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County to Create Poet Laureate

Post to Raise Awareness of the Power of Poetry and the Spoken Word

SAN JOSE, CALIF.—Today, the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors voted to establish a Santa Clara County Poet Laureate.

The post of Poet has a long tradition in England. A Californian, Kay Ryan, was named U. S. Poet Laureate earlier this year. Last week, California's governor named Carol Muske-Dukes, a University of Southern California professor as California's Poet Laureate.

"I believe that the Poet Laureate will be a focal point for the expression of Santa Clara County's many cultures through the literary arts," said Supervisor Liz Kniss, District 5, who along with Supervisor Blanca Alvarado introduced the resolution.

Kniss went on to say that a County Poet Laureate will raise awareness of the power of poetry and the spoken word, celebrate the spirit of the people and the special qualities of Santa Clara County, and create, over time, a body of work that commemorates the rich and varied culture of Santa Clara County.

"This action is long overdue," said Supervisor Blanca Alvarado, District 2, citing Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hiawatha's Departure* as her favorite poem. "Poetry can inspire us to be our best selves and there are times when all of us can benefit from such inspiration."

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County to Create Poet Laureate – page 2 of 2

Supervisor Don Gage, District 1 said that Edna St. Vincent's Millay's *First Fig* is his favorite poem. He recited the poem for the audience:

“My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light.”

The selected Poet Laureate will be expected to undertake a project to make poetry more available and accessible to people in their everyday lives. The Poet Laureate will act as a resource for poetry and literary activities to the Santa Clara County Library, represent the County of Santa Clara through outreach related to poetry, presentation of appropriate works at the Annual State of the County ceremony and other selected County sponsored events, as well as at activities to celebrate Poetry Month.

“The Board’s action today is the first step,” said Acting County Executive Gary Graves. “We will work closely with the Arts Council Silicon Valley to outline a selection process and recruit potential candidates.”

To be eligible for nomination, a candidate must be a member of the local community who has lived in the County for five years; demonstrated a commitment to reading and writing poetry and embracing the opportunity to engage in civic discourse; and be willing to commit to serving a two-year term in the honorary post.

“The creation of the new Santa Clara County Poet Laureate position reflects the rich cultural and artistic expression of our region,” said Bruce Davis, Executive Director of the Arts Council Silicon Valley. “I look forward to his/her selection and inspirational educational activities throughout the County.”

A number of California Counties and cities have established the position of Poet Laureate, including San Francisco, Marin, and Napa, Sonoma, and Alameda Counties in the Bay area.

Next Steps

The County of Santa Clara and the Arts Council Silicon Valley will issue a *Call for Nominations* during the first week of January. Information will be posted on the websites of both organizations in January: www.sccgov.org and www.artscouncil.org.