



GAYLE HENEY

POET LAUREATE

Town of North Andover

Gayle Heney selected as North Andover Poet Laureate for another two years

NORTH ANDOVER, Jan. 26, 2010 / -- North Andover Poet Laureate – Local poet Gayle C. Heney continues on her quest of poetry awareness for all and recent selection as the Town of North Andover’s poet laureate for a second term strengthens her platform.

“Poetry is a force that brings people together,” the North Andover resident says. “I see it as a way of taking the pulse of the times in which we live and a means of conveying knowledge and insight. I think it’s such a wonderful tool and needs to be cultivated as part of the community’s fabric.”

Heney has settled comfortably in her role, first appointed as the town’s second poet laureate in July 2008, saying that being poet laureate has opened doors for her in the schools, in the community and beyond.

“I have known Gayle for more than 10 years and in that time I’ve been in her writing group called The Write Group that meets at her home,” says Blair Gracie Woodman, who was a math and science teacher at Greater Lawrence Tech, now retired. Woodman, a member of the North Andover Poet Laureate Committee since 2006, testifies to Heney’s positive influence. “I wasn’t writing poetry when I first joined the group. A small group of six, we participated in poetry exercises and I got involved as time went on. We have such an interesting group, from diverse

backgrounds, and Gayle is the catalyst. Just look at the fact that she would decide to start a group and then invite people she didn't even know."

In 2007 The Write Group published a poetry book, "Moments Falling Open, which "enlarged our experience so much," Woodman adds.

Heney, very active in North Andover elementary and middle schools, has introduced poetry programs to more than 295 kids in fifth through seventh grades and continues to make herself available for language arts events. One of the highlights of her last year was attending a four-month program, "Essex LINC's, Local History in a National Context," which prepares her for teaching elementary school social studies in the context of poetry.

"I took that class to make myself a more knowledgeable poet," she says. "I now know the local history of Essex County within the context of the Massachusetts Frameworks. I will use my abilities through this program to bring social studies into the classroom using an exciting vehicle, and that is poetry."

Heney arranged for poets to read original poetry at the Fall Arts & Sounds Festival at the Rolling Ridge Conference Center, sponsored by the North Andover Cultural Council and Andover's Artists Guild, and at North Andover's first poetry slam. The keynote speaker at Northern Essex Community College's Peace Poetry Contest in May 2009, she has identified college programs for the coming year and has introduced herself at the high school.

"I have contacts at North Andover High School and now I'm establishing contacts at Merrimack College," Heney says. "I'm excited about what I will do."

Heney's activities have overflowed naturally into arts programs in the area as well.

"I am very pleased about teaching poetry at the Essex Arts Center in Lawrence," she says. "Part of being poet laureate is building bridges to other institutions. The Essex Arts Center is a jewel in Essex County and they are very willing to promote poetry."

Heney hosts TV programs on local television, judges community poetry contests, participates in readings and continues to share her own poetry as she encourages others.

A formal announcement and official appointment and reception schedule will be released in April, during National Poetry Month.

"We are privileged to have such an active poetry advocate in Gayle; she made it very easy for the committee to extend her tenure," says Robin Ellington, Poet Laureate Committee chairman.

"With Gayle as poet laureate the community can enjoy the ride."