

Lit Youngstown 2019 Annual Report

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Letter from the Director

Lit Youngstown is five! To follow the metaphor, we're past the newborn phase, all dreamy and unformed, past the clumsy, head-heavy toddler stage, nearly through the pre-school trying-everything-occasionally-elbow-launching-off-the-table years. We'd be heading off to school this fall, having learned much and with much to learn. This report is one of the highlights of my year, taking time to look back over the seasons before we lace up our Keds and stride into a new year.

Winter

We kicked off 2019 at Soap Gallery with a reading by Marion Boyer and Arya-Francesca Jenkins, accompanied by YSU student jazz musicians. At Literally a Party, our first member appreciation night, we celebrated with more jazz and readings by the Lit Youngstown Board of Directors.

In early February, nearly 100 writers of all ages came to St. John's Episcopal Church and the Public Library of Youngstown & the Mahoning Valley for our second Winter Writing Camp. Teaching artists from the region led sessions on blackout poetry, sparking imagination, making collage, and many other topics, and the library hosted tours throughout the day. We enjoyed poems and stories at the open mic read by participants ranging in age from five to eighties.

Spring

In March, YSU Writing Center Director Angela Messenger presented with Karen at the prestigious Conference on College Composition and Communication in Pittsburgh. We highlighted our partnership: each February, Lit Youngstown hosts readings by YSU students published in *CROW*, *Compose: a Review of Writing*, giving voice to students and the value of strong writing.

Also in March, Arya Francesca-Jenkins hosted a class on writing short fiction, and in May, Karen led a workshop on submitting poems and stories for publication.

Before summer break, we finished the Food for Thought book discussion series on authors who had recently visited the Valley, hosted by our community partners at Cultivate Café. This round of books included short story collections, memoirs, poetry, historical fiction and nonfiction.

Summer

In July, hundreds of visitors to our Summer Festival of the Arts tent tried their hand at the "Where I'm From" poem template, created by George Ella Lyon to highlight the vivid and idiosyncratic details of our lives, cultures and physical landscape. We also hosted a reading series, bringing in a dozen local and regional writers and poets to read throughout the weekend. And our signature Tony Armeni birdbath raffle was our highest earning raffle so far.

Karen and Liz Skeels read their poems at the YWCA Women's Show. In August, Bridgid Cassin taught a workshop on the elements of scene and summary in fiction writing.

Then we took a deep breath and plunged into fall.

Fall

There were two National Endowment for the Arts Big Read grants in Ohio in 2019, and we were thrilled to help bring one to Youngstown, along with our partner, the Public Library of Youngstown & Mahoning Valley. We selected the novel *Into the Beautiful North* by Luis Alberto Urrea, and encouraged the community to read along with us. Over thirty events related to themes in the book, including a City Club panel on migration, making *sopes* at Casa Ramirez, a night of immigrant stories and ethnic foods, and a planetarium show on Mesoamerican mythology. The culminating event was a visit from the author, who told stories about the people who inspired the characters.

The 2019 Fall Literary Festival featured eight 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. One Festival highlight was the dedication of poetry stamped in sidewalk squares.

After the conference, inspired by a discussion at the literary nonprofit administrator's caucus, Matt Weinkam of Literary Cleveland and Karen kicked off the Ohio Writers League, a forum for the statewide connection of poets, writers, administrators, publishers, book stores, libraries and other literary arts entities.

A week after the Festival, the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts brought poet Ross Gay to YSU, and we were pleased to host his evening reading at St. John's Episcopal Church. Ross was born in Youngstown, and that made his visit especially meaningful.

A week later, Karen met Liz Hill in Philadelphia to present on literary arts outreach at the Coalition for Community Writing Conference. We met and networked with writing program administrators from throughout the country.

This year's monthly First Wednesday Readers Series mixed it up with accomplished writers of creative nonfiction, essay and poetry. Readers included faculty from numerous colleges and universities including Johns Hopkins, Chatham and the University of Michigan, as well as YSU student essayists and local and regional poets and writers. Readings were followed by open mics where many community members read their poems and stories.

The Writers Circle continues to meet each month, where writers bring new work to share with one another, creating a welcoming environment to writers of all experience levels.

More Community Engagement

Thanks to our community partner YSU, Joshua Nauman, who interned with us in 2017, returned to do work for us as part of his capstone. Sarah Davis, who also interned as an undergrad, returned as a student in the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts.

We were out in the community in many ways, including teaching classes at the Hoyt Center for the Arts, Ohio Living Park Vista, the YSU English Festival, and the Kinsman Public Library. We spoke at the Youngstown Rotary, Hiram College and staffed tables at the NEO Healing Alliance in Akron and the Warren Farmers Market.

Lit Youngstown was included in an oral history project about community resilience by artist Jennifer Vanderpool that displayed at the Tyler History Museum.

Karen was honored at the GEMS of the Valley event sponsored by the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley, noting the work of Lit Youngstown in the community. At the City Club State of the Valley panel discussion at Stambaugh Auditorium in June, Karen represented arts in the Valley. Other panelists included Sarah Boyarko, COO of Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber; Traci Hostetler, Superintendent, Mahoning County Educational Service Center; and Patricia Sweeney, Health Commissioner, Mahoning County District Board of Health. The discussion centered on quality of life in Mahoning and Trumbull Counties, and initiatives toward improvement. Karen returned to the City Club in August to facilitate a discussion on art and infrastructure.

In our role as community citizens, we answered phones during WYSU pledge drives in April and September; donated \$100 to the Sundress Academy for the Arts in Knoxville, Tennessee, in acknowledgement of their work with marginalized writers; sponsored and purchased a work of art for Power of the Arts' Go Art! which put Valley artists' work on buses; and purchased a white oak tree for St. John's Episcopal Church, where our office is housed.

We had a few changes to the board, wishing a fond farewell to Kelly Bancroft, Anne Garwig, Ginny Taylor and Molly Toth, and welcoming Elaine Arvan Andrews, RBrown, Tricia D'Avignon, Nicole DiPiero and Penny Wells. The newest members join Liz Hill, Courtney Kensinger Nicole Robinson and Liz Skeels, forming an enthusiastic and hardworking board.

Looking Forward

And we are looking forward!

The 2020 First Wednesday Readers Series is underway: in addition to novelists, short story writers, essayists and poets, we'll throw in a storytelling and humor night April 1.

This year's Food For Thought book discussion will delve into writing in and about the natural world. We'll read Rick Bass's short stories and Aimee Nezhukumatathil's poetry, lush with natural settings, and nonfiction books about humans and our microbes, and the dire predictions of climate change, among several others.

The Winter Writing Camp, February 8, for writers of all ages at St. John's and the Public Library of Youngstown & Mahoning County, will be free to participants, including lunch and child care. This year we're adding African-tradition storytellers Jocelyn and Robert Dabney.

Literally a Party is coming up in January, and we'll again invite YSU musicians and engage in a staged reading of *Into the Beautiful North*. We don't often get to just hang out, and we're looking forward.

In March, we'll hold *Whitman and Brass*, a celebration of America's iconic poet Walt Whitman and the music of his day, hosted by the Purple Cat Theatre. And in June, we'll have a birthday party at Noble Creature, with literary trivia and a performance by Terry Murcko, who is putting local iconic poets' poems to music.

This year's affordable writing workshops will delve into writing memoir, writing haiku, persona poetry, flash fiction, speculative world building and ordering a collection of poems or stories.

The Fall Literary Festival planning is in the works for September 25-26. In addition to stellar visiting writers and a rich array of programming, we will offer writers the opportunity for a professional photograph and a session on building an author website.

Lit Youngstown is partnering with the YSU art department on a Wean Foundation grant that would fund the design and installation of a literary mural on a downtown building.

And we are broadening our programming to include more teens: writing with at-risk teens at Akron Children's Hospital, and hosting a new monthly writing workshop for teens.

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 increase opportunities for writers to hone their craft, share and publish their work; for writers to teach and support other writers; and for writers and readers to experience and enjoy the literary arts. We believe that the acts of writing and reading foster creativity, an increased understanding of the self, a strengthening of community, and a broader knowledge of the world.

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 shared, promoting empathy, self-awareness, critical analysis, active citizenship, information and knowledge.
Lit Youngstown

**Statement of Financial Position Summary
As of December 31, 2019**

ASSETS	
Bank Accounts	\$4,997
Total Current Assets	<u>\$4,997</u>
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	
Liabilities	0
Total Liabilities	<u>0</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	0
NET ASSETS	\$4,997

**Statement of Activities
Year Ended December 31, 2019**

Support and Revenue	
Foundation Grants	\$10,935
Government Grants	4,834
Religious Grants	950
Individual Contributions	10,537
Yuhasz Scholarship Fund	100
Sales/Donations for Books/Products	3,091
Workshop and Program Fees	8,945
Total Support and Revenue	<u>\$39,392</u>
Expenses	
Administrative	4,637
Programs	11,135
Fundraising	2,174
Yuhasz Scholarship Fund	100
Director Stipend	10,000
Author Honoraria & Stipends	12,168
Reimbursed Author Sales	1,741
Total Expenses	<u>\$41,955</u>
Change in Net Assets	(\$2,563)
Net Assets Beginning of Year	7,560
Net Assets End of Year	4,997

With Gratitude

Thank you to all those who worked to bring the light to Lit Youngstown in 2019.

Current Board of Directors: Elaine Arvan Andrews, RBrown, Tricia D'Avignon, Liz Hill, Courtney Kensinger, Nicole DiPiero, Nikki Robinson, Liz Skeels and Penny Wells

Outgoing Members of the Board of Directors: Kelly Bancroft, Anne Garwig, Ginny Taylor and Molly Toth

Staff: Director Karen Schubert, Bookkeeper Heather Best

Workshop, Winter Writing Camp and Fall Literary Festival Faculty: Mari Alschuler, Nin Andrews, Christopher Barzak, Marion Starling Boyer, Erica Cardwell, Jill Christman, Michael Croley, Arya F. Jenkins, Kayla Jeswald, Sarah Kiepper, George Ella Lyon, Philip Memmer, Philip Metres, Michael Nyers, Katie Passerotti, Ellen Perduyn, Karen Schubert, Lindsay Sinkovich, Liz Skeels. Special thanks to Ohio Humanities evaluator Cheryl Torsney

YSU Student Interns: Sarah Davis, Josh Nauman

Readers and Open Mic Emcees:

- January: Poets Marion Starling Boyer of Twinsburg and Arya-Francesca Jenkins of Youngstown, YSU student jazz musicians Dan Mihelarakis and Matt Jackson
- February: YSU Student Essayists from *CROW*, *Compose: Compose: A Review of Writing* and editors of *Volney Road Review*
- March: Painesville poets Margie DeLong & Tanya Pilumeli
- April: poet Joanne Lehman of Wooster and creative nonfiction writer Sarah Wells of Barberton, open mic emcee Tom Welsh
- May: poets Bonné de Blas of Cleveland, Monica Kaiser of Kent & Sheryl St. Germain of Pittsburgh
- June: fiction writer Mary Grimm and poet Susan Grimm, both of Cleveland, open mic emcee Steve Force
- July: novelist Alex DiFrancesco of Cleveland and poet Noor Hindi of Akron, open mic emcee Joelle Lambert
- August: poets James Arthur of Boston, Cody Walker of Ann Arbor and Catherine Wing of Kent, open mic emcee Arya-Francesca Jenkins
- September: poets Clint Elston and Brandon Noel of Warren, open mic emcee Elizabeth Burnette
- October: writer EF Schrader and poet Michelle R. Smith, both of Cleveland, open mic emcee Elizabeth Burnette
- November: poets Pamela Anderson of Kent and Steve Thomas of Cleveland, open mic emcee Beth Franklin

Summer Festival of the Art Readers:

Marion Boyer, Mari Alschuler, Elaine Arvan Andrews, Nancy Christie, Allison Pitinii Davis, Dom Fonce, Rochelle Hurt, Karen Kotrba, Jamie Marich, Terry Murcko, Barbara Sabol, Rikki Santer, Bill Soldan, Jimmy Sutman

NEA Big Read

Planning Committee: Marnie Alvarez, Cindy Beach, Kelly Kotel, Deb Liptak, Janet Loew, Erin Phemester, John Waller

Key Program Participants and Organizers: Violetta Aguirre; Mia Catherine Allonby; Laura Beadling; Louisa Berger; Lynn Bilal; the Labra Brothers; Gayle Catinella; Lidia Cornelio; Dragana Crnjak; Tim Francisco; R.W. Franklin; Anne Garwig; India Gatts; David Hassler; Liz Hill; Missy McCormick; Chris McCullough; Jordan A. Mccusker; Marlene H. Mikan; Grimilda Ocasio, OCCHA, Nicole Pettit; Carlos Jr., Carlos Sr. and Celerina Ramirez; Jeanine Rees; Lowell and Ellen Satre; Denise Sculli; Terry Shears; Taylor Swan; Anne Torres; Luis Albert Urrea, Ana Maria Wetzl

Program Hosts: City Club of the Mahoning Valley, Casa Ramirez, St. John's Episcopal Church; the Unitarian Universalist Church of Youngstown; Wick Poetry Center; WYSU; Youngstown Playhouse; YSU Art Department; the YSU Ward Beecher Planetarium

Volunteers: Mari Alschuler, Elaine Andrews, Kelly Bancroft, Rebecca Banks, Cherise Benton, Heather Best, Allison Pitinii Davis, Dante DelBene, Ashley Dillon, Nicole DiPiero, Beth Franklin, Toni Gallagher, Anne Garwig, Courtney Kensinger, Joelle Lambert Dina Liguore, Rae McCann, Josh Nauman, Adam Stevens, Taylor Swan

Financial Support

Patrons and Foundation funders (\$500 or more): the Kennedy Family Fund via the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley; the Nathalie and James Andrews Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, Ohio Humanities, Craig Paulenich & Karla Krodel, Purple Cat, St. John's Episcopal Church, Youngstown Foundation

Donors: Andrews Foundation; Community Foundation of Mahoning Valley; Harrington, Hoppe & Mitchell; Ohio Arts Council; Ohio Humanities; Purple Cat; Sojourn to Past; St. John's Episcopal Church; Unitarian Universalist Church of Youngstown; Youngstown Foundation
Frederick and MaryLou Alexander, Pamela Anderson, Lesley N.Arimah, Nancy Beeghly, Marion Boyer, Barbara Brothers, Jeanne Bryner, Julianna Cancio, Bridgid Cassin, Rosemary Dapolito, Sheri DellaPenna, John Dyer, Barbara Faires, Beth Franklin, David Garrison, Mike Geither, Anita Gorman, Liz Hill, Deb Hobart, Miriam Klein, Karen Ktorba, Elliot Legow, Michele Lepore Hagan, Maryann Limmer, Sarah Lown, Sarah Lowry, Jeff Murphy, Craig Paulenich & Karla Krodel, Ellen Perduyn, Maureen Reardon, Rebecca Moon Ruark, Lowell & Ellen Satre, Liz Skeels, Virginia Taylor, Steven Thomas, Molly Toth, Cole Wardell, Laura Grace Weldon, Catherine Wing, Suzanne Winick