

MSAC Literary Arts Summit Minutes
Lyric Center for Creative Writing, 20 E. Main Street, Frostburg, MD
August 22, 2009, 2pm-4pm

Objective:

Over the last five years, Maryland's literary arts community has significantly grown due to the formation of organizations, networking among writers, influx of new writers, creation of reading series, increased media attention through publicity and blogs, and a new energy in regard to literary art. The Maryland State Arts Council is calling for Literary Arts Summits across the state to support this resurgent and active scene, to further communication between organizations, to promote a collaborative spirit (especially during difficult economic times), and to explore the challenges that face those creating and presenting the literary arts, while fostering ways the community can discover solutions together.

Attendees:

Gerry LaFemina, Frostburg Center for Creative Writing, Frostburg University
Andy Vick, Allegany Arts Council
Georgia Kreiger, Allegany College of Maryland English Department
Keith Schlegel, Frostburg University English Department
Kim Brown, Frostburg Center for Creative Writing
Michele Haines, MFA, Independent writer
Christine Stewart, Maryland State Arts Council

Meeting began: 2:10 pm

Christine – Welcome

Introductions

Asked: How are things going for your organization?

Gerry LaFemina, Frostburg University – things still looking good. Backing is good from the University, members of board are active fundraisers, good local partnerships with libraries and county arts council. Are looking to branch out into new programming – after school, working with veterans, working with community volunteers and other organizations. No staff so no layoffs. Also – name change – new, official name of the Center is the Lyric Center for Creative Writing.

Andy Vick, Allegany Arts Council – have reserves to tap into, organization has scaled back, seconds Gerry's comment about collaborations/partnerships. Positive new changes like the Backbone Mountain Review becoming more regional, showcasing Allegany County, places within a one hour radius from Cumberland. The Valentine's Day reading is always very successful, as is the poets in the schools program the County Council does with Frostburg. The One Book project with Sue Hughes of the Board of Education was a big success.

Michele: happy to see the programs and community expand, and see all the opportunities for people in my age group. Postings on Facebook, too.

Kim: coordinates outreach for the Lyric Center, sometimes difficult to get a response from certain communities about participating in events like the small press fair.

Keith: excited about the new space for the Lyric. Now can really serve the larger community. People come to events and then go spend money in area businesses – the bookstore, the coffee/café next door. It's a vital connection and collaboration between Main Street and Frostburg University. The Univ. is making an investment in Main Street businesses. Makes interacting with the University less intimidating.

Georgia: people know Allegany College as a nursing school, but now beginning to be recognized for writing program. It's part of continuing ed program as well. The challenge is to get the information through the existing channels to reach the community

Asked: Problems? Challenges?

--No shortage of ideas. Publicity also not a problem. Lots of different events to attend. Keeping up so far, great volunteers and interns and students – all help out. Able to connect students and community writers who may not have opportunities otherwise.

--RE: Publicity – feel that we are reaching people who are interested, but how to reach others who could be interested? There are groups of people who don't get the County Arts Council's Arts Flash. Art suffers from misconceptions and stereotypes so people - if not sure what to expect, or think they know and won't like it – don't come.

--Some people aren't raised to embrace the arts or one particular discipline. Hard to get people to take the plunge in terms of participating and attending events. Sometimes the arts are not on people's radar.

--This area also has a smaller community. That means a smaller number of attendees at events.

--Could collaborate further, want a centralized calendar and best way to communicate events/programming to public. Could join forces for the latter.

Asked: At the University/College level – are professors doing a good job of serving as conduits to communicate information about events and opportunities to their students?

--Agreed the answer was yes. But there are still professors who are artists who are not members of the local arts council. Always a good idea to support the local agency that supports your chosen discipline/career.

Asked: Professors involved in community? Giving readings? Shows? Talks? (i.e. lead by example) – outreach to students

--At Allegany College there is a 20 year old literary arts magazine. Very stable and strong. Professors are involved and give readings of their own work. Working on the magazine builds self-esteem for students. There are new administrators/faculty who are now on board and ready for new programming/events at Allegany. There is a renewed interest in creative writing classes. There is also a group of faculty at the college that get together to workshop each other's writing. Student groups as well.

--Students come to readings. Fairly well attended.

-- Send literary magazines to local high schools.

--Can also put them out at the arts council.

--Possibility of launching a low-residency or online MA program in creative writing in the near future.

--At Allegany Arts Council – there is a registry of artists online – all disciplines. Not enough people take advantage.

--Frostburg professors can go to Allegany College and give readings, talks, interact with students

Asked: What are the demographics of your audiences?

--About 25-30 people per event

--mostly writers, students, recent graduates

--local artists

--then community members, ages ranging from 20-60

Valentine's Day poetry event is very popular, as was a recent event based on The Great Gatsby where audience members attended in period dress.

For Backbone Mountain Review – the age range is all over the map

Book clubs are listed in Frostburg's newsletters with time and place for interested people

Asked: Have you surveyed the community on their interests and needs?

--Survey was done in November, 2008 online.

--Could do a paper one at events. With just a few questions, boxes to check instead of written answers.

Asked: Goals in general? And/or goals to check in on at next meeting? General comments?

--improved communication with libraries and community colleges

--creating a poetry slam where colleges and community colleges compete (2 and 4 yr colleges against each other)

-- Andy can come to area organizations and board meetings to share what's on the arts council's website.

--Possible to have a literary arts page on MSAC website?

--At next meeting, need the local libraries and some secondary school reps, and independent booksellers in area

--Allegany College needs instructors, will tap into MFA community for adjunct and continuing ed

--Frostburg creating a regular time/space for writers to come write in their new space. Possible mentoring and tutoring services

--more coordination with local libraries and youth groups to present writing programming, such as rotating poetry workshops

--literary arts summit good idea – good to get together and share challenges and resources.

Next Meeting: February 12, 2010, time TBD, Lyric Center for Creative Writing