

Fisher Poets Gathering 2008

A fourth reading venue has been added to Fisher Poets Gathering (FPG) for the 11th annual event on the weekend of Feb. 22 to 24 in Astoria OR. This addition allows an expanded evening program of readings and music from a record number of fishing industry people bringing their original poems, stories and songs this year. The 2008 event gathers up close to 70 presenters, along with several local music groups, all with fishing industry ties. The fourth venue also makes more audience space for a growing number of aficionados who come from the Astoria area and points around the country for original writing about the hard-working vocation of fishing and to be part of the lively ambiance of the event, said Florence Sage of Astoria, an 11-year FPG producer.

For FPG 2008, the Astoria Event center (9th and Commercial) joins the Wet Dog Cafe (foot of 11th St.), Columbian Theater and VooDoo Lounge (11th and Marine Dr.) as an evening reading venue. The evening program also starts earlier this year to accommodate the number of presenters: Friday from 5:30 to 11 p.m., and Saturday from 5 to after 11 p.m. in the three larger venues. A new "VooDoo Mike" runs 7 to 11 p.m. in the VooDoo Lounge, which also hosts late-night music.

"We have a wealth of talent," Sage said. "The program is so tight this year that we had to close it before the last week of January. Committee members have willingly given up coveted second reading slots to make room for newcomers, and anyone contacting us now is being offered time at the VooDoo Mike, which has some flex."

Readers new to the gathering this year come from fisheries on the east coast, including Cape Cod and Chesapeake Bay MA, and some more remote areas of Alaska. Graphic artist Ray Troll comes down to FPG from Ketchikan AK for the first time to play what he calls his "fishy tunes" and show slides of his art in a workshop. They join dozens of fisher poets who have appeared at the gathering over all or most of its 11 years, including local favorites, event founder Jon Broderick of Cannon Beach OR, Smitty Smith of Long Beach WA, Geno Leech of Chinook WA, Jay Speakman of Gearhart OR, Dave Densmore and Hobe Kytr of Astoria OR. Returning performers come from cities and towns in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Maryland, Rhode Island, Arkansas and Florida. All FPG presenters come as volunteers.

Saturday morning's six workshops run from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., at the Columbia River Maritime Museum (CRMM) at the foot of 17th St, and Baked Alaska restaurant at the foot of 12th St. This year's planned workshop choices: at CRMM, Ray Troll's Making Art About Fish and Fishing, The Bristol Bay Watershed and the Proposed Pebble Mine in Alaska, History of Columbia River Packers Association, History of the Nonprofit Salmon Nation; at Baked Alaska, Poetry Writing and Song Writing. "Dangerous Dave" Densmore's fishing boat, the Cold Stream, moored at Pier 39, foot of 39th St., is open for visits from 9 a.m. to noon. Pre-workshop breakfast is available at Pier 39 Saturday at Coffee Girl cafe and at Baked Alaska restaurant.

The very popular afternoon Story Circle of "never-written adventures" from the memories of "old fishing hands" will again be held in the commodious Liberty Theater, 12th and Commercial, 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, "with enough seats for its

many fans," Sage said. "This venue is thanks to a grant from Englund Marine in Astoria."

A live auction runs onsite between sets at two locations during the evening, featuring certificates for special area lodgings, "sold" by Broadus MT auctioneer and fisher, Curt Olson.

FPG events come to a close in Astoria Sunday with the Readers' Farewell Mike at the Astoria Event center from 10 a.m. to noon. Breakfast is available in the grill beforehand. A Sunday 3 p.m. reading by several poets at Cannon Beach Arts Association gallery completes the gathering.

Event buttons are available Friday and Saturday from 3:30 p.m. through both evenings at the Columbian Theater box office; during the Saturday morning workshops at the Maritime Museum and Baked Alaska; Saturday afternoons during the event at the Liberty Theater; and at the Astoria Event Center on Sunday morning.

Buttons are \$10 for the weekend, or \$5 for one day or event. Enamel patron pins are also available to help support the gathering. There is no other entry charge for FPG. Last reading at Cannon Beach Arts Association gallery Sunday afternoon does not require a button. A new Gear Shack stocks books, CDs and FPG gear. All donations from buttons, patron pins, CDs, books, gear, other memorabilia and grants go solely to support on-site audio costs and small travel stipends for readers and musicians.

Information about the Astoria area and lodging is provided by the Astoria-Warrenton Chamber of Commerce: 503-325-6311, www.oldoregon.com.

"Fisher Poetry" comes from experiences living and working in the industry, and ranges from fast-moving rhyming couplets and crafted free verse to include songs, short stories, personal memoirs and essays.

The Fisher Poets Gathering has been an annual event in Astoria in the last full weekend of February since 1998. The gathering has been given substantial support every year by Clatsop Community College, with contributions of services, goods and panel members from several local organizations and businesses, as noted in the annual program. But otherwise it is a community venture put together by a small committee of volunteers. The 2008 committee consists of: Jon and Doreen Broderick of Cannon Beach, David Campiche of Seaview WA, Lorrie Haight of Long Beach WA, Hobe Kytr and Florence Sage of Astoria, and Jay Speakman of Gearhart. Venues are donated. Major grantors have included Cannon Beach Arts Association and the Patricia Freeland Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation.

This popular event has grown in audience and fame over the years. It has been designated a Library of Congress Local Legacies project, and been the subject of many local, regional and national news articles and productions, including NBC's Today Show and the Smithsonian magazine. It is the subject of a documentary filmed over several years of the gathering by New York documentary filmmaker Jen Winston, called "Fisher Poets," which has shown by invitation at several film festivals.

KMUN-FM broadcasts the Friday and Saturday evening program from the Wet Dog Cafe for all 11 years of the gathering. Since 2007, that includes "streaming live" over the web around the world. Sage commented, "We're happy that KMUN makes FPG available "word for word" to our

many local listeners, and to all fishing and like-minded people with the equipment to pick it up."

Detailed updates are posted on the website during February as they become available.