

2023 ANNUAL REPORTS EDMONTON STROLL OF POETS



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This has been a season of successful pivots. Although things are still a bit uncertain at times, the Stroll of Poets continues to adapt and facilitate poets in sharing their words in this community. We've been happy to see familiar faces again this fall upon return to in-person Haven poetry readings at the Upper Crust Café and Audrey's Books. It was also a pleasure to find our way back to in-person board meetings at the Percy Page center this season.

It's been an absolute delight to welcome new poets and audience members to our community these past seven months! To our new members, we appreciate you for finding us and please continue to spread the word that this is a warm and generous community. Gratitude goes out to our Communications Committee for sending out press releases and engaging social media platforms which make us available to Edmonton and the surrounding area. For those of our members who couldn't join us in person we miss you and look forward to a time when we can see you again.

What a blessing it is that the Treaty Six Land Acknowledgements have now been integrated into our Stroll community meetings in a thoughtful way. We're much obliged to everyone who has participated in this personalized and meaningful writing of Land Acknowledgements. It takes courage to step out of the box of limited thinking and complacency and dive into a deep and complex subject to which we don't know how each individual will respond. Naomi McIlwraith, your wisdom and support as our Indigenous liaison on this subject means the world to us.

Our 2022 Anthology is now published and once again available for pick up here at the AGM. What a journey it's been to navigate the distribution of Anthologies the past two years. Much gratitude goes out to our meticulous editor, Deborah Lawson, for hosting us in her yard the past two years and for all of the work she has done over the years to make the Anthologies happen. We also can't thank our Administration assistant, Ellen Kartz, enough. Ellen works hard to process and renew memberships, update the website and do many other things for the Stroll of Poets. She knows this organization inside and out and has contributed her time and skills with dedication and panache for several years.

Financially speaking, we're held in check and balances by Alice Major, our bookkeepers and auditors to whom we give credit to for their industrious work. To this team and the generous donors among our membership, we couldn't have kept afloat without you.

It takes a team of devoted volunteers to run the Stroll and we wouldn't be here if it weren't for the steadfast work of all our board members and associates. I'm also grateful to our Vice President, Max Vandersteen for all his support as well as John Leppard's continued advisory.

In closing, it's you, the members, who make The Stroll of Poets a rich and engaging community. It has been my great joy and privilege, to serve in this organization as President for the past two years. Have a wonderful spring and we hope to see you out at the remaining Havens and The Blinks this April!

Janis Dow
President

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This past season of the Stroll of Poets has brought back the opportunity for our community to gather together once again and the response has been tremendous. While it has been very pleasing to observe the return of many familiar faces and voices with our return to live poetry readings at the Upper Crust Café and Audrey's Bookstore, it has also been very satisfying to welcome many new faces and voices to these events as well.

Working together with this board, directed respectfully by Janis Dow, over this past year has been very rewarding to me. It has been a pleasure to work with and support her over this period. The experience of planning for the Stroll season and events along with the other members of this board has resulted in a fruitful season for everyone. From the Poets for Ukraine event during the Edmonton Poetry Festival, to the Anthology distribution events of last year's edition and creation of this year's issue (available at the AGM). From the roll out of the Thirty Years of Strolling chapbook at the Legislature Grounds, to the return of a live Annual General Meeting, we have enjoyed several successful events. Add to this; the many live Haven Reading events -including Fresh Verse- the 30-30, Cures for Eikosienophobia, Prime 23 poetry prompt sessions and the Writers Circle gatherings. We can conclude that it has been a productive season.

Things that we are planning for, to come before our summer break, include the return of the Blinks during the Edmonton Poetry Festival in April and the close of the Haven Reading Series with Fresh Verse, featuring eight young emerging poets at the Upper Crust Café, on May 1st. Plans are also underway to roll out The Stroll History Project (at long last) in June in conjunction with a Stroll fundraising event. There are also plans for a new publication containing Treaty Six Land acknowledgements submitted by Stroll members.

Many thanks to all the individuals who have helped to bring about these events and also to all those who participated in these opportunities to engage with others in our community. A well-deserved thank you goes out to Ellen Kartz as well for keeping us all up to date with promotion and news about all of the things going on through the Stroll Newsletter and website, among the numerous other things she carries out on behalf of our organization. I also wish to acknowledge all of the help that she provided with uploading the Stroll history to the Stroll of Poets website in preparation for the upcoming rollout.

Finally, thank you to all members of this board for working so cooperatively and to all members of the Stroll for their support of this executive board. Here is hoping for more great things to come the way of the Stroll of Poets.

Max Vandersteen
Vice President

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Stroll's revenues started to recover modestly in 2022-23 after two years of pandemic. With in-person events happening again at the Upper Crust, we collected admission revenue of just under \$2000 for the period September-January. We also maintained our donations revenue at \$2000—thanks to all who contributed to the translucent box, or online through PayPal. And our membership numbers continue to be strong, along with the associated fees.

However, our total annual revenues are still about \$3000 below our pre-pandemic levels. Returning to more in-person events in the coming year should help restore them. Meanwhile, from an expense point of view, our basic costs have increased somewhat since before the pandemic, due to changes in our contract with the Writers Guild of Alberta. However, we have been able to finish the fiscal year with a surplus of over \$400 for the period.

This means that as of January 31, 2023, we have accumulated a 'cushion' of \$7400. This is more than the usual \$4000 or so that is needed to see us through the payments that will be required in coming months. It gives us some latitude to carry on some outreach activities that we haven't been able to do during the pandemic. We will be seeking input from the membership about activities that would be valuable to members and consistent with the mission of the Stroll.

We remain very grateful for grant support from the AFA and the Edmonton Arts Council, which makes it possible to contract with the Writers Guild of Alberta for administrative support. Without the continuity provided by this arrangement, it would be much harder for our busy volunteers to keep the Stroll operating smoothly. I am personally very grateful for the excellent work that Ellen Karts does to manage banking and PayPal matters.

Finally, I would like to reiterate thank-yous that I include in this report each year – but which are perennially heartfelt. The financial statements do not reflect the large number of volunteer hours that go into keeping the Stroll's programs going year-round. I would like to thank our auditors, Trudy Grienuer and Anna Mioduchowska, for their 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. 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

It has been a pleasure working as secretary to the Stoll Board. My main job is to take minutes at the meetings, distribute them to the other board members, incorporate their comments into revised minutes, and then distribute a final copy to be voted on at the next meeting. The finalized minutes are then submitted to the Writer's Guild of Alberta where they are archived for future reference. I would like to thank Naomi McIlwraith and Shirley Serviss for taking minutes when I have been unable to attend a meeting.

I have enjoyed working with the other members of the board. They all take the responsibility that comes with being on the Stoll Board very seriously. They work hard to ensure the Haven, the anthology, the Blinks and all the other Stoll activities run without a hitch or a hiccup, so that the Stroll membership and the public at large can continue to share each other's poetry.

Markus Eymann
Secretary

OUTREACH AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Outreach activities are initiatives that go beyond the Stroll's core program of Haven readings—activities that help our membership develop as individual poets and come together as community. In the past year, these included the following:

- The Writing Group started in summer, 2021 has carried on past its planned duration, speaking to its success. The group meets online every third Wednesday. Anyone interested in joining can check with Max Vandersteen to see if there is room for new members.
- Celebration of The Stroll's 30th Anniversary continued with a well-attended outdoor launch of a chapbook, "Thirty Years of Strolling," on June 27 at the Alberta Legislature.
- "Poetry Remix" challenged writers to create new work inspired by the thousands of poems published in Stroll anthologies over the past three decades. Two dozen poets responded, and their new creations are available on the Stroll website were posted online at <https://www.strollofpoets.com/strolls-30th-anniversary/poetry-remix/>. Thanks to the work of Kayleigh Cline for initiating and organizing this project.
- Trudy Grienerauer organized the 6th annual 30/30 challenge, in which poets were provided a prompt every day for the 30 days of National Poetry Month (April).
- "Not Just a Land Acknowledgement", initiated by Ellen Kartz and brought to the board by Janis Dow and Naomi McIlwraith, (2021) continued throughout the past year, to encourage land acknowledgements at all Stroll events that go beyond rote recitations and contribute more meaningfully to understanding and reconciliation. The Treaty Six Committee (Naomi McIlwraith, Leslie Dawson, Gary Garrison and Janis Dow) is now planning publication of a book with Land Acknowledgement samples and essays, to record and share this work.

- An extensive history of the Stroll has been compiled and is being uploaded to the website, thanks to the hard work of Max Vandersteen and Ellen Kartz. A celebration of this history will be held in June, 2023.

As can be seen from this list and from the Stroll history project, outreach activities are many and various. From workshops and writing circles to creating chapbooks or special performances, they grow out of the needs and interests of members themselves.

In the coming year, as we emerge from the constraints of the pandemic period and shake its snow off our boots, the Stroll will be looking for new outreach projects that members are passionate about and are willing to work on, to keep the Stroll energy going into its next 30 years.

Respectfully submitted by Shirley Serviss and Alice Major

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Working together, Max Vandersteen, Kayleigh Cline, and Leslie Dawson formed a very effective communications portfolio team this year. We have successfully re-established a connection with the community through the efforts of this committee. With the creation of a media contact list and the distribution of press releases, several outlets subsequently spread the news about the Stroll and its events. Through continuous posts to Facebook and Twitter we have significantly grown our number of followers. We have, in fact, very nearly reached 500 members of our Facebook group page, an increase of 75 over last year.

We believe that the efforts described have played a part in the resulting increased audiences, the participation of many new faces, first time readers and young poets, as well as the return of several past members of the Stroll of Poets that we are witnessing in our events and our social media. The communications team has been actively promoting and reporting on Stroll events and Stroll member activities, opportunities with other poetry communities, and a variety of poetry contest submission announcements.

Our report would not be complete without acknowledging the cooperation and efforts of Ellen Kartz in attending to our website and circulating a weekly newsletter to our membership. Through these Stroll communication sources she has informed us all regarding promotion of the Haven and other events, news about achievements, general board announcements, and opportunities for involvement.

Respectfully submitted by Max V., Kayleigh C., and Leslie D.

ANTHOLOGY EDITOR'S REPORT

Report of the Managing Editor *Stroll of Poets' Anthology 2022*

The privilege of working with a dedicated group of people, mostly volunteers, was once again mine in 2022. Many thanks to the Stroll's Board of Directors, and to my board liaisons, Markus Eymann and Naomi McIlwraith, for their continuing support and encouragement.

I am also most grateful to Ellen Kartz, the Communications and Partnerships Coordinator of the Writers' Guild of Alberta and the Stroll's Executive Assistant, for her collaboration, professionalism, and cheerful willingness to meet my every administrative need. Ellen "smoothed out many a wrinkle" for me—and thus, for you.

The addition to the anthology of an essay titled "Not Just a Land Acknowledgement" advised readers of the Stroll's commitment to move beyond trite or rote land acknowledgements, and to address more authentically the complexities of living, working, and creating on Treaty Six Territory. The Board and trusted stakeholders entered into a diligent process to examine how the Stroll might express meaningful and respectful gratitude for being on lands where Indigenous voices have been heard for many generations.

The Proofreading Bee for the 2022 anthology was held on Thursday, February 3, 2022. With pandemic-related physical distancing restrictions still in place, proofreading success depended more than ever on a small group of dedicated volunteers who shouldered the task with efficiency and grace. My thanks go out to Louise Fairley, Lynn Gale, Dorothy Lowrie, Naomi McIlwraith, and Max Vandersteen. As well, thanks to Anne Gerard Marshall, who once again assisted with the critical task of reviewing the galley proofs.

The 2022 anthology presented readers with 87 poems. Fortunately, publication in our anthology is supported by technology that doesn't rely on face-to-face engagement. The email submissions of those 87 members is evidence that poetry still has the capacity to be triumphant—even in the face of complications.

This year we received 36 cover-art entries from 12 people. The winner was Max Vandersteen, whose autumn-themed photograph, titled "Wilderness Portal," was taken in Olympic National Park, Washington. Congratulations, Max!

Once again, distribution of the anthology was held as a "come and go" event in my front yard on two Saturday afternoons—the first on May 28, 2022 and the second on August 20, 2022. Many thanks to the volunteers who helped distribute the books (and I apologize for not recording their names). As with previous open-air distributions, we were extremely fortunate to have excellent weather, and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity for face-to-face visits. For those who couldn't attend on either distribution day, anthologies were either picked up from my home at a pre-arranged time or mailed out.

We continue our longstanding affiliation with College Copy, printers of the anthology. We are fortunate to maintain an excellent relationship with Aly Janmohamed and his dedicated staff.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Lawson
Managing Editor, *Stroll of Poets' Anthology 2022*

POETS' HAVEN REPORT 2023

Introduction

The Havens that take place at the Upper Crust Café and Audrey's books are a safe and respectful place for poets to express themselves. Whether or not you're a new poet who has recently joined us or a more seasoned poet who's been with us for years, there's a deep and rich listening at the Stroll Havens. This generous listening and the people who operate the Haven, the Stroll of Poets board and members like yourself, facilitates the poetic expression of people as part of the arts and culture scene in this city.

Behind the Scenes

Our Haven Committee is a group of volunteers who work behind the scenes to support the smooth running of the Haven. Our team of Haven Coordinators this season consists of John Leppard and me (Team Leads), Kayleigh Cline, Loren Marsden, Naomi McIlwraith and Max Vandersteen. We collectively work hard to run the Havens out front and behind the scenes. It's been such a blessing to have five Haven members this season. Each coordinator takes at least one of these many tasks: Replying to membership inquiries through our strollquestions@gmail.com account, scheduling, managing our SignUp Genius platform for reader spots, filling in readers for cancellations, sending bios out to Mic Hosts, helping out at Havens with sound equipment storage, set up and microphone stand, liaising with The Upper Crust Café and Audrey's books and site management on Haven nights.

If you are a new member and working on the Haven Team appeals to you, we welcome the assistance.

Back to in person

It has been a successful pivot, this season, to move from online Haven at Home poetry readings back to in-person gatherings at the Upper Crust Café and Audrey's books. Online readings that were eight minutes due to Zoom fatigue have now increased back to ten minutes for in person readings. This brave new poetic world hasn't been without a few challenges and a fair number of readers this season had to cancel reading spots due to contracting Covid. Our Haven team filled most spots with wait list readers. It's been important to pace ourselves as we pivot back to in-person gatherings because what you see out front requires a lot of output in the back. As a team we proceed with caution and care so things are done in balance for the well-being of both our members and volunteers.

Attendance

With masks and hand sanitizer at the door, the September launch saw 36 participants who dared to enter a post-pandemic return to Havens on September 12. Attendance fluctuated starting out in the mid-

thirties then dipping to mid-twenties and up again to the forties. On December 12, fifty-nine people came out which is closer to pre-pandemic numbers. To date, we've had 14 readings to date with an average of 42 people attended each Haven night. Moving from bi-weekly spots from the Haven at Home reading series to in person readings are still at an average of two Havens a month. There are two Havens remaining and Fresh Verse readers under 25 in May. We had twenty-two first time readers this year! We also had many new members and audience guests in attendance. Thank you to everyone for coming out and we understand as well, that it's been difficult for those of you who would have liked to return but were unable to due to health concerns.

POETS' HAVEN	2022- 2023	2021-2022
HAVENS (Season Total Excluding Launch)	16*	15
ATTENDANCE	550 (39/night)	542 (36/night)
FEATURED READERS (Total Scheduled)	60	60
OPEN MIC	118 (25 new)	138 (13 new)

* Figures not complete until April 2023 and Chart records to be amended May 17, 2023.

Wrap up

Cheers to Anne Gerard Marshall, for her hard work as Haven Host. She warmly welcomes members and guests at the Haven, records attendance, and keeps track of door fees and money from the donation box and Anthology door sales. She couldn't have done it without the help of her Door hosts please, so please know you are appreciated.

A big thank you to the Mic Hosts for helping us to make the in- person Haven at Home gatherings invigorating. Appreciation also goes out to all the readers for bringing the content and passion of poets. We're much obliged to Ellen Kartz, who works behind the scenes as our administration assistant at the WGA and puts our Haven ads among others in the weekly newsletter. Credit to Max Vandersteen and Kayleigh Cline who worked to promote Havens on our Facebook and Twitter accounts and Naomi McIlwraith for sending out Reader, Mic Host and Door notifications.

Big Thanks to our sponsors; the Edmonton Arts Council, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Council, Writer's Guild of Alberta and the City of Edmonton. Thank you to everyone who pitched in with extra donations to the Stroll this year.

We hope to see you out at the next few Havens at the Upper Crust and Audrey's and again for the Blinks.

Respectfully submitted by Janis Dow,
On behalf of Haven Team Leads

HAVEN HOST'S REPORT

It is an absolute delight to be meeting in person again and welcoming new poets into our community. It is so good to hear new and well-known voices at the mic.

I am grateful to all the door hosts who help me to meet and greet. I really do need you by my side. Thank you each and every one.

We don't forget the regular non-poets who come to hear us. A poet needs an audience and you are an important part of ours. We appreciate your support.

All of you- please keep coming. Bring a two-minute poem; bring five bucks; bring friends.

I am honored to have completed my fourteenth year on the Board, most of them at the door; looking forward to year fifteen.

Submitted by: Anne Gerard Marshall