


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 31, 2010
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 
SUBJECT: APPOINTMENT OF THE ALEXANDRIA POET LAUREATE

ISSUE: Appointment of the Alexandria Poet Laureate.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Appoint Amy Young as the new Poet Laureate for the City of Alexandria, based on the recommendation of the selection committee (Attachment 1);
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute a letter of agreement with Amy Young to serve as Alexandria Poet Laureate from April 14, 2010, through April 14, 2013;
- (3) Express appreciation to the current Poet Laureate, Mary McElveen, for her three years of service to the City and her contributions in developing a poetry program for the City; and
- (4) Thanks the members of the Alexandria Poet Laureate selection committee and request that they remain in place as an advisory body for the Alexandria Poet Laureate (Attachment 2).

BACKGROUND: In 2004, then Councilman Ludwig Gaines proposed the designation of a Poet Laureate for the City of Alexandria. In response, a steering committee of citizens and City staff was established to develop a protocol for selecting a Poet Laureate. On April 25, 2006, City Council received the proposal submitted by the steering committee. Following a public hearing on May 20, 2006, City Council unanimously approved the establishment of the Poet Laureate program.

A Call for Nominations for an Alexandria Poet Laureate was issued and a selection committee charged with choosing the Poet Laureate was formed. The selection committee interviewed five candidates and the committee unanimously selected Mary McElveen as Poet Laureate. The Alexandria Commission for the Arts endorsed the committee's choice and recommended the appointment to City Council. On April 10, 2007, to coincide with National Poetry Month, the City Council proclaimed Mary McElveen as the City's second Poet Laureate. City records show

that, in 1979, the Alexandria City Council appointed Jean Elliott, a 78-year-old Alexandria resident, as the City's "Poet in Residence" and placed a plaque on her South Fairfax Street home. Prior to Ms. McElveen's appointment, Ms. Elliott was the first and only Poet Laureate of record for the City of Alexandria. She died in 1999.

The role of the City's Poet Laureate is to promote appreciation of poetry as an art form; to encourage creative writing and reading of all forms of literature; and to promote literacy through poetry. Since her appointment three years ago, Ms. McElveen has created and presented poems for official City ceremonies, including the Re-dedication of Freedmen's Cemetery, 2007; the annual USA/Alexandria Birthday Celebrations in 2007, 2008 and 2009; Rededication of the new T. C. Williams High School, 2007; the Alex Arts Awards 2007 and 2008; the Alexandria Commission on Women's Salute to Women Awards Dinner 2009; and the Dedication of the Charles Houston Recreation Center.

Ms. McElveen also conducted outreach activities in Alexandria schools, including presenting and conducting poetry workshops with Hammond Middle School; participated as a judge for the Mt. Vernon Community School's Poetry Slam; and served as a judge and speaker for the PTA Reflection contest and the selection of the Alexandria City Public School Poet Laureate. She has also conducted poetry readings at Woodbine Nursing Home; Alexandria City Public Libraries Authors Night; Yockadot Poetics Festival; and Del Ray Artisans. Ms. McElveen also represented the City at the German Embassy's poetry program; read with Samuel Hazo, a former Poet Laureate of Pennsylvania and Carolyn Foronda, Virginia's Poet Laureate; and appeared at the National Convention of the League of American Penwomen in Alexandria, VA. On April 30, 2009, Ms. McElveen brought national "Poem in Your Pocket Day" to Alexandria. This poetry-filled day included workshops throughout Alexandria City Public Schools, poetry readings in coffee shops and Market Square, and a culminating poetry evening at the Athenaeum. Ms. McElveen's three-year term as the City Poet Laureate concludes in March, 2010.

The Poet Laureate term is three years. Ms. McElveen chose not to reapply for this position because of her concerns that she may not be able to serve a new full three year term.

DISCUSSION: To plan for the selection of Ms. McElveen's successor as Poet Laureate, the Alexandria Commission for the Arts and Office of the Arts issued a Call for Nominations in fall 2009. A total of six nominations were received and reviewed by the selection committee.

The City selected three finalists and interviewed them on March 15, 2010. Each finalist read two poems of their choosing, one for public presentation to children and one to adults. The finalists shared their ideas for carrying out the role of Alexandria's Poet Laureate, talked about their ability to write poems for specific City events, and discussed the time commitment involved in fulfilling Poet Laureate responsibilities. After the interviews, the committee recommended that Amy Young be the City's next Poet Laureate.

Amy Young is a resident of Alexandria and has read, studied and written poetry since she was a child in Washington, D.C. For the last 11 years, she has led the Writer's Lab for 11 and 12 year-olds with learning disabilities at the Lab School of Washington. She has also taught writing workshops at night for learning disabled adults. Ms. Young has studied poetry in George Mason University's Master of Fine Arts program and has been trained to lead intensive writing workshops for people from all walks of life.

Poet Lore, a prominent journal, has recently published Ms. Young's work, and a visual artist in St. Louis is producing and selling collage paintings inspired by her poems. The 21st Century Consort, a leading classical music ensemble, has chosen *Characters*, a series of Ms. Young's poems along with new music and visual images, to be the centerpiece of a special concert at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in May 2010.

The selection committee also chose Dan Logan as an alternate, should Ms. Young be unable to serve the full three-year term. In addition, the committee recommends that it remain in place as an advisory body to the Poet Laureate. The advisory body will work with the Office of the Arts staff to offer guidance to the Alexandria Poet Laureate.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Poet Laureate will receive an annual honorarium of \$500. These funds are identified in the Office of the Arts budget. Any additional funds needed for the Poet Laureate program will be raised through private sources.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1. Letter from Donna Fowler dated March 23, 2010
- Attachment 2. Poet Laureate Selection Committee
- Attachment 3. Resumé of Amy Young

STAFF:

James Spengler, Director, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Alisa J. Carrel, Director, Office of the Arts, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Cheryl Anne Colton, Acting Director, Durant Community Arts Center and Cultural Arts Administrator, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

March 23, 2010

The Honorable William D. Euille
City Hall, 301 King
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mayor Euille:

On behalf of the selection committee for Alexandria's Poet Laureate, I write to tell you that we have chosen Amy Young as our nominee, to serve a three-year term beginning April 15, 2010 and ending April 15, 2013. The committee asks that Amy be appointed officially to this position.

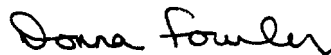
Ms. Young is a resident of Alexandria and teaches writing to young teens with learning disabilities at the Lab School of Washington. She has also taught writing to adults. Her poetry is both whimsical and serious, varied in form and content, and accessible. She hopes to bring her experience with poetry to a wide range of audiences in Alexandria, including individuals with disabilities and those whose first language is not English. Her poetry has been published in *Poet Lore*, a poetry journal, and will be the basis for a concert by the 21st Century Consort, a classical music ensemble, at the Smithsonian this spring.

We were fortunate in having a selection committee that brought a variety of thoughtful perspectives to their task. The committee consisted of Anne Paul, Jennifer Lane, David Martin, Susan Maney Lovett, David Martin, Sydney-Chanele Dawkins, Ross Simons, Susan Maney Lovett, Elizabeth Simons, Barry Amis, Marlene Cooper Vasilic, Shanna Gerlach (Alexandria's elementary school poet laureate) and myself as chair. We felt that Amy Young's enthusiasm, talent, and experience would make her an excellent Poet Laureate for our city.

The selection committee recommends further that Dan Logan be our alternate nominee for Poet Laureate, should Amy Young be unable to serve the three-year term. We also recommend that the selection committee remain in place as an advisory body for the Poet Laureate, to be available to her to discuss ideas, provide feedback, and stay informed of her activities. We will work with staff of the Office of the Arts to support the work of our Poet Laureate.

It has been a privilege to work with my fellow selection committee members, and I commend them for their dedication to this effort and thank them for their time, effort, and interest. Thanks to you and City Council for your support of the Poet Laureate program and the arts community in Alexandria.

Yours truly,



Donna Fowler
Chair, Poet Laureate Selection Committee and Vice Chair, Alexandria Commission for the Arts

Cc: Members, City Council
Members, Poet Laureate Selection Committee
Members, Alexandria Commission for the Arts
James Spengler, Director, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Alexandria Poet Laureate Selection Panel:

Donna Fowler
Member, Alexandria Commission for the Arts

Barry D. Amis
Member, Virginia Poet Society

Sydney-Chanele Dawkins
Member, Alexandria Commission for the Arts

Shanna Gerlach
Alexandria's Elementary School Poet Laureate (Richard & Theresa Gerlach, parents)

Susan Maney Lovett
Writer, The Right Word, LLC

David Martin
Member, Alexandria Commission for the Arts

Anne Paul
Member, Alexandria City Public Library Board

Elizabeth Simons
English Language Arts Curriculum Specialist, Alexandria City Public Schools

Ross Simons
Member, Alexandria Commission for the Arts

Marlene Cooper Vasilic
Director of Outreach and Special Events, Center for American Progress

City of Alexandria Staff:

Cheryl Anne Colton
Acting Director of the Durant Center and Cultural Arts Administrator, Office of the Arts,
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Jennifer M. Lane
Education Coordinator, The Lyceum, Office of Historic Alexandria

Amy A. Young ~ 2601 Dewitt Ave. Alexandria, VA 22301
703 683-0451 aayoung@comcast.net

TEACHING & EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

- * **Writers Lab Instructor, The Lab School of Washington, Washington DC. 1999-present.** Use technology, literature and art to increase confidence and writing proficiency in 4th-6th grade LD students.
- * **Workshop Leader. The Lab School of Washington. 2008 & 2009 "Encouraging Imaginative Writing in Every Child"** Introduced teachers to techniques and approaches aimed at increasing confidence and reducing stress in the writing classroom.
- * **Night School Instructor The Lab School of Washington 2007 and 2008.** Led 6-10 week writing workshops for adults with learning disabilities.
- * **Creative Writing Instructor. Summer Festival of the Arts, Bar Harbor, ME 2003** Taught creative writing and poetry to 5th-8th graders.
- * **MarcoPolo Teacher Development Workshop Leader. The Lab School of Washington. 2002.** Familiarized teachers with **Marcopolo** .
- * **Title I Reading Paraprofessional, Connors-Emerson School, Bar Harbor ME. 1996-98.** Worked with Reading Recovery/Title I instructors to assess K-3 students and conduct reading groups for at-risk students.
- * **Private Tutor. Shepherdstown WV, 1994-95 and Washington DC, 1988-89.** Tutored LD elementary school children. All subjects.
- * **Resource Room LD Teacher. Western Heights Middle School, Hagerstown MD. 1990-91.** Taught LD /ED 6th-8th graders.
- * **Graduate Assistant. The American University, School of Education, Washington DC, 1988-1989.** Assistant to Sally Smith, Professor of Learning Disabilities.
- * **Tutor Trainee/Tutor. Lab School of Washington, Washington DC. 1987-89.** Daily volunteer in early primary LD classroom. Attended regular seminars on teaching LD students. Tutored children and adults.
- * **English Teacher and Interpreter. Wilhelm Pieck University, Rostock, East Germany. 1986-1987.** Taught English to adult professionals and translated academic documents during graduate study/work program.

COURSES & WORKSHOPS ATTENDED

- * **Bernadette Glaze Mulholland Language and Learning Conference. George Mason University 2009**
- * **Kennedy Center Professional Development Workshops 2008-2009: It All Starts With A Story: Using Media to Teach Literacy; Documenting the Power of Learning Through the Arts; Developing Reading Comprehension Skills Through Bookmaking and Book Arts**
- * **Associated Writing Programs Conference. Augusta, GA 2007**
- * **Amherst Writers and Artists Leadership Training. Litchfield, CT 2005**
- * **Amherst Writers and Artists Writing Workshop. Amherst, MA 2005**
- * **The Lab School of Washington Scientific Conferences 2003-2009**
- * **Universal Design: Effective Instructional Practices for Students with Learning Differences.** Commonwealth Academy. 2003
- * **Marco Polo Teacher Trainer In-Service.** Rock Creek International School. 2002.
- * **Executive Functioning: The Brain's Command and Control System.** Lab School of Washington. 2002
- * **Presenting & Evaluating New & Old Interventions for Children & Adults with LD and/or ADD.** Lab School of Washington Conference. NIH. 1999.
- * **Developing A Balanced Reading Program for K-12 Students.** University of Maine. 1997.
- * **Observing Young Learners to Inform Instruction.** University of Maine. 1997-1998.

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EDUCATION

- * Completed coursework toward MFA in Poetry at **George Mason University**
- * Masters of Special Education: Learning Disabilities. **The American University**, Washington DC. 1990. Honors. Extensive practical training at The Lab School of Washington,
- * Bachelor of Arts. **Brown University**, Providence RI. 1984. German. **Pembroke Prize** "For an Outstanding Thesis in the Area of Women's Studies".

OTHER

- * Poems to be set to music and performed by **21st Century Consort** at **Smithsonian American Art Museum** May 8th 2010
- * Poem published in *Poet Lore* 2008
- * Assistant Children's Librarian & Substitute. Shepherdstown Public Library, Shepherdstown WV, 1995.
- * Assistant Manager. Four Seasons Books, Shepherdstown WV. 1992-1995.
- * Founder of **Friends of Shepherdstown Library**
- * Co-Editor and Co-Creator of *In Good Company* poetry page in Shepherdstown Chronicle.
- * Manager. Bartleby's Books, Bethesda MD. 1987-1988.
- * Manager. Travel Books Unlimited, Bethesda MD. 1984-1986.

PERSONAL

Born June 21, 1962. Three children, Benjamin (19)at Ithaca College (TC Williams '08), Liam (16), junior at TC Williams and Eliza (12), 7th grader at GW Middle School.