

2020 ANNUAL REPORTS EDMONTON STROLL OF POETS



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well, my friends, the last few months have certainly presented us with many challenges related to the pandemic and the myriad accommodations necessary to insure our health and safety. As we officially wrap up our poetry year and stand at the threshold of our 30th year of operation I marvel anew at the power of poetry and poets. Certainly, that power would not manifest without the strength and determination of our many volunteers who sustain its governance and manage our highly successful Poets' Haven reading series.

It has been my absolute pleasure to work with an amazing group of people including the Stroll board and associates, our administrative assistant Ellen Kartz and anthology editor Deborah Lawson. Their unwavering support and commitment to the health and welfare of the Stroll and its membership are the heart and soul of our organization.

This year the board bids farewell to our friend Marco Melfi, who has served as vice-president for six years. In that capacity he has acted as my sounding board on many occasions. His honesty and support have been of such immense value to the Stroll. Marco has also served in the capacity of Haven coordinator all of those six years and under his guidance we modernized the sign-up process, altered the floor plan at the Upper Crust to accommodate more seating, and have seen our average nightly attendance go from 38 to 50.

But that wasn't all he did. He also served as website manager and communications coordinator, developing our presence on social media. When the board decided that the Stroll should further extend its arms to the community, Marco took the lead on our exciting new Outreach and Development committee. We are so grateful for Marco's dedication and commitment to the Stroll of Poets and wish him all the very best in his new leadership and poetic pursuits.

To all who volunteered their time this past season to support the Stroll and the Poets' Haven thank you, so very much. Every contribution is of value and tremendously appreciated!

Yours in verse,
John Leppard
President

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Another year, another decade!

The Board's work, on behalf of the membership, to ensure the Stroll lives and grows is always made easier thanks to all the collaboration. I wish to thank fellow Board members Alice, Anne, Janis, John, Lisa, Markus, Naomi, plus Associates Audrey, Josh and Max and Ellen Kartz from Writers' Guild of Alberta for another good year!

No Stroll year is the same. In addition to overseeing the finances, running the weekly Haven and the annual anthology this season the Board and Associates responded to restore the website, updated the Stroll's policies, welcomed new Haven volunteers and launched our Outreach & Development initiative. These accomplishments were due to the cooperation among the Board and Associates as well as the leadership of John Leppard. John's ongoing consideration for members, the organization and the volunteering environment he fosters continues to serve the Stroll in ways too numerous to count.

I was again honoured to serve the membership on the Board and as Vice President. This was my sixth year on the Board and it was with mixed emotions that I've decided not to run again. I learned a lot during this time as a poet, a volunteer and community member. I am grateful to Alice and John for their initial invitations many years ago and everyone for their encouragement season after season. I will still be around and in the crowd to help with the chairs, the sound, those doors and of course to share more poetry.

Marco Melfi
Vice President

TREASURER'S REPORT

This has been an excellent year for the Stroll's finances. Our revenue for the year shows a surplus over expenses of more than \$1100; by comparison, two years ago we ran a deficit of more than \$1600 and last year we basically broke even.

Our total revenues for 2019-20 were almost \$16,700, compared with \$15,300 the year before. This is almost entirely due to an increase in donations, achieved by the fairly simple expedient of highlighting the donation box at all our events and pointing out that we keep the Stroll's membership fee and event admission charges as low as possible so that the organization is accessible to everyone. We are also grateful for a special \$500 donation from one of our members, David Brydges. We really appreciate the fact that members who *can* contribute have responded to our appeal over the past year. Our costs are not going to go down.

Grant revenue increased slightly. We are very grateful for grant support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Edmonton Arts Council, which makes it possible to contract with the Writers Guild of Alberta for the administrative support from Ellen Kartz. Without the continuity provided by this arrangement, it would be much harder for our busy volunteers to keep the Stroll operating smoothly.

Our expenses are fairly consistent with previous years. Administration costs increased by \$600, but this was partially offset by modest reductions in marketing costs.

The net result is that our accumulated surplus—aka ‘the cushion’—is now a little over \$5300. This is actually more than we traditionally aim for as of January 31 each year; maintaining it enables us to pay the bills through the lower-revenue period of spring/summer. Having this slightly fatter cushion is reassuring because of uncertainty around what recent provincial budget cuts will mean to our grant from the Alberta Foundation of the Arts. Even more importantly, it gives us a little more flexibility to undertake new programming initiatives and support outreach projects.

The financial statements do not reflect the large number of volunteer hours – approximately 1200 – that go into keeping the Stroll’s programs going year round. Thanks to all of you who contribute your energy to proofing bees, door hosting, hauling equipment, organizing the Blinks and all other activities that need to happen to build our Stroll community.

I would like to thank our auditors, Richard Davies and Manny Blosser, for their careful review of our financial records. I would also like to thank our bookkeeping poet, Ivan Sundal, for maintaining the records and producing our annual statement, Haven host Anne Gerard Marshall (and all our volunteer door hosts) for keeping track of the weekly admissions so scrupulously, and our administrative assistant Ellen Kartz for her careful, prompt attention to banking matters. And as always, it has been a great pleasure to work with my fellow Board members – the greatest volunteers around.

Alice Major
Treasurer.

SECRETARY’S REPORT

I am honoured to have served as a member of the Executive for the Stroll of Poets for the past two years. It is a privilege to work on such a competent board as it guides the regular operations and future directions of this exemplary organization.

My main responsibility on the board has been to record and distribute the minutes following each meeting. Upon approval from the board, the minutes become an integral part of the historical record of the society. They are held in the archives at the Writers’ Guild of Alberta for any member of the society or the board who wishes to view them.

Over the past year, it has been exciting to witness and contribute to the advances the Stroll has made in Outreach and Development under the guidance of our Vice-President, Marco Melfi.

I am sure I echo the sentiments of my fellow board members in expressing my sadness that Marco will be leaving the board this year. We are a better and stronger organization for having been gifted with his commitment and enthusiasm. He shall be missed.

In closing, I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of my fellow board members, especially Naomi McIlwraith and Josh Luukkonen, who have stepped in to help me with the minutes when I was unable to attend meetings. Under the exceptional leadership of John Leppard, the Stroll of Poets and the impact of its board are thriving.

Lisa Mulrooney
Secretary

OUTREACH & DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The Stroll of Poet's Outreach and Development was a new initiative launched for the 2019-2020 season. Outreach and Development was about growing members' skills and increasing and extending our impact as a poetic community. The initiative's goals included: creating opportunities to share knowledge, learn new skills and expand horizons. It was a way to harness much of the creative energy and ideas that already existed among the membership.

In the fall of 2019 the Board invited proposals (for activities, sessions or other poetry related events) that supported the above goals. The Board committed to promotion and advertising, liaising between the proponent and interested members/poets. The Board was grateful to all those who submitted and were impressed with the variety of ideas.

The event selected was a workshop. The workshop, called *Utopia or Dystopia*, was hosted by Shirley Serviss at the McMullen Gallery at the University of Alberta Hospital in February 2020. Shirley led fifteen participants (new and long time Stroll members) through a series of writing prompts based on the gallery's installation by Emmanuel Osahor: paintings of real and imagined landscapes within Edmonton, a living wall of tropical plants and a soundscape of the river valley.

A sincere thank you to Shirley for facilitating and the participants for making this a positive collaboration.

With a framework set up for Outreach and Development, the number of proposals submitted and the participation at the selected workshop, this initiative has a foundation to build on for the following Stroll season.

Marco Melfi & Josh Luukkonen

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

This year the Board's portfolios that included social media and the website were brought together under a new portfolio called Communications. This recognized the important relationship between Twitter, Facebook and the Stroll's website (along with the Stroll's newsletter) to promote the Stroll, engage with poets and share events for and from the writing community.

Just as this season was getting underway it was discovered that the Stroll's website had been infected. The issues were, thankfully, temporary and the Stroll's website was relaunched healthier and stronger. The issues were addressed thanks to the decisive and responsive actions of Ellen Kartz. Mike Gravel stepped in to look at the causes and provided the needed expertise to address the issues. This collaboration was essential and the Board is very grateful. These lessons prompted the Board to update its work plan for increased monitoring and maintenance of the website.

Twitter continues to be an active way to connect with the larger Edmonton, Alberta, and Canadian poetry and literary communities online. While activity and engagement were slower than other years it remains an important resource to post and interact with people, poets or organizations like Parkland Poets, the Writers' Guild of Alberta and the Edmonton Poetry Festival. Facebook continues as a group page for Stroll events and information. Thank you to members for their ongoing interaction and sharing. A special thank you to Trudy G. for her assistance posting the weekly Haven lineup.

The use of SignUp.com for members to book their Haven readers or volunteer as a mic or door host worked again for a second year. The Board is grateful to the membership for embracing this new tool and for the feedback along the way.

A final thank you to Ellen Kartz for publishing the weekly newsletter and her assistance with any and all matters related to Facebook and the Stroll website!

Marco Melfi & Josh Luukkonen

HAVEN DOOR HOST'S REPORT

It's been an honour to welcome poets and supporters to the Haven this past year. All of you who come with your poetry, appreciation and applause are what keep us going. So please keep coming. We thrive on all your goings and comings. Bring five bucks, bring a friend, bring a two-minute poem. See you there.

I'd like to thank all the door hosts who worked with me. I want you to know how grateful I am because I really love having you there. I especially enjoy telling you what to do – it's my favourite part. Without you, who would I push around? OK, OK, I really do need you! Thanks!

I couldn't do it without you.

Next year I'll be at the door to welcome you. Come and join me. Come sit by me. I'll put you to work.

Anne Gerard Marshall

POETS' HAVEN COORDINATOR'S REPORT

Introduction

Poetry is a thriving community here in Edmonton! What other proof do we need of this then attendance on a Monday night in January when temperatures dipped below average yet people braved the winter weather to be warmed by our poetic community?

Behind the Scenes

Our Haven Coordinators are currently Marco Melfi, Janis Dow and John Leppard.

As a team, it's our job to assure a benevolent atmosphere for poets to express themselves and audiences to enjoy the poetry readings on Sundays and Mondays at Audrey's and the Upper Crust.

In the past few years we've gone from four coordinators to three, so this year we worked on ways to distribute more tasks to the general member body for future sustainability. We're now pleased to have a team that has expanded and continues to grow in both numbers and camaraderie .

We did this with an invitation to Stroll members in the fall to join the Haven crew. People were invited to learn more about sound set up and take down, mic adjustment and liaising with staff at the Upper Crust. This takes pressure off a few and assures a smooth and balanced flow to the reading series.

A heartfelt thank you to those who stepped up to help out, including Markus Eymann, Max Vandersteen, and Elaine Elrod who all helped with sound set up and take down and mic adjusting. Naomi McIlwraith also helped us in mic adjusting and sound crew as well as sending out weekly e-mail reminders and site management.

We continue to work together to streamline the process of training new members as well as spelling each other off for breaks during the reading series and we've added details such as making a sound schedule on Google apps that crew members can access to continue success in this area.

Appreciation

We appreciate all the help from those who volunteered as door hosts, mic hosts, directing traffic flow at the door and all other behind the scenes operations. Our success at the Stroll is dependent on everyone who takes part in this amazing community so a huge thank you to all involved! Anne Gerard Marshall did her usual excellent job of tracking head counts and money at the door as our head door host. Alice played her part by frequently keeping us aware of our financial situation and putting attention on our well-fed donation box.

Thank you to everyone who pitched in with extra donations to the Stroll this year. Appreciation goes out to Marco and Josh who worked to promote us on our website and social media this year. Our hard-working Ellen Kartz, is a whiz at membership renewal and everything else she does to support us from her post. Her constant support from the WGA is much appreciated. We appreciate the constant support of the WGA and board members as well as the staff at the Upper Crust and Audreys Books. The continued use of these venues is an important part of our community. Thanks to the very capable serving staff for their tireless work to support us on Haven nights.

Attendance and membership

Our Stroll community is alive and growing as we now have 128 members, 20 of whom became new members this year! We had a total attendance of 925* on Monday nights at the Haven. We filled 82 out of 88 reading spots and 165* open mic readers, with 16 first time readers. Our average attendance on Monday nights this season was 36* people (not including March numbers) so thank you for making this a vibrant community!

	2019-2020		2018-2019	
	Upper Crust	Audreys	Upper Crust	Audreys
Readings	25	3	22	4
Attendance	966 to Mar. 9*	71	1095	45
Scheduled Readers	84 spots	13	84	13
Open Mic Readers	173	14	196	8
Mic Hosts	16	2	22	4
Door Hosts	19	n/a	21	n/a

*Due to Covid outbreak we didn't have a March 16 date, March 9th was the final night

Audrey's Books

There were three Sundays at Audreys Books this year. John Leppard and Marco Melfi acted as hosts and site managers and other people hosted during regular readings. Sunday attendance is about the same as last year and we continue to keep Audrey's reading afternoons on Sundays going so people have an alternative place to attend the Stroll if they can't make Monday nights. We appreciate the kindness of Audrey's books and all the great staff who work there☺

Wrap up

As the season draws to a close we want to say how much we enjoyed being part of the Haven reading series in 2019/2020☺ and we shall see you at the Poetry Festival in April. Have a fabulous spring and summer and we'll look for you in September again as we resume our reading series in the fall!

Respectfully submitted by Janis Dow