

Northfield Poet Laureate Report

September 2019

No reports were submitted for June, July, and August. I was out of town for nine weeks during that time (22 days in June, 29 days in July, 21 days in August).

Upcoming Events

Thursday, October 3. 7pm. Content Bookstore. Poet Laureate Rob Hardy in conversation with Lizzie Ehrenhalt (Minnesota Historical Society) about the book she co-edited, *Precious and Adored: The Love Letters of Rose Cleveland and Evangeline Simpson Whipple, 1890-1918* (Minnesota Historical Society Press).

Thursday, October 24. 7pm. Content Bookstore. Book launch reading for Doug Green's first collection of poetry, *Jumping the Median* (Encircle Publications).

Tuesday, November 5. 7pm. Northfield Public Library. Poetry reading by Steve Schild.

September Events

Hispanic Heritage Month Kick-off

September 14. Oscar Mireles, Poet Laureate of Madison, Wisconsin.

3rd Northfield Poetry Festival

September 26. Monica Berlin (Carleton College, co-sponsored with the Center for Community and Civic Engagement). Attendance: 15 (mostly Carleton faculty, staff, and students)

September 28. 10am. Group reading at Content Bookstore, with Doug Green, Becky Boling, Brent Christianson, Marie Gery, David Walters, and Steve McCown. Attendance: 35

2pm. Group reading at Northfield Public Library, with Joanne Sullivan, Andrea Een, Alexis Hernandez, Riki Kölbl Nelson, Diane LeBlanc, Leslie Schultz, and Rob Hardy. Music by Mestifonía. Attendance: 35

The poetry festival included seasoned readers as well as one or two poets who were reading publicly for the first time. It included a poet who has lived in Northfield for 50 years and another who has lived here for 14 months. It included seven women and six men. The band, Mestifonía, was enthusiastically received, and at least one audience member commented on how well the music fit with the poetry. One of the poets emailed to say: "Kudos to you for bringing us poets together in community places and for getting that fab group of musicians to play. Loved them!" In my opinion, this was the most successful of the three annual poetry festivals I've hosted.

Poetry Post Update

The Poetry Post, designed and fabricated by local artist Jen Wolcott, was unveiled at the library on September 28. Jen still has some work to do on the piece, which will be installed in October. The first poem to be displayed will be "The 19th Letter," by local poet and artists Toni Easterson, who read her poem at the group reading at the library on September 28.

LBSA Poetry Workshop

On Wednesday afternoons in October, I'll be leading a poetry workshop with two residents of one of the Laura Baker (LBSA) off-campus houses. The goal is to write poetry together that can be read at the LBSA annual gala in December. A poem we wrote together in March was featured in a recent issue of the LBSA newsletter. This activity is a collaboration with Bridget Novak, the LBSA art specialist.

Greenvale Park Elementary Sidewalk Poetry

Superintendent Matt Hillmann has asked me to compose a special sidewalk poem for installation outside the new school building. The planning is in the early stages, but I may work with MaryBeth Youngblut to create a poem with some of the children at the school, as I did with children at Prairie Creek.

SEMAC Grant

After consultation with Teresa Jensen, I have decided not to apply for a 2020 SEMAC grant to support the Poet Laureate program. In all three years of the program's existence, we've entered December with a significant fund balance. The poetry reading series can be run at minimal expense by inviting local poets to read, or through working with Content to bring to town poets with books they want to promote. Carleton and St. Olaf, with much greater resources, often bring more well-known poets to town (recently, Li Young Lee, Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Hanif Abdurraquib). Other organizations I've worked with, like Prairie Creek and LBSA, have offered to pay for services. In the past, I have declined payment because of the grant. But instead of relying on outside grant funding each year, it might be better to move to a funding model that demonstrates local support for the program.

Frankly, after three years, I find that applying for and administering a grant adds significantly to the workload of the position. At this point, I think I need to scale back expectations a bit. Although a search for a new Poet Laureate was open for two months in the spring, no one applied. It is, of course, flattering to be told that I've "set the bar too high." I wanted the Poet Laureate program to have a strong start, but I don't want it to come with unrealistic expectations.

Finally, because of my wife's sabbatical from Carleton in the fall term of 2020, I may be out of town for much of the second half of next year, which would of course make it impossible for me to make use of grant funding during that time.

September programming expenses

Oscar Mireles honorarium: \$300

2 nights at Alumni Guest House for Oscar Mireles: \$120

Mestifonía honorarium: \$500

TOTAL: \$920