

Lit Youngstown 2020 Annual Report

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Letter from the Director

Wow! To say the least. This wasn't the year we expected—a 5-year celebratory calendar packed full of canceled events seems like a bit of a prank. But thanks to support from our community and beyond, we are still moving. The year in review is a wild ride, even as we continue to grapple with the grief, fear and disruption of a pandemic.

Winter

We kicked off 2020 with a packed house at the Soap Gallery for a reading by Cleveland poets John Burroughs and Shelley Chernin, and also celebrated English Toffee day. At Literally a Party, our first member appreciation night, we enjoyed tacos, jazz and readings of *Into the Beautiful North*.

In early February, over 100 writers of all ages came to St. John's Episcopal Church and the Public Library of Youngstown & the Mahoning Valley for our third Winter Writing Camp. Teaching artists from the region led sessions on descriptive language, technical writing, Maya Angelou, and many other topics. We enjoyed poems and stories at the open mic read by participants ranging in age from five to eighties. Jocelyn and Robert Dabney performed African-based music and stories.

February's First Wednesday reading featured *Akron Beacon Journal* columnist Holly Christensen and educator and poet Chris Gibowicz on World Nutella Day.

Spring

In March, we welcomed Kayla Jeswald who read from her memoir, and poet Cliff Richeal on National Poundcake Day. Later that week, Gene Brode led a workshop on writing flash fiction. The following week we met at Cultivate Café to discuss *The Unsheltered* by Barbara Kingsolver. That was our last in-person event.

In April, Lowell and Ellen Satre hosted us on Zoom for a discussion of *The Hidden Half of Nature*, and author Anne Biklé joined us from her famous garden in Seattle. That would be the first of many gifts of Zoom this year.

Jessica Fischhoff of Pittsburgh taught a workshop on persona poetry in May, and we discussed *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas Tallamy, the last of our series on humankind and the natural world. Mari Alschuler led a workshop on writing from photographs.

Summer

In June, we resumed the First Wednesday series via Zoom, with Terry Provost of Cleveland and Lit Youngstown board member Nicole Robinson of Akron. July's reading featured Diane Kendig of Canton and Youngstown native Hannah Rodabaugh, now of Idaho.

Kelly Bancroft led a workshop on playwriting and Adrianna Lamonge on writing from activism. We began a monthly online writers workshop for teens led by Carrie George of the Wick Poetry Center.

And our signature Tony Armeni birdbath raffle was our highest earning raffle so far, with many thanks to West Side Bowl for hosting the birdbath and selling tickets.

Kathleen Strafford of Leeds, England and Ted Lardner of Cleveland read their poetry for the First Wednesday August reading. Ashley Dillon led a workshop on building an author website.

Our community partnership with Akron Children’s Hospital began in August, when Karen trained with Lit Youngstown board member Nicole Robinson in Akron, and then began twice-weekly writing groups with teens at the Mahoning Valley campus.

Fall

September felt like the month we hit our stride. The First Wednesday reading featured Youngstown-born William Heath of Maryland and Susan Petrone of Cleveland, who drew on Youngstown family lore for her novel *The Heebie Jeebie Girl*.

Realizing that authors of new books were being denied the usual readings and book signings because of the pandemic lockdown, we initiated the New Book News reading series, featuring Ohio Poet Laureate Kari Gunter-Seymour, Paula J. Lambert of Columbus and Cathryn Essinger of Dayton.

The 2020 Fall Literary Festival was a Zoom extravaganza, thanks to support from production technicians Daynee Rosales of Virginia and Andrea Cash of North Carolina. We featured four highly accomplished visiting writers and two hundred presenters and attendees from as far away as Maine and Florida, with dozens of readings, workshops and panel discussions focusing on the theme of cultural identity in writing and publishing. Over 400 undergraduate students in 21 classes also registered from their campuses around the country; their curiosity and enthusiasm were a terrific addition. The open mic included 27 readers, and 6 attended the literary arts nonprofit administrators’ caucus.

Also in September, after nearly a year of planning, YSU Painting Professor Dragana Crnjak and her special topics Public Art students began conceptualizing and painting a mural on Andrews Ave., incorporating dozens of memories submitted to Lit Youngstown by community members. The painting was completed in late October, and the mural will be varnished and dedicated in spring of 2021. We are proud to be program partners and fiscal sponsors for this project, and are grateful to the Raymond J. Wean Foundation and Youngstown State University for the funding that made the project possible.

In October the First Wednesday reading featured Youngstown playwright Kelly Bancroft and Kent poet Jessica Jewell. The New Book News series continued through December, featuring 30 highly accomplished writers from throughout the U.S., as well as Merwyn Taylor in Trinidad and Meg Pokrass in the U.K.

The Writers Circle was a thriving, in-person gathering before Covid-19; we tried a few online formats before setting up a permanent, online forum for sharing and critiquing new work.

More Community Engagement

Thanks to our community partner YSU, we benefitted from internships with Danny Gage and NEOMFA student Cassandra Lawton.

We were out in the community in a few times before the lockdown, guest-speaking at the Austintown Rotary and the NEOMFA internship class, and co-sponsoring a book discussion on *The Color of Law* at St. John's Episcopal Church. Karen and other Lit Youngstown writers took part in the Ravenna Winter Writing Festival.

We donated \$100 to Book 'Em Pittsburgh, an organization that distributes books to incarcerated Pennsylvanians.

We saw some changes to the board, wishing a fond farewell to Elaine Arvan Andrews, Cherise Benton, RBrown, Nicole DiPiero, Courtney Kensinger and Liz Skeels, and welcomed Nin Andrews, Anthony Manna, Reaghan McCann (Co-treasurer), Tommy Mihalopoulos and Joshua Nauman. The newest members join Tricia D'Avignon (Chair), Liz Hill (Co-treasurer), Nicole Robinson and Penny Wells, forming a dedicated and hardworking board.

Looking Forward

And we are looking forward!

The 2021 First Wednesday Readers Series is queued up and will likely be an online-in person hybrid. We'll feature poetry and fiction writers from the region and far beyond.

This year's Food For Thought book discussion began in September with a series of books by Black authors, including Ross Gay's poetry collection *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*, Colson Whitehead's novel *The Nickel Boys* and Octavia Butler's graphic novel *The Parable of the Sower*.

The Fourth Wednesday Happy Hour kicked off in December online, and we look forward to meeting in person at venues around the region.

We also hope to host some summer mini writing camps in parks around the county, but we will follow the county's lead on the safety of in-person gatherings.

This year's affordable writing workshops will delve into our personal writing strengths, writing for happiness, writing scene, and many other topics.

The Fall Literary Festival planning is in the works for October 7-9 at Youngstown State. Our keynote will be poet and creative nonfiction writer Ross Gay, a Youngstown native. He'll be joined by poet and memoirist Jan Beatty, poet and novelist Bonnie Proudfoot, and playwright Mike Geither.

And, to help us fulfill a longstanding goal of writing in the community, we have hired last semester's intern Cassandra Lawton to develop and pilot a program for writing with cancer survivors.

We are so grateful to all who worked with us, in many ways.

Write On!
Karen Schubert, Director

Our Mission, Values and Vision

Mission

The mission of Lit Youngstown is to provide opportunities for writers and readers to experience and enjoy the literary arts. We support beginning and experienced writers in their goals to hone their craft, and share and publish their work. We believe that the acts of writing and reading serve as both window and mirror: fostering creativity and increasing understanding of the self and our diverse community.

Values

Our values help us achieve our goals.

- We provide a platform for writers to share their work
- We offer access to visiting writers with a wide range of styles and experience
- We pay our teaching artists
- We keep our classes affordable and inclusive
- We foster a nurturing environment for helpful critical feedback
- We collaborate with other community organizations to extend our reach and build on the work being done here
- We recruit volunteers to help broaden the face of our organization, and help strengthen our connection to individuals

Vision

We envision a society where literacy, reading, literary creativity and ideas are valued and celebrated, promoting empathy, self and cultural awareness, critical analysis, active citizenship, information, and knowledge.

Lit Youngstown
Statement of Financial Position Summary
As of December 31, 2020

ASSETS	
Bank Accounts	\$15,315
Total Current Assets	<u>\$15,315</u>
LIABILITIES	
Restricted Funds	\$3,261
Total Liabilities	<u>\$3,261</u>
EQUITY	
Unrestricted Funds	\$12,054
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	\$15,315
NET ASSETS	\$12,054

Lit Youngstown
Statement of Activities
Year Ended Dec 31, 2020

Support and Revenue	
Foundation Grants	\$14,190
Fiscal Agent Project	5,000
Government Grants	10,396
Religious Grants	200
Individual Contributions	10,790
Special Project	2,400
Yuhasz Scholarship Fund	250
Sales/Donations for Books/Products	832
Workshop and Program Fees	4,665
Total Support and Revenue	\$48,723
Expenses	
Administrative	\$5,286
Fiscal Agent Project	4,139
Programs	6,607
Fundraising	1,553
Director Stipend	12,000
Author Honoraria & Stipends	6,675
Reimbursed Author Sales	145
Internship Stipends	2,000
Total Expenses	\$38,405
Change in Net Assets	10,318
Net Assets Beginning of Year	4,997
Net Revenue End of Year	15,315

With Gratitude

Thank you to all those who worked to bring the light to Lit Youngstown in 2020.

Current Board of Directors: Nin Andrews, Tricia D'Avignon (Chair), Liz Hill (Co-founder, Co-treasurer), Anthony Manna, Reaghan McCann (Co-treasurer), Tommy Mihalopoulos, Joshua Nauman, Nicole Robinson and Penny Wells

Outgoing Members of the Board of Directors: Elaine Arvan Andrews, Cherise Benton, RBrown, Nicole DiPiero, Courtney Kensinger and Liz Skeels

Staff: Director Karen Schubert, Outreach Coordinator: Cassandra Lawton, Bookkeeper Heather Best

Workshop, Winter Writing Camp and Fall Literary Festival Faculty: Mari Alschuler, Sayuri Ayers, Cynthia Atkins, Kelly Bancroft, Lou Barrett, Cherise Benton, Marion Boyer, Bridgid Cassin, Gene Brode, Rob Colby, Dorsey Craft, Regis Coustillac, Jocelyn Dabney, Robert Dabney, Ashley Dillon, Meredith Doench, Nikki Eriksen, Cathryn Essinger, Dave Essinger, Kelly K. Ferguson, Jessica Fischhoff, Quincy Flowers, Nick Gardner, David Lee Garrison, Barbara George, Carrie George, David Giffels, Henry J. Gomez, Paul Grilli, Jeff Gundy, Kari Gunter-Seymour, Piotr Gwiazda, Kevin Haworth, Annie Hogsett, Jason Kaufman, Suzanne Kelly, Annmarie Kelly-Harbaugh, Beth Kissileff, Paula J. Lambert, Adrianna Lamonge, Lynn Levin, Eric Lidji, Marjorie Maddox, Charles Malone, Jacqueline Marino, Amanda Nicole Miller, Julie L. Moore, Josh Nauman, Aimee Noel, Katie Passerotti, Susan Petrone, D.M. Pulley, Belinda Rismiller, Amber Ree Robinson, Aubrey Jewel Rodgers, Barbara Sabol, Elaine Schleiffer, Dr. Ken Schneck, E. F. Schraeder, Susanna Sharp-Schwacke, Meg Silver, Liz Skeels, Larry Smith, Lindsey Smith, Tricia Springstubb, Stephanie Stearns, Myrna Stone, Julie Stotz-Ghosh, Toni Thayer, Abby L. Vandiver, Dana Washington, Robin Wesson, Shanna Powlus Wheeler, Janet Wong

YSU Student Interns: Danny Gage, Cassandra Lawton

Readers and Co-hosts:

- January 8 John Burroughs (Cleveland) & Shelley Chernin (Cleveland), open mic emcee Reaghan McCann
- February 5 Holly Christensen (Cleveland) & Chris Gibowicz (Youngstown), open mic emcee Jimmy Sutman
- March 4 Cliff Richeal (Steubenville) & Kayla Jeswald (Youngstown), open mic emcee RBrown
- June 3 Nicole Robinson (Akron) & Terry Provost (Cleveland)
- July 1 Diane Kendig (Canton) & Hannah Rodabaugh (Idaho), co-host Danny Gage
- August 5 Kathleen Strafford (U.K.) & Ted Lardner (Cleveland), co-host Diane Kendig
- September 2 Susan Petrone (Cleveland) & William Heath (Maryland), co-host Cheryl Torsney
- October 7 Kelly Bancroft (Youngstown) & Jessica Jewell (Kent), co-host Molly Fuller
- November 4 Craig Paulenich (Lisbon) & James Winter (Salem), co-host Cassandra Lawton

- December 3 Barbara Sabol (Akron) & Heather Dobbins (Arkansas),
co-host Barbara Marie Minney

Program Partners & Hosts: St. John's Episcopal Church; WYSU; Youngstown CityScape; YSU Art Department

Volunteers: Mari Alschuler, Pamela Anderson, Rebecca Banks, Laura Beadling, Cherise Benton, Marion Boyer, Russell Brickey, Simmons Buntin, Elizabeth Burnette, Tricia D'Avignon, Bonnie DeBlas, Shari DellaPenna, Nicole DiPiero, Heather Dobbins, Liz Dreier, John Dyer, David Essinger, Steve Force, Timothy Francisco, Beth Franklin, Molly Fuller, Nick Gardner, Barbara George, Carrie George, Christian Anton Gerard, Chris Gibowicz, Anita Gorman, Janine Harrison, Furaha Henry-Jones, Nora Hickey, Liz Hill, Rochelle Hurt, Jayson Iwen, Jonathan Jackson, Arya-Francesca Jenkins, Jr., Diane Kendig, Courtney Kensinger, Jacob Ari Labendz, Karen Lapidus, Dina Liguore, Charles Malone, Anthony Manna, Jacqueline Marino, Reaghan McCann, Sarah McColl, Anastasios Mihalopoulos, Jonie McIntire, Tracy McQuillan, Barbara Marie Minney, Josh Nauman, Maureen Reardon, Meg Silver, Stephanie Stearns, Wendy Stewart, Cheryl Torsney, Jayne Moore Waldrop, Robin Wesson

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Donors: Mari Alschuler, Pamela Anderson, Gary Barnes, Brilex BBM, Dianne Borsenik, Marion Boyer, Barbara Brothers, Jeff Buchanan, Deanne Buffalari, John Burroughs, Kathleen Calby, Erica Cardwell, Andy Carson, Allison Pitinii Davis, Shari Della Penna, Davita Fitzgerald, Michael Geither, Christine Gibowicz, Pam Goldman, Anita Gorman, Kari Gunter-Seymour, Eric Hansmann, Julianna Cancio Harper, Janine Harrison, Rochelle Hurt, Miriam Klein, Karen Ktorba, Elliot & Christine Legow, Anthony Manna, Donald Martin, Reaghan McCann, Laura McCrystal, Angela Messenger, Susan Miller, Robert Miltner, Barbara Marie Minney, Aimee Noel, Caryl Pagel, Ellen Perduyn, Maureen Reardon, Rebecca Moon Ruark, Barbara Sabol, Carol Sacherman, Lowell & Ellen Satre, Elaine Schleiffer, St John's Episcopal Church, Thomas Stone, Deanna Tennant, Toni Thayer, Cheryl Torsney, Judith Vollmer, Robbin Wesson, Mark Winne