

HoCoPoLitSo

Howard County Poetry & Literature Society

ENLARGING THE AUDIENCE FOR CONTEMPORARY POETRY & LITERATURE SINCE 1974

ANNUAL REPORT FY 2022

JULY 2021-JUNE 2022

Tap dancing towards the next chapter

By Susan Thornton Hobby
HoCoPoLitSo Recording Secretary

For 23 years, Pamela Kroll Simonson has been tap dancing her way through HoCoPoLitSo's readings, festivals, workshops, television shows, and publications.

Whatever HoCoPoLitSo events throw at her – snow delays for writers' planes, tornado threats during poetry festivals, loss of grant funding, guests' food allergies, out of print books – Simonson has twinkled her size five pumps as fast as she could and managed.

That's what a managing director does.

"I'm adaptable," she said, laughing. "I always have to have my tap shoes on. The goal is to make sure everyone is where they're supposed to be as close as possible to when they're supposed to be, and our patrons come out of it with smiles on their faces."

Simonson, who will retire at the end of this year, started when Ellen Conroy Kennedy, HoCoPoLitSo's founder, was executive director.

"I still hear her on my shoulder," Simonson said. "She was always kind. She may have been exacting, but she would make sure things were exact without belittling."

Over the years, Kennedy helped Simonson learn to write grants, run events, and handle prickly artists and antagonistic guests.

Simonson considers herself lucky to have been "a fly on the wall" as authors such as Lucille Clifton and Sherman Alexie laughed together, or Anne Enright and George O'Brien suffered through the after-effects of a long night to re-record a faulty television program, or Colm Tóibín



Pam Kroll Simonson, Catherine McLoughlin-Hayes, Theo Dorgan and Paula Meehan at an Irish Evening.

PHOTO BY DENNY LENCH

brought a sold-out Irish Evening audience to its feet.

"This little organization – little by all standards – has a nationwide and worldwide reputation," Simonson said. "That's an honor to be a part of."

HoCoPoLitSo has recently tapped a new contingent of high school students to serve as Bauder Youth on Board, and their ideas and enthusiasm "give me hope to come in contact with so many ideas and problem-solvers," Simonson said.

Retirement means Simonson will take more time for grandchildren, volunteering, and dancing. But instead of tap, she'll be twirling around the floor in her specialty, West Coast Swing.

Simonson will still be attending readings, she said, "because HoCoPoLitSo has helped me become the person I am."

"Meeting all these people, seeing life through so many different lenses," Simonson said, "it allows me to be more open and more accepting."

2022 Highlights

A Year of Celebrations

As pandemic restrictions persisted, HoCoPoLitSo continued to produce events that shared poetry and literature virtually. The **Lucille Clifton Reading Series** on November 5, 2021, opened HoCoPoLitSo's 47th season with "Potluck Poetry: Verse in Good Taste" celebrating 30 years of hosting a writer-in-residence program in Howard County public high schools. Poets and former writers-in-residence **Sandra Beasley**, **Alan King**, **Steven Leyva**, and **Naomi Ayala** read their favorite food poems and shared a recipe from their kitchens.

The **44th Evening of Irish Music and Poetry**, broadcast on February 11, 2022, honored retiring Irish Evening chair **Catherine McLoughlin-Hayes** (1986-2020) and creator **Padraic Kennedy** (1979) with messages and readings from previous guests. **Daniel Mulhall**, Ireland's Ambassador to the U.S., welcomed authors **Theo Dorgan**, **Vona Groarke**, **Colum McCann**, **Mike McCormack**, **Alice McDermott**, **Paula Meehan**, **Colm Tóibín** and newcomer **Mary Madec**. O'Malley's March, led by **Martin O'Malley**, with **Jared Denhard**, **Jim Eagan**, **Sean McComiskey**, **Peter Miller**, **Ralph Reinoldi**, and **James Wilson, Sr.**, provided rousing Irish music and accompanied step dancers from the Teelin School **Quinnlyn Boyle**, **Jessica Jacobs**, **Ben Koolbeck**, **Reese O'Halloran**, **Gianna Romano**, **Katherine Wright**, and **Maureen Berry**, director/choreographer. Patrons were invited to join in a community toast with a signature cocktail, Roscommon Rosie, created by the Wine Bin of Ellicott City. Photographer **Denny Lynch** and artist **Katherine Farrell** shared their work during the preshow.

In partnership with Howard Community College (HCC), HoCoPoLitSo produced the fourteenth **Blackbird Poetry Festival** on April 28, 2022. The in-person event welcomed **Molly McCully Brown**, a 2019 National Book Award Finalist, the author of *Places I've Taken My Body*. The festival included a morning workshop, an afternoon and evening reading hosted by poet **Hayes Davis**, with a poem read by Wilde Lake High School Poetry Out Loud finalist **Yasmin Roach**.



Molly McCully Brown

Celebrating its fifth season, **Wilde Readings** produced ten readings with open mic opportunities. Organized by **Linda Joy Burke**, **Ann Bracken**, **Laura Shovan**, and **Faye McCray**, recordings,



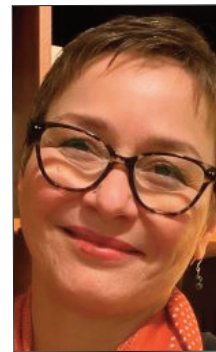
Sandra Beasley



Alan King



Steven Leyva



Naomi Ayala

available on Facebook, feature a diverse group of readers: **Mary Brandenburg**, **Kenneth Carroll**, **Nisha Chawla**, **Marlena Chertock**, **Virginia Crawford**, **Tracy Dimond**, **Courtney Dowe**, **Meg Eden**, **Gabor Gyukics**, **Kristin Kowalski Ferragut**, **Kathleen Hellen**, **Melanie Henderson**, **May Kurolwa**, **Lucinda Marshall**, **Emily Rich**, **Miranda Samuel**, **Leona Sevick**, and **Hananah Zaheer**.

Bauder School Programs

HoCoPoLitSo's Bauder writer-in-residence **Naomi Ayala** worked virtually with students from county high schools and Howard Community College (HCC). Ayala shared her work in both English and Spanish during poetry workshops.

For thirty-one years, to foster lifelong reading habits and a love of literature, HoCoPoLitSo has honored students by presenting book awards with personalized bookplates to the winners of its All-County Writing Competition and students recognized for Promise and Achievement in Language Arts. With the support of donor Dr. Lillian Bauder, the tradition continued.

The ten creative writing winners were **Naomi Ling** (River Hill), **Jack Millstein** (River Hill), and **Benjamin Liao** (River Hill) in the personal essay category; **Naomi Ling** (River Hill), **David Lunsford** (Long Reach), and **Annika Przyzycki** (River Hill) in the poetry category; **Yusuf Mirasyedi** (River Hill), **Katie Kim** (River Hill), and **Andrea Davis** (River Hill) in the short story category and **Tiffany Smith** (Homewood Center) in the playwright category. Twenty-six students were selected by their English departments to receive HoCoPoLitSo's Promise and Achievement Award in Language Arts. The honorees were: **Caroline Greaser** and **Joshua Molinari** (Atholton); **Francesca Cumello** and **Julia Gaevsky** (Centennial); **Robert Coulter** and **Mariam Shah** (Glenelg); **Nader Atta-Allah** and **Lecann Wong Arbelo** (Hammond); **Jinia Smith** and **Tiffany Smith** (Homewood); **Gabrielle Rabold** and **Matthew Verderaime** (Howard); **Mona Hode** and **Autumn**

Boit (Long Reach); **Nadeen Alomar** and **Anna Han** (Marriotts Ridge), **Natalie Gales** and **Deon Kouatchou-Ngongang** (Mt. Hebron); **Marissa Douglas** and **Aaron Rodrigues** (Oakland Mills); **Imani Raheem** and **William Chapman** (Reservoir); **Chole McGeehan** and **Julia Trost** (River Hill); and **Valerie Brady** and **Emmanuella Osei** (Wilde Lake). Students received books by such outstanding poets and writers as Elizabeth Acevedo, Lucille Clifton, Billy Collins, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Laura Lippman, James McBride, Colum McCann, and Ocean Vuong.

Coordinated by HoCoPoLitSo's High School Liaison **Susan Thornton Hobby**, this year's reviewers were **Michael Clark** (retired journalist and past editor of *Little Patuxent Review*), **Sylvia Lee** (associate professor of English, HCC) and **Patricia Van Amburg** (poet and professor emeritus of English, HCC).

Ellicott City 250

On June 4, actors **Shawn Sebastian Naar** and **Sarah Luckadoo** read from *Through the Eyes of Poets* at the **Patapsco Female Institute** to commemorate the replanting of **Mary Jerdone Coleman's garden**.

From April 1, the beginning of National Poetry Month, through June 30, twenty-five poems celebrating Ellicott City's 250th anniversary were displayed in store windows along Main Street. Selected poems were read at an event on June 12 at the Museum of Howard County History. Readers included **David H. Barrett**, **Scot Ehrhardt**, **Fred Foote**, **Neal Goturi**, **Doris Ligon**, **Patti Ross**, **Laura Shovan**, **County Council Member Liz Walsh**, and **Laura Yoo**. With a grant from Patapsco Heritage Greenway and the support of Maryland Heritage Area and EC250, HoCoPoLitSo curated and produced the exhibit and created the anthology *Through the Eyes of Poets: Ellicott City at 250*, authored and edited by **Susan Thornton Hobby**.

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SAVE THE DATE
Saturday, February 18, 2023



45th Irish Evening

with Colm Tóibín and Maureen Dowd



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Partnerships

Together with **Howard County Library System**, HoCoPoLitSo's **Susan Thornton Hobby** and climate educator **Julie Dunlap** hosted the Inconvenient Book Club at the Howard County Library Miller Branch. The cli-fi club met virtually and in person between June and July.

In June, HoCoPoLitSo participated in the **Howard County Arts Council's** Art Reach at the Long Reach Village Center with poetry writing activities for people of all ages using **Taylor Mali's** Metaphor Dice.

HoCoPoLitSo On-Line

Production of HoCoPoLitSo's *The Writing Life* resumed in April with **Molly McCully Brown** hosted by **Hayes Davis**. Recordings of Potluck Poetry, the 44th Irish Evening and Wilde Readings are available at youtube.com/HoCoPoLitSo.

Poetry Moments, a series in partnership with HCC's Arts Collective that began in 2020, to mark the importance of Black Lives Matter, concluded with 54 entries. The videos feature local actors offering introductions to poems, followed by poets reading their work, originally recorded on editions of *The Writing Life*.

Inaugural Ellen Conroy Kennedy Poetry Contest



Noah Arhm Choi

Noah Arhm Choi was awarded first prize in the 2021 Ellen Conroy Kennedy Poetry Contest for their poem "Rummage" and received a \$500 cash prize. The poem was published in the winter 2022 issue of *The Little Patuxent Review*. **Liz Holland** was awarded second place with a \$100 cash award for her poem "Lifeboy Swept Away." Interviews with the authors can be seen at HoCoPoLitSo.org. More than 125 entries were received from New York to California.

Kennedy established HoCoPoLitSo in 1974 to enlarge the audience for contemporary poetry and literature by producing live events in Howard County, Maryland. She served as president and CEO for 30 years.
