National Book Festival Expands to Two Days with All-Star Lineup

Center for the Book Coordinates Author Program

By Guy Lamolinara

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress is once again responsible for the stellar lineup of authors, illustrators and poets who will appear on the National Mall this September to talk about and sign their work.

As it has since the inception of the National Book Festival in 2001, the Center for the Book is coordinating the author program for this year’s festival, which will expand to two days, Saturday, Sept. 24 (10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.), and Sunday, Sept. 25 (1 -5:30 p.m.).

Nobel and Pulitzer winner Toni Morrison will be this year’s recipient of the Library of Congress National Book Festival Creative Achievement Award. (Past winners were John Grisham and Isabel Allende.) Morrison is the author of the widely acclaimed “Beloved” “Song of Solomon,” “Tar Baby” and “The Bluest Eye,” among other novels. Her most recent novel is “A Mercy.”

America’s literary heritage will be showcased in the Pavilion of the States on Sept. 24 only. Representatives from the 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories will talk to pavilion visitors about local authors and a special brochure with a map of the United States is a great way to entice kids to visit all 52 tables, where they can get a unique stamp from each state and territory. On the back of the brochure is a list of 52 “great reads,” which have been selected by the states. The pavilion is organized by the Center for the Book and sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies.

“The Center for the Book is pleased to use its contacts in the publishing industry to secure the nation’s best writers and illustrators for participation in the National Book Festival,” said John Y. Cole, the Center’s director.

On Saturday, Sept. 24, authors, poets and illustrators will make 45-minute presentations in pavilions dedicated to Children, Teens, Contemporary Life, Fiction & Mystery, History & Biography and Poetry & Prose. These same six pavilions will host presentations the following day, but the tent used for the Pavilion of the States

(Story continues on next page)
The Library of Congress’ National Book Festival has been an inspiration to many of the affiliated Centers for the Book to host or support festivals in their state as part of their mission to promote their states’ unique literary heritage. Moreover, all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories are represented in the Festival’s Pavilion of the States.

Please remind your members and state networks about the Festival, Sept. 24-25 on the National Mall, and direct them to the website at www.loc.gov/bookfest. For those who cannot attend in person, there are hundreds of author webcasts of their presentations from past festivals, and this year’s presentations will be available for viewing soon after the festival ends.

Help Support the National Book Festival

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Letters About Literature Winners Celebrated Nationwide

By Guy Lamolinara

It is one thing to read the entries in the Letters About Literature contest. It is a different and far richer experience to listen to a student read his or her letter in person.

The Center for the Book makes an effort each year to attend the recognition ceremonies for the six students who win National awards annually in this program that asks students in grades 4-12 to write a letter to an author about how his or her book affected them. This year, Guy Lamolinara, the Center’s communications officer, and Cathy Gourley, the program’s coordinator, traveled to these events to present the awards, which include a $500 GiftCard from Target, which co-sponsors the program with the Center for the Book, and a $10,000 grant from Target to the school library of the student’s choice.

At the magnificent state Capitol in Boston, Mass., in a room as inspiring as her words, Maryam Salah read the letter she wrote to Jerry Spinelli, author of “Maniac Magee.” The sixth-grader demonstrated remarkable maturity in her prose. Maryam, a Muslim, related her experiences when she began to wear the head covering known as a hijab. “At first I was innocent,” she wrote. “I didn’t know how to interpret the less-than-friendly stares. Then the comments began: ‘Aren’t you hot?’ Lastly came the changes in behavior: some people went from smiles to disapproval. Sadly, discrimination is real.” Spinelli’s book taught her that “outward appearance means nothing.”

Searcy, Ark.’s Southwest Middle School hosted the ceremony for their star Letters About Literature writer, Taylor Mathews, who wrote to Erin Hunter, author of “Into the Wild.” Taylor wrote how he “hated reading” until his mother handed him “Into the Wild,” which he says he read only because “I knew that if my mom saw me ditch the book, she would probably go into a fit about how I never read.” The book “began what has become the greatest adventure of my short life … Now, I am in the 6th grade, and I am still reading like a maniac.”

Christian Lusardi of Scotts Ridge Middle School in Ridgefield, Conn., read his letter to George Selden, author of “The Cricket in Times Square,” in a ceremony at the main branch of the Hartford Public Library. Christian read the book just before he

(Story continues on next page)
was diagnosed with cancer. “As if by fate, I read the book ‘The Cricket in Times Square’ at the beginning of fourth grade, right before I got sick,” he wrote. “My diagnosis in the middle of one scary Saturday night whisked me away from everything familiar to me without warning. Thoughts of Chester surviving in his new world inspired me to fight with all my strength and to keep fighting through the long haul. Chester and I not only survived, but thrived, despite the terrible odds against us. And, along the way, we both made some incredible new friends. Mine included a brave little cricket, and for that, I thank you.”

The Sunnyvale Public Library hosted California’s ceremony, during which Akash Kar, an 11th grade student at Saratoga High School in Saratoga read his letter to Jhumpa Lahiri, author of “The Namesake.” The family of Akash and those of other contest finalists attended. Akash used his letter to reveal his homosexuality to his family. He wrote:

“The thing that speaks to me most, however, is the struggle Gogol has – choosing his culture over his identity. I empathize with Gogol’s struggles, as I am going through similar struggles myself being a homosexual Indian in a predominantly anti-gay culture. Gogol struggles with his love for Maxine – struggles which can be rooted to the lack of acceptance to interracial marriages in his culture. Although notions about interracial marriage begin to change in Gogol’s culture – a culture that I share with Gogol – he breaks up with Maxine. Eventually he marries Moushumi – a young woman struggling with her own identity – but their marriage quickly falls apart. I was dealing with similar issues as Gogol, deciding whether cultural beliefs trump personal choices. Gogol hears stories of failed interracial marriages throughout his childhood, just as I had to live through the provoked suicides of two very close cousins – both of whom were homosexual. I may never be able to convince my family that there is nothing wrong with being gay – and understandably so. They have been tormented with the deaths of two of their nephews – boys they considered their own sons. If, and when, I fall in love with and marry another man, I am unsure about whether or not my parents will be present at the wedding, whether or not I can invite members of the Indian community, and whether or not I can ever show my face at Indian social events afterwards. These thoughts – and
2011 Illinois Letters About Literature winners assembled in the Secretary of State’s Capitol Office in Springfield. Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White congratulated (from left) Level II winner Naasir Haleem of Naperville, Level III winner Stacie Cler of Bloomington and Level I winner and National Honor winner Conrad Oberhaus of Lincolnshire.

In Maryland, Melina George of Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson read her letter, which won first place in the state for grades 4-6, during the state’s Letters About Literature awards ceremony.

Keynote speakers Rep. Kate Hogan and M.T. Anderson before the Boston event.

Maryam Salah reading her letter in the Massachusetts State House in Boston; she learned that “outward appearance means nothing.”

The Maryland event included former senator Paul Sarbanes (back row, fourth from left) and his son, Rep. John P. Sarbanes (back row, far right).
many more – pulled me into a deep depression – they just feared that the same that happened to my cousins would happen to me. I was able to overcome the depression; however I still was not able to figure out where my life was headed and what decisions I would make. This is how your book saved my life.”

Ashli Bynum’s equally moving letter was just as painful. Ashli, from Forest Hills Northern High School in Ada, Mich., wrote to Marge Piercy, author of “Barbie Doll.” Ashli is an African-American with albinism. Ashli’s family and schoolmates attended the ceremony, held in the school’s library.

“As a result of what happened in that grocery store, Ashli says, “I became motivated to join more student organizations and spend more time volunteering, hoping that one day others will be more accepting of people like me.”

Instead of an immediate burst of applause, the audience sat silently for a few seconds that seemed, at the time, like many seconds. Everyone was too amazed and in thrall at the maturity of this young woman who was able to distill something positive from a very painful situation. When the parents, teachers, family members and fellow classmates did applaud, it was a palpable manifestation of how the Letters About Literature program really does change lives for participants -- as well as those who get to hear students read their letters.
‘The One and Only’

Vivian Hewitt Discusses Her Remarkable Life in Center for the Book Program

By Guy Lamolinara

Vivian Ann Davidson Hewitt, who, among other achievements, was the first African-American president of the Special Libraries Association, brought her unique brand of charm and wisdom to the Library in a program dedicated to her groundbreaking life.

Hewitt’s May 23 discussion of her memoirs, “The One and Only,” drew a crowd that included many members of her large and extended family, one of whom is a member of Congress from North Carolina, Rep. Mel Watt.

The Center for the Book hosted the event as part of its Books & Beyond author series. Hewitt’s association with the Library of Congress dates to 1979-1982, when she served as a member of the Center for the Book’s first National Advisory Board. Later, in 2000, the Library’s American Folklife Center initiated the Local Legacies program to mark the Library’s bicentennial. Representative Watt suggested that documentation of Hewitt’s family reunion, which has been held annually since 1906, become one of the Local Legacies projects from his state (lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/legacies/NC/200002916.html).

Center for the Book Director John Y. Cole introduced Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, who called the program “a different kind of Library of Congress special event. This is a celebration of a remarkable American family whose roots stretch back centuries.” In 2005, Watt invited Billington to attend his family’s reunion in Charlotte, N.C. “There was some of the best storytelling and music I have ever heard,” said Billington, who was made an honorary member of the family.

“The One and Only” Vivian Hewitt is introduced by Rep. Mel Watt, who is a member of her extended family, during a celebration of her life at the Library of Congress.

All photos: Abby Brack

Vivian Hewitt is universally admired professionally and beloved personally – a very rare combination,” said the Librarian, in his introduction.

Hewitt’s remarkable life (she was born in 1920) also includes stints as chief librarian for the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Council on Foreign Relations. In addition to her career with libraries, Hewitt and her late husband, John Hewitt, collected more than 500 pieces of art during their 50-year marriage. The John and Vivian Hewitt Collection of African-American Art is now in the permanent collections of the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts and Culture in Charlotte.
“My family and friends had been after me for many years to do my memoirs, but I kept back-burnering it,” said Hewitt. However, when she met the woman who would become her editor, Ann Segan, “who was heaven-sent,” Hewitt knew she had to do it, and so for five months, twice a week, she talked with Segan about her life. (Hewitt’s book may only be purchased online at [www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/1800058/].)

Hewitt describes herself as one of “the talented 10th—those African-Americans from her generation who were college educated and were expected to give back. It wasn’t a matter of wealth or class.” The term was coined by W.E.B. DuBois, who said: “We were expected to do good works and contribute to the community, to do unto others.”

“I am 91,” Hewitt said, as she began her story. How can I give my life’s story in half an hour?” She couldn’t. So Hewitt said she would offer some “highlights.”

“I am the direct descendant of a slave who was brought over from Guinea in the 16th century, and my family is very lucky because we have our family history for nine generations…. I was born in New Castle, Pa.,” near Pittsburgh. “New Castle was famous for its theater. Bob Hope got his start here, and the Warner brothers were from New Castle…. and me, she joked.

She attended Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pa., which “forged the career I would have.” While at Geneva, she worked in the college library. Tuition for a semester? $120. During that time, she met the executive director of the Urban League of Pittsburgh. “He said, ‘We do not have a professional librarian in the city of Pittsburgh.’ So I applied to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in 1943. The director said during my interview, ‘We have been waiting for someone like you for a long time. I am sorry you don’t look more like a Negro than you do, so that when people walk into the library they’ll know what you are.’

“That was the time, and you have to think of the context of the time,” Hewitt said matter-of-factly without any hint of irony. And to point out that she was not alone, she told how “there were two Jewish girls in the school, and one of them said to me that ‘had it not been for the war I doubted that either of us would be in the library school.’ And when they graduated one of the professors said, ‘You would be happier in New York than here.’

“Those are the things we had to contend with.”

Her career eventually took her to Atlanta, where she met her future husband, John Hewitt. Because he was originally from New York City, they relocated to Harlem after they were married in the 1950s. “I saw very few black people outside of Harlem,” she said. “Not until the 1960s” did things begin to change.
In New York she worked, starting in 1963, for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “on the 54th floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza. Those were the 20 most wondrous years any librarian could wish for.” While at the Endowment, she became very active in the Special Libraries Association. When Carnegie moved to Washington, she decided to retire and ran for SLA president. “So what to do next? Old librarians don’t fade away, or not this one!” Hewitt won the election and held the one-year position in 1978-79.

Living in Harlem exposed the Hewitts to many of the nation’s most prominent African-American artists. “My husband and I collected art in New York. We were among the pioneers who collected African-American art.” They collected more than 500 pieces during their 50-year marriage. When her husband’s health began to deteriorate they decided to seek another home for the collection. But “we wanted to keep it together … to use as a tool to teach young people to collect art and appreciate their heritage.” The collection eventually came to be housed in its own building at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts and Culture in Charlotte.

There were many more tales to tell but time had run out. Perhaps Hewitt best summed up how she lived her life in her book’s dedication: “I saw opportunity and I took it. I was taught that when opportunity comes knocking, you open the door. I got that from my parents. It was in-bred.”

River of Words Poems Are Set to Music for Special Concert

The River of Words (www.riverofwords.org) environmental poetry and art contest has been a project of the Center for the Book since 1996. Students from around the world are asked to write a poem or create a piece of art inspired by their local environment.

Now, some of those poems have been set to music by young composers under the mentorship of renowned composer Libby Larsen as part of the Youth Inspiring Youth program. Larsen is a former fellow of the Library’s Kluge Center. The songs were performed as part of a concert on May 9 at St. Patrick’s Church in Washington with WomenSing from San Francisco and the Peabody Children’s Chorus.

Youth Inspiring Youth is a four-year-old collaboration between River of Words and the award winning California-based treble chorus WomenSing. The concert was conducted by WomenSing’s musical director, Martin Benvenuto.

Center for the Book Director John Y. Cole introduced the concert and spoke briefly about the Center’s partnership with River of Words. “River of Words is one of the Center for the Book’s most important programs, and we are glad to see that its influence extends even beyond those who enter the contest each year,” said Cole. “Music and these wonderful poems written by students are a perfect match.”
Two of the winners in 2000 from the River of Words environmental poetry and art contest returned to the Library of Congress on May 10 in a special program in which they discussed the contest’s impact in a program called “Inspiring Stories from River of Words.” In 2000, El’ Jay Johnson of Washington, D.C., who at age 8 won the River of Words Anacostia Watershed Prize (he’s now 19) and Kevin Maher of Lafayette, La., who at age 12 won the National Poetry Grand Prize (he’s now 22) told how being a River of Words winner at such a young age had changed each of their lives. Furthermore, the two remembered each other.

He also noted that the River of Words award ceremonies can be seen on the Center for the Book’s website at www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/index.php (type River of Words in the search box).

The most recent River of Words ceremony was in 2010. The webcasts are a chance to experience the students reading their poems and explaining their art pieces. River of Words co-founders Pamela Michael and Robert Hass moderate the ceremonies.

For this concert, Cole explained, WomenSing had commissioned young composers to create music inspired by the work of three award-winning River of Words poets. The works, “Wit and Fright,” “Unseen Secrets” and “A Precious Pearl,” were based on poems by Ryan Harper (born 1986), Joshua Fishbein (born 1984) and Lauren McLaren (born 1988), respectively.
Colorado Book Awards Holds 20th Anniversary Awards Ceremony

The 52 affiliated Centers for the Book promote their state’s literary heritage as part of their mission to extend the reach of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress nationwide.

“The long-running Colorado Book Awards are prime evidence of that state’s commitment to getting Coloradans interested in and reading their local authors,” said Center for the Book Director John Y. Cole.

Cole was in Aspen, Colo., on June 24 for the 20th annual Colorado Book Awards ceremony. Co-sponsored by Colorado Humanities, the Colorado Center for the Book and the Aspen Writers Program, in recent years the event has been held during the six-day Aspen Summer Words Literary Festival, and the awards have been expanded to include finalists in 10 categories: Art/Pictorial, Biography/History, Children’s Literature/Picture Books, Creative Nonfiction/Memoir, General Nonfiction, Genre/Popular Fiction, Juvenile Literature, Literary Fiction, Poetry and Young Adult Literature.

The Colorado Center for the Book is also a strong supporter of River of Words, the Center for the Book’s environmental poetry and art contest, as well as Letters About Literature, a reading and writing program, co-sponsored by Target, for students in grades 4-12. The 2010 winners and honorees were celebrated in April at the Denver Public Library, where the 246 students who entered River of Words and the 568 who entered Letters About Literature received recognition.

In other news, Colorado Center for the Book program coordinator Tim Z. Hernandez recently won the national 2010 Premio Aztlan Literary Award for his novel “Breathing, in Dust.” (Texas Tech University Press). He accepted the award in May at the National Latino Writers’ Conference in Albuquerque.
Rhode Island Center for the Book Hosts Events, Plans Reorganization

Center for the Book Director John Y. Cole was a special guest in Providence on June 6 during the annual meeting of the Rhode Island Center for the Book. The keynote speaker was Rhode Island author Kimberly Newton Fusco, past winner of the American Library Association’s Schneider Family Book Award. As part of the program, Cole presented certificates to 10 Rhode Island 2011 Letters About Literature winners and honorees.

He also announced a forthcoming program at the Rhode Island School of Design featuring Rhode Island poet and translator Forrest Gander, who was selected by Poet Laureate W.S. Merwin as a 2011 Library of Congress Witter Bynner Fellowship winner. Co-sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and the Rhode Island Center, the event also will feature an announcement regarding the reorganization of the Rhode Island Center for the Book and an expansion of its effort to become “a dynamic environment for book culture that connects communities, appreciates imagination and craft, and encourages exploration of the written word.”

Calendar of Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER 16 (Friday), noon, West Dining Room, Madison Building

Books & Beyond program. Pam Munoz Ryan will discuss and sign her Americas Award winning book, “The Dreamer,” illustrated by Peter Sis (Scholastic, 2010). Co-sponsored with the Hispanic Division.

SEPTEMBER 17 (Saturday), 10 a.m.-noon, Mumford Room, Madison Building

Americas Awards ceremony for Children’s and Young Adult Literature. Awards to Pam Munoz Ryan (author) and Peter Sis (illustrator) for “The Dream” (Scholastic, 2010) and to Willie Perdomo (author) and Bryan Collier (illustrator) for “Clemente!” (Holt, 2010). Co-sponsored with the Hispanic Division and the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs.

SEPTEMBER 24 & 25 (Saturday & Sunday) National Mall

National Book Festival

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SEPTEMBER 28 (Wednesday), noon, Pickford Theater, Madison Building

OCTOBER 4 (Tuesday), 11 a.m., Coolidge Auditorium, Jefferson Building

OCTOBER 12 (Wednesday), 10 a.m.-noon, Pickford Theater, Madison Building
Research Presentation. Graziella Tonfoni will discuss her recent research on publishing in the digital age. Co-sponsored with the European Division.

OCTOBER 21 (Friday), 5:30-7 p.m., West Dining Room, Madison Building
National Collegiate Book Collecting Awards Ceremony. Co-sponsored with the Rare Book and Special Collections Division, the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of America and the Fellowship of American Bibliographic Societies.