

Poets come to the valley

By Sarah Vance

Poetry Please is getting people writing in the Valley.

The project has cumulated with the release of a book, an interactive website, and outdoor poetry installations, throughout the region. Nine local sponsors stepped up to support this partnership between Madawaska Valley and the South of 60 Visitor's Centre, which also operates as an art gallery.

For over a year, local poets including Marcia MacDonald, Marta Lewandowski and Andy Trull, artistic director of the Ottawa Valley Creative Arts Open Studio have spearheaded the project.

"It was encouraging to work with Andy, who would bring an old fashioned typewriter to the poetry pop-ups that were hosted around the area," said Lewandowski, a poet who is also a certified reflexologist and natural health practitioner near Wilno. "Children loved working with a typewriter. Many had never seen one before and they delighted in the chance to use it."

Strategies such as creative games and one-line prompts were used by poets who popped up at events, including the Heritage Hockey Cup in Barry's Bay and the Opeongo Nordic Ski Club, as well as local library and South of 60 workshops.

"It was very exciting to get people thinking of the poetry of a hockey game, and to understand, how any activity can be linked to the arts and expressed through it," added Lewandowski. "We have been catching moments in time, thoughts and feelings, as they emerge."

Danielle Paul, a former employee of the South of 60, created the cover illustration for the book, which accompanies all of the promotional activities; the website and bookmarks being handed-out around the township.

"I designed the illustration as a lemonade stand to invoke the excitement that a children's lemonade stand brings, but I substituted a poet in the stand," said Paul. "We wanted a fresh image that would encourage people to participate and share their ideas -- we wanted to show that it was a pop-up format, much like a fresh lemonade stand on a hot summer day."

The website is worth a look, at www.poetryplease.ca and includes an interactive map of the locations where outdoor aluminum signs, have now been installed outside local businesses.

By clicking on map pin-points, such as Madawaska Kanu Centre, Sigrid Naturals, and Omàmiwininì Pimàdjowin, the Algonquin Cultural Centre in Pikwàkanagàn, Golden Lake, readers can view the poems online.

"We are truly grateful for the many signs already installed at local businesses," said Anya Gansterer, from South of 60. "We are inviting new businesses from anywhere in the province to see the value of our signs and to join in sponsoring this project."

Sponsors who give \$250 will receive a poem sign of their choosing, for outdoor or indoor installation, along with the support of the South of 60 team, who are available to help with the installation.

Town councillor Carl Bromwich described the project as a lot of fun, suggesting that people are now seeing poetry in a more vital and living way,

"I think when folks arrive here they have greater peace and quiet -- a natural beauty and about as close as one can get with the wildness," said Bromwich. "This is what inspires folks to dream, visualize and create feeling."

In the coming weeks Trull is set to install an outdoor poem sculpture, which incorporates naturalized play themes. Visitors are

invited to come to the South of 60 to check it out.