

For immediate release
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AEC Conference Writers Visit Schools, Book Clubs *Literary Festival Outreach Touches 7,000*

Sam Pickering, the author who served as the inspiration for Robin Williams' character in *Dead Poets Society*, is among 19 writers visiting area schools during the 2011 Arts & Education Council Conference on Southern Literature.

The authors taking part in the Writer Residency Program will spend a day at the schools, meeting with students to encourage them to read and perhaps inspire them to become writers.

"The residencies are an important extension of the conference and help fulfill the mission of the AEC and the Fellowship of Southern Writers," said Susan Robinson, AEC executive director.

"We are happy to provide our students the opportunity to meet professional writers and learn how they go about creating literature."

The Fellowship of Southern Writers was founded in 1987 to encourage and reward excellence in the literary arts by southern authors.

The Fellowship meets in conjunction with the biennial conference, set this year for April 14 to 16 at the Tivoli Theatre.

During the conference some 50 authors will read from their works, offer lectures and take part in panel discussions. Ten writers will be inducted into the Fellowship, while 10 will receive Fellowship prizes.

The mission of the AEC and the Fellowship blend perfectly in the extra-conference activities that stimulate a love of books and an interest in writing among people of all ages.

For his writer residencies Pickering will be visiting Notre Dame High School and Red Bank High School, as well as speaking to UTC's Teaching Academy.

Dead Poets Society is based on Pickering's carpe diem teaching approach during his tenure at Montgomery Bell Academy in Nashville.

A Tennessee native, Pickering now serves on the English faculty at the University of Connecticut. His recent books include the memoir *A Comfortable Boy* and *Journeys*, a volume of personal essays.

Among other authors participating in residencies are poet Ellen Bryant Voigt (East Hamilton Middle/High School), Nashville performance artist Minton Sparks (Center for the Creative Arts) and Chattanooga native Elizabeth Cox, a novelist and short story writer (Baylor).

The AEC conference outreach includes the Young Southern Student Writers Program. This year students in grades K-12 submitted more than 5,000 entries for the competition, judged by the UTC English Department.

Four-hundred-and-eighty winners will be honored at an awards ceremony on April 12 at the Tivoli.

"When this program started 10 years ago, we received 500 entries and picked 50 winners," says Dr. Verbie Prevost, head of the UTC English department and director of the program for young writers.

“Since then, we’ve had to move the entry deadline up twice to allow more time to ready through them all. But we are encouraging more kids to write – what a great problem to have!”

The conference outreach also includes a Creative Writing Workshop for 30 Hamilton County high school teachers. Fiction writers Allen Wier and Jill McCorkle and poet Andrew Hudgins will offer the workshop on April 13.

Conference writers, including Josephine Humphreys, Bobbie Ann Mason and Richard Bausch, will visit local book clubs to discuss their works.

“The outreach program is so comprehensive, it is expected to reach some 7,000 area residents this year,”

Robinson says. “Through these programs the AEC meets its objective of providing innovative, artistic experiences for the enrichment of the community.”

For more information on the Conference on Southern Literature call the Arts & Education Council at 423.267.1218 or visit www.southernlitconference.com.

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