

Literary Arts

By Robin Cody

Literary Arts is a nonprofit arts organization with a mission to enrich the lives of Oregonians through language and literature. Its programs include Portland Arts & Lectures, Oregon Book Awards and Literary Fellowships, and Writers in the Schools.

The organization began in 1984 with a small lecture series that brought leading authors and artists to Portland. Over the years, speakers such as Calvin Trillin, John Updike, Elizabeth Gilbert, and Stephen Sondheim have appeared at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in downtown Portland. The annual six-part series has regular audiences of more than 2,000, making it one of the largest lecture series in the U.S.

In 1993, Literary Arts joined with the Oregon Institute of Literary Arts (OILA) to celebrate Oregon writers with the Oregon Book Awards. Brian Booth, a Portland attorney and civic leader, founded OILA in 1986. Booth and his wife, Gwyneth Gamble Booth, marshaled the financial support and public enthusiasm for book awards to honor Oregon's literary past and to celebrate its contemporary writers.

The annual Oregon Book Award ceremony is a gathering of the literary community to celebrate Oregon's best writing and to hear winners announced in each of seven genres. Special awards go to individuals and organizations that support the state's literary culture.

Since 1998, Literary Arts has promoted Oregon Book Awards authors with the Oregon Book Awards Author Tour. Finalists and winners visit towns across the state for free readings in libraries, art centers, and other public venues. The tour establishes connections between Literary Arts and writers and readers statewide.

Literary Arts provides financial support to Oregon writers and independent publishers with Oregon Literary Fellowships. In 2008, with the help of the recently established Oregon Writers' Endowment, the minimum amount of each fellowship rose to \$2,500. With its book awards and fellowships, Literary Arts has honored more than 500 writers and publishers and distributed more than half-a-million dollars.

Literary Arts also cultivates young readers and writers through the Writers in the Schools program. The program started in 1996 and now hires twenty-five Oregon writers each year to teach semester-long writing workshops in Portland public high schools and alternative schools. The Writers in the Schools Program also sponsors one-on-one mentorships, one-day author visits, workshops for teachers, and public student readings.

In 2001, the Poetry Downtown program was added, a four-part series that brings world-renowned poets to Portland to read and discuss their work. In all, Literary Arts programs reach more than 12,000 writers, readers, teachers and students in Oregon each year.

Sources

www.literary-arts.org

The Oregon Encyclopedia

http://oregonhist-oep-dev.azurewebsites.net/articles/literary_arts/