



Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas

<http://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org>

Year in Review – 2016-2017

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 Arkansas poets.

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

Membership Benefits: PRA branches are located across the state for members to meet monthly. PRA also offers an online group, plus a quarterly newsletter, website, and periodic e-blasts to keep members informed. PRA's two annual conferences provide contests and networking opportunities, plus educational speakers and critiques. Members also may participate in the annual NFSPS conference with poets from other states. PRA members may publish winning poems in PRA's anthology and/or the NFSPS anthology, and promote their poetry books on PRA's website.

Contests: Members may enter 15 free PRA contests throughout the year. PRA's annual Poetry Day event sponsors another 30 contests, many open to all poets, for a small entry fee. Winners receive monetary prizes of up to \$1,000. Plus, members may enter 50 national contests at discounted rates with NFSPS. PRA also supports a number of student contests annually, including the Sybil Nash Abrams Contest for Arkansas High School and Junior High students, PRA's statewide Jeannie Dolan Carter Collegiate Contest, plus national student contests through NFSPS. Guidelines for all contests are posted on PRA's website, and distributed through branches and educational partners.

Activities 2016-2017: PRA poets hosted various activities, published books, spoke at events, and promoted poetry throughout the year. Many also received an impressive number of awards. (See details on PRA's website.) Highlights of the year include:

Jeanie Dolan Carter Memorial Collegiate Contest was established in 2016 by Roger Carter of Hot Springs and PRA President Dennis Patton to honor Carter's late wife. Mr. Carter's sponsorship will continue the contest annually with no entry fees and prizes totaling \$1,000. JDC Chair Donna Smith coordinated the 2017 contest with statewide outreach from all branches. Pat Durmon and Diane Stefan judged. Winners were announced in April 2017 at the Spring Celebration where they read their poems. Winners were: 1st - Ellie Black of Hendrix College/Conway (from Clarksville); 2nd - Dennison Schultz of UofA Fayetteville (from Cabot); and 3rd - Anushah Jiwani of Hendrix College/Conway (from Little Rock).

PRA Partnered with the 2016 Arkansas State Fair to sponsor *Best-of-Show* poetry winners in 4 age groups. Winners were announced in October at the Fair and on PRA's website. Prizes included cash for each BOS winner, plus a 1-year PRA membership for the adult winner. Entry is free to Arkansans. Chair Donna Smith judged the contests and submitted press releases to the 4 winners' home town newspapers. (See complete winners' list on PRA's website.) PRA's Board voted in June 2017 to continue the partnership.

Arkansas' 69th Poetry Day Conference on October 22, 2016, was hosted by PRA's Roundtable Poets of Hot Springs, in honor of Arkansas Poet Laureate Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni (1953-1969) who established the first Arkansas Poetry Day in October 1948. Poetry Day Chair John Crawford led a Friday night sing-along, read-around and impromptu contest. Featured speaker Kai Coggin shared readings Saturday from her poetry books and led group critiques. Kai is a creative writing teacher, poet, author, workshop leader, and performer. President Dennis Patton announced the 2016 Merit Award winner, Donna Smith of Greenbrier for her service on PRA's newsletter, numerous committees, and statewide promotion of poetry. A business meeting followed. Then Frieda Patton announced Poetry Day Contest winners. (See entire list on PRA's website.) John Crawford invited all to visit the *Hot Springs Wednesday Night Poetry* group, ongoing weekly for 27 years with featured speakers and open mic performances, at 6:30 PM at Kollektive Cafe.

PRA's South Arkansas Poets of the Pines Branch (SAPOP) sponsored monthly "Open Mic" nights all year at PJ's Coffee on the Square in El Dorado. Marilyn Joyner, Jim Barton and Janet Ryan represented SAPOP in the 2016 "Between the Lines," publication of South Arkansas Community College. On October 28th SAPOP also hosted *SCARE ON THE SQUARE*, an evening of ghost stories, ghoulish poems, and music at PJ's. Marilyn Joyner won 1st for her ghost story, and a charming young gecko/dino won 1st for her costume.

Karen Hayes of PRA's River Market Branch

developed the *Laman Poetry Scribble* writers' circle in North Little Rock. They meet each 2nd Tuesday from 6-7:30PM at the William F. Laman Public Library, and welcome anyone who wants to write poetry. Karen also offers the *Dogtown Poetry on Demand at the Argenta Art Walk* each 3rd Friday from 5-8PM at the Laman Argenta Branch. She tells patrons, "You name it; I'll write about it." She sets up her table with a sign, tip jar and her 1971 jade green Olivetti typewriter. If patrons are stumped on a subject, she offers a little box of words they can draw. The poems are free. Tips are voluntary and donated to a charity. She says, "Twenty dollar bills make me very happy." She types the poem, reads it to the patron, and takes a picture of the poem to keep, plus a picture of the patron with the poem, if they're willing. Her best gig so far was the Little Rock Pride Fest at the Clinton Presidential Library. She wrote for 5 hours and had a line at her table! She also offered "poetry quickies," short, face-to-face, memorized poems as samples. Karen makes her free poetry service available at events for the sheer pleasure of seeing people value poetry.

Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration on April 22, 2017, was hosted by PRA's Saline County Branch in Benton. The annual event honors Arkansas Poet Laureate Dr. Lily Peter (1971-1991). Featured speaker Russell Strauss shared ideas on entering, sponsoring and judging poetry contests. Russell is a native of Memphis, President of the Poetry Society of Tennessee, past NFSPS President, current NFSPS Liaison with state societies, and PRA member. After his presentation he challenged members with a *Terza Rima Sonnet Contest*. Then a vote determined Light and Serious Verse Contest winners. Donna Smith introduced the 3 winners of the 2017 Jeannie Dolan Carter Collegiate Contest who read their poems. Frieda Patton introduced the 3 attending winners of the Sybil Nash Abrams junior and senior high contests who read their poems. (See list of all contest winners posted on PRA's website with pictures.) Donna Smith read and sang her winning 2016 Sybil Nash Abrams poem about Arkansas musician Glen Campbell. President Dennis Patton led a business meeting and discussed a new state law authorizing PRA to recommend future Arkansas Poet Laureates to the Governor. Finally, Spring Contest winners were announced.

Two Rivers Poetry Branch partnered with Dewey's Café in Ft. Smith for Open Mic Nights at 7PM every third Thursday. Branch meetings are the same day at 2:30 at Sweet Bay Coffee. Also, River Valley Writer's *Kindly Critics* group meets twice monthly at the main Ft. Smith Library on Mondays at 6PM to offer encouragement and critiques for poetry and prose.

Hot Springs Branch sponsored the second annual Dr. Paul Tucker Memorial Prize (funded by Doc Crawford) during the *Hot Springs Festival Arts and the Park*, April 28-May 6, 2017. Branch members judged the winners who received \$300 in prizes at a special noon ceremony on May 6th at Hill Wheatley Plaza.

John Crawford Received International Honor. In 2017 the International Biographical Institute of Great Britain awarded Dr. John Crawford the honorary Doctor of Letters. Crawford is a professor emeritus of Henderson State University, with 5 degrees. He has contributed poetry and essays to numerous literary journals since the 1960s, and published 4 academic books that are in the Library of Congress and university libraries across the nation. He also has 3 volumes of poetry, 1 chapbook (1990 Chapbook Prize of Erie, PA Poetry Forum), and a new volume titled "Female Voices from the Bible," by Christian Faith Publishing of PA. Dr. Crawford has won the Sybil Nash Abrams Prize twice, and received PRA's Merit Award in 1988 for his contributions to state, regional and national poetry. He is a charter member of the *Hot Springs Wednesday Poetry Group*, now in its 28th year, and President of the Hot Springs PRA branch. He continues to read at various venues and has twice performed a musical history of poetry at the NFSPS conference.

PRA Website Promoted Members' Poetry Books.

The Board voted in June 2016 to help members promote sale of their poetry books by adding a new tab to PRA's website. The website lists only PRA authors, only poetry books, and links for potential buyers to deal directly with authors. Members may post their books by contacting PRA President Dennis Patton.

PRA's Jim Barton, President of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS)

presided over his first national convention in Fort Worth, Texas, June 29-July 2, 2017. The conference agenda offered many great speakers and fun activities in the area. Arkansas was well represented with PRA members attending and winning in the national contests. Congratulations to 17 PRA members who won 37 national awards. (See the entire winners' list in the Strophes national newsletter at nfsp.com.)

Siloam Springs Writers Branch Hosted First Writers' Conference

July 7-8, 2017. Speakers were PRA President Dennis Patton, Dr. Paul Linzey from Florida's Southeastern University, and Traci Manos from John Brown University. Participants came from as far as Wichita, Kansas. The Siloam Branch is planning a second summer conference in 2018.

PRA served 143 members, 11 branches and one online group statewide this year.