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First poet laureate wants Lafayette and Orinda to resonate with this art form

By Sophie Braccini



Amy Glynn Photo provided

The Lamorinda Arts Council poet laureate committee recently announced the selection of Amy Glynn as the first Lafayette/Orinda poet laureate. Glynn, who is a Lafayette resident and published poet, is full of ideas to make poetry an accessible and popular discipline in Lafayette and Orinda, and thus contribute to the artistic vibrancy of the area. The cities of Lafayette and Orinda have entrusted LAC to fund and manage this program.

Glynn sees poetry as one of the art forms that can give sense to the chaotic world where we live. "Whether it is in a formal way or not, poets write poetry for the same reason scientists conduct experiments, to test hypothesis," she ventures. "You think that an idea might be true, and writing a poem about it is a way to figure out if it is." Reading or writing poetry is her way of observing and explaining the world. She believes that this art form is accessible to all, and that the poet

laureate program is going to be a way to develop it in Lafayette and Orinda.

Words, written or told, in the form of stories or poems, have been a part of Glynn's world as far as she can remember. The young mother of two daughters always knew that writing would be what she would do. After studying at Mount Holyoke College, Emily Dickenson's alma matter, she went to Lancaster University in England for her master's degree in creative writing. She has worked in all kinds of different jobs, from paralegal to teaching English as a Second Language, while always finding time to advance her writing.

Measure Press Inc. published her first book of poetry four years ago, "A Modern Herbal," and will publish her second collection when it is completed. Glynn has been a James Merrill House Fellow, a Bread Loaf Orion Environmental Writers' Conference Scholar, and a Mona van Duyn Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Conference. She and Robert Pinsky co-curated the "Favorite Poem Project" reading at the Robert Frost Library at Amherst College in 2015 and the Head-Royce School in Oakland in 2017.

She is a staff journalist for Paste Magazine and is freelancing as a wine writer.

LAC president Lawrence Kohl explains that a committee independent from the LAC board selected the poet laureate. He explains that it included several former poet laureates from other cities such as Connie Post, former Livermore poet laureate. LAC received six applications and Glynn was selected after several rounds of interviews. LAC has secured the funding for the poet laureate, a \$3,000 annual stipend.

LAC has formed a poet laureate committee that will manage the program, with Glynn at its center, but Kohl believes that there is more to do than one person can handle. He would like members of the community, including the schools, to join the committee. He notes that this program is somewhat unusual since Glynn is expected to support poetry activities in two cities rather than just one, as it is usually done in larger communities.

Glynn is already full of creative ideas. Besides writing poems, giving classes or organizing events, she has participated in the creation of ekphrastic poetry - often a vivid description of a piece of art - with her friend, painter, and gallery owner Jennifer Perlmutter, and now she imagines more. She thinks of multidisciplinary events, of poetry readings in different places, of open mics for new poets, of master classes in schools, in addition to the official duty a poet laureate is usually expected to perform to celebrate local events. She feels ready to serve the diverse communities' needs.

The libraries in Lafayette and Orinda are also engaged in promoting poetry with the program and the first events with Glynn will happen at the two libraries at noon on April 26 in Orinda and at 7 p.m. April 30 in Lafayette, including poetry readings and light refreshments.

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