

Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas

Year in Review – 2014-2015



Purpose: Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas (PRA) is a private, non-profit organization established in 1931 to share the love of poetry, encourage the writing of poetry, and support poets in Arkansas.

History: PRA is the oldest poetry organization in the state. Most of Arkansas's Poet Laureates have been members. Among them were Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni of Fayetteville (1953 - 1969), and Dr. Lily Peter of Helena (1971 - 1991), for whom the two annual PRA conferences are named. Current Arkansas Poet Laureate Peggy Vining of Little Rock also is a member. PRA participates in the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS), a national non-profit also promoting poetry.

Contests: Contests for PRA members are offered free throughout the year. PRA's annual Poetry Day contest in October is open to all poets for a small entry fee. Winners receive monetary prizes of up to \$1,000. Guidelines are posted on PRA's website and in PRA's membership yearbook. PRA also supports a number of student contests annually, including the Sybil Nash Abrams Student Contest in Arkansas and national contests through NFSPS. Information is posted on PRA's web site, and distributed through branches and educational partners.

Membership Benefits: PRA branches are located all over the state for members to meet monthly. PRA's two annual conferences offer educational opportunities to learn more about poetry and meet other poets. Members also may participate in the annual NFSPS conference with poets from all over the nation. PRA's monthly contests and its spring contests are free for members. Winning poems may be published in PRA's annual anthology, and national winners may be published in the NFSPS national anthology. PRA also offers the free service of a state critic for members to help edit and improve their work.

Activities 2014-2015: During the fiscal year PRA hosted several events and promoted poetry in various ways. Many PRA poets also received an impressive number of awards too numerous to name here.

The South Arkansas Poets of the Pines held a very successful open mic night at PJs Coffee House on the Square in El Dorado in August. Nearly twenty poets aged 20 to 80+ read their work to a standing room only crowd, and folksinger Rickey E. Pittman opened the show with his music. The owners asked the group to return for regular open mics monthly or bi-monthly.

Mountain Home Free Verse Society hosted a wonderful 2-day event in October celebrating the 67th annual Poetry Day in Arkansas. Dwight Durmon spoke on his tumultuous military experiences as an advisor in Kuwait and a POW in Iraq. Then PRA's State Critic Todd Sukany

offered valuable tips on writing effective poetry, reading more poetry and challenging our way of thinking. Annual awards were announced and a good time was had by all.

The Mountain Home Free Verse Group also recently produced their second CD featuring readings of original poetry by members active in poetry locally and nationally. All proceeds from CD sales go to a scholarship fund for a Mountain Home High School graduating senior.

Jim Barton (South Arkansas Poets of the Pines) was named 1st Vice President and Membership Chair of the NFSPS Board in June for the next 2 years. He said his goal is to have poetry organizations from every state join NFSPS. Jim is an award-winning poet, published author, Treasurer of South Arkansas Poets of the Pines and State Treasurer for PRA. He was featured speaker at several venues this year including: Mississippi Poetry Society's Annual Festival, PRA's Spring Celebration, a Senior English class at El Dorado High School, and the Annual South Arkansas Community College Celebration of the Arts in El Dorado. He also won Tennessee's "Best of the Fest Award" in October.

During the year several poets led by Pat Durmon (Mountain Home Free Verse) researched and created lists of "Old School" and "New School" Marketing Tips to help PRA members publish their poetry.

The Saline County Branch of PRA hosted this year's Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration in May. Opening remarks from Betty Heidelberger memorialized Dr. Peter who was Arkansas 3rd Poet Laureate (1971-1991). She was a successful farmer in Phillips County, a distinguished author, poet, teacher, musician, conservationist and philanthropist. Dr. Peter was a dreamer who made things happen, much like Betty who as past PRA President partnered with the Little Rock Zoo where today visitors see poetry displayed throughout the zoo. Then PRA's own Jim Barton spoke on tips to edit poetry and advised poets to "cut, cut, cut" unnecessary words. Contest winners were announced and newly elected PRA officers were installed to serve during the next 2 years. Outgoing PRA President Cathy Moran received a plaque and gavel for her 4 years of fine leadership.

PRA said farewell to renowned Arkansas poet Miller Williams in January. Williams was a long-time friend to PRA. He spoke at PRA conferences and most recently wrote the Foreword for PRA's Eightieth Anniversary Anthology. His closing remarks in the Forward were, "Welcome to some good hours with friends you may not have known you had."

Marilyn Joyner, David Hall, and Donna Henson (all from South Arkansas Poets of the Pines) presented a program "Poetry from the Garden" to Union County Master Gardeners. The branch also plans to start a "Poetry in the Parks" program during the fall as part of their mission to spread the word and words of poetry.

Marcia Camp and Justin Booth (both River Market Poets) recently published a book chronicling Justin's progress as he became an award-winning poet during a short prison term. He credits the River Market Poets branch with encouraging him toward much of his success. He has since given poetry readings in New York and California. He also enjoys considerable popularity in Ireland.

Dr. Ed Madden (PRA member at large and former Arkansan) was named the first City Poet Laureate for Columbia, South Carolina in January. Dr. Madden will serve a 4-year term to, "encourage appreciation and create opportunities for dissemination of poetry in Columbia." Originally from Newport, Arkansas, Madden serves on the faculty of the University of South Carolina, teaches English, directs the University's gender studies program, and leads poetry summer camps for students. He has published 3 poetry books and won fellowships from the South Carolina Academy of Authors and the South Carolina Arts Commission.

For more information on Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas see poetsroundtable.webs.com (and coming soon, <http://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org>).