Announcing the First Durango Poet Laureate and Durango Rising Poet Laureate

Durango, CO — On December 1, 2023, the Durango Poet Laureate Program proudly unveils the names of its inaugural laureates. Following a rigorous selection process, the Poet Laureate Committee, made up of volunteers from local organizations, is thrilled to introduce the 2024 Durango Poet Laureate and Durango Rising Poet Laureate for poets ages 12-17, who will take up their roles in January 2024.

After an overwhelming response from the community, with 33 nominations received for the Poet Laureate position and 12 applications for the Rising Poet Laureate, the selection committee embarked on a weeks-long review process. Top candidates were invited for meetings to discuss their passion for poetry and their vision for promoting the poetic arts in Durango.

Drumroll, please...

The 2024 Durango Poet Laureate is Esther Belin, a distinguished poet who has lived in the Durango area since 1997, and has two single-volume poetry books published by the University of Arizona Press, one of which won the American Book Award in 2000. She was one of four editors of The Diné Reader: An Anthology of Navajo Literature which won the American Book Award in 2022. She teaches at Fort Lewis College in the Native American & Indigenous Studies department, and is a faculty mentor in the Institute of American Indian Arts Creative Writing MFA program. Esther will serve a three-year term and will receive an annual stipend of $2,000 to leave a positive mark on the cultural landscape of Durango. “The best poetry is generated when the person releases the self and becomes a conduit to the free play of creativity and imagination. When people are guided into spaces of vulnerability and safety, poems that reflect on relationship, participation and contribution to society are achieved,” she said.
In addition, the Rising Poet Laureate for 2024 is Zoe Golden, a junior at Durango High School who has published poetry in the Cambridge Hall of Poetry Magazine, the Durango High School newspaper. She is a community bike coach for Everypedal, a member of the National Honors Society, and a member of Durango Climate Action. Zoe will serve a three-year term and will receive an annual stipend of $500. This exciting opportunity will allow Zoe to inspire and engage with young voices in the community, as she has already demonstrated through poetry readings at her school and at The Hive. “Poetry has changed my life and I believe it has the power to change the world,” she said. “Being the first Rising Poet Laureate of Durango is completely and utterly a dream, my dream, and I am incredibly thankful for this opportunity as well as very excited to share the joy and journey of poetry with the community. While I will claim poetry as my best confidant throughout the years, poetry lingers and grows in everyone, belongs to everyone, and I am more than delighted to spark fires of poetry into the hearts of all here to listen.”

Gail Lovell of Friends of the Durango Public Library, a member of the selection committee, expressed the difficulty of the decision-making process, stating, "It was such a hard decision to make, but it was so gratifying to be a part of the process of uncovering how many talented poets live here in our town."

Daisy Grice of the Durango Public Library, another committee member, shared her enthusiasm, saying, "We are so excited to see the poets in action starting next year. We think there will be an aura of more poetry around Durango, hopefully fostering a sense of creativity and beauty."

The Poet Laureate and the Rising Poet Laureate will commence their terms in January 2024. Their first public poetry reading is slated for early next year, and from there, they will be a constant presence at various community events, sharing their writing with the public. Additionally, you can look forward to a new poetry column in "The Telegraph" newspaper and captivating poetry installations on public buses, all designed to bring the magic of poetry to everyday life.
For updates on upcoming events, readings, and installations by the Durango Poet Laureate and Rising Poet Laureate, please visit the Durango Public Library's website: https://www.durangogov.org/1728/Durango-Poet-Laureate-Program

Press Contact:
Daisy Grice
she/her
Adult and Circulation Services Supervisor
Durango Public Library
970-375-3387
daisy.grice@durangogov.org

About the Durango Poet Laureate Program
Mission Statement: The Durango Poet Laureate shall act as a representative of the poetic arts through recitation of original poetry and attendance at various events and community gatherings, creation of poetry that reflects our unique past and present, and furthering Durango’s creative economy through active engagement with the community.

This program is funded by the City of Durango's Lodgers Tax Arts and Culture Fund and administered by the Friends of the Durango Public Library and the Poet Laureate Committee. The program is set to create a vibrant platform for local poets to share their unique voices while engaging with the community at large.

About Friends of the Durango Public Library
Friends of the Durango Public Library is a 501c3 organization dedicated to supporting the Durango Public Library and enhancing its role within the community. By advocating for library resources, hosting events, and fostering literary engagement, Friends of the Durango Public Library contributes to the vibrant culture of the region.

Poems by the Laureates

Personal Poem
by Esther Belin

When I walk around downtown Durango
My general intention is to not have one
However, when I start walking past familiar landmarks
Carver’s, Maria’s Bookshop, Brown’s Shoe,
I sometimes find myself searching for the location
of shops and restaurants no longer there

In deep thought, I walk past the Animas
Chocolate Company thinking
I will not go in to buy a tray of truffles, or
An Americano, or discounted chocolate in
the bin by the east wall, yet

this time I am wrong again because
I do pop in, and gaze deeply into the case
and rather than see the chocolatier’s artistry displayed
in all the multi-colored & diversely shaped
small batch truffles neatly arranged, a thought
pops into my head, deterring me from my intention
to focus on shiny speckled & smooth surfaces, gold dusted
surfaces, nut-layered surfaces, all laid out

for purchase & consumption. My attention
wavers. There is a ruckus on Main St. and just as
I lift my head, I see Nancy who tells me she
just came from the Pride (not official Pride event
because she is affiliated with a subversive collective
that interjects love & kindness willy nilly) event
at the 11th St. Station. She’s covered with rainbow
hearts and we split one down the middle and pose. Click,

click, click again because we are so goofy, sharing laughter
and good times from just being able to hug in broad
daylight on Main St. in this mountain desert, tourist-
tangled, tousled about like miners searching for a
Mother-lode-of-gold town, the place we call home.

five letter caption
by Zoe Golden

in which there must always be
specifications
forbidding of opening a book
to find stories
not written in complete sentences
not completely written in sentences.
description is useless
there is nothing to imagine
but however you take truths in your mind. 
without a reminder 
of what you are getting yourself into; 
a lot of lines you have to see between, 
a lot of inferring what metaphors mean, 
obnoxious words, 
coal covered screams. 
hope you don’t pick up the wrong 
typewriter’s dinner 
and find yourself alone 
at the plate.