

Best-selling author David Baldacci opens Roanoke Valley Reads next month

by **RALPH BERRIER JR.** | 981-3338
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Wish David Baldacci were here? The best-selling author will kick off this year's Roanoke Valley Reads community reading project with a free appearance, open to the public, on Oct. 17.

Baldacci's 2000 novel "Wish You Well" is the book selection for the project, which turns the valley into one big book club by inviting residents to read a common book and come together to discuss and celebrate the novel.

"Wish You Well" was a departure for the author best known for his suspenseful, Washington, D.C.-based thrillers such as "Absolute Power" and this year's "The Hit." The 2000 novel is set in the mountains of Southwest Virginia in the 1940s. The story centers on two children from New York City who are sent to live on a family farm after their parents are in a car crash. Culture clashes, corporate thuggery, environmental destruction and courtroom drama play out in what is, basically, a coming-of-age story.

Baldacci, 53, who lives part time at Smith Mountain Lake, will speak at Jefferson Center's Shaftman Performance Hall at 7 p.m. Oct. 17. Roanoke Symphony Orchestra Music Director and Conductor David Stewart Wiley and multi-instrumentalist Jeff Midkiff will perform Appalachian music.

Event organizers have also picked two books for young readers for this year's reading project. "Jack Outwits The Giants," by Paul Brett Johnson, is a picture book for early readers. "Belle Prater's Boy," by Ruth White, is a chapter book that runs for more than 200 pages. This year's Roanoke Valley Reads events include activities and entertainment for children.

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