

WHEREAS, the Academy of American Poets established the month of April as National Poetry Month in 1996 to seek to highlight the extraordinary legacy and ongoing achievement of American poets, to introduce American to the pleasures and benefits of reading poetry, to bring poets and poetry to the public in immediate and innovative ways, and to make poetry an important part of our children's education; and

WHEREAS, poetry, as an essential part of the arts and humanities, affects every aspect of life in America today, including education, the economy, and community pride and development; and

WHEREAS, in 1979, the Alexandria City Council voted Jean Elliott, a 78 year old Alexandria resident, as the City's first and only Poet Laureate of record, and with her passing in 1999, the City has not had a Poet Laureate; and

WHEREAS, in May 2006, City Council re-established an Alexandria Poet Laureate program as a readily identifiable low to no-cost means of Alexandria to confirm publicly the value of literary art, and enhance the quality of life in Alexandria; and

WHEREAS, a protocol and a "call for nominations" to select the Alexandria Poet Laureate was created by a steering committee consisting of citizens: Colette Wachtel, Alexandria Commission for the Arts, Jon C. Burton, Northern Virginia Community College, M. Magnus, Poet, and City staff; and

WHEREAS, a panel of judges, chaired by Jack Sullivan, included Wendi Kaplan, Citizen at Large; Adam Good, Published Poet, Taylor Dohmen, Elementary School Poet Laureate, Alexandria City Public Schools, Anne Paul, Alexandria City Public Library Board, Donna Fowler, Alexandria Commission for the Arts, Keith Donaldson, Alexandria Arts Forum, Dianne Daily, Northern Virginia Community College, Ruth Brannigan, Mount Vernon Community School, and Susan Maney Lovett, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce reviewed 18 nomination packets and interviewed five finalists; and

WHEREAS, the panel of judges selected Mary McElveen as the best candidate for the position of Poet Laureate for the City of Alexandria because Ms. McElveen has a passion for the music of words, and believes that poetry should be "set loose" in the everyday world for the pleasure of the public; and

WHEREAS, the Alexandria City Council, on February 15, appointed Mary McElveen as the City's Poet Laureate and requested during National Poetry Month, that Mary McElveen be introduced to the community as the City of Alexandria's Poet Laureate; and

WHEREAS, the Alexandria Poet Laureate will serve as an official resource available to commemorate for present enjoyment, as well as posterity, the City's history and historic events, installations, groundbreaking and public dedications, as well as many of the City's annual celebrations, parades and cultural events; and will also work to bring poetic art to the City's libraries and schools and serve as a bridge to the City's diverse community that might not otherwise be exposed to it, and in difficult times, a Poet Laureate will offer appropriate words of reflection, inspiration and healing;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM D. EUILLE, Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and on behalf of the Alexandria City Council, do hereby proclaim Mary McElveen, as the City of Alexandria's Poet Laureate and the month of April as:

"NATIONAL POETRY MONTH"

in the City of Alexandria and formally invite and call upon Alexandria citizens to celebrate poetry by reading, memorizing or writing a poem to promote poetry and the literary arts in our City and to encourage the greater participation of children, especially in educational programs and activities in the literary arts and make poetry and the literary arts a part of the fabric of life in our City.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Alexandria to be affixed this 10th day of April 2007.

WILLIAM D. EUILLE **MAYOR**
On behalf of the City Council
of Alexandria, Virginia

ATTEST:

Jacqueline M. Henderson, CMC City Clerk

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4-10-07

City of Songs

History wrote refrains here--
The rattle of carts, the chime of churchbells,
The muffled drum of famed footsteps
Reverberating on our cobbled streets;
Old rhymes writ with images
Glimpsed through a rippled mirror--
Songs of remembrance.

Today is an unwritten poem
Crackling in the nighttime air.
Rhythms ride the streets on Harleys
Staccato beat on 'high',
And couplets crowd the corners
With their conversations
In raucous bar-time voices.

Monuments punctuate the traffic
That flows in measured time,
Crawling in iambic meter
(Stop, start. Stop, start.)
Toward the beltway's perpetual rondo
That repeats, repeats, repeats
Each day and night.

But the river remembers a slower song
Flowing like an eecummings poem
Unhindered and peaceful
Past lordly houses stacked
Like syllables in haiku formation,
Shouldering for space along its banks.

We are tomorrow's unwritten poems:
Homeless and builder,
Tourist and truck driver,
Lawyer and artist-- all of us
Speaking our souls to cellphones
And singing to the empty air.

Who listens for our voices?
Who speaks the soul of the city?
Who is history's troubadour, the future's oracle?
Alexandria is an unwritten poem:
Pick up your pen.
It's our turn now.

-Mary McElveen-
March 25, 2007