponed due to Covid-19.

Toby assumed the presidency in August of 2021, and in November, 2021, held a banquet for both 2020 and 2021 at the Moon Valley Country Club in Phoenix. The theme for the banquet was “Those Were the Days, My Friend.” Members dressed in costumes from the past, present or future.



President Toby Heathcotte
2006-2016 and 2021-2024.



Maureen Scanlon as a butterfly

Those Were The Days, My Friend!
Arizona Authors Literary Awards Banquet
Celebrate Winners of 2020 and 2021 Literary Contest
November 6, 2021
Glendale Civic Center
5 to 9 PM
Dinner – Bar – Awards – Costumes – Prizes – Photos – Literary Magazines
Theme: “Those were the days, my friend.”

Think of a time or place in your life or the life of a character in the past or the life yet to come. Come in a costume depicting the same. Creativity in costumes is limitless with this theme! Choose any time or place, past, present, future – real or imagined. Costumes are not required but make the event far more fun for everyone.

For Map and Directions, go to: <https://glendaleciviccenter.com/>

We hope all winners from 2020 and 2021 will attend and share their stories about their winning books. Winners from both years will be asked to speak and honored equally. Authors are invited to bring one of their books for the lottery. We will have prizes for the best costumes; come and share your costume story with us!

Buffet:
Southwestern Salad, Beef or Shrimp Fajitas, Tortillas, Black Beans, Spinach and Cheese Enchiladas, Spanish Rice, Mixed Greens, Chips and Salsa, New York Cheesecake with Strawberry Sauce.
Tickets to the Buffet: \$50.

Reserve through toby@tobyheathcotte.com no later than November 1st.
Pay to arizona.authors@yahoo.com at Venmo or send check or money order to:
Arizona Authors Association
6145 West Echo Lane
Glendale, AZ 85302-5709



2021 Banquet with 3 members in costume from left: Penny Orloff, Barbara Renner, and Toby Heathcotte



Left: Rico Austin won prizes in the Arizona Authors Literary Contest in both 2020 and 2021. He is seen here with Vijaya Schartz.

Right: Janet Alcorn, a winner of the contest, and Mad Max in costume.





Kathleen Cook, President and Web Administrator, 2024-present

2020s

In January 2024, we elected two new members to the board, Penny Orloff, as the Secretary and new Editor-in-Chief, and Mark Walker, our long-time columnist and advisor. Treasurer and Contest Director Jane Ruby assumed the office of Vice President, and Web Administrator Kathleen (Katy) Cook was elected President.



Jane Frances Ruby, Vice President, Treasurer and Contest Director, 2024-present

New Bylaws



Toby Heathcote, named President Emeritus and Arizona Authors Historian in 2024 by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors.

With a great deal of help from the Board, Katy rewrote the outdated bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, to address many issues arising from 21st century technology, rules and legal code. The 46-page document was submitted to the Arizona Corporation Commission on June 2, 2024, and will serve as our policy go-to guide in years to come.

During her six months in office, Katy increased the number of Zoom workshops, instituted a schedule for Board Meetings, added features to the website, and added to the membership rolls with the help of Mark Walker.

Moving forward, more features will be added to the website, including a book store with thousands of our members' volumes, a store with Arizona Authors merchandise and calendars, and much more.

Throughout its history, the Arizona Authors Association has been dedicated to helping members grow and expand their readership. With these features in place, we look forward to providing even more opportunities in the future.



Penny Orloff, Secretary and Editor-in-Chief, 2024-Present



Daniel Dickinson has joined the board and will take over as our new web administrator in January, 2025.



Mark D. Walker, Columnist, Consultant and Board Member, 2024-Present

What will
What will
tomorrow hold?
Stay tuned!