

County of Santa Clara
Office of the County Executive
Children and Family Services, Public Safety & Justice
Office of Public Affairs




CE12 032409

Prepared by: Gwendolyn Mitchell
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DATE: March 24, 2009

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: 
Gary A. Graves
Acting County Executive

SUBJECT: Recommended Appointment of Nils Peterson as Santa Clara County Poet Laureate

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Under advisement from November 18, 2008 (Item No. 21): Consider recommendations from the Office of the County Executive relating to the recommended appointment of the Santa Clara County Poet Laureate.

Possible action:

- `. Accept report relating to the Appointment of the County Poet Laureate; and
- a. Appoint Nils Peterson to the honorary post of Santa Clara County Poet Laureate commencing for a two year period April 1, 2009 through March 31, 2011.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no increased cost to the General Fund. As specified in the November 18, 2008 transmittal, a stipend of \$3,000 per year was recommended to be charged to the Board of Supervisors Countywide Special Funds in the Clerk of the Board's Budget (BU106). In addition, the Arts Council Silicon Valley has pledged an additional \$2,000 to be split equally between the stipend and the costs associated with the Poet Laureate's proposed public project.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

On November 18, 2008, at the request of President Kniss, the Board of Supervisors approved the creation of an honorary post of Santa Clara County Poet Laureate and directed administration to develop a process to select a nominee for Board appointment to the post, and to develop an agreement with the selected poet.

BACKGROUND

Following the Board's referral of this item, as suggested in the transmittal, the County Executive's Office of Public Affairs convened a meeting of Arts Council Silicon Valley and the County Librarian and a representative from Supervisor Kniss' Office to develop a process for the selection of a nominee to be appointed by the Board of Supervisors as Santa Clara County Poet Laureate. The working group created all of the informational materials which called for applications, and outlined the criteria, duties, and application guidelines. The group recommended the creation of an inaugural committee to provide feedback on ways in which the work of the Poet Laureate can be supported, so that it has maximum benefit countywide and to identify individuals to serve in the screening process. The Committee met on January 28, 2009. Members of the Inaugural Poet Laureate Advisory Committee and their affiliations are listed on Attachment A.

A call for applications was issued on January 7, 2009. Applications were due by February 17, 2009. Materials were posted on the County Library, County of Santa Clara, and Arts Council Silicon Valley websites. Application Instructions are available as Attachment B. News releases were issued and the call for Poet Laureate was broadly covered in local, national, and international media.

Arts Council Silicon Valley assumed responsibility for coordinating and administering the selection process. It was determined by the working group that the candidate screening process would take place in two discreet parts. First, Peer Review of the applications would be conducted by a five person panel comprised of Clark Kepler - Owner of Kepler Books, devorah major - San Francisco Poet Laureate, 2002-2006, Frances Phillips - Poet, Creative Work Fund, Al Young - Poet Laureate for the State of California, 2005-2008, and retired Gilroy Librarian June Hymas. The Peer Review Panel was tasked with individually reviewing and rating the 23 applications that were received by the February 17, 2009 deadline. The candidates were rated on artistic merit, commitment to the community and alignment of proposed project with Poet Laureate mission. The ratings were compiled and the top three candidates were referred for interviews.

Based on the Peer Review rankings, the top three candidates were referred to an Interview Committee comprised of Tamara Alvarado - Director of Multicultural Leadership, 1stACT Silicon Valley, Alan Soldofksy - Chair of MFA Program, San Jose State University, Kevin Arnold - Executive Director, Poetry Center San Jose, Diem Jones - Director of Programs, Arts Council Silicon Valley, and Gwendolyn Mitchell, County Executive Office, Director of Public Affairs. The interviews and selection process were completed on March 17. Nils Peterson, Professor Emeritus, San Jose State University emerged as the recommended nominee for the Post of Poet Laureate. For the nominee's biography, see Attachment C.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

County administration will enter into an agreement with Nils Peterson to serve as Santa Clara County Poet Laureate, for a two-year period beginning April 1, the first day of National Poetry Month.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A - Inuagural Advisory Committee
- Attachment B - Poet Laureate Application Instructions
- Attachment C - Peterson Biography