

**The Writers Guild of Alberta:
The First Thirty Years**

**Compiled and Written by
Bob Stallworthy
for the Writers Guild of Alberta
2010**

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Past Presidents: Rudy Wiebe, George Melnyk, Vivian Hansen, Dymphny Dronyk, Myrna Kostash, Suzette Mayr, Alice Major, Blaine Newton

Former Executive Directors: Liz Grieve, Lyle Weis

Former Acting Executive Director: Kerry Mulholland

Current Executive Director: Carol Holmes

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Don Meredith for turning over the files he kept stored in his "safe keeping place"

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Presidents of the Guild

Rudy Wiebe	1980 - 1981	Candas Jane Dorsey	1993 - 1994
Ted Blodgett	1981 - 1983	Alice Major	1994 - 1995
Joan Clark	1983 - 1984	Darlene Quaife	1995 - 1996
Chris Wiseman	1984 - 1985	Fred Stenson	1996 - 1997
Gloria Swai	1985 - 1986	Tololwa Mollel	1997 - 1998
Monty Reid	1986 - 1987	Scott Morrison	1998 - 1999
Martyn Godfrey	1987 - 1988	Anne Burke	1999 - 2000
Aritha van Herk	1988 - 1989	Geo Takach	2000 - 2001
Myrna Kostash	1989 - 1990	Suzette Mayr	2001 - 2002
Jon Whyte	1990 - 1991	Christina Grant	2002 - 2003
Reg Silvester	1991 - 1992	Vivian Hansen	2003 - 2004
George Melnyk	1992 - 1993	Anne Burke	2004 - 2004
Vern Thiessen	2004 - 2006	Patricia MacQuarrie	2010 - 2011
Lori Lavallee	2006 - 2007		
Dymphny Dronyk	2007 - 2008		
Blaine Newton	2008 - 2009		
Audrey Seehagen	2009 - 2010		

Executive Directors

Mary Walters	Norma Lock	Liz Grieve
Lyle Weis	Diane Walton (Interim)	Kerry Mulholland (Acting)
Miki Andrejevic	Christina Grant (Interim)	Carol Holmes

Writers Guild of Alberta Liaisons

The WGA maintains arm's length relationships with a number of arts organizations for mutual benefit. These organizations include but are not limited to:

Access Copyright	Get Publishing Communications Society
Alberta Foundation for the Arts	Glenbow Museum
Alberta Playwrights Network	Library Association of Alberta
Alexandra Writers' Centre Society	LitFest
Book Publishers Association of Alberta	Calgary Distinguished Writers Program
Calgary Arts Development	Parkland Regional Library
Calgary International Spoken Word Festival	PEN Canada
Canadian Authors Association	Poets' Ink
Canadian Literature Centre	Saskatchewan Writers Guild
Creative Writing Research Group (University of Calgary)	Canadian Literature Centre (University of Alberta)
Editors' Association of Canada	Stroll of Poets
Edmonton Arts Council	The Writers' Union of Canada
Edmonton Poetry Festival	Wordfest
Edmonton Public Library	Writers Beyond Borders
Young Alberta Book Society	

Writers Guild of Alberta: The First Thirty Years

The Beginning

The Writers Guild of Alberta was formed by 179 writers from across the province meeting in a classroom at SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology) in Calgary October 18 and 19, 1980. The organization obtained its incorporation June 1, 1981.

The WGA grew out of the anger of provincial writers at the way the Literary Arts Branch, within the newly created Department of Culture, under its first Director, John Patrick Gillese, was being run. As Fred Stenson says in his article, "The Writer's Life", Alberta Views, March/April 2001, " John Patrick Gillese, a professional writer of magazine fiction and a stalwart of the Canadian Author's Association, ran the department's literary arts branch in a populist, grassroots way. He favoured contests and workshops as a means of helping writers. The novel competition, in particular, was of great help to many - including me. It's purpose was to discover Alberta novelists; among others, it found Jan Truss and the perennial best-seller Pauline Gedge."

Stenson continues, " The literary arts branch had a rah-rah attitude that took financial success as the sole barometer of literary success. It focused on the beginning writer, plying the always-popular nostrum that 'you too can be a bestseller, given sufficient effort and dedication'. The branch's attitude toward university writing courses, literary quarterlies, writers/academics, and all those writers whose progress in literature did not include payola verged on hostile."

The result of the growing anger was a symposium of 35 writers, meeting with then Minister of Culture, Mary Le Messurier in April of 1980. One of the concerns expressed was the way in which the Department was dispersing its budget. Support for the writers of the province appeared to be in decline. That group elected a Committee of Nine to

make precise proposals to the Minister concerning government support for writing. The committee members were: Edna Alford, Sharon Batt, Sandra Jones, Myrna Kostash, Allan Shute, Stephen Scobie, Aritha van Herk, Rudy Wiebe and Jon Whyte. That Committee of Nine presented an eleven page report to the Minister on May 7, 1980, with proposals regarding the structure of funding for writers in the province. In a July 12, 1980 article entitled, "Federation of Alberta Writers to Meet in Calgary", for the Calgary Herald, Brian Brennan states that the proposals made to the Minister were the following: "that the Literary Arts Branch receive a budget increase of \$97, 500 for that current fiscal year; that all major grants to writers, magazines and publishers be awarded through a jury system; that grants under \$1000.00 remain at the discretion of the Literary Arts Branch; that grants be established on a Senior, Junior and Novice levels; that the Literary Arts branch establish a writers' catalogue similar to that used to promote the talents of Alberta performers; that the writers-in-schools program be broadened and more widely publicized; that a publishing development program be created to provide grants, loan guarantees and interest subsidies to Alberta publishers. In the same article, Brennan notes the "Federation's" interim executive members were: Rudy Wiebe (Chairman), Joan Clark, Christopher Wiseman, Jan Truss, and Reg Silvester.

Further in Brennan's article, the aims of the newly formed "Federation" were: "to lobby for improvements in provincial funding and programs, to encourage growth of publishing in Alberta, to deal with the problems of writers and to create a greater public awareness of their work, and to create a sense of community among writers who feel isolated in smaller towns and rural areas."

There was a heated discussion at the inaugural meeting in October regarding whether the organization was to be for professionals only (those with at least one book published) or open to all writers resident in Alberta. Aritha van Herk, who initially agreed with the restricted membership, was persuaded against it and spearheaded the latter argument which won the day. The first elected Board was made up of Rudy Wiebe, President; Chris Wiseman, Vice-President; Merna Summers, Secretary;

Joan Clark; Jan Truss; William Latta and E.D. Blodgett. The constitution, closely modeled on that of the Saskatchewan Writers Guild, was developed by Christopher Wiseman. Robert Kroetsch wrote the Preamble to the constitution. Membership that first year was 92. Today it is 1000, made up of writers at every stage of their writing career, from the beginner to Governor General Award winners, from the professional to the hobbyist.

In his president's address at that first Annual General Meeting (fall 1981), Rudy Wiebe said, "The guild is necessary to help create a sense of writer community. When writers write, they are always individualistic and always alone. That is as it should be, but they also need a sense of belonging... We need to belong to a guild where we can agree and disagree with each other on these matters, so that we can build a sense of writers' tribe, not divisiveness, in this province.

In that first year, the Department of Culture gave the fledgling organization \$10,000 as an operating. Support for the Guild has steadily grown over the years. Much of the credit for the Department's growing support of the Guild goes to one culture worker, Ken McVey. McVey went on to see that the Department continued to support the Guild until his death in 1987.

Some interesting comparisons with the early Guild. The membership fee established at the time of the first meeting was \$25.00. The details for the 1982 Annual General Meeting appeared in the August Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 4. The meeting was held in Calgary at the Glenbow Museum. Registration for three days was \$20.00. The banquet was an additional \$15.00. The hotels recommended for their proximity to the Glenbow were the Hotel York (\$35.00 per night) and the Westward, now the Hotel Arts, (\$33.00 per night). The organizers made the following suggestion, "If this still sounds like too much, we would recommend crashing at a friend's or reintroducing yourself to a long lost relative." The fee in 1987 was \$35.00 for regular membership and \$15.00 for seniors and students. Fees in 2010 are \$60.00 and \$30.00 respectively.

The establishment of the distinctive Guild logo which is still used today was unveiled on the header of the April 1983 Newsletter. This logo has been reproduced as gold-coloured lapel pins, on buttons with the slogan "Book Lovers Never Go To Bed Alone", on T-shirts, on sweatshirts, and on plastic "license plates". They were all sold as part of the fund raising efforts of the Guild.

In the June 1984 Newsletter it is reported that there had been a discussion of obtaining a charity number at the 1984 AGM. It seems there was the concern that getting a charity number might mean having to rewrite the complete constitution of the organization. Faye Reinberg Holt was investigating the possibility of setting up an arm's length branch of the WGA. It was hoped that the Literary Arts Foundation (now AFA) would make this move unnecessary. Fred Stenson moved and Charles Mandel seconded a motion to have the Guild set up a Writers Guild Foundation, if necessary, to apply for a charity number that would allow tax deductible donations.

The Annual General Meeting of 1986 saw the Guild formalize some of its structure through a series of motions:

- to allow the VP to assume the Presidency of the Guild. If the VP does not assume the President position, then the President is to be elected at the AGM;
- that the Past President will be honorary and voluntary without voting rights;
- the Board of Directors shall consist of members in good standing elected by the membership.

Recent practice has allowed the Past President to vote at executive meetings.

The Guild has shown that it is an organization that is changing and growing as its membership grows and changes. Nowhere has it demonstrated those changes more than in creating and setting out for its membership, the vision statement, mission statement, guiding beliefs and operating principals. The revision and honing of these crucial elements culminated in the following being passed by the Executive in March 2010:

WGA Vision Statement

An Alberta where past, present, and future contributions of writers are supported, acknowledged and valued.

WGA Mission Statement

At the AGM of 1997 the Guild's mission statement was restated. It read: "The Writers Guild of Alberta is an organization of writers which exists to support, encourage and promote writers and writing; to safeguard the freedom to write and read; and to advocate for the well-being of writers."

The Mission Statement has been reworked since 1997 and the statement reads: "The Writers Guild of Alberta's mission is to inspire, connect, support, encourage and promote writers and writing, to safeguard the freedom to write and to read, and to advocate for the well-being of writers."

WGA Values and Guiding Beliefs

The WGA believes that:

- The literary arts are essential to the well-being of all individuals, communities and the economy of Alberta;
- Working in partnership with the other organizations contributes to the quality of life in Alberta;
- Networking and collaboration are beneficial to innovation and the creative process;
- A free and safe environment is essential for writers to pursue their craft;
- Knowledge and ongoing development are fundamental to creative growth.

WGA Operating Principles

The WGA's operating principals are derived from its mission, values and guiding beliefs, and include the following:

- Meet the identified needs of the WGA's membership and allied stakeholders;

Reinforce the vital importance of local, community-driven systems for literary arts services;

- Effectively manage staff, volunteer, and financial resources.
- Recognize and acknowledge volunteers, donors and sponsors;
- Pursue open and interactive communications and information networking with its membership and allied stakeholders;
- Establish positive, respectful relations with provincial government (elected officials, departments and agencies), other provincial organizations, institutions, enterprises, and municipalities;
- Be forward-thinking and flexible and undertake strategic planning and management;
- Embrace and utilize technology;
- Operate with fiscal responsibility, pursue financial sustainability;
- Develop realistic expectations and undertake regular performance management reviews.

Such operating principles will guide the actions of the WGA Board of Directors and WGA staff particularly with respect to the internal management and operations of the WGA.

Prior to 2004, the WGA Board would have been considered a "working Board". That is, often the board members were directly involved in with issues around any given program or concern of the Guilds. In the early days the Board members were each assigned an area of the Guild and were expected to be a liaison between the Board and a specific volunteer committee. Early in his term as president, Vern Theissen encouraged the changes in the By-Laws that would firmly establish the WGA Board as a policy Board and bring the by-laws in line with other organizations and to reflect the reality of the WGA as it is today.

Apparently, at the 2005 AGM it was ratified that Board members could vote electronically. By the time of the 2006 AGM this had not been implemented. At the 2006

meeting there was an addition to possibility for the use of electronic voting. "Members may have the option of participating electronically in General Meetings, including electing members to the Board of Directors or considering future amendments to the Guild's Bylaws.

At the 2006 AGM the By-Law regarding nominations to the Board of Directors was changed to read, " Written nominations for the Board of Directors may be made in advance of the AGM, signed by the candidate and two members of the Guild who are in good standing. Additional nominations and seconding motions may be put forth at the AGM by Guild members who are in good standing with the consent of the nominee.

In the early years, office staff were few and the Guild was an organization that functioned largely through its volunteers. In 1980 the organization asked The Writers Union of Canada for assistance in setting up a Grievance Committee. The Committee was to operate in a similar fashion to that of the Writers Union. Committee members were: Tim Christiansen, Fred Stenson, Aritha van Herk, Myrna Kostash, Joan Clark. In a November 8, 1980 letter, Joan Hynd-Smith of the Writers Union makes suggestions regarding how the newly formed Committee might function. Among them were the following:

- "The writer who has a complaint against a publisher must approach you with all the data concerning his grievance";
- "Once the complete facts about the grievance are in your hands, your committee should meet to decide whether the writer has a valid case";
- "Once having decided that your writer has been callously mistreated, the Committee should decide on the best method for resolving the dispute";
- "Incidentally, the first letter from the writer [to the publisher] should never invoke the Grievance Committee or make threatening suggestions";
- "It is always best to resolve the dispute amicably."

The Annual General Meeting reports for 1992 indicate that the Guild had a Professional Standards Committee. The Committee submitted a report to the Meeting in which it put forth the argument that many of the members of the organization were professional

writers and deserved to be treated accordingly. In particular, it was recommended that members be paid for presenting workshops and readings. The recommendation was that the writer be paid \$300 for a 4 hour workshop, or half that for a 2 hour workshop. The member should be paid for a reading based on the suggested rate which worked out to be \$75 per hour. Other expenses were to be negotiated with the organization or institution hiring the writer.

Among the other committees, volunteers were organized into the Retreats Committee (responsible for organizing retreats); the Finance Committee (responsible for supporting the Treasurer); the AGM Committee (an ad hoc committee responsible for organizing the yearly AGM and Gala); the Newsletter Committee (responsible for supporting the Newsletter editor); the Book Awards Committee (responsible for recruiting sponsors and helping office staff coordinate the Book Awards). According to the 2005 Annual Report other committees that have existed from time to time and for a specific purpose or for the general functioning of the Guild include: Education/Workshop/Outreach, Promotions and Marketing, Web site, Communications, Displays, Membership, Political Affairs/Advocacy, Professional Standards, Fundraising, Casino, Grants and Sponsorships, Writers Project Loan Fund, Take the Poetry Route, Manuscript Reading Service, Strategic Planning and Policy Procedures, YouthWrite and Nominations. Much of the committee work has been absorbed by the staff.

Supporting Alberta Writers Through Politics

It didn't take long for the Guild to become involved in things political. In the 1982 Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 5 there is a call for members to write letters of support for the CBC radio program "Alberta Anthology". Apparently, the CBC was threatening to drop the program due to budget cutbacks.

The Guild followed up letters written by Joan Clark in 1983 to Pierre Trudeau, Ed Broadbent and Joe Clark expressing Guild support for the motion, "That the

membership of the Writers Guild of Alberta urges the Government of Canada to include 'copyright' under 'property rights' in the Bill of Rights" by, in 1985, sending correspondence to the Sub-Committee on Revision on Copyright, House of Commons, Ottawa, supporting a submission made by The Writers Union of Canada and the League of Canadian Poets regarding changes to the Copyright Act. The Guild lent its support to the following:

- The WGA underscores the strengthening of the moral rights of creators as outlined in the submission.
- The Writers Guild of Alberta is opposed to compulsory licenses.
- In the case of ownership of copyright in employment situations, the Writers Guild of Alberta believes that the employee who is the creator of the work should remain first owner, and that employers who wish to secure copyright will do so through the regular employment contract.
- The Writers Guild of Alberta stresses the urgent need for the establishment of a system of Payment for Public Use, and for the immediate implementation of such a system.
- The Guild heartily endorses the concept of a Reprography Collective to administer the collection and distribution of fees for use of copyright materials...
- The WGA encourages the government to address the complexity of copyright issues for current [1985] and future technologies.

The Alberta government has funded the writing and publishing sector of the arts in diverse ways over the years and the Guild did not always feel adequately supported. The Guild has carried the concerns of writers to each Minister. Past Presidents Rudy Wiebe, Ted Blodgett, Chris Wiseman, and Joan Clark spent countless hours making presentations to the then Culture Minister, Mary LeMessurier, asking for a funding source that would be at arm's length from the government. The result was the creation of the Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts (AFLA) in 1984. That first board of AFLA didn't have one writer as a member. The Guild again voiced its concerns and three writers were appointed to the board. At the same time the Guild was promoting the idea of peer juries to adjudicate the recipients who would receive grants from AFLA.

The playwrights in Alberta had organized themselves into the Alberta Playwrights Association about the same time as the formation of the Guild. By 1984 their Association was in serious difficulty. In September of that year the Alberta Playwrights Association entered into negotiations regarding a merger of the two organizations with the Guild. The major concerns that the Guild had were: that the Guild's constitution did not make provision for any kind of affiliate organization, the amount of autonomy that the APA would want, would the APA want a member on the WGA Board.

In 1985 the APA approached the Guild to administer the two major programs that were theirs. One program was the creation of a "Guide to Alberta Playwrights" and the other was a "Playwrights in the Schools" program. Money which the APA had received from Alberta Culture for these programs was transferred to the Guild.

In 1986, during the Free Trade debates, the Guild formed a "Owning Our Own" Committee with Myrna Kostash as the Chair. It appears that there were a couple of reasons for creating the committee. In the minutes of the January 11, 1986 Executive meeting, the first reason given was that The Writers Union of Canada had asked the Guild to consider becoming involved and it was felt that the Union had done a lot for the Guild. The second reason was that, "The Guild should be clear about Alberta sovereignty". The Committee wrote a letter to then Culture Minister, Mary LeMessurier, asking her to seek advice from representatives of the arts community, film producers, writers, and publishers when considering the issues of cultural sovereignty. The Committee also organized a Symposium with Sharon Pollock as Chair to discuss the issues of Free Trade to which one hundred people attended.

On behalf of the Guild and its members, Rudy Wiebe represented the Guild's concerns about cultural sovereignty in Canada during the free trade debates. He also took part in a meeting with then Minister of Communications in the Federal Government, Marcel Masse, regarding Payment for Public Use (PLR). Only slightly later that year, Joan Clark represented the Guild at a Halifax Conference hosted by the Writers Federation of Nova Scotia and designed to coincide with a meeting of culture ministers in the same

city. The Guild supported the original feasibility study done to determine whether writers should receive compensation for photocopies made of their work (now known as Access Copyright). According to a report written by Monty Reid in 1986, the WGA met with the Status of the Artist Committee and raised three issues: Free Trade and Culture, Funding for Canada Council, and Developing Our Audience.

There were two major reports created about the writing and publishing industry in Alberta. The first, *Out of the West: the Business of Publishing and Writing in Alberta*, was written by James Douglas (Douglas and MacIntyre) and according to the article, "Feeling the Pinch", written by Bob Weber in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, was released on April 28, 1986. In it Weber states, "Publishers are proliferating like never before. Their ranks have swollen from one to 25 in just over a decade...The Bad News? Marketing and distribution of Albertan books remains inadequate. Cash flow problems continue..." Weber goes on to quote Douglas as saying, "Of government support, I think that government aids are needed to nurture our infant industry because we lie in an exposed place between powerful British and American publishing interests." At the time of the article, Weber states that the WGA had 475 members. Weber also quotes the Douglas report as having surveyed 210 of those Guild members and together they had authored a total of 286 books, and each of those members had an average of four periodical articles a piece each year. The writers in the survey were earning less than \$7000.00 per year.

The Guild endorsed this report although the concern expressed was that the report was "an economic study and as such succeeds well as far as it goes." The Guild didn't feel the report addressed the critical questions of cultural values and literary merit. The fear was expressed that granting agencies might use the report as the sole basis for grant policies. The Guild approached Douglas to write a letter supporting the writing of a companion report giving the writer's side of the industry. Douglas agreed to do so.

In 1988 Guild members took an part in the development of the second of the reports, *Word for Word Report*, commissioned by the Department of Alberta Culture &

Multiculturalism and the Writers Guild of Alberta, on the business of writing in Alberta, a report compiled and written by Andreas Schroeder. Among the 29 recommendations, in no particular order, were the following:

- That, in view of the fact that reading fees have not changed significantly in almost a decade, the WGA lobby AFLA, Alberta Culture and the Canada Council to increase fees to \$300 per reading;
- That Alberta's writers' organizations and the Alberta Publishers' Association make greater efforts at a dialogue amongst themselves, by informing themselves more extensively about each others realities and problems in Alberta;
- That Alberta's trade missions be charged with the inclusion of Alberta books on their agendas, and that Alberta agencies abroad (such as Alberta House in London, England) include the showcasing of Alberta books in their promotional programmes;
- That the WGA (and preferably other Alberta writers' organizations) set up a Rural Writers' Review Panel, which would correspond throughout the year and meet at the beginning of each year's AGM to propose specific suggestions to the Plenary Session for the improvement of government and writers' organizations services to rural writers.

In 1991 the government rolled all the cultural funding agencies into the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA). Among the changes that resulted from this decision was that the Guild received more operating funds. Another result was that of peer juries being put in place to adjudicate grants. The downside was that it seemed to be more difficult to get members of the writing community on the board of AFA.

Past President George Melnyk said that, "The WGA was created not to redefine the relationship between writer and publisher but rather between the writer and the state." The WGA has watched as government ministries responsible for the literary arts were restructured and renamed, from the Ministry of Culture to a reorganization under current

Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach which placed the literary arts under the portfolio of Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit. In 1986 the Guild urged the Alberta Government not to move the Department of Culture into a "Super Department" with Tourism, Recreation and Parks but to keep it as a separate department.

As part of the developing relationship between writers and the state, early in the life of the Guild (1982), the organization was interested in communication and co-operation with other provincial writing organizations. That year plans were initiated for a Western Council made up of the Saskatchewan Writers Guild, the Writers Guild of Alberta, the Manitoba Writers Guild, and the BC Federation of Writers. According to the Preamble of the drafted constitution for the Council, the purposes were: 1) to promote literary arts in Western Canada; 2) to be an umbrella/support agency for the groups by:

- supporting individual aims and objectives of the four guilds;
- sharing information;
- liaison with provincial and federal agencies; and
- improving status of writers through support for western publishers and publishing.

Membership was to be made up of the Past President or Chair of each organization and one current member from each guild. A quorum was to be three out of four provinces. The Western council was invited to the 1984 Annual General Meeting.

Ten years later, during his term as President (1992-93), George Melnyk put forward the possibility of a national organization of Provincial Writers' Guilds and Federations. There was little apparent interest in this idea from Ontario east so the idea became one of creating a "Western Summit" consisting of the Presidents and Executive Directors of the provincial writers' organizations of western Canada.

The Western Summit had two objectives:

- the first was to bring together the organizations from different provinces to discuss common political concerns and program sharing and development;

- the second was to create a national organization which would be a lobbying organization on behalf of provincial organizations to the federal government in much the same manner as the provincial premiers meet with the Prime Minister.

The first meeting took place in Banff. However, there seemed to be an inability on the part of the provincial organizations to see the relevance of a national organization.

There were two concerns: that their various constituencies were primarily provincial with only provincial funding; and various Executives felt that their organizations' budgets would not allow for travel of the respective Presidents and Executive Directors.

In 1995 the Guild, represented by Miki Andrejevic, Alice Major, and Darlene Quaife, attended the National Literary Summit in Montreal. At that meeting the Guild was considered one of the best writers organizations in Canada.

The Guild was a founding member of the Edmonton Arts Council (1995) and the Calgary Professional Arts Alliance (about 1994). In 1996 the Guild became a founding member of WordFest: Banff Calgary International Writers Festival.

Due to its being the largest writers group in the province and the only truly provincial one, in 1995, the Guild was designated as the Provincial Arts Service Organization (PASO) for the writing community of Alberta. The designation was made by the provincial government in an attempt to try to streamline communication with the writers' organizations in Alberta. Under this designation, the government considered the WGA the voice of writers in the province. Funding from AFA was increased at this time.

This designation caused an unreasonable amount of tension between the WGA and a number of other local and smaller writers groups around the province. The fear was that because the Guild was being given more money under the designation, the local groups would lose some of their grant money. This was not the case. Nevertheless, it took a number of years to convince the groups of this fact. Some of the most vocal groups

have since ceased to exist. The Guild continues to act as the PASO for the literary arts in the province.

As early as 1984 the Guild Newsletter was carrying articles in support of Freedom to Read Week. From about 1992 until about 1998 the Co-ordinator of the Calgary office was co-chair of the Calgary Freedom to Read Week committee. The Guild continues to maintain its stand by supporting Freedom to Read events in both Calgary and Edmonton. The organization has a strong stand against censorship based on the belief that, "The Criminal Code of Canada currently provides protection against the obscenities of child pornography, sexual violence and exploitation."

The year 2000 saw business man Conrad Black take over the Southam Newspaper chain which included the Edmonton Journal and the Calgary Herald. It wasn't long before there was labour unrest within both papers. Staff writers and editors went out on strike in both cities. There was an acrimonious settlement. The Guild Executive wrote a letter in support of the staff of the Calgary Herald.

In 2007, as a member of PEN, the Guild served on the steering committee for the Writer-in-Exile program in Edmonton. In partnership with the University of Alberta, the City of Edmonton, Athabasca University and other community stake holders, the WGA administers a year-long residency for a writer living in exile from their country for reasons of political persecution.

Supporting Alberta Writers Through Programs & Services

One of the Guild's priorities has been keeping the members apprised of the activities of the organization. In the beginning the Newsletter was black and white on 8 1/2 by 11 white paper and stapled in the corner. The first Newsletter came out almost immediately after the October 1980 meeting. As the work in both the office and regarding the Newsletter increased, the first Newsletter Committee was struck in 1985-86. Members were: Don Meredith, Rhona McAdam, Mary (Riskin) Walters. At the 1986 Annual General Meeting a motion was made by Marilyn Stratton that the Newsletter Editor be

a funded position. In the fall of 1990, the newsletter became *WestWord*, a 36 page glossy bi-monthly magazine with articles of interest to writers. Editors or editorial teams have been: Mary (Riskin) Walters, Nancy Semotiuk, Hazel Sangster/Jena (Bamsey) Snyder, Dave Panchuk/Cath Jackel, Cath Jackel/Michelle Wilson, Rhona McAdam/Bonnie Bishop, Heather Markham/Judith Pond, Wayne Arthurson, Shirley Serviss, Nora Abercrombie. A number of these people filled the position of editor for more than one term.

The April 1981 Newsletter notes that the "Traveling Nude Workshop" program was a major line item in the Guild budget. The name came from the story by Henry Keisel.

"The program was designed to upgrade writer education in Alberta by improving the quality of instruction available in smaller centres." The original program was to be one night per week for ten consecutive weeks in places such as Fort McMurray, Camrose, Edson and Red Deer. This program ran in 1982 with instructor, Gloria Swai in Killam, Alberta; in 1984 at the request of the writers of Grande Prairie (Write-Ons) for a workshop consisting of three weekends spaced apart by three weeks to allow the participants to get a reasonable amount of writing done; and a Short Fiction workshop in Wetaskawin.

In the same Newsletter it was reported that a committee comprised of Henry Kreisel, Merna Summers and Chris Wiseman were in negotiations with the Department of Education on the possibility of having a Writer-in-Residence established in two school jurisdictions in the province. It doesn't indicate which school jurisdictions were being considered.

Also in 1981 there was a Exchange Reading Series organized between the WGA and the Saskatchewan Writers Guild. Readings took place in Edmonton and Calgary and were hosted by the Woodcroft Writers' Series and the Calgary Creative Reading Series respectively. Ken Mitchell, Guy Vanderhaege and Glen Sorestad reading in Edmonton and Calgary, Ann Szumigalski read in Edmonton only. A list of WGA members eligible

for Canada Council subsidized readings was sent to Saskatchewan for a decision as to who would read there from Alberta.

In the Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 1982, the Manuscript Reading Service is announced. According to founding member Merna Summers, the establishment of this service came about as a result of the rural writers attending the first meeting of the Guild asking that there be a way for them to receive assistance with their manuscripts. The Service involves having established writers read and comment on manuscripts submitted by another writer often, but not always, a beginning writer. Writers submitting could be members or nonmembers. The fee charged to the submitting writer differed depending on whether the person was or was not a member. As a point of interest, at the outset, the fees charged for a manuscript of 20,000 - 100,000 words the cost was \$75.00. In 2010 the Board committed to increasing support for this program. The first co-ordinator of the Service was Reg Silvester. Other co-ordinators include: Ian Adam, Cecelia Frey, Ken Rivard. Administration of the Service is now done through the office in Edmonton.

A program to help promote the members of the WGA and their books was the Book Display. It was the brain-child of Marilyn Stratton. The display consisted of copies of the books published by members, not for sale, but travelling to Teachers' Conventions and Book Fairs around the province from 1983 to 1996. A final decision to discontinue the traveling display was made in 2003 due to the huge number of books contained in the display. It was suggested that a power-point presentation on CD might fulfill the needs. Co-ordinators were: Marilyn Stratton, Bob Stallworthy, Don Blake, Joyce Pinkney and Bernard Bloom.

Visibility of Alberta writers and writing has been a constant concern of the Guild. A tour of members was organized in 1983, sending the selected writers first to Bonnyville-St. Paul and Provost-Lloydminster in February of that year. The tour continued to Vegreville-Vermillion in October and Sedgewick-Alliance in November.

The Guild was instrumental in organizing the Jasper Writers' Program in 1983-84. As well as the Guild, the members of the co-operative organizing the program were the Jasper School Board, Jasper Recreation Department, Adult Education Council, school principals and teachers, Arts Jasper Society, and the Jasper Public Library. The program began with a one week Writer-in-Residence, Jan Truss, and then a series of two day sessions with Fred Stenson, Bert Almon and Doug Barbour. With the support of the WGA, the Canada Council, and Alberta Culture, the program was expanded.

In November 1985 Executive Director, Mary Riskin, entered into negotiations with QCTV in Edmonton to showcase Alberta writers in their programming. The program would be weekly in nature and would involve interviews with established writers, information for aspiring writers, information on the Writers Guild itself, information on other writers' organizations and a calendar of events.

The Guild created a WGA Directory in 1986. This compilation of members' names, skills and willingness to go to schools was published every two years until the late 1990s. It was distributed to all the schools in the province free of charge. It was superseded by the Directory on the Guild web site. The original members who worked on this project are Marilyn Stratton and Faye Reinberg Holt.

It would seem that from a very early date there has been a concern regarding how to involve young writers in the organization. Among the Notices of Motion for the 1986 Annual General Meeting was a motion by the Youth Publication Committee, "That the WGA develop and support a provincial literary magazine for youth in Grades 9 - 12." The Committee had looked very carefully at "Windscrip", the youth magazine produced by the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild. The Committee felt the advantages of having a magazine for youth would be:

- "to encourage creative writing in schools";
- "to make students aware of the value of writing";
- "to increase students' reading of writing by peers";

- to give writers who were published a sense of belonging to a writers' community" ;
and
- "to provide publicity for the Guild."

Initially, the print-run was to be 5000 copies. Funding for the magazine was to be provided by provincial grants, federal work project grants, corporate sponsorship, subscriptions and the sale of ad space. Members of the Committee were: William Latta (Chair), Derryn Yeomans (Executive Representative), Donna Duncan-Reilly (Calgary), Dennis Johnson (Red Deer), Richard Stevenson (Lethbridge), Eric MacInnes (Rocky Mountain House).

The 1988 Winter Olympics and its accompanying Literary Arts Festival gave the Guild another chance to promote Alberta writers. The Guild appointed Elona Malterre, Mark Jarman and Fred Stenson as representatives on the Festival Organizing Committee. A number of Guild members took part in readings and presentations on either the Main Stage or on various "side" stages.

According to a Year End Report 1989 written by former member Sylvia Bough, the "Write on Target" correspondence writing program, co-sponsored by Lakeland College and Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, was launched with a short fiction course (Writing Short Stories) in the fall of 1987. This course was dedicated to the memory of Ken McVey, Senior Consultant with Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism who died during the creation of the program. As of April 1988 there were 49 students in the course.

A non-fiction course (Writing for Magazines) was being advertised at the time of the report in April 1988. It was dedicated to the memory of John Patrick Gillese, former Director of Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism Film & Literary Arts Branch and founder of the original correspondence course. At the time of the report there were 10 students registered and requests for information had come from over 100 people.

A quarterly newsletter "L.C.Writeline" was established as part of the overall program and at the time of the report the first issue had been published.

The Guild has made an effort to stay in touch with members' desires and needs. In 1990, the Guild commissioned a study entitled, *Directions '90 Planning Document* which was prepared by Snowater Consultants. In 1998, the Guild commissioned Haines Elliott, Business and Not-for-Profit Consultants, to create a survey and compile the results with this objective in mind: "to position the Guild to be successful in finding the necessary additional funds to allow the Guild to improve services to members and become more visible in the community." In 2008, the Guild again surveyed its members with an electronically distributed survey. The responses were also collected electronically.

In 1992, the staff and volunteers of the Southern Alberta office teamed up with what was then Rogers' Cable 10 Community Television to produce a series of programs entitled, "On the Writer's Block". The principals involved with this series were David Campbell, Program Manager, Cable 10; Bob Stallworthy, WGA Southern Office; Carol Hutcheson, Denise LeClaire, and Brad Zipursky, volunteers with the WGA. This program put the spotlight on among others, Chris Wiseman, Fred Wah and James (Mac) Moir. The program aired once a week for six weeks.

In November 1993 it was proposed to bring young writers together to see what their concerns were, what they wanted most and needed. Alice Major and Candace Jane Dorsey were involved in the creation of a Strategy Kit which could be put together regarding the concerns of the writers. The Kit would give the young writers the chance to respond individually.

There has always been a concern within the organization regarding the fact that much of the activity seemed to centre in the Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary corridor. At various times throughout the history of the Guild, there have been efforts to reach out to writers based in other locations throughout the province. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the respective Executives made a point of traveling to a locale outside of the corridor, but where there were a number of members living, to hold one of the executive meetings

and an outreach party afterward. The parties were always open to members and would-be members alike.

In 1996, the Guild launched YouthWrite, a residential summer camp for kids who love to write. The two week residential camp for students is divided into one week for 12-14 year olds and a second week for 15-18 year olds. The camp has been held for most of the years at Kamp Kawanis, near Bragg Creek. Under the direction of YouthWrite coordinator Gail Sobat, the camp gained popularity among young writers, and in recent years was filled to capacity. Winter WordPlay, an annual weekend camp for young writers was instituted in Edmonton in 2002. In 2007, it was decided to re-allocate resources towards the development of programs for the 18-30 year old demographic, and programs that could reach young writers across the province, and the Winter WordPlay program was cancelled. In 2008, Derriquer DeGagne took over the Coordinator's duties. In 2009, funding for YouthWrite was transferred to the Young Alberta Book Society by Alberta Foundation for the Arts instead of the Guild. That year the Guild created a youth program called inkPulse, a day camp, to replace YouthWrite. The first camps were held at the Bennett Centre in Edmonton. In its second season, camps were held in Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, and Lethbridge. The first coordinator of this new program was Derriquer DeGagne.

Outreach programming became one of the activities mandated to the Southern Alberta Region Office when it was opened in Calgary in 1990. Several workshops were organized out of this office and held in Brooks and High River. Around 2002 the Guild wanted to formalize the outreach workshops into a regular program rather than as ad-hoc programming. Then President, Suzette Mayr, was instrumental in promoting this formalization, suggesting that libraries and book clubs should be contacted in the more rural areas. The late Sharon Drummond was a member of the Executive then and undertook to formalize the program. The Guild-to-Go program established in 2008 is part of the formalization of on-going outreach programming.

The dream began before, perhaps as early as 1994, but in 1996, because of a budgetary surplus, the WGA Board allocated a sum of \$10,000 (dollars) to the Edmonton Community Foundation. The idea behind the fund was that the money would eventually be used to establish a "Writer's House" in Edmonton. The goal for the fund was \$600,000 - \$800,000 in four years. The hope was to have a library of Alberta books, space for readings and displays that would attract the public and writers from inside and outside the province and a permanent home for the Guild. There was a call for donations from WGA members that promised for a donation of \$500 or more the donor's name would appear on a "Founder's Wall" in the house. Market fluctuations for both the housing market and the investment market meant that the dream of a Writer's House had to be postponed. In 2003 the monies from this fund were redirected into a bursary and scholarship fund. As of 2010, all monies have been reintegrated into the WGA operating budget.

In the Annual Report of 1999, there was discussion regarding the future of the Writers Project Loan Fund. This fund, initially \$11,000, was created in 1998 from donations made by several WGA members with the purpose being to allow a writer to borrow enough money to complete a project. It was decided at the 1999 meeting to extend the life of the Fund and put information in WestWord regarding its existence and purpose. By 2004, the fund had made at least one loan. The initial donors to the fund were: Rudy Wiebe, Penny Kome, Monica Hughes, Dave Duncan, Myrna Kostash, M. Jennie Frost, Merna Summers. Currently, some of the money is still a loan that can be recalled and some has been converted to gifts to the Guild to be used for the original purpose. Application can still be made by an individual writer for assistance through this fund.

In 2000 the Guild recognized the rapid advance in electronic technology. The development of a web site was completed. The site has undergone a number of transformations since its inception, the most recent one in 2009. The newest version of the web site was launched at the 2009 AGM.

An electronic news-bulletin, *WriteClick* was created in 2004 as a means of keeping members up-to-date on events, launches, readings, markets and opportunities across the province which for various reasons might not be mentioned in *WestWord*. *WriteClick* is delivered weekly to over 95% of WGA members.

In 2005 the John Patrick Gillesse Fund was set up to support the education and development of Alberta writers either at post secondary institutions or through less formal learning opportunities that further the education and development of writers. The initial donations to create this fund came from Miki Andrejevic, Grant Kennedy and Keith Turnbull. The evaluation criteria for this program are:

- The applicant must be a member in good standing of the Writers Guild of Alberta;
- The Applicant's writing ability and profile;
- The Applicant's financial need;
- The perceived benefit to the individual from participation in the program.

The above criteria are subject to change and revision by the WGA Board as deemed appropriate in achieving the purpose of the fund. The award would be announced and presented as a bursary of the John Patrick Gillesse Fund.

Almost from the beginning the Guild held writing retreats organized by the Retreats Committee. The first retreats were held at Strawberry Creek, a writers' retreat built by Rudy and Tena Wiebe. Retreats are still held there in summer. The Guild began holding winter retreats at The Banff Centre in 1996.

Over the years there have been numerous workshops and readings in both Edmonton and Calgary, both as part of the AGM and separately. In Calgary these events metamorphosed into WGA Cabarets, held once a month between October and April from 1991 until 1996. During this time, there were also Members' Gatherings with special programming organized by a volunteer committee in Edmonton.

There were special events organized in both cities, between 1996 and 2006 by volunteers. In approximately 2005, the Guild began hosting, in both Edmonton and Calgary, an evening of readings done by the writers short-listed for each of the awards

included in the Alberta Book Awards. These readings are open to the public. In 2006 Members' Nights with specific programs were recreated in both cities, and attendance has steadily increased. The Guild plans on the creation of more of these WGA Events in communities besides Calgary and Edmonton and will encourage public attendance (with discounted or free admission to WGA members).

In 2005, as part of the celebrations for Alberta's centenary, the WGA created a program entitled, "Write Around Alberta". The idea was to promote a sense of pride in the writers and stories of the province. The program was launched in July of that year. By the time that it wrapped up in 2006, 42 different communities had had visits from Alberta authors. It is estimated that 3000 people attended Write Around Alberta events.

In the 2006 Annual Report, the Guild announced the creation of a "circulating library of Alberta's literary works." The library began to function as of January 2007 and is open to any member of the Guild. Due to size, logistics and a concern that this idea might be duplicating the services of the public libraries, the lending from the library was discontinued in 2009.

The Writers Guild of Alberta launched the inaugural Teen Writing Group in Calgary in September 2007. The program is facilitated by a Teen Writing Mentor contracted by the Guild and coordinated through the Southern Alberta Office. Mentors to date have been Katherine Main (2007-2008), Rachelle Pinnow (2008-2009), Sarah Ivany (2009-2010) and currently Robyn Read (2010-2011). The Teen Writing Group (for ages 15-18) meets monthly. The purpose of the group is to unite teens interested in pursuing the craft of writing; to provide a fun, friendly, safe and structured environment for participants to receive constructive feedback on their writing; to involve themselves in literary discussion; and to engage with like-minded young writers. There has been an average of 7 participants since the group started. A similar group was started in Edmonton in 2008. Edmonton mentors have been Alexis Kienlen and Erinne Sevigny.

Meeting places have been selected at the discretion of the Mentor in consultation with the WGA offices: Book-On-4th (2007-2008), Calgary Public Library (2008-2009), Freehand Books Office (2009-current) in Calgary. The group meets at the Stanley Milner Public Library in Edmonton.

In spring of 2008, a series of "Gen Y" workshops aimed at the 18-30 age group was piloted. Both the Teen Writing Group and the Gen Y workshops are intended to serve as template for programs that can be offered across the province.

Supporting Alberta Writers Through Special Events and Partnerships

An early project (1983) developed by Alberta Culture was "Better Read Alberta" fashioned after a similar program run by the Alberta grocers promotion, "Buy Better Alberta". The Guild was asked to take part in this three year promotion of writers and publishers. The idea was to promote twenty-five Alberta writers. Alberta Culture produced posters and book marks and prepared a catalogue of writers to be distributed to schools and libraries around the province. The slogan for the program was, " Read Alberta Books - There's One For Everyone".

Hosting international writers began for the Guild as early as 1983. At the invitation of the Canadian government, four Chinese writers, an artist and an interpreter visited Calgary as part of a cross-Canada tour. They met several Canadian writers and were hosted by the Guild at an informal luncheon.

In 1984 the Guild was one of four literary organizations to launch the first Alberta Book Fair. It was held at, what was then the Convention Centre in Edmonton. Apparently, there were 28 publishers as well as booksellers, and writers' organizations displaying their books and information materials at the Fair. Ten writers and other performing groups entertained the more than 3000 visitors who attended the Fair. Writers participated in a Blue Pencil Cafe.

The Guild hosted Soviet writers touring in Western Canada in 1989. The four writers and one interpreter were passing through Edmonton and Calgary on their way to Selkirk College in southern British Columbia. They travelled to Edmonton where they met with members of the Guild and faculty members of the English Department at the University of Alberta. They visited the Ukrainian Village outside Edmonton and were hosted at a dinner in a city restaurant. In Calgary they were given a White Hat ceremony, a reading at, what was then Mount Royal College, and a special dinner hosted at a privately owned ranch outside Okotoks.

In 1994, the Guild initiated the Calgary Stroll of Poets at the suggestion of member Janeen Werner-King. Located in stores and bars along 17th Ave. SW, Calgary for the first couple of years, later it moved into the Kensington area of Calgary. Eventually, the Stroll became known as the Society of Poets, Bards and Storytellers in Calgary.

The Edmonton Stroll of Poets originally formed as a separate entity. The WGA has provided administrative assistance to the Edmonton Stroll of Poets since 2004.

At the 1994 Annual General Meeting a motion was passed that would allow for the creation of an "Affiliated Organization" type of membership. This type of membership would be open to other writers' organizations around the province. They would maintain their autonomy and identity. The rationale behind the creation of this form of membership was a concern raised, by what was then Alberta Culture/Alberta Community Development, that there was a proliferation of writers' groups forming in the province. Each of these groups was applying for funding. While agreeing to create the type of membership, the Guild rejected the argument that there was a funding issue for the government. By motion at the AGM the Executive for 1994-95 was instructed to create the criteria for this form of membership.

In 1996 the Guild had several members on the steering committee that was instrumental in getting WordFest: Banff-Calgary International Writers Festival off the ground. The Guild has continued to be involved with the Festival as a founding member

and now hosts at least one event during the Festival each year. Members involved included Darlene Quaife, Fred Stenson, Tim Christison, Bob Stallworthy.

The WGA was also involved in the early development of Edmonton's LitFest, the Calgary International Spoken Word Festival and the Edmonton Poetry Festival.

In 2001, the Guild took over the role that the Edmonton Arts Council had performed in the collaboration between the Council, Edmonton Transit, Canada Council and Pattison Outdoor Group. This team had made "Take The Poetry Route" a reality in Edmonton. Unfortunately, the Canada Council funding for this project has been withdrawn and the project is on hold pending new funding sources.

In 2007 the WGA entered into a partnership with the Alberta Film Partners administering the Alberta Screenwriters Initiative, an annual award for screenwriters.

In 2008 the Guild and the Library Association of Alberta created the joint project, Check Out the Writer! The program placed a Writer-in-Residence in each of seven different rural regional library systems for three months. Not only was the writer available to the library but also to the communities within that library region. Writers were selected on the basis of the needs of the area as seen by the host library.

"Wired Writers of Alberta", a new program created in 2009 in partnership with the Library Association of Alberta and the Education Institute. This was a chance for writers, writing groups and book clubs to meet with a well-known Alberta writer. Faye Reineberg Holt, Jacqueline Guest and Myrna Kostash were the presenting writers. The program continued in 2010.

The WGA took part in the first Alberta Arts Days, an initiative of the Alberta government to focus attention on the Arts in the province, held in the fall of 2009. The organization was a partner in a joint application, along with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta, the Alberta Music Industry Association, and the Alberta Magazine Publishers

Association, to AFA for the Arts Partnership Grant program. The goal was to profile Alberta artists in libraries and bookstores throughout Alberta. Events were held in both Calgary and Edmonton.

"Backstage with a Writer" was the 2010 program developed by the WGA in partnership with the rural libraries across Alberta. The project consisted of a series of sessions presented by Alberta authors, each of them focusing on a different genre or role related to the writing life. Some of the places in which events were held were: Calgary, Edmonton, Black Diamond, Cold Lake, Grande Prairie, Lacombe, Olds, Rocky Mountain House, Taber, Tofield, Spruce Grove, and Vegreville.

The Parkland Regional Library launched "Write On" in 2010. The program was co-sponsored by the Library Association of Alberta and the WGA. There were four free two-hour workshops on the four topics; Where Do Story Ideas Come From?; Writing Your Memoir; Speaking of Dialogue; and Business Writing - Plain and Simple. Fram Kimmel was the writer who presented these workshops. The program was a success.

Supporting Alberta Writers with Advice

From the beginning, the WGA has acted as a resource for writers, answering queries from writers about all aspects of the writing life, or directing them to sources of information. According to the April 1981 Newsletter, at first the Guild didn't have money for either office space or paid staff. Nevertheless, the members voted, "That when an office is established, it should be located in Edmonton. It was felt that proximity to government offices was a desirable thing." The first office was very small and located in the Weinlos Building. By 1985 the office had moved to 10523 - 100th Ave and on March 3, 2005 to its current location at the Percy Page Centre, 11759 Groat Road.

In August 1986 an office was opened in the Old Courthouse in Red Deer. Phyllis Shuell was the first Co-ordinator. Staffed by volunteers this office responded to questions from both members and non-members alike. The office organized "Outreach readings" at

the Ponoka and Innisfail libraries, held readings at the 49th St Blues Cafe, organized Old Courthouse Literary Cafes, and hosted an Outreach Party at Red Deer College as well as assisting the Red Deer Public Library in setting up readings during Poetry Month, and was involved in the first "Crossing Place" reading event as well as assist in the planning of Annual Meetings held in Red Deer. At an Executive meeting, January 1994, Blaine Newton reported that the "writing circle" was meeting twice a month in the office. As well, a workshop on presenting your own work had been organized by the office. Office volunteers also maintained the literary arts section of the main bulletin board in the Old Courthouse. Office co-ordinators included Phyllis Shuell, Carolyn Dearden, Blaine Newton, Leo Jacques, and Sherry Scott.

In 1989 an office opened in Calgary. First located in the Alexandra Writers Centre, it moved in 1991 to the Old Y Centre for Community Organizations. Its mandate was to provide improved service to the existing membership, increase membership in the southern part of Alberta, recruit sponsors for the Awards program, and provide outreach programs to the more rural areas of southern Alberta. For the first few years the Co-ordinator was assisted by a volunteer Office Committee. Some of the programs run were monthly cabarets, fundraising by selling cash calendars, and a short-lived TV program focusing on local writers on Roger's TV and assisted in the organization of Annual Meetings held in Calgary and Southern Alberta. In 2009 the Southern Alberta office moved to 509-20 Ave., SW. Co-ordinators in the Southern Alberta Region office were: Bob Stallworthy, Judith Pond, Renatte Donovan, Jason Hammond, Cathie Dunklee-Donnell, Samantha Warwick.

In 1998, and with the help of volunteers Jenny King-Brown and Richard Stevenson, the Guild opened a Lethbridge office in the St. John's Ambulance complex. The purpose of this office was to provide local support to the most southerly Alberta writers and to increase the presence of the Guild.

By mid-1999 both the Lethbridge and Red Deer offices closed.

The Guild in Crisis

During the late 1980s and early 1990 the Guild was faced with two pressing issues: finances and credibility. The Guild worked extremely hard during this time to deal with the financial issues. Former Executive Director, Lyle Weis, says, "The Guild worked hard, through fundraising and increased government support, to bring itself to a comfortable financial state. It is this financial stability that gave the organization the strength needed to make the members' concerns heard."

An example of the ingenuity used by Guild members to raise funds is the "Writers Guild Auction", which was held at Christmas in either 1982 or 1983. The auction was billed as an invitation to "the curious, the eccentric gift-giver, the bibliophile, to an auction of literary curios, memorabilia, autographed books, & other unique & bizarre items". Some of the items up for auction were: a candlelight dinner at Claudio's with an anonymous poet; red panties signed by Robert Kroetsch; clippings of Rudy Wiebe's beard; a baseball autographed by Bill Kinsella. All items were sold.

Lyle Weis continues, "The whole issue of credibility was tackled by working hard to establish visibility in the eyes of the writing community and Alberta society as a whole. This was a success, largely through the efforts of a committed cadre of established writers like Aritha van Herk and Rudy Wiebe, and the efforts of volunteers and dedicated staff. Partly as a result of the drive to establish visibility, the membership grew dramatically during the 1980s and into the 1990s. We came to represent a much broader and more numerous body of artists. They in turn were more visible, and carried more clout with various governmental agencies and NGOs."

At an Emergency Meeting of the Guild held in Red Deer on December 11, 2004, chaired by Lyle Weis and Bob Stallworthy, the organization was in serious trouble.

A Task Group was formed to investigate the reasons for the organization getting so far off course and to make recommendations to correct the situation. The Task Group distilled all the discussions and interviews that they conducted and produced an

unanimous conclusion as to the source of the crisis. Their report said, "In a nutshell, what happened exactly and who said what and who was responsible hardly matters as much as the fact that the structure of the Guild - the way the Staff is organized, the way the Board is run - did not have strong enough check valves in place to prevent minor issues from snowballing into a larger crisis."

The Task Group created a "Timeline of Events" that led up to the crisis of 2004. One of the critical reasons cited for the crisis was the lack of presentation of an organization budget at the 2004 AGM. It had always been the practice to have the Treasurer of the time present a budget to be ratified by the membership during the AGM. Practice it may have been, but there was no by-law which required that the practice be followed.

Further the Task Group reported, "It seems that anyone involved was operating in good faith and had the Guild's best interests at heart. No one situation or person is to blame, and yet everyone is in some way responsible for adding more fuel to the fire at some point along the way. It is quite clear that this was not their intent. Poor communication, poor communication systems, lack of accountability, lack of role definition and apparent basic lack of trust and compassion for each other as human beings, meant that these issues could continue to grow and fester unchecked."

The Guild Regroups, Renews

At the Emergency Meeting the members in attendance elected new Board members to replace the ones who had resigned. Vern Theissen agreed to take on the role of President.

The Task Group made the following recommendations as a result of what they felt that they had learned from the interviews they conducted:

- The Board will carry out annual, formal job evaluations for every staff position;
- The Board will work to change the WGA Bylaws to allow the election of one-third of the Board every year, with more suitable length of terms;

- Reinvigorate direct services to the WGA members;
- Provide job descriptions for each member of the WGA staff;
- Provide descriptions of their responsibilities to each member of the WGA Board, Executive and any Committees;
- Clarify its role as either a Working Board or a Policy Board;
- An Alternative Dispute Resolution process is put in place in case of future conflicts that may arise;
- The habit/practice of having the entire membership ratify or approve the budget of the Guild at the AGM cease;
- Regular Strategic Planning sessions be held with Board and Staff;
- The Policy Manual be updated.

Under the direction of President Vern Theissen, the Board established itself as a Policy Board. At the same time the search for a new Executive Director was initiated and Liz Grieve was hired. She began to reorganize the office staff, create open lines of communication with staff and Board and begin the task of creating proper job descriptions. The practice/habit of presenting the budget for ratification to the general membership at the AGM was discontinued.

During Dymphny Dronyk's term as President, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, as the government funding agency, insisted that all the not-for-profit organizations that it funded have a clear organizational structure and the policies and guidelines to go with it. If the Guild had not complied with this requirement, the funding from AFA could have been severely curtailed. The Board fulfilled this requirement, creating a manual that had, among other things, complete job descriptions for everybody who works for the Guild, a clear mission statement, a clear vision statement, policies on such things as Board conduct, elections, conflict of interest, harassment, to name a few. The result is that the Guild now has clear and defined statements of Values and Beliefs and Operating Principles. Each Board member now receives the manual at the beginning of his or her term.

During Blaine Newton's presidency, 2008-2009, the Guild put together a strategic plan that was to extend from 2008 to 2013. The plan was passed by the Board in November of 2009. "This strategic plan is intended to be read in context with the Vision and Mission Statements of the Writers Guild of Alberta, and is intended to be an extension of those statements.

In Audrey Seehagen's President's Report, term 2009-2010, she said her goal for the year was to "Git 'er done". During her term the WGA Board of Directors met and in her mind made great strides in cohesiveness. In her estimation, the most significant accomplishment was revamping of the *WGA Vision, Mission Statement, Values & Guiding Beliefs, and WGA Operating Principles*.

Acknowledging Excellence and/or Service with Awards

The Alberta Literary Awards, named after Georges Bugnet, Howard O'Hagan, Stephen G. Stephansson, R. Ross Annett and Wilfred Eggleston were created by the Writers Guild of Alberta in 1981 to recognize excellence in writing by Alberta authors. The Glen Pharis Ringwood award for Drama was created in 1985, the Jon Whyte Memorial Essay Prize was established in 1992 and the Henry Kriesel award for Best First Books was added in 1993. Entries are judged by an independent jury recruited by the Writers Guild of Alberta. Submissions are evaluated on originality, creativity and quality of writing, as well as appropriate fit within a category. In 1994 the Golden Pen Award was created as a Lifetime Achievement award. Most recent of all are the Amber Bowerman and James Gray awards.

The WGA also presents occasional Lifetime Membership Awards to members who have made an outstanding contribution to the Guild. Recipients are: Mary Walters, Marilyn Stratton, Phyllis Schule, Bob Stallworthy, Shirley Serviss and Lyn Thompson.

In addition, to these awards the Guild has, over the years, created other awards to honour the memory of members: the Martyn Godfrey Award (administered by Young

Alberta Book Society), the Lynne Fairbridge Award, the Isabel Miller Young Writers Award and the Jon Whyte Memorial Essay Prize.

In 1985 the Guild joined with Periodical Writers Association of Canada, the Canadian Authors Association, the League of Canadian Poets, and the other Guilds and Federations across Canada to explore the possibility of creating a Distinguished Canadian Writer Award to celebrate the career of a Canadian writer.

The Guild was involved in the development of the Edmonton City Book Prize (1995) and City of Calgary W.O. Mitchell Book Prize (1996). The judges are found by the Guild and the books are collected by the organization and distributed to the judges. The Guild continues to administer those prizes on behalf of both cities.

From time to time the Guild has created one time awards usually funded by a specific donation. An example of this is the Howard Palmer Outstanding Service Award. In 2008 an Honorary Membership was awarded to William T. (Bill) Trofimuk for his contribution of \$5000 to the organization.

Along with one-time awards, the Guild has been approached to create other awards. Former member, Sylvia Bough, proposed an award for periodical writers. She was requesting that funds be set aside in the 1987-88 budget to allow for the creation of such an award.

At the same meeting the Awards Committee received a motion that an annual award for Genre Fiction be established. The award was to include historical fiction, fantasy, science fiction, mystery, horror, thriller, and western.

In 1989, a letter from Cecelia Frey, chair of the Awards Committee to Executive Director, Lyle Weis, raised the possibility of an Electronic Media Drama Award.

A chronic concern of the Awards Committee has been the amount of work that the award judges are asked to do. It is noteworthy that this concern was brought to the Board in a letter from Mary Walters in 1995. That year the number of submissions increased to 26 in the Children's Literature category, more than 30 in Non-fiction, and 12 in Novel. In 2010 submissions are: Ross R. Annett Award for Children's Literature 32, Wilfred Eggleston Award for Non-fiction 28, Georges Bugnett Award for Fiction 19, Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry 16, Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Story 20, Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award for Drama 12, Jon Whyte Memorial Essay Contest 10, Amber Bowerman Memorial Travel Writing Award 8, James H. Gray Award for Short Non-fiction 38, City of Edmonton Book Prize 23, The City of Calgary W.O. Mitchell Book Prize 22.

There are normally three judges for each category; either two people from inside the province and one outside or one inside the province and two from outside. Initially, all judges had to be writers but in recent years the source of judges has been expanded to include bookstore staff and librarians.

The practice of conference calls among jury members when decisions were not unanimous was established in 1993.

For a number of years the Guild produced posters and book marks with the winning books on them were handed out at the Gala.

The 1994 Annual General Meeting and Awards Gala was the last combined event held by the Guild for some time. The membership voted to separate the AGM and Conference from the Gala. The thinking was that having two separate events might create more attention in the media for both. Another attempt to raise awareness of writers and writing was the combining of the Guild's Award Gala with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta celebration to create a Book Awards Gala, an event which was held alternately in Edmonton and Calgary. In 2007, the WGA and the Book Publishers Association amicably decided the best interests of their members would be

served with separate awards events. The WGA returning to past practices, hosted the 2007 Alberta Literary Awards Gala in conjunction with its conference and AGM in Grande Prairie. In 2010 the Gala was a joint function between the WGA and the Book Publishers Association of Alberta.

Awards Created by the Writers Guild of Alberta

R. Ross Annett Award for Children's Literature

This award was established in 1981 in honour of children's author Ronald Ross Annett (1895-1988). Annett is best known for a series of more than 70 stories in the series *Babe and Joe* (Saturday Evening Post) which centered around a girl named Babe, her older brother Little Joe, and their father Big Joe. His *Epecially Babe* stories, set in Jenner, AB, were collected into a book in 1942 and reprinted by Treefrog Press in 1978. In 2002 it was decided that this award would alternate annually between children's chapter and picture books.

Henry Kreisel Award for Best First Book

This award was dropped in 2002 as it was felt that the category pitted fiction against non-fiction against children's fiction against poetry etc. This competition between genres was thought to be too difficult to judge fairly.

Wilfred Eggleston Award for Non-fiction

Eggleston was a novelist working in Alberta whose first novel was published in 1938. He wrote a number of novels after that all set in the southern Alberta. He was one of the creative writing instructors at the Banff School of Fine Arts during the 1950s and 1960s.

Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction

O'Hagan's writing was of a literary kind as opposed to the more popular fiction. He worked during the 1950s and 1960s, writing both novels and short fiction. His novel, *Tay John*, is his best known work.

Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award for Drama

This award was created to recognize the contribution to drama that Gwen Pharis Ringwood made in Alberta. Her most creative period was during the 1930s when she wrote both radio and stage plays.

Georges Bugnet Award for Novel

Georges Bugnet was one of the foremost French writers of Alberta. He was born in France in 1879 and died in St. Alberta in 1981. In 1905 he moved first to Manitoba and then to St. Albert, Alberta and eventually homesteaded northeast of Edmonton in the Rich valley. During his life he wrote four novels and numerous articles, essays, short stories and poems.

Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry

Stephan G. Stephansson was an Icelandic poet who homesteaded near Markerville in Central Alberta. He was an insomniac and wrote well into the night after a full day's work on his farm. He wrote only in his native language and poet Kristiana Gunnars translated his work into English.

Golden Pen Award

This award was created to acknowledge the lifetime achievements of an Alberta writer. This award has been given four times: W.O. Mitchell, 1994; Dr. Grant McEwan, 2000; Rudy Wiebe, 2007; Myrna Kostash 2008.

Lynn Fairbridge Award

Lynn Fairbridge was a children's fiction writer with several novels to her credit. She was a strong advocate for children and their own literature. Her career was cut short by cancer. This award is given each year.

The Isabel Miller Young Writers Award (Poetry or Fiction)

The award was established in memory of Isabel Miller, a school teacher and writer who was active in Celebration of Women in the Arts, the Stroll of Poets and the Writers Guild

of Alberta. \$500 in prizes, awarded as cash or partial scholarship to attend YouthWrite, the WGA's summer writing camp for kids.

Jon Whyte Memorial Essay Prize

The Jon Whyte Memorial Essay prize was established as a tribute to Jon Whyte, a much-respected author, historian and arts community leader in Alberta. Essays reflect issues of concern to Albertans and/or the interests of Jon Whyte. The winner receives \$1000, and two runners-up receive \$500 each.

The Amber Bowerman Memorial Travel Writing Award

This award was created after the sudden and violent death of a young journalist and travel writer, Amber Bowerman. The \$10,000 to establish this award was donated by member Ann Campbell. This award recognize a writer with an extraordinary story to tell about how their life was changed by what they saw, heard, tasted, smelled, or touched when they travelled.

Howard Palmer Outstanding Service Award

This was a onetime award, created in honour of Dr. Howard Palmer and funded by a donation provided by Professor Don Smith. Both Dr. Palmer and Professor Smith were members of the History faculty of the University of Calgary. The 1993-94 Board approved the creation of the award and it was presented at the 1994 Gala.

James H. Gray Award for Short Non-fiction Award

This award will be presented for the first time in 2010. It is sponsored by Western Magazine. James H. Gray was a journalist, working for the *Winnipeg Free Press* before moving to Alberta and then editing separately both the *Farm and Ranch Review* and the *Western Oil Examiner*. He was well known for writing about the early history of Alberta, was one of the writers who walked out on the first Guild meeting in 1980, refusing to join the organization. He received a number of awards: Outstanding Contribution to Alberta History, Alberta Order of Excellence, Member of the Order of Canada and several honorary doctorates

Sources

WestWord

Past & present staff of the Writers Guild of Alberta

Various and sundry documents in the possession of the Edmonton WGA office

WGA Annual General Meeting Reports

"The Writer's Life," by Fred Stenson, AlbertaViews, March/April 2001,

"Federation of Alberta Writers to Meet in Calgary", by Brian Brennan, Calgary Herald,
July 12, 1980

Correspondence between volunteers and office staff

Correspondence from some members of the WGA

Discussions with some Past Presidents

WGA Task Group Report, 2004

WGA Archival Material, 1980 - 1986, Alberta Provincial Archives, Edmonton

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Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, James H. Gray

Appendix A

Strategic Plan

Background

In August 2008, the Writers Guild of Alberta (hereafter the Guild) began a process to research and develop a five-year strategic plan.

This plan is based upon information gathered from the membership through response to a survey, as well as discussions at the Board of Directors level. The purpose is to have the Guild Board:

- Articulate and prioritize goals,
- Strategize the optimal use of the Guild's human and financial resources to achieve those goals, and
- Assign short-and long-term timelines to achieve those goals.

The process also allows for a re-assessment of the organization's governance, including examination of the Guild's current structure and governance model.

This document provides the vision for the future of the Guild, including creative strategies and innovations to challenge the organization, The plan is intended to foster co-operation and participation between the Guild membership, the Guild staff, governmental department and organizations, other writing organizations, and the general writing community.

This plan represents a renewed commitment to the values and mandate of the organization. For the purpose of this plan, "short-term" shall refer to a one-to-three year time frame and "long-term" shall refer to a three-to-five year time frame, unless otherwise noted.

Plan Structure

In order to organize and focus the initiatives of this strategic plan, it has been divided into the following sections:

1. Advocacy
2. Business
3. Resource
4. Governance

There is acknowledged overlap between the sections

1. Advocacy

It is the Guild's intention to act as an advocate for writers, supporting their rights and facilitating the promotion of the writing community within the Province of Alberta.

The mandate of the Guild in this regard is not clear. By establishing a clear mandate, the Guild can take a progressive approach to how we undertake this role.

Short-term:

- Establish a standing advocacy sub-committee with the responsibility to identify member needs with respect to advocacy, including identifying what advocacy means to the membership.
- Establish a process of ongoing liaison between the membership and the Board for the purpose of identifying opportunities for advocacy.

Long-term Goals:

- Improve relationships with key influencers, including funding agencies, the government and the media
- Utilize high-profile members for advocacy work and keep them engaged with the Guild
- Cultivate a regional presence to ensure province-wide representation of advocacy efforts

2. Business

The Guild is committed to a strong and consistent delivery of programs and services that will benefit current members and attract new members. The membership, depending upon their level of experience, may have distinctive programming and

service needs. The Guild needs to implement initiatives to target all experience levels in order to embrace its membership.

The Guild will continue to acknowledge and celebrate the members' collective accomplishments while maintaining the tangible and intangible benefits of membership. Guild services need to attract new members across the range of experience and continue to be of benefit to members as the progress in the profession.

The Guild will focus on three key areas of program and service delivery to increase, diversify and maintain members:

1. Increase total membership by targeting outreach to emerging writers, offering new programs and services while articulating the tangible and intangible benefits of membership.
2. Increase membership among established writers by focusing programs and services on their needs, involving them in Guild programs in a teaching or mentoring capacity, and articulating the tangible and intangible benefits of membership
3. Re-define the focus and scope of our communication: in-house publication, website and e-mail publications

Increased membership improves the financial health of the Guild. A balance of established and emerging writers increases our legitimacy as a representative of the writing community and adds depth to our resources with respect to delivering member services.

The business of the Guild also included financial management. The Guild must ensure stable and appropriate budgeting, following recognized accounting principles.

Stable and sustainable financing will include investigating alternative sources of revenue, consistent with the principles of the Guild. Stable financing is an essential component of long-term planning of services.

Short-term:

- Expand and increase membership at all levels of writing experience;
- Open communication channels to ensure the Guild is meeting the need of our members;
- Qualify and quantify member turn-over;
- Make better use of our communication tools, and investigate new communication opportunities, to educate and inform members;
- Assist the membership in facilitating educational opportunities;
- Ensure Guild presences or participation in major writing events within the province;
- Investigate opportunities to engage established writers in the Guild programs.

Long-term Goals:

- Enhance the education component of our services through more workshops panels, and seminars, possibly in conjunction with our general meeting conference;
- Foster corporate connections to sponsor awards, the annual conference and/or workshops;
- Increase membership by 25% by year five to 1250;
- Reduce member turn-over by 10% by year five (improve retention rate);
- Add one well-known writer as a member per year;
- Increase the operating budget by 25% by year five;
- The Board will investigate options to stabilize and improve the long-term finances of the Guild.

3. Resources

The Guild should be a primary source for information on Alberta writers for local, national and international communities.

The Guild will continue to strive to communicate effectively with its membership, partners and writing community. To this end, the Guild will look to its current resources and introduce new initiatives to expand its scope of communication and seize new opportunities for networking.

The Guild will focus these efforts in two primary areas:

1. Writers Guild of Alberta website

2. Outreach and networks

3.1 Web-site

The Guild web-site has the potential to be enhanced as a resource and communications tool for the membership and the membership and the organization. A thorough review and, as necessary, overhaul of the web-site is underway in order to give it better design, presentation and content. It will focus on opportunities to make the web-site interactive and user friendly. Users are defined as the membership and the general public, as well as the staff whose job it is to maintain the site.

The process will include the necessary training of staff in order to ensure that day-to-day changes are made to keep the site relevant.

Short-term Goals:

- Assess the purpose of the web-site and the needs of the membership;
- Assess the technical requirements to meet user expectations;
- Invest in the re-development of the site.

3.2 Outreach and Networks

The Guild's primary responsibilities to its members and to the community merit a clear and effective means of communication. A meaningful relationship between the organization and its membership will be furthered by consistent communication about member benefits and programs. Ideally, all members will be able to encapsulate the mission of the organization in one or two simple sentences.

A comprehensive approach to communication must include strong components of outreach and community-building in order to provide incentives to encourage writer participation in the Guild. Creating communication networks for the membership fosters a sense of significant belonging which is needed in a community of independent artists.

Outreach to the public through the media will revitalize and brand the Guild's public image and ensure the exposure of members and their work. The Guild can undertake outreach to targeted audiences, such as educational institutions and communities. The Guild will strive to raise its public profile and to work within its own membership to instill simple yet lasting practices to create greater recognition for the Guild.

Short-Term Goals

- Implement more effective methods and systems to share information with other organizations;
- Establish a consistent brand for the Guild;
- Assign a staff member to publicity and marketing;
- Have a regular presence in the media;
- Have a regular presence in writing or arts events in the Province;
- Investigate opportunities to partner with other writing or publishing organizations;
- Assess relevance of programs;
- Increase networking opportunities for members.

Long-term Goals

- Become the resource organization for arts media reporters for issues related to Alberta writing;
- Increase the profile of the Guild and the Guild members in the community;
- Increase the participation of members in Guild activities, including both experienced and novice writers;
- Increase the profile of the Guild in academic institutions;
- Increase the public awareness of the Guild Literary Awards;
- Have a thriving membership program by year five.

4. Governance

The Guild is a member-driven organization and, therefore, we seek to strengthen the representation from the entire membership while representing the diverse needs of our members.

We will continue to examine and assess our governing model - a Board that provides policy and general direction, while assisting staff in practical ways. The Board will focus on larger issues, giving staff an over-riding direction. The Board will also provide leadership. The staff will be guided on a day-today basis by the Vision and Mission statement, as well as the Guild 'Values and Guiding Beliefs' and 'Operating Principles'.

The Board will establish ad hoc and standing committees as required, made up of Board members and general membership, to carry out additional work.

The Annual General Meeting will map out the coming year's priorities.

Short-term Goals

- The Board will establish written guidelines for the establishment of ad hoc and standing committees;
- The Board will continue to review and augment the Board Policy manual;
- The Guild will continue to operate in a financially responsible way.

Long-Term Goals

- The Board will periodically review the Guild Vision Statement and Mission Statement, and the Values and Guiding Beliefs and Operating Principles."

