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Kansas Humanities Council and Kansas Poet Laureate Program Proposal

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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KANSAS HUMANITIES COUNCIL AND KANSAS POET LAUREATE PROGRAM

PROPOSAL: The Kansas Humanities Council becomes the organizational home for the Kansas Poet Laureate program. KHC is “dedicated to promoting the humanities as a public resource for all Kansans,” including making connections “between history, literature, ethics, and culture and the daily decisions that Kansans make on the job, at home, and in their civic life.” This mission is closely aligned with the mission of the Poet Laureate program, which is to promote and encourage a broad appreciation of the literary arts in Kansas, particularly in concert with the literary arts’ effect on the lives of Kansans.

BACKGROUND: The Poet Laureate program began in 2005 under the auspices of the Kansas Arts Commission. Previous poets laureate are Jonathan Holden and Denise Low. Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg is the third poet laureate, appointed by then-governor Kathleen Sebelius; her term runs July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2012 (as established by the KAC board). This two-year-term was extended for an additional year by KAC in 2010 because KAC staff and commissioners considered her work to be excellent, and it was agreed the position itself would be more effective with three-year terms.

After the defunding of KAC, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg contacted Linda Browning Weis of the KAC many times with no response. The Poet Laureate webpages were removed from the KAC website and the KAC chair eventually notified the National Endowment for the Arts that the Poet Laureate program was eliminated. KAC, under its present leadership, does not intend to continue the Poet Laureate program, and Dr. Mirriam-Goldberg is under no contractual obligation to the organization since no formal agreements were ever issued for any KAC programs for FY 2012.

BACKGROUND ON PRESENT POET LAUREATE: Dr. Mirriam-Goldberg's Poet Laureate projects build on the work of previous poets laureate. Dr. Denise Low published electronic broadsheets and a book on Kansas poets, and started a blog on Kansas writers, readings and literary events. Dr. Jonathan Holden presented statewide tele-seminars on the craft of poetry, and began a website on Kansas poets. Dr. Mirriam-Goldberg's projects include "Poetry Across Kansas," writing workshops, readings and trainings for writers to lead ongoing writing circles; podcasts and radio broadcasts on writing prompts and Great Plains writers; a regular blog, emailings, facebook page for the Poet Laureate, and other social networking; occasional poems for events, such as the state's sesquicentennial and the KU chancellor's inauguration; and National Poetry Month contests and projects each April. In the last year, she organized a national convergence of 20 state poets laureate (in conjunction with the release of an anthology of state poet laureates' poetry, which she served as lead editor on); and she edited a website and book featuring 150 Kansas poems to celebrate the state's sesquicentennial.

Dr. Mirriam-Goldberg is the author of over twelve books: four collections of poetry; *The Sky Begins At Your Feet: A Memoir on Cancer, Community and Coming Home to the Body*; a writing guide for teens, *Write Where You Are*; several anthologies; and a forthcoming novel, *The Divorce Girl*. She is the founder of Transformative Language Arts Program at Goddard College, where she teaches in the MA program. She leads writing workshops statewide, and has collaborated with songwriter Kelley Hunt on performance and writing workshops. Holding a PhD in literature from the University of Kansas, Dr. Mirriam-Goldberg has served as a discussion leader for KHC’s popular Talk About Literature in Kansas program for nearly two decades.

HUMANITIES COUNCILS & POET LAUREATE PROGRAMS: There are presently 40 states with poet laureate programs. Six of these programs are under the auspices of state humanities councils

(Louisiana, Oklahoma, Colorado, Iowa and Minnesota, and in partnership with other organizations, Washington), while 19 are under state arts agencies, and the remaining are either separate government offices, under tourism departments or other organizations.

BENEFITS FOR KHC: The Poet Laureate program enjoys a great deal of respect both statewide and nationally. It is well-regarded by legislators, academic institutions, state arts and literary communities, and the national and international literary arts world at large. Under the auspices of KHC, the Poet Laureate program would continue to strengthen the presence and appreciation of literature throughout the state. The poet laureate can serve as a highly visible ambassador for the humanities at state functions and can work cooperatively with other KHC programs as appropriate.

POET LAUREATE PROGRAM JULY 1, 2011 - JUNE 30, 2012 GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

I. PROGRAMMING

- ⤴ ***Begin Again: 150 Kansas Poems.*** In commemoration of the Sesquicentennial, the poet laureate edited and produced an anthology called *Begin Again: 150 Kansas Poems*. Published by Woodley Press, the anthology features the work of ??? Kansas poets. During fall 2011, a 20-city book tour is planned with readings in Garden City, Ulysses, Dodge City, Manhattan, Salina, Topeka, Wichita, Lawrence, Kansas City, Pittsburg, Emporia,, Leavenworth, and other towns. (See <http://150kansaspoesms.wordpress.com/> for more information).
- ⤴ **Poetry and Politics: A Gathering of State Poets Laureate.** The Kansas Poet Laureate with represent our state at a national event in New Hampshire on October 13-16, with statewide readings and a conference engaging poets laureate, legislators, politicians, journalists, and the public.
- ⤴ **Poetry Across Kansas: Reading and Writing Our Way Home.** This program includes public readings, writing workshops, and trainings designed to facilitate ongoing writing circles in communities throughout Kansas. Events are scheduled at the initiative of the local host organization.
- ⤴ **Readings & Workshops.** The poet laureate will participate in public readings and workshops throughout Kansas in nonprofit venues including schools, colleges and universities, libraries, arts centers, and community centers.
- ⤴ **Poetry Month Activities.** In April 2012, a series of programs designed to encourage the reading and writing of poetry will be offered in conjunction with National Poetry Month. Past activities have included the Poetry Pen-Pal Project, Kansas Daily Poem in Your Pocket, and weekly contests announced on the Poet Laureate website.
- ⤴ **Poetry Out Loud.** The poet laureate will serve as a judge for this state contest sponsored by the Department of Education.
- ⤴ **Daily Blog, Facebook Page & Twitter.** The poet laureate will maintain a blog about literature and the writing life with automatic posts to the Poet Laureate pages on Facebook and Twitter.

II. FINANCES: Under the KAC, the poet laureate received an annual stipend of \$2,500 along with a budget for travel and auxiliary expenses (\$2,000-\$2,500). With the loss of state funding, various fundraising options are planned to generate support for the Poet Laureate program, including:

- ⤴ A statewide fundraising campaign this fall using the internet, social networking, and information distribution through various organizations, and the *Begin Again: 150 Kansas Poems* book tour events. The heart of this campaign will internet-based, making it easy for Kansans to contribute. Goal: \$2,500.
- ⤴ Individual solicitations will generate an additional \$500 (one arts patron has already committed to that amount).

✧ A benefit concert performance with the poet laureate and will take place this winter in Lawrence. Goal: \$1,500.

Most donations* will be directed to KHC, as the program sponsor. The anticipated income should defray most costs, with no direct funding requested from KHC.

III. SELECTION OF THE NEXT POET LAUREATE: The process of selecting the 2013-15 poet laureate would commence in January 2012. KHC would accept applications for the position, and review them using the criteria and scoring protocols already developed by the KAC. The criteria include quality of poetry, community service experience, education, publication record, and proposed public programming. Ideally, applications would be due in April, with the notification of the new poet laureate taking place in July and the position commencing in November with the start of the KHC fiscal year.

IV. FUTURE PROGRAMMING AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: After this first transitional year, KHC would enjoy the opportunity to review the program and develop a long-term strategy for promoting poetry, literature, and their appreciation in Kansas. This could entail continuing to host the Poet Laureate program, moving the Poet Laureate program back to a state arts agency (when viable and eligible for NEA funds again), or working in partnership with with a state arts agency on the Poet Laureate program.

*The internet-based campaign may be conducted this fall before KHC has a chance to fully evaluate this proposal, and if so, would be done under the fiscal sponsorship of a not-for-profit organization that has offered to host this portion of the campaign.