



**WORCESTER COUNTY POETRY
ASSOCIATION**

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



**Worcester County
Poetry Association**
Growing Poetry Since 1971

wcpaboard@yahoo.com

www.worcestercountypoetry.org

P.O. Box 804, Worcester, MA 01613 | 508797 4770

Table of Contents

01	President's Message	1
02	Secretary's Report	4
03	Treasurer's Report	8
04	Budget vs. Actuals for 2025	9
05	Balance sheet for 2025	10
06	WCPA operating revenue amount	11
07	Programming at the WCPA 2025	12
08	Communications Report 2025	13
09	Frank O'Hara Prize	14
10	Dan Lewis Fellowship Fund	16
11	Stanley Kunitz Medal Award	18
12	The Gregory Stockmal Reading Fund	19
13	The Openest Mic	20
14	3Decker Journal	21
15	The Worcester Review	23
16	Mapping Worcester in Poetry	24
17	The Clemente Course in the Humanities, Worcester	26
18	Worcester Writer's Collective	30
19	Executive Director's Report	32

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome, Everyone!

During 2025, the WCPA doubled down on its commitment to promote local poets and writers and their original works, expressing thoughtfulness, struggle and beauty - recording truth. There is no better way to nurture a strong, independent city and region than to encourage diverse voices to speak and to write. We are constantly looking for new ways to provide that support and the safe spaces in which it can happen, especially necessary during these darkening and dangerous times when moral clarity is needed more than ever. Together, we continue to envision and to create that vital third space where literary artists can find belonging, cross fertilize, share their work with a larger audience and support one and other. As you read through the following pages, you will marvel at the opportunities this long-lived organization offers our community

2025 highlights include:

- A NEW program called Member Mingles featuring dinner, live music and conversation for members before board meetings.
- With thanks to our local restaurant and musician partners:
The Boynton, The Broadway, Boomers, Volturno, Don Prang, P.E. James, David Leach, William Westgroves, Alfee West and Awareness of Joy.
Also - thanks to Sandy Edwards for sharing her excellent Zine Workshop.
- The launch of the first two issues of our new journal, 3Decker, produced in partnership with The Worcester Cultural Coalition. Both featured the work of Worcester Poets Laureate. Read more about them below.
- VP of Programming, Joe Fusco, Jr., worked his magic offering two open mics a month featuring young artists and old.
- Thanks to donor, Dee O'Connor, we organized a new Youth Poetry Contest to honor the life of her late husband, local teacher, mentor and poet, Curt Curtin. The Curt Curtin Youth Poetry Prize will launch in March, 2026.



- Board member and 2024 Dan Lewis Fellowship awardee, Laura DiCaronimo, was nominated for a Boston Music Award for her energetic and inclusive Openest Mic series, centered in the City of Fitchburg.

JOIN US! We welcome everyone. Our board meetings are open, two publications, our new 3Decker featuring local artists and our venerable Worcester Review, are included in each membership, our contests and programs can be accessed through our website. Put your finger on the pulse of our city and county and feel them sing.

Most importantly, I am grateful to each member of our hard-working Board for their gifts of creativity, collaboration and dedication to the literary arts. It's within your words and actions that democracy survives - alive, awake, unflinching - increasingly practiced and performed, stock full of the awareness of joy.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Bacon

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Worcester County Poetry Association Annual Meeting, March 2, 2025

The 53rd Annual Meeting of the Worcester County Poetry Association was held in the ballroom of the Salisbury House, 61 Harvard Street, Worcester, MA, on March 2, 2025, at 2:00 PM.

Board Members in Attendance:

- Pamela Gemme
- Rodger Martin
- Ann Lewis
- Phil Lemos
- Kate Gregoire
- Bruja the Villain
- Rob Baker
- Linda Warren
- Judith Ferrara
- Brett Larrobino
- Robert Steele
- Joe Fusco, Jr.
- Sam Capradae
- Robert Eugene Perry
- Susan Elizabeth Sweeney
- Tarique Cooper

Members in Attendance:

- Laura DiCaronimo
- Judith Ferrara
- Paul Szlosek
- Michelle Johnson
- Irena Kaci
- Carla Okala
- Jay Lavelle
- Serenity Jackson
- Ned Bacon
- Ann Marie Lucci
- Heather MacPhearson

Linda Conte, guest from NEPC

Opening poem:

Elizabeth Bacon read from *The Obsessive Machine*, by Carolyn Oliver

Welcome:

Wayne Daygle, consultant for our Strategic Plan, welcomed new board members, and new partner, The Poets' Cauldron.

Call to Order and President's Message:

Elizabeth Bacon, President, called the meeting to order, asking the members to sign in as required for voting. Her message emphasized our strategic plan, and WCPA's focus on creating community.

Secretary's Report:

(The Secretary's report is in the printed and online version of the Annual Report 2024 booklet.) Linda Warren referred members to the Annual Report booklet and asked for a motion to accept the minutes. Robert Steele motioned to accept the report. Beth Sweeney seconded. The motion was approved.

Treasurer's Report:

(The Treasurer's report is in the printed and online version of the Annual Report 2024 booklet.) Mary Driscoll, Treasurer, thanked the program managers to keeping things within budget. Membership dues were down, possibly due to continuing recovery from Covid. Last year's revenue, however, was more than expected. She thanked Elizabeth and Irena for their support, and highlighted a few budget items including the one time grant of \$80,000 from the city of Worcester (leftover Covid funds). She thanked the family of Curt Curtin for \$5000 which we matched to establish the endowment for the Curt Curtin Youth Poetry prize. Rodger Martin motioned to accept the report. Rob Baker seconded. The motion was approved.

Committee Reports:

(The full reports are in the printed and online version of the Annual Report 2024 booklet.)

Programming Committee:

Joe Fusco, Jr. summarized the 2024 Programming Committee report, noting highlights including 16 online readings at The Thirsty Lab, the annual Stockmal Reading, Susan O'Brien's Women's zoom reading, Poet-Poiri, the Richard Fox poetry series, and Foxfest, sponsored by a grant from Richard Fox's family. The winner of the Slam poetry contest at Foxfest was Daniel Letona. Joe reported that Poetry Extravaganza will rise again in 2025 at the Mill in West Boylston. Arts in the Garden may continue into 2025. WCPA programming also assisted the National Baseball Poetry Festival by hosting an open mic.

Membership Report:

Ann Lewis reported that the membership process changed in April 2024, to better separate donations from memberships. Processing, notifying and managing membership can now be handled on a new web page, and as of April 2025, members will automatically receive notice of renewal using the same charge card as the original donation. Members will have to "do nothing" and memberships will renew, or "do something" to prevent that. This will address members who did not renew because they forgot, which includes 25% of our members. She mentioned the survey sent out to determine what members value about membership benefits. Roger mentioned that it's rare for us to get so many renewals in January and February, which is evidence of the effectiveness of the new process.

Public Program Manager and Outreach Coordinator's Report:

Irena Kaci highlighted her 2024 priorities, including the Strategic Plan and workshop with Wayne. During 2024 Irena also met with community leaders to get a sense of who our peers are and where we're all going. She highlighted several grants received by WCPA, including the Worcester Cultural Council grant of \$80,000. Additionally, she gave a shout out to the WWC showcase theatrical event staged in 2024.

Rain Poetry:

Kate Gregoire asked members to save the date Apr 13 for the JMAC Rain Poetry celebration. She reported that the fourth year of Rain Poetry was the biggest year yet, featuring 25 poets, including age categories for school aged poets in Worcester County. The project took rain poetry to the airwaves - "Raindrops" on WCUW featured 30 second spots of rain poets reciting their poems. She urged all of us to help encourage submissions. The project now includes publication of the winning Rain poems, and a reading open to the public.

Mapping Worcester in Poetry:

Beth Sweeney shared some 2024 accomplishments of the Mapping Worcester in Poetry project, whose mission is to identify, document and celebrate places in Worcester associated with poetry, and to support new poems about Worcester. She gave a shout out to students at Holy Cross who have been working with her, highlighting their research on Abstract Expressionism and Frank O'Hara. The students prepared a feature section of the Worcester Review. The Mapping Worcester project sponsored two readings at Elizabeth Bishop's grave, on her birthday and her death day. She announced that on May 15 the Worcester Historical Museum will open "The poem Next Door" exhibit showcasing fifty years of Worcester Places associated with poetry. She invited anyone who has information about a particular place where a poetry organization has met or readings have happened to let her know. She also announced an October collaboration with the Worcester Art museum, titled, "Rainbow, Rainbow, Rainbow," which will celebrate Elisabeth Bishop and everything the rainbow represents.

Worcester Review:

Phil Lemos reported that most of the work of the next issue was already completed by Carolyn Oliver, the previous editor, when he took over as Editor. The Worcester Review is now in the process of finding a new printer, and Phil welcomed suggestions for any members.



He has worked on several other literary reviews; the wrinkle for this one was that the printer went out of business. The WR staff have already started the reading period for the next issue and have about 500 submissions. Once this current (late) issue is out, WR will try to put out another issue before the end of the year.

Clemente:

Elizabeth reported that 2024 was the 10th anniversary of Clemente in Worcester. The milestone was celebrated with a dance party. They again have support from the Alden Trust, so they have been able to put in reserve a year's financing for the upcoming year.

Elizabeth Bacon reported that the (2024) 10th Clemente class will be graduating May 12th.

Over 1000 people have participated in the Clemente project over the years. During the month of May, Clemente will be staging a public art auction in collaboration with the Inside/Out project and the Worcester Art Museum on the exterior wall of the museum's Lancaster Street entrance.

Worcester Writer's Collective:

Brett Iarobbino introduced himself as one of the committee that runs the WWC, along with Irena Kaci, Nick Baker. 2024 was the first year of being under the WCPA umbrella. The WWC hosted 45 meetings dedicated to writing and workshoping. About 128 individual writers participated, along with guest writers. He invited anyone who is interested in being a guest writer to let him know – there is a small stipend. In 2024 WWC presented its inaugural showplace theatrical production (visual, audio, live, etc.), at which about 200 Worcester residents saw new writing acknowledged and presented on stage. WWC received grants from 15 cultural councils and others, totaling about \$7000.

The Poets' Cauldron:

Bruja The Villain introduced herself as a multidisciplinary artist who started this event after Covid to address a sense of depression in the Latino neighborhood about the loss of music, art, restaurants, and people. Worcester is about 17% Latino. Multiple times, an arts space in Worcester is lost. One of the new spaces to replace the Sprinkler Factory is The White Space, which was being used to host events. Opening night at Bruja's Poets' Cauldron open mic had 180 people. It's been functioning for three years now, hosting 240 artists, and upwards of 1000 listeners. The readings feature a dedicated band for live music. The Poets' Cauldron philosophy is that it's okay to make mistakes, stumble, forget the poem, etc., but being vulnerable and sharing our humanity brings us together and celebrates the arts. The Poets Cauldron has received grants again this year.

O'Hara Prize:

Irena Kaci and Joe Fusco Jr. announced that the winner of O'Hara prize was Paul Szlozak. Second and Third place winners were Claire Shaeffer-Duffy and Art DuBois. The 2024 contest judge was Dennis Barone. Seventy people submitted a total of 188 poems for the contest. DeMisty Bellinger will be the 2025 judge.

Dan Lewis Award:

Ann Lewis recapped the award, made possible by an endowment by Dan's Family which will offer an award of \$2500 to a Worcester County poet to be used to fulfill a need that otherwise would not be met. She announced the 2nd Dan Lewis prize winner, Hose Daniel Latona Gonzales, who will use the fellowship to visit his home country, Honduras. (He has at his time returned to Honduras because of the current political climate here.)

Ann Lewis read one of Dan's poems: Pieces of Sky.

Stanley Kunitz Medal:

Judy Ferrara reported that Paul Szlozek was the winner of the Kunitz Medal this year, and thanked the committee for their work. She noted that 2025 nominations close March 31, and encouraged members to see the online guidelines if they wish to nominate someone. Judy noted that this was her last year as chair of the committee and quoted Kunitz in closing: "My association with others, particularly poets, has been one of the happiest chapters of my life."

Nomination of Board Members:

Elizabeth presented the slate of board members and thanked the members who are continuing their service for another year: Oliver de la Paz, Kate Macintyre, Joe Aguilar, Vanessa Gonzales, Joe Fusco Jr., Mary Driscoll (Treasurer), Linda Warren (Secretary), Jay Lavelle, Robert Steele, Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, Rodger Martin, David Thoreen, Rob Baker, Sam Capradae, Phil Lemos (Managing Editor, Worcester Review), Tarique Cooper, Bruja The Villain, Sharon ? . She then welcomed new members: Pam Gemme (who represents the National Baseball festival), Robert Eugene Perry (who has run a monthly open mic for six years and just started an Indi press – Linden Press), Laura DiCaronimo, and Emma Coullard.

Anne Marie Lucas motioned to accept the slate of board members, and Rob Baker seconded. The motion was approved.

Award of Recognition:

Elizabeth presented a framed broadside to Ann Lewis, long time board member who is leaving the board. Ann will continue to serve as Membership chairman.

Motion to Adjourn:

Rodger Martin made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Elizabeth Bacon seconded. The motion was approved.

Annual Reading:

The guest reader for the 2025 Annual Meeting was Worcester Youth Poet Laureate Serenity Jackson.



P.O. Box 804, Worcester , MA 01613

www.worcestercountypoetry.org

wcpaboard@yahoo.com | 508 797 4770

DATE: 121/31/25

TO: WCPA Board

From: Ann Lewis, Membership Coordinator

RE: Membership

**Membership Report - FY 2025
As of 12/31/25**

	Members		Members By Level				Amt
	Check	Online	\$12	\$20	\$35	\$50	
January	4	14	4	8	4	2	436.00
February	5	17	3	8	9	2	611.00
March	4	22	4	8	13	1	713.00
April	1	7	1	5	2	0	194.00
May	0	9	4	1	4	0	228.00
June	3	1	1	2	1	0	55.00
July	3	3	0	4	2	0	185.00
August	2	7	0	5	4	0	255.00
September	5	5	1	4	3	2	172.00
October	1	8	1	4	1	3	257.00
Novemeber	2	6	0	3	5	0	235.00
December	1	7	1	2	3	2	257.00
Total	31	106	20	54	51	12	3,598.00

Member Status	Current*	Lifetime	Honorary
* Includes Paid, Lifetime & Honorary	149	11	1
		2025 Lapsed	2025 New
		46	49

Total Membership Received = \$3,598.00

TREASURER'S REPORT

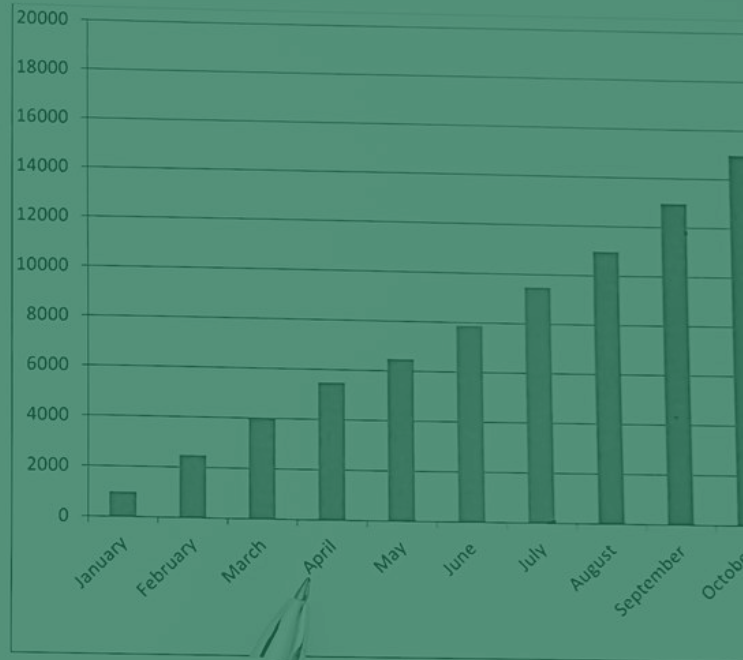
During 2025, we continued to improve our financial reporting with monthly “flash reports” and quarterly summaries of actual vs. budgeted performance. These reports are provided to our Board of Directors each month. The intention was to provide program managers with useful information on a timely basis to help them to control expenses. I am happy to report that all program managers were able to run highly successful events while maintaining budget discipline.

We also took steps to improve basic cash management by moving both the WCPA and Clemente savings accounts out of very low yielding bank accounts and placing these funds in separate short-term Certificates of Deposit. The boost to interest income was helpful in a tight fiscal environment. Also helpful: several important categories of administrative spending came in under budget.

On the revenue side, we saw an increase in individual contributions. Membership revenue was stable, reflecting strong outreach and improved renewal processes. Transfers from endowments for discreet programs were lighter than we had hoped.

We are deeply grateful to our members and donors—especially our dedicated, all-volunteer program managers—for their efforts. Partners such as Mass Humanities and Greater Worcester Community Foundation were also crucial in supporting WCPA’s strategic goals during a challenging year.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Driscoll, Treasurer.





Worcester County Poetry Association

Budget vs. Actuals: FY25

January - December 2025

	TOTAL		
	ACTUAL	BUDGET	OVER BUDGET
Revenue			
4010 Individual Contributions	52,810.79	21,150.00	31,660.79
4020 Corporate Contributions	4,747.50	15,000.00	-10,252.50
4230 Foundation / Trust Grants	81,224.00	126,560.00	-45,336.00
4500 Government Grants	23,975.00		23,975.00
5180 Program Service Fees	14,997.00	2,132.00	12,865.00
5210 Membership Dues	3,421.70	3,900.00	-478.30
5300 TWR Revenue	3,948.00	2,000.00	1,948.00
5400 Rental Income		3,000.00	-3,000.00
Transfers from GWCF Endowments	10,710.00	19,120.00	-8,410.00
Total Revenue	\$195,833.99	\$192,862.00	\$2,971.99
GROSS PROFIT	\$195,833.99	\$192,862.00	\$2,971.99
Expenditures			
7500 Consultant and Contractor Expenses	90,313.57	94,215.00	-3,901.43
7600 TWR Honoraria	290.00	1,600.00	-1,310.00
8100 Supplies, Web, Etc.	11,671.88		11,671.88
8210 Rent / Lease	19,138.04	19,600.00	-461.96
8300 Travel & Meetings	262.88	9,218.52	-8,955.64
8400 Event Expenses	17,840.01	12,850.00	4,990.01
8500 Other Expenses		7,800.00	-7,800.00
8532 Dues and Subscriptions	969.25	1,011.00	-41.75
8570 Advertising Expenses	513.79	600.00	-86.21
8580 Filing Fees	35.00	100.00	-65.00
8581 Donations	300.00	528.92	-228.92
8600 Supplies for Programs	568.25		568.25
Total Expenditures	\$141,902.67	\$147,523.44	\$ -5,620.77
NET OPERATING REVENUE	\$53,931.32	\$45,338.56	\$8,592.76
Other Revenue			
5310 Interest Income	1,418.73	37.00	1,381.73
5312 Credit Card Promo	44.82		44.82
6800 Realized/Unrealized Gains/Losses	46,065.81		46,065.81
Total Other Revenue	\$47,529.36	\$37.00	\$47,492.36
Other Expenditures			
9000 GWCF Administrative Fees	4,303.76		4,303.76
Total Other Expenditures	\$4,303.76	\$0.00	\$4,303.76
NET OTHER REVENUE	\$43,225.60	\$37.00	\$43,188.60
NET REVENUE	\$97,156.92	\$45,375.56	\$51,781.36



Worcester County Poetry Association

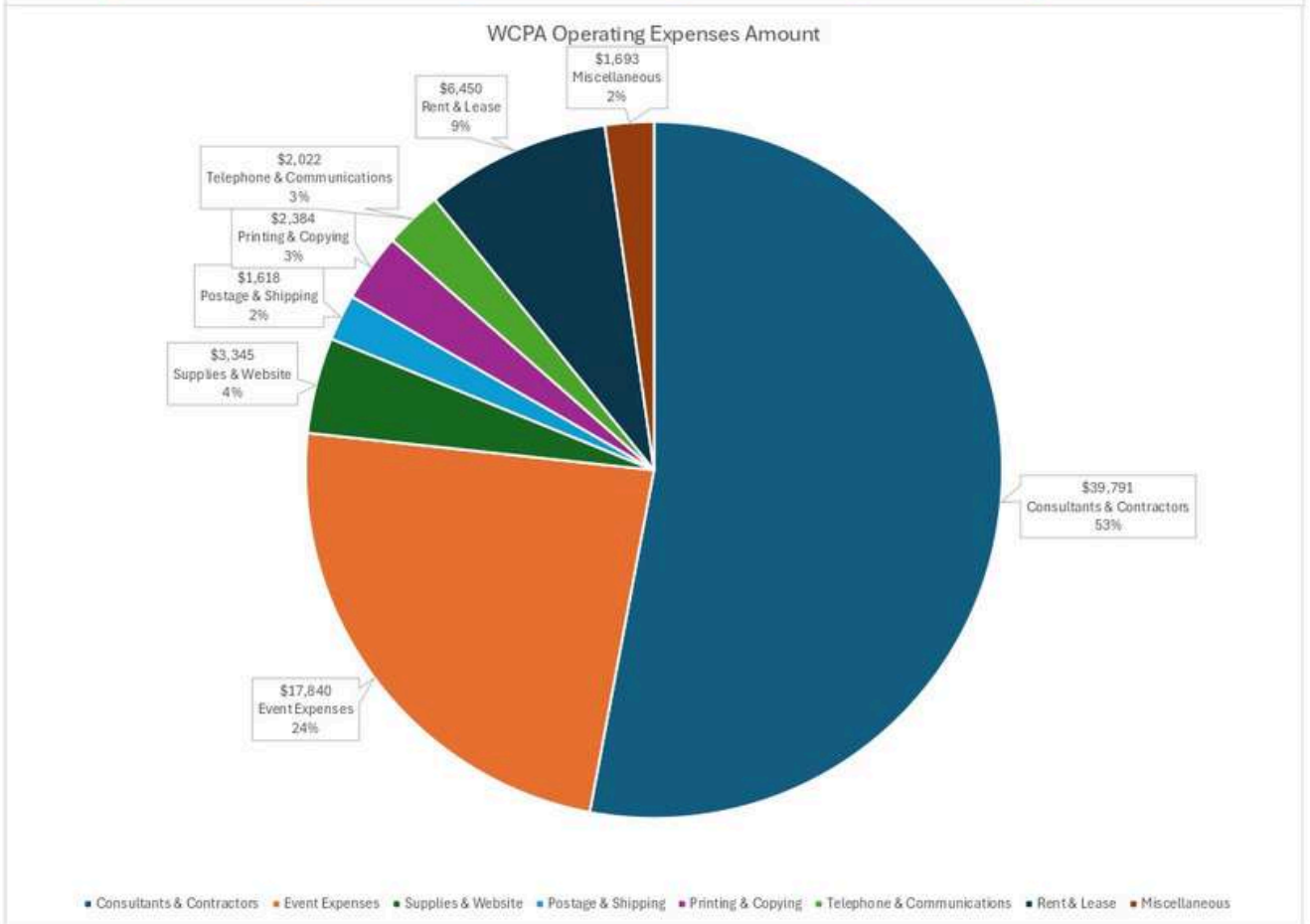
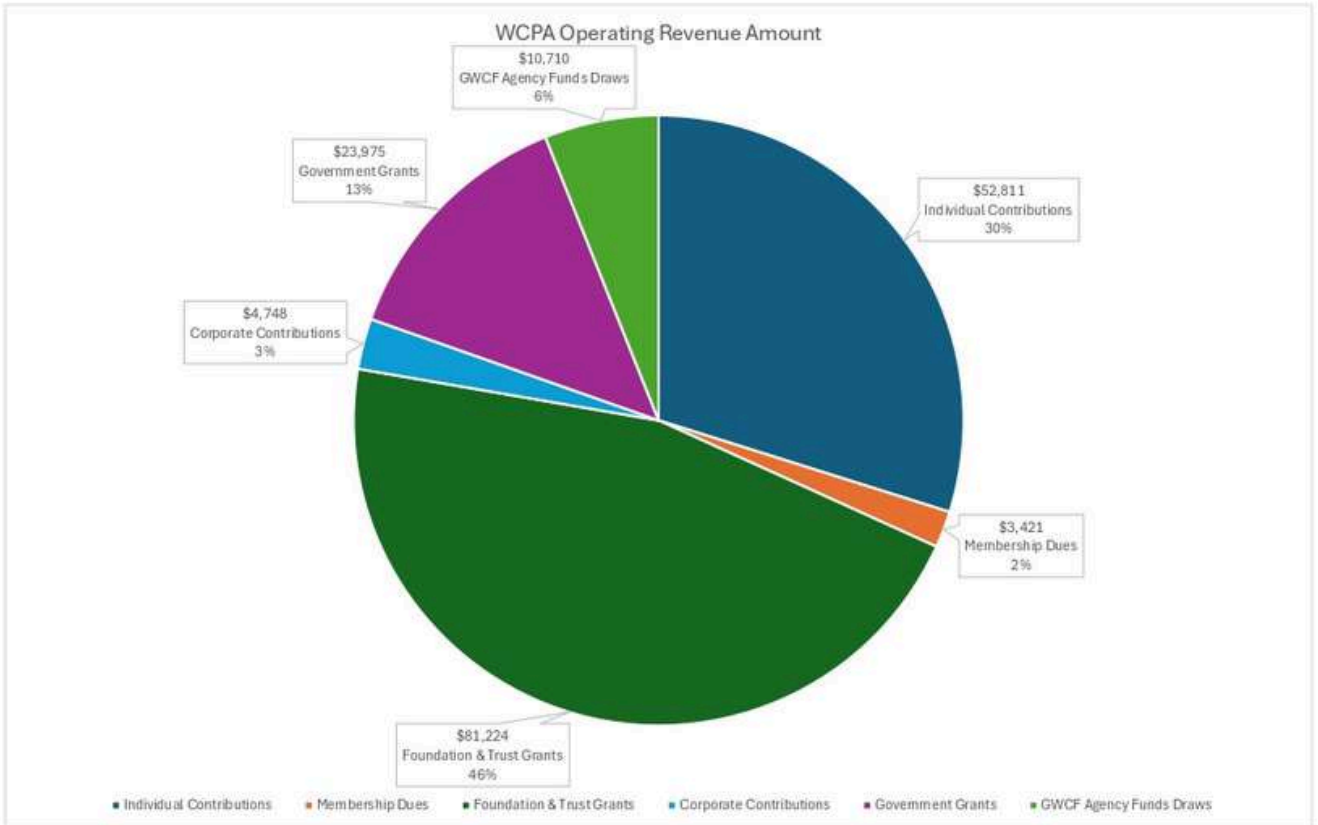
Statement of Financial Position

As of December 31, 2025

	TOTAL
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
1030 Paypal	4,332.64
1040 LCU TWR Checking	2.87
1041 LCU Membership Savings (0000)	5.00
1050 MNB Checking (8031)	31,096.73
1071 MNB CD (7859)	22,857.71
1072 MNB CD (8419)	22,243.35
1073 MNB CD (8401)	30,151.46
1074 MNB CD (9300)	26,286.00
1075 MNB Admin 1050	20,181.88
1085 MNB Writers (0358)	1,913.47
BOA Clemente Bank Account (NEW)	24,350.00
Total Bank Accounts	\$183,421.11
Total Current Assets	\$183,421.11
Fixed Assets	
1300 Website	10,000.00
1600 Fixed Assets	
1640 Fixed Asset Furniture	1,352.84
1670 Computers / Office Hardware	14,290.91
Total 1600 Fixed Assets	15,643.75
1700 Accumulated Depreciation	-16,630.00
Total Fixed Assets	\$9,013.75
Other Assets	
1500 GWCF Agency Fund	
1510 Founders' Fund	65,696.94
1520 Worcester Review Endowment Fund	113,330.31
1530 Stanley Kunitz Award Fund	29,049.73
1540 Gregory Stockmal Reading Fund	21,838.21
1550 College Contest Fund	13,656.04
1560 Dan Lewis Memorial Poetry Fund	122,244.77
1570 Curt Curtin Youth Poetry Endowment	9,500.00
Total 1500 GWCF Agency Fund	375,316.00
Total Other Assets	\$375,316.00
TOTAL ASSETS	\$567,750.86
	TOTAL
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Credit Cards	
2100 BOA Card	-27.83
Total Credit Cards	\$ -27.83
Total Current Liabilities	\$ -27.83
Total Liabilities	\$ -27.83
Equity	
3000 Unrestricted Net Assets	463,415.77
Restricted Net Assets	0.00
2025 In Honor of Amy Richter	7,206.00
Total Restricted Net Assets	7,206.00
Net Revenue	97,156.92
Total Equity	\$567,778.69
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	\$567,750.86

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

WCPA OPERATING REVENUE AMOUNT



PROGRAMMING AT THE WCPA 2025

Susan Roney O'Brien hosted the Thirsty Lab Zoom Readings with technical support by Lex Thomas. 16 readings with over 350 Zoomers. Susan also hosted the Women's Zoom Reading May 22nd. 22 readers.

WCPA sponsored The Richard Fox Poetry Series at Root and Press Cafe and Books in Worcester hosted by Joe Fusco Jr. 10 'live' features and an open mic with an

average of 20 patrons. The Poetry Extravaganza at The Mill in West Boylston was promoted by the WCPA and also hosted by Joe Fusco Jr. 11 'live' features and open mic with an average of 30 patrons.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joe Fusco, Jr.



COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT 2025

The Communications Committee is in charge of the WCPA Website, the Newsletter, and managing our membership.

During 2025, under the stewardship of Rob Baker, our web master, the web site underwent a tech audit, added membership functionality to enable our members to join or renew online, and expanded opportunities for members such as a bookshelf/online bookstore for the sale of members' books. Additionally the site is being redesigned, with the help of Catherine Martin, web designer, and Rob as technical wizard.

Our monthly newsletter, created and sustained by Brett Iarrobino, has grown in its outreach and now has 1300 recipients.

Membership, under the care and feeding of Ann Lewis, increased by 20 members in 2025, supported by surveys of members' renewal decisions and what membership benefits are most important to members. We've also gained members through collaborative events and through our partnerships with other writing organizations.

Our committee is small but mighty, and our committee members wear other hats as well, and work closely with the rest of the board to get out the word and keep us all in communication.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Warren, Chair



FRANK O'HARA PRIZE

2025 Annual Poetry Contest: The Frank O'Hara Prize presented by Irena Kaci Another successful year for the WCPA's Annual Poetry Contest: The Frank O'Hara Prize is complete.

We held an in-person Winners' Reading on October 19th, 2025, in the Boardroom at 61 Harvard Street.

The 2025 winners are as follows:

First Place - Anthony DiPietro of Worcester, Massachusetts, for his poem "The God of Hide and Seek". DiPietro is a gay sex poet originally from Providence, RI, who has lived throughout New England and elsewhere. Now deputy director of Rose Art Museum, he resides in Worcester, MA. He composed his 2021 chapbook *And Walk Through* (Seven Kitchens Press) on a typewriter during the pandemic lockdowns, and his debut collection is *kiss & release* (Unsolicited Press, 2024).



Second Place - Maia Campbell of Worcester, Massachusetts, for "When I Grow Up". Campbell is a Jamaican-American writer and doctoral candidate studying political philosophy at the University of Dallas. Maia has published poetry in *Amistad: Howard University's Literary Arts Journal* and *Wilder Roam*. She has also participated in several poetry readings and has had her work publicly displayed as part of the Worcester County Poetry Association's Rain Poetry Competition in 2022 and 2024. Maia grew up in Worcester and moved back to the city in 2023.

Third Place - Claire Schaeffer-Duffy of Worcester, Massachusetts, for "Homage to the Enemy's Poet". Schaeffer-Duffy is a founding member of the SS. Francis and Therese Catholic Worker, a lay community in Worcester, MA, that offers hospitality to men and women in need and engages in a variety of works for peace and justice. The community publishes *The Catholic Radical*, to which Claire contributes. Claire began writing as a freelance journalist for the *National Catholic Reporter* in 2000, a pursuit that has allowed her to satisfy her wanderlust. Her profiles, features, and investigative stories have garnered several awards from the Catholic Press Association. You can find her book reviews in *America* magazine. She and Scott are the happy parents of four children and grandparents of six. The couple still logs their miles as long-distance runners, although lately, Claire is thinking about taking up the ukulele.



Honorable Mention – **Em Judkins** of Worcester, Massachusetts, for “Crying About Old Women at the Macy’s Jewelry Counter (Again)”. Em Judkins (they/them) is an over-caffeinated queer poet and filmmaker based in Massachusetts. They graduated from Smith College with a B.A. in English and Film and Media Studies. Their work has received Ethel Olin Corbin Prize, the Ruth Forbes Eliot Prize, and Elizabeth Drew Essay Prize, and appears in The Core Review, new words poetry journal, Emulate, and elsewhere. They believe in love and bad art.



Contest Judge DeMisty D. Bellinger’s latest book, *All Daughters Are Awesome Everywhere*, is an award-winning collection of short fiction from the University of Nebraska Press’ Zero Street Fiction series. Her other books are the novel *New to Liberty* (Unnamed Press), and the poetry collection *Peculiar Heritage* (Mason Jar Press). DeMisty teaches creative writing at Fitchburg State University in Massachusetts. You can learn more about DeMisty at demistybellinger.com.

77 people submitted a total of 189 poems, comparable to 2024. 75% of submissions came in via Submittable, the online portal we leverage, thanks to The Worcester Review. The remaining entries came in by mail.

January Gil McNeal is going to be our 2026 Contest Judge. Irena Kaci will supervise JJ Fields’ management of the 2026 Frank O’Hara Prize.

THE DAN LEWIS MEMORIAL POETRY FELLOWSHIP FUND

Judges for the 2025 Lewis Fellowship were Grey Heald, Christie Beckwith, and Claudia Alvarez-Plaud.

Laura DiCaronimo selected Christie. Pam Gemme selected Grey. And Daniel Letona selected Claudia. The process involved focusing on the person's artistic form first and foremost. The second most compelling consideration was the poet's project proposal and whether it was attainable with the funds afforded by the fellowship.

Michelle Koza, 2025's winner was selected unanimously. All 3 judges found hers to be the most compelling application.

Thanks,

Final Report from, Daniel Letona, Dan Lewis Fellowship Recipient 2024

One of the gifts of poetry is the discovery of the self, poetry becomes a mirror that reflects both our internal and external life. In the fixation of shining the mirror of discovering every spot within our subconscious, I found a lot of missing parts. There has been a lot of my culture, I haven't had the resources to explore. The first poem I memorized and slammed was an intense desire to connect with these repressed parts of the self.

*"My voice is a fabric torn by apathy and cultural genocide
I'm forced to play hide and seek with corn to find the unsung / who whisper
"our tradition, woven won't die" and with my hands stuttering
I wonder / If I should be a weaver or not"
- excerpt from Chilam Balam: Comayagua*

The fellowship allowed me to reconnect and learn some of my cultural heritage and history. I traveled through the jungle into ancient maya temples, where people will make pilgrimages for spiritual and religious reasons. In el Peten, Guatemala I traveled into la Danta a preclassic maya pyramid in the middle of the jungle. I walked for three days among Howling and Spider monkeys with no electricity or cellphone reception. Just listening to birds, trees and the wind whispering the courage to recite the poem that got me there with monkeys and in front of the temple. In our way back from the temple the last day of the trip we found a jaguar footprint on the mud, all of this moments felt like the meaning to the words



Jaguar footprint



the twins going to the underworld

*snakes and Monkeys
screaming in my head / Quetzales / Guacamayas
I want to spit feathers and birds who used to be caged
I want to vomit keys
I want to speak with jaguars" - excerpt from Chilam Balam: Comayagua*

The experience allowed me to witness things I had only read about, it gave me better discernment. The main Maya creation story, el popol vuh, was translated and written in Spanish. We don't have an original native scripture so there is always the fear of tampering with the stories for either lack of understanding of the culture or propaganda. La Danta being a preclassic temple that existed before the colonization period has art that backs up some of the important cultural parts of the popol vuh for me, like the descent into the underworld where the twins rescue their father, maize from.



I also went to Machu Picchu, Peru. On this trip I was able to see the bigger picture of the mesoamerican cultures, the incredible power of both trade and engineering. This was really significant and important to me. In my hometown Comayagua, Honduras there are two really small museums, the historical one has a clay piece depicting a condor. I was taught through this type of artifacts how connected the mesoamerican trade is. Another example of this is in Copan, Honduras there is a statue of a huge statue of an Aztec Healer. It was incredible experience that helped me connect more with my poems.



Machu Picchu, Peru



Aguas Calientes, Machu Picchu, Peru.



Mirrors of Water, Machu Picchu. Reflected the sky and were likely used to see the movement of the stars

2025 STANLEY KUNITZ MEDAL AWARD

The 11th Stanley Kunitz Medal was conferred at a ceremony on Thursday, July 31st from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. at the Fletcher Auditorium, Worcester Historical Museum. The recipient, Victor D. Infante, was honored for his lifelong commitment to poetry, therefore emulating the spirit and energy of Worcester native, Stanley Kunitz (1905-2006). Speakers included William Wallace, Executive Director of the museum and WCPA President Elizabeth Bacon.

Committee members John Hodgen, Judith Ferrara, and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney read poems by Stanley Kunitz, followed by the keynote reading by Victor Infante. The event closed with a 1991 recording of Stanley Kunitz reading “My Mother’s Pears.” Music was supplied by writer, poet, and musician Michael Milligan. Videographer TJ Millunzi recorded the event. Refreshments followed, including a sheet cake displaying an image of the medal, which was donated by Carol Stockmal, curator/owner of the Stanley Kunitz Boyhood Home. Beverages were purchased through this year’s budget, and committee members Heather Macpherson and John Hodgen donated desserts; Beth Sweeney donated strawberries; and Judith Ferrara donated veggies. A Power Point slide show featuring images from the ten previous ceremonies was shown before and after the ceremony. Judy photographed the event and also created two memento booklets, one of which was delivered to Victor Infante, while the second will be archived with the collection housed at 4 Woodford Street. Victor’s name was added to the medal plaque, also donated by Carol Stockmal, which displays all recipients’ names and is kept at Woodford Street.

In September, Judy Ferrara forwarded Victor’s image to be added to the 2024 WCPA Annual Report for its winter/spring meeting; Heather belatedly wrote the report and actual budget.

If there is anything else required for your records, please do

not hesitate to contact me.

As a reminder, I have stepped down after serving one year as Chair, and Mark Wagner has kindly volunteered to fulfill that role. I will remain on the committee along with Judith Ferrara, Joe Fuscoe, Jr., and John Hodgson. With Judy’s assistance, we will forward any and all documents, files, and so forth to Mark.

Copies to: Committee members Joe Fusco Jr., John Hodgen, Judith Ferrara, Susan Elizabeth Sweeney.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Macpherson, Chair



Victor Infante, Kunitz Medal Recipient 2025

THE GREGORY STOCKMAL READING FUND

In an effort to resume our long standing tradition of bringing a nationally recognized poet to Worcester each year, the WCPA's Gregory Stockmal Reading Fund joined forces with the WPI School of Arts and Sciences to inaugurate the WPI Library's first annual Olive Higgins Prouty Poetry Celebration. It featured National Book Award winning poet and University of Massachusetts, Amherst Professor Martín Espada, reading from his 2021 book *Floater*s, and his new book *Jailbreak of Sparrows* (April 2025).

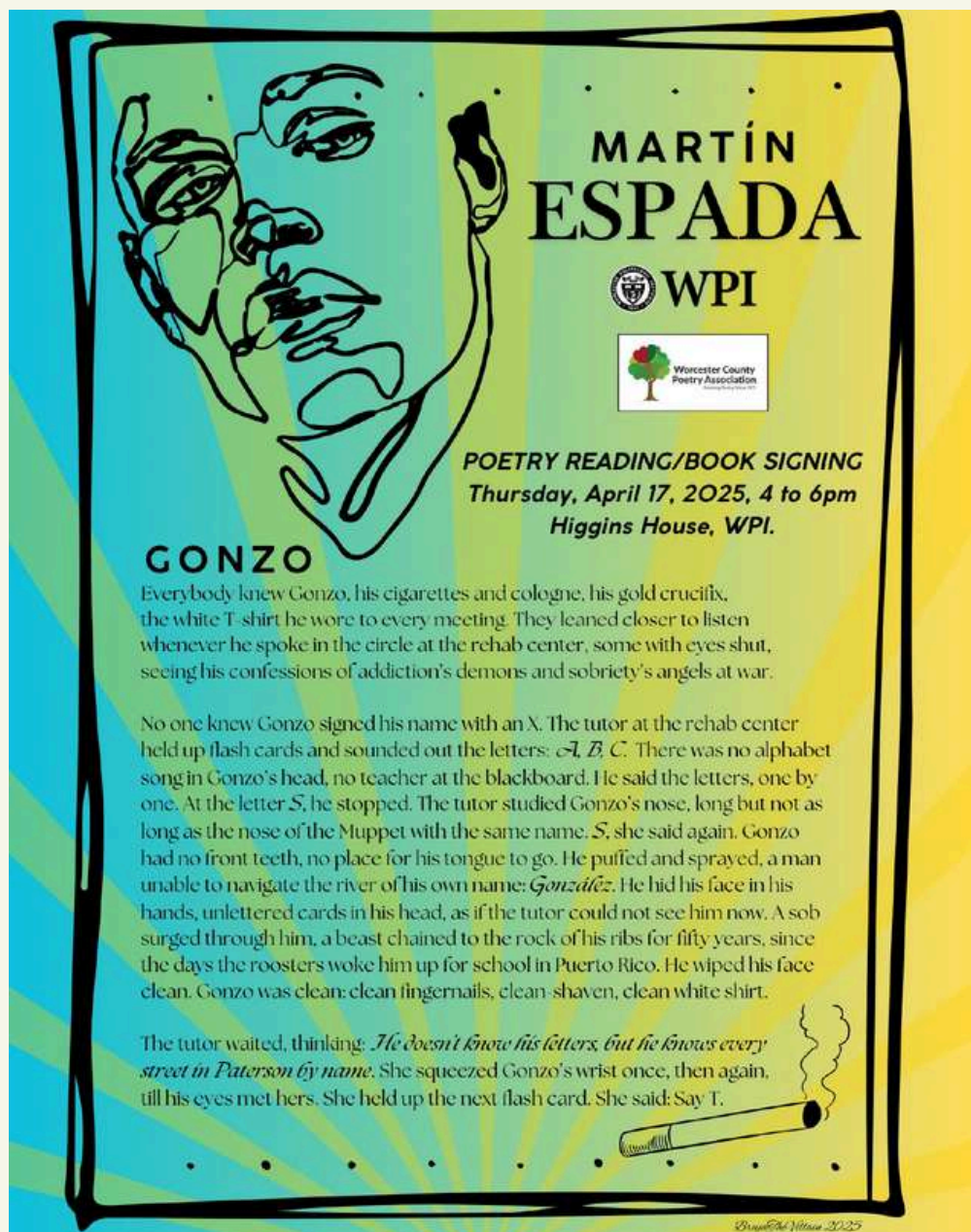
The WCPA was responsible for funding a beautiful broadside commemorating the event. It was created by local poet and artist Bruja the Villian.

The reading took place at Higgins House at WPI and was followed by a reception and book signing.

After the reading, Mr. Espada taught a poetry workshop for Clemente students. They were joined by WPI creative writing students and their professors. Guided by Mr. Espada, students wrote poems about their names and shared them with each other - some reading their own work for the very first time.

Espada's reading was organized and made possible in collaboration with the WPI School of Arts & Sciences, the Worcester County Poetry Association, the Gregory Stockmal Reading Fund at the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, and the Clemente Course in the Humanities.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Bacon



THE OPENEST MIC

2025 was another openest year for our mic, surpassing our goals of both reach and attendance. We had poets from Vermont, New York State, Maine, Connecticut, New Jersey, New Hampshire and of course Massachusetts.

We co-hosted and supplied the venue for the Massachusetts Poetry Olympics, specifically uniting parts of MA outside of Boston and Worcester to showcase their talent both by submission and in-person.

We provided a week of entertainment as the focal point of 01420 Week, hosting a poetry slam, a workshop, a chalk art poetry day, and a mic as well as giving support to and organizing artists providing entertainment on days we weren't directly.

We had 10 events, taking place at Fitchburg City Hall, the Fitchburg Art Museum, Rise and Grind, the Mill St. stage, New Dawn, Canvas by Coff33 Corp and Smokestack Roasters. We built the relationships between ourselves and Coff33 Corp to have a residency that we are launching and will continue after we have it.

We hosted a stage at the River City Rhythm and Rock Festival. We were mentioned in the Museum of Worcester Poetry Town exhibit and created what the director of the FAM called "the first and welcome" collaboration between the FAM and the Museum of Worcester's moving typewriter.

We gave a platform to politicians and felons, gentlemen and total animals! We had a wonderful and fun year together and Tyler and I are both keeping each other accountable for positive changes in our personal lives. The only bad thing about 2025 for us poetically is that each day is unfortunately still only 24 hours long and we only have 365 of them to create art together!!

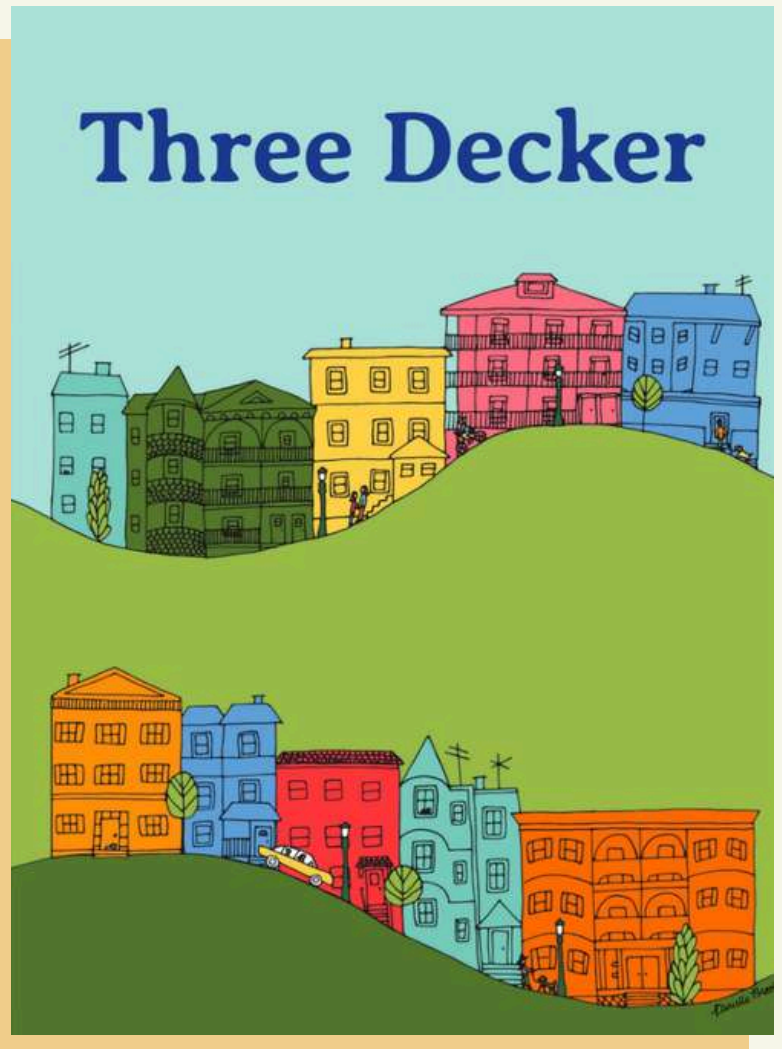
Laura Di Caronimo



Laura Di Caronimo

3 DECKER JOURNAL

Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the WCPA published a small literary magazine called "The Issue," complimenting the The Worcester Review (TWR) and focused on local voices as TWR turned to accepting submissions nationwide. Board members Rob Baker and Tarique Cooper, with help from those involved in that previous project and TWR, thought to revive that history and that effort, and 3Decker came together with a mission to publish and promote the voices of Worcester County. The name itself, 3Decker, speaks to the iconic houses in and around Worcester and reflects that neighborhood and community feeling. Our thanks to WCPA member Kayti Burt for suggesting it as part of a contest among our members to come up with the name. In our inaugural year, we received submissions from over 100 writers and poets. Some of our poets were featured in both issues, and we love the returning poets to capture this moment in time in our local literary history.



Our first issues were made possible by a grant from the Worcester Cultural Coalition, and we are so grateful for the support of and collaboration with Fabian Barracks, Yaffa Fain, and Shantelle Jackson. Through this partnership, we are proud to feature Poets Laureate and Youth Poets Laureate pieces about the city of Worcester in our pages. In our first issue, we featured works by Oliver de la Paz (2023-2025), Serenity Jackson (2024-2025), Juan Matos (2020-2022), Amina Mohammed (2020-2021), and Adael Meija (2022-2023). We look forward to including pieces by our newest laureates, Nic Jean Turner (2026-2028) and Samara Tang-Rainwater (2026-2027), in an upcoming issue.

Our thanks as well to the White Room's Birgit Straehle for gathering a pool of local artists to provide covers for our issues. Our first issue featured a piece from Danielle Brooks, used with permission by Redemption Rock Brewing Company. Our second issue features a piece made for our magazine by Eamon Gillen. Our cover art will always feature some aspect of Worcester, and we want local businesses to shine right alongside our writers. We'll feature local businesses interested in sponsoring our journal in our cover art, as well as our website and socials.

Finally, we held two readings this year to celebrate each launch. With the help of local pianist David Leach, we created a wonderful format for our readers, repeating their poems three times to a musical accompaniment. We're excited to put on more of those readings in the future.

Three Decker is about the community coming together and saying we are here, we are stronger together, and we are not afraid to make our voices heard. We're looking forward to the years to come and to reading the work of more local literati.

Copies of Three Decker are available via the WCPA's website, or the Three Decker website, at <https://threedecker.org>. In our second year, we plan to include copies of Three Decker in local libraries, and bookshops.

Respectfully submitted,
Irena Kaçi, Rob Baker and Kate Gregoire, Editors



THE WORCESTER REVIEW ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025

THE WORCESTER REVIEW

VOLUME XLV, NUMBERS 1 & 2

2024 / \$18.00



The Worcester Review had a difficult 2025.

September found Issue 45 delivered from its new printer, Tidepool Press. By the last days of December all our members should have received their copies in the mail.

By mid- December, we had put the journal on temporary hiatus. It is now being reorganized under the direction of longtime Managing Editor, Rodger Martin. We want to thank everyone who has stepped up to help and look forward to the coming together of a newly energized editorial team and to the publication of Issue 46 by the end of 2026.

Elizabeth Bacon, President

Across the Mutual Landscape Mapping Worcester in Poetry

INCLUDING WCPA'S ANNUAL FRANK O'HARA CONTEST WINNERS 2024

MAPPING WORCESTER IN POETRY NEWS, MARCH 2026

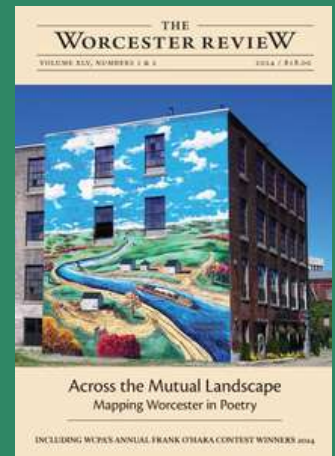
<https://worcestercountypoetry.org/mapping-worcester-in-poetry/>
Contact: Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, ssweeney@holycross.edu



Here's the latest from Mapping Worcester in Poetry, an initiative funded by the Mellon Foundation (through Scholarship in Action at Holy Cross) and directed by Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, with Worcester County Poetry Association as community partner and Katherine Gregoire as WCPA liaison. MWiP identifies, documents, and marks sites related to some of the city's best-known poets—including Stanley Kunitz, Elizabeth Bishop, Charles Olson, Frank O'Hara, Etheridge Knight, Mary Fell, and Chris Gilbert— while nurturing new poetry about places in Worcester and Central Massachusetts.

MWiP Project Update

In 2025, Beth worked with student associate Anna Claire Pritchett, who helped to install The Poem Next Door, filmed the exhibit, and created a slide show of events. Our guest-edited feature in The Worcester Review 45 came out! We launched the Worcester Poetry Archive at the Museum of Worcester and began to develop another feature for The Worcester Review 46. MWiP appeared in the Telegram & Gazette, Worcester Magazine, Holy Cross Magazine, Judy's Journal, and WGBH's Culture Show. From left: Beth with student associate Tessa Zafón-Whalen '26; Anna Claire Pritchett '26; and Worcester Review 45 contributor Amanda Sopchockchai '27.



The Poem Next Door at the Museum of Worcester, May 16—Dec. 31



With exhibition coordinator Vanessa Bumpus, Beth guest-curated a landmark exhibit that was viewed by thousands of people during its extended run. The Poem Next Door brought six famous poems, set in the city, to life with images, objects, recordings, manuscripts, and bright green doors that allowed viewers to enter each poem. It depicted the poets' neighborhoods (complete with street signs) as well as places—cafés, bookstores, libraries, renovated factories—where poetry grows.

The Poem Next Door featured rain poems, a reading nook, a desk with prompts for writing new poems about places, and a vintage typewriter on which to record them (a typewriter, indeed, that also traveled to galleries, stores, and open mics throughout the summer).

The exhibit was celebrated in reviews, feature articles, a photo essay, an op-ed, a blog entry, and anonymous secondhand praise (the nicest kind!) from someone at the Institute of Contemporary Art who called it the best curated show of 2025.

Next Door has already led to other partnerships and possibilities, and we're immensely grateful to everyone who contributed, especially the marvelous staff at the Museum of Worcester. If you missed the exhibit, check out Anna Claire's 2-minute video tour on our website!



Summer in the City: Celebrating the Poetry of Worcester Places

Hundreds of people attended MWiP's programs for the Poem Next Door (see slide show on website):

- **May 16:** Opening Reception
- **June 10:** In a Poet's Footsteps (members-only event for the Museum of Worcester)
- **June 17:** Poems in and out of Places Contest Winners' Reading
- **July 15:** Tales from Poetry Town and Poetry Bazaar (pictured at left below)
- **July 24:** Inside the Kunitz Family: Biographers James Dempsey & Judith Ferrara (video on website)
- **Aug 14:** Follow the Ruckus! Open mic & spoken-word poetry games (pictured at right below)
- **Aug 23:** Poems in Parks: Reading poems about the city's parks & open mic in Elm Park
- **Sept. 4:** Across the Mutual Landscape: Open mic & launch for The Worcester Review & Three Decker
- **Sept. 25:** Closing Reception (research on Worcester poets by students and faculty)



"Poems as Part of a Wondrous Whole"

On July 10, MWiP hosted a reading of poems about Worcester places (at right) for Room of Wonders: A Worcester Wunderkammer, an exhibit at Cantor Art Gallery featuring work by local artists.



"Discovery Day": The Worcester Poetry Archive at the Museum of Worcester

On November 15, 17 donors came to the museum with multiple boxes and bags to help launch a new archive of materials related to Worcester's poetic history. Our next Discovery Day is May 16, 2026.

THE CLEMENTE COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES



In February, a new leadership team was established for the 2025-2026 Clemente Worcester year with the goals of continuing to offer excellent programming and community engagement to our students while also expanding upon such programming. Our new team consists of Academic Director Laura Kane (Worcester State University), Community Coordinator Jarelys Castillo (2015 Clemente Alumna), and Advisory Board Chair Kristin Boudreau (Worcester Polytechnic Institute).

On May 10th, we held our 11th annual graduation ceremony and celebrated the accomplishments of 17 graduates, one of our largest graduating cohorts. At the ceremony, the Trachtenberg Award, generously funded by Amy Richter and Jim Eber to honor outstanding scholarship, was awarded to graduate Luli Kalo and to alumna Dukroa Owens.

In June, Clemente Worcester suffered a tremendous loss with the passing of Amy Richter, our beloved Academic Director and History Professor. Amy was a true friend to all of us—students and faculty alike—and a tireless, devoted leader, teacher, and mentor. In her honor, Jim Eber, Elizabeth Bacon, and the Clemente Course national leadership team established the Amy Richter Teaching Award to recognize Clemente faculty who exemplify excellence in teaching, mentorship, and dedication to students. The first awardee will be recognized this year (2026).

June also saw two of our Clemente alumni, Dukroa Owens and Doreen Samuels, read and present their stories at the UMass Chan Medical School as part of their Med Moth series.

Our 2025 Summer Bridge Course was taught by Lucia Knoles, PhD, Assumption University, (<https://assumption.edu/people-and-departments/directory/lucia-z-knoles-phd>). The course, titled, "Storytelling for Survival: Using Oral History to Support Our Nonprofits," focused on teaching Clemente students the skills to use oral history interviewing techniques to collect stories for any non-profit or cause.

A group of Clemente graduates from different years gathered biweekly at the Worcester Public Library in July and August for a James Baldwin reading club led by poetry professor Kris Boudreau.

Recruitment for the 2025-2026 Clemente class was accomplished by our Community Coordinator Jarelys Castillo, who used new and innovative strategies for connecting with potential students by expanding our social media presence, holding an Alumni Reunion and joining the city's "Out to Lunch" events on Worcester Common. We received 28 applications, held 21 interviews, and admitted a class of 19 students. Two students who had not completed last year's class returned to try again. Every year we remain true to our motto, "Once a Clemente student, always a Clemente student."

With great excitement, faculty, alumni, and Advisory Board members welcomed the 2025-2026 class and their families at a Community Dinner held in their honor on Thursday, September 25th at Trinity Lutheran Church.

Our first course meeting and orientation was held at the Worcester Art Museum immediately after the dinner.

Our guest speakers that evening were representatives of College Unbound, Registrar

Nikki Andrews and alumnus and Assistant Registrar Matt Sutherland). We also got to play with paints while Andrew Armstrong (Tuckerman Hall, A Little Night Music) played piano and invited us to paint what we heard.

Thanks to the generosity of Mass Humanities, our largest funder and supporter, and the Worcester chapter of Simon Says Give, all students were supplied with Chromebooks and internet connections if needed, as well as books, folders, and writing instruments for all. Clark University continues to provide us access to their Canvas platform, a learning management system that has been extremely helpful for sharing readings, assignments, and information with students, as well as providing them a space to complete assignments for the course. The Worcester Art Museum continues to donate classroom space for our program to meet in person each week on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Trinity Lutheran Church rents us space for our Children's Program and provides space for our Community Dinners and special programs. We are grateful to The American Antiquarian Society who has generously hosted our Graduation for the past four years and will do so again in May. These community partnerships provide vital connections to our Worcester community as well as the essential infrastructure that facilitate our students' success.

We forged a new partnership this year with Indigo Fire Studio in Watertown, MA. In October, Indigo Fire generously donated 25 pounds of clay and kiln space to our class and, along with the leadership of Mass Humanities' and Indigo Fire's own Sarah Carroll, our students participated in a clay hand-building class that combined related lessons in Philosophy of Art and Art History with tactile creative work.

We hired a new U.S. History instructor, and all other faculty returned:

Kristin Boudreau, PhD, Instructor of Literature, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
<https://www.wpi.edu/people/faculty/kboudreau>

Elissa Chase, PhD and JD, Instructor of Art History, Assumption University
<https://www.assumption.edu/people-and-departments/directory/elissa-chase-jd>

Laura Kane, PhD, Instructor of Philosophy, Worcester State University
<https://www.worcester.edu/faculty/laura-kane/>

Began new leadership role as Academic Director.

Melinda Marchand, PhD, Instructor of U.S. History, Clark University
(<https://www.clarku.edu/faculty/profiles/melinda-marchand>)

Claudia Bastante, accompanied by her husband and partner Jack Bastante, continued in their leadership roles as Clemente Children's Program Managers through their organization Monano Art, Inc. (www.monanoart.com). Our excellent children's program mirrors for the children of our students what their parents are learning so that they all can talk more about it at home.

We are grateful to our funding partners for providing the support needed to make our work possible: Mass Humanities, Anna Maria College, Clark University, Quinsigamond Community College, The Alden Trust, The Clearbrook Fund and many individual donors. Thank you all. Our 2026 Graduation will be held for the fifth year in The American Antiquarian Society's Antiquarian Hall on Saturday, May 9th at 2pm. We are delighted to feature Massachusetts Poet Laureate Regie Gibson as our Commencement Speaker. All are welcome.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Kane, Academic Director



WORCESTER WRITER'S COLLECTIVE

The Worcester Writers' Collective (or WWC) enjoyed an incredible year of growth, success, and community in 2025! Throughout the year, the WWC had 47 weeks of Tuesday meetings at the JMAC. Across those meetings, 136 individual writers attended some or all of the 3-hour process, including our one-hour period of silent reading, revising, and editing, followed by our two-hour reading and workshopping of attendees' writing.



Weekly attendance is strong and steady, with anywhere from 20-30 writers in attendance every night, frequently calling for us to hold simultaneous meetings that strategically split up our writers based on genre, medium, and interests. In October, we launched a Novel Intensive, where 8 writers read sections of their novels in advance, and engaged in deeper, more sustained critique sessions. We hope to expand this model to other mediums in 2026.

While weekly collective meetings remain the lifeblood of our ever-growing community, the leadership team is especially proud of all the meaningful ways our programming and partnerships this year. We are especially excited about our blossoming collaboration with the Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor. Beginning in March, writing inspired by Worcester County's history and environment was installed along walking and biking trails. Seventeen writers had their work featured on the trail, reaching hundreds of readers, as well as a kickoff event attended by more than 40 people. We cannot wait to continue this project that allows for a deeper examination of place and belonging for so many of our members.



The Worcester Writers' Collective also produced its inaugural showcase, "From Page to Stage," a collection of original Worcester poetry, playwriting, and flash fiction, presented as a theatrical performance at the Prior Performing Arts. The WWC's Summer Showcase took place on July 31st, and we had 163 people reserve tickets. Our showcase brought 12 different pieces of writing to life using actors, sound and lighting technicians, projections, and a commitment from everyone involved. It is clear this mode of storytelling is needed and desired in our city, and the WWC has every intention of continuing this annual tradition in 2026.

We also set out to create additional opportunities for storytelling throughout Worcester County. In September 2025, the WWC began a monthly storytelling open mic event, Bards at the Barrell, held at Spicy Water Distillery in Millbury. That event has between 8- 20 people attending, and we plan to continue growing attendance and excitement.

We also began drop-in writing day on Sundays in a new program entitled Sunday Scribbles. That event has between 4- 15 people attending various coffee shops in the Worcester area every week. This is an essential part in growing our sense of community and belonging.

The WWC is fortunate to have received funding for all this wonderful work from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and 17 local cultural councils in the state, with a combined total of \$6,310 supporting the development, promotion, and cultivation of local Worcester writing. So much of the incredible success in this report was made possible by our relationship with the WCPA, and we are incredibly grateful for their commitment to growing Worcester's literary arts scene. Our mission for 2026 is to continue seeking funding opportunities to make this collective sustainable for years to come.

The contents of this report were written, reviewed, and endorsed by the entire Worcester Writers' Collective leadership team. We are thrilled to share them with our friends at the Worcester County Poetry Association and look forward to many more annual reports to come.

Regards,

Brett Iarrobino, Emma Couillard, Irena Kaçi, Jeff Raymond, Nick Baker, Em Judkins, Renee Kirk, Karla Okala, Christine Quirk

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

This has felt like an historical year for both our organization and the world at large. We continue our work uplifting writers and poets in Central Massachusetts with the understanding that it is more important than ever to offer fortitude and community to one another. Here are some of the highlights.

Strategic Planning: Beginning the Work

After completing our Strategic Plan last year, this year it was time to do the hard part. We worked to expand our scope by launching yet another publication that broadens our scope beyond poetry. We strengthened our partnership with the city via both this publication and our participation in the selection of the city & youth Poet Laureates. We put in the ground work for launching a new Curt Curtin Youth Contest that will launch in 2026. We grew our presence in the city via Beth Sweeney's 'The Poem Next Door' exhibit that ran for almost six months at the Museum of Worcester. Lastly, we grew our relationship with our local organizations, including the New England Poetry Club and The Worcester Writers' Collective.

Public Outreach & Tabling

In addition to expanding the programming of our fiscal sponsees, The Clemente Course in Humanities and the Worcester Writers' Collective, the WCPA has made inroads throughout Worcester County by visiting small arts organizations as far out as Ashburnham. In both April and September the WCPA participated in and led a panel during The Writers Unite Summit at New Dawn Arts Center. With the help of our friends at the Worcester Writers Collective (WWC), The WCPA was a stalwart at local outdoor festivals and events such as 'Out To Lunch' and 'Color the City'.

Throughout the summer we were present at a variety of local spots, including Southbridge's Jacob Edwards library in July, The Shrewsbury Public Library in April, and The Museum of Worcester from June until November. We hosted a series of three poetry workshops at the Shrewsbury Public Library during Poetry Month, drawing about 12-14 people to each workshop. In July, we hosted one of the three 'Launch' readings for the inaugural 3Decker journal at the Jacob Edwards Library, inviting Worcester County poets local to the Connecticut border to come participate in an open mic and listen to our 3Decker poet. We had an audience of 15-20 folks.

Lastly, two years' worth of Mapping Worcester in Poetry by Board Member Beth Sweeney finally culminated in a 6 month long program focused around a feature at the Museum of Worcester. Kicking off in June 2025 with a series of readings both indoors and outdoors, the program included readings at Elm Park, at TidePool Bookshop as well as in the Museum of Worcester itself.

3Decker Launch Successful

In June 2025, we hit another wonderful milestone via the launching of the inaugural Issue of 3Decker! Our first issue featured a cover by Danielle Brooks, used with permission by Redemption Rock Brewing Company. It featured works from emerging local writers like Renee Slovic, Emma Couillard, Brett Iarrobino, Sarah Chestnut right alongside more established writers like Eve Rifkah, Pamela Gemme, and Poet Laureate Oliver de la Paz. To honor the work of such outstanding writers, we invited musician David Leach to collaborate with four of our poets in a singular performance combining poetry and music.

The end result was a truly unique and inspiring reading, unlike any other event the WCPA has ever hosted. We vowed to invite David Leach to come perform at every subsequent launch, and booked him for our January Winter Issue launch.

Our second issue was completed in December and features a cover made for our magazine by Eamon Gillen. We are looking forward to celebrating with another inspiring poetry and music collaboration. This year has strengthened our commitment to celebrating the hard work of our Board Members as well as our volunteers, and we invested some of our funds into throwing a big Holiday Celebratory Bash inviting many of our community partners and writers from all over Worcester County. The outcome was a potluck that was filled with music, joy, dancing and riveting conversation. It was a wonderful way to say goodbye to 2025.

Curt Curtin Revv Up!

After a few false starts with the Curt Curtin Youth Poetry Contest, in September 2025 we were finally poised to solidify the plan and set a launch date. Dee O'Connor was kind enough to continue to meet with us here at the WCPA and talk through realistic expectations and setting the groundwork. Luckily, four intrepid volunteers, eager to support youth work, formed the Curtin Youth Contest Committee. Christine Quirk, Renee Slovick, and Em Judkins in partnership with intern Ketshaly Philome became the foundation for the new Poetry Contest. The Committee has secured two very well respected Judges to serve for the 2026 inaugural year. Additionally, the committee has won the buy-in of four separate Worcester Public Schools, looking to invite students to participate. All in all, the contest will have a wonderful start in 2026.

Interns!

And speaking of interns, in July 2025 we were able to make a long standing dream come true thanks to Mandy Gutmann-Gonzalez at Clark University's English Department. Starting with the 2025-2026 school year we were gifted three fantastic interns who have since transformed the WCPA in terms of capacity. Izzy Simoes '27 has taken on the challenge of marketing and keeping our Instagram account active and full of compelling content. Izzy also handles the community outreach by regularly participating in our programs in person. Ketshaly Philome '26 has been handling our website posting, as well as spearheading a lot of the Curt Curtin Contest effort. By the time the contest takes off, Ketshaly will be our point person for all things youth work. JJ Fields has singlehandedly immortalized our BroadSides and history onto Google Drive for future use and general storage. JJ has also tackled our grant research and will transition into point person for the O'Hara Prize in 2026. All three interns have very quickly become very valued team members and before long I won't remember how I got by without them.

Showcasing our Talents!

The WCPA expanded its readings in 2025. We have been at so many new venues and showcased so much new talent. Winners of the O'Hara Prize get their annual reading, but community talent launching their own spoken word events have been connecting with our 'Poetry To The People' Initiative. Local libraries and institutions reach out to us every year to bring poetry to those spaces and between the 3Decker's reach, and the Worcester Writers' Collective, we have been very successful at putting forward new voices this year! And we are just getting started!

To The Future

We are only in the first year of our five year plan and, even in these lean times, our resolve is steadfast. With each step, we get closer to our goals, and we will effect some big changes by 2030. Our partnerships have strengthened and our foundation is sound. There is so much more to do and we are here for the long haul. Grow with us Worcester County! Let's go!

Irena Kaçi





**Worcester County
Poetry Association**
Growing Poetry Since 1971

Worcester County Poetry Association

wcpaboard@yahoo.com

www.worcestercountypoetry.org

P.O. Box 804, Worcester , MA 01613 | 508797 4770

