



2023 WISCONSIN WRITERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REPORT

Message from the President

2023 was a special year for Wisconsin Writers Association, as it marked the 75th year of our organization. We heartily celebrated this milestone with many opportunities for members to gather, learn, create, and network. A total of 138 of us attended our conference this year. Nearly 400 of us took part in some kind of programming we offer.

Our membership grew by 24% in 2023, and we've been actively growing our programs and activities alongside that membership growth. One of the achievements you'll read about inside is our work on Mission, Vision, and Values. I always feel invigorated by having my *why* explicitly stated in writing. These words inspired the new programming you'll read about, like the Midwest Writers Room podcast and the Creative Writing Program. We strive to be an organization that lives and breathes our values.

If learning about WWA inspires you to get involved, please visit our Volunteer page to see a list of current volunteer opportunities. If you're looking to build your writer community, this is a rewarding way to do so.

Finally, please join me in thanking Barry Wightman for his years of service as WWA's President. He steered this organization through the traumatic COVID years, and here we are, stronger than ever. Under his leadership, not only do we have exciting new programs for members, but we have more robust governance and infrastructure as well. He is a role model for creative, honest stewardship of this noble organization. We are grateful for your service, Barry.

Peace,
Luella Schmidt
President

Events Committee

Thanks to great planning by the Events Committee, WWA members had many workshops and events to choose from in 2023.

Events:

- Provided one Zoom event per month free to WWA members
- Paid stipends to over 40 Wisconsin writers for their presentations - on Zoom and at the Conference
- Registration at events ranged from 20 to 117 participants
- Members are familiar with and expecting our monthly Zoom events
- Encouraged our members to read their work at open mic nights
- Partnered with organizations across the state – Chippewa Valley Writers Guild, Shake Rag Alley, HerStry, Novel In Progress Boot Camp, and more
- Partnered with Shannon Ishizaki at Orange Hat Publishing and Kim Suhr at Red Oak Writing
- Brought agents to our conference
- Presentation by Wisconsin State Poet Laureate Nicholas Gulig

With gratitude to our Events Committee volunteers:

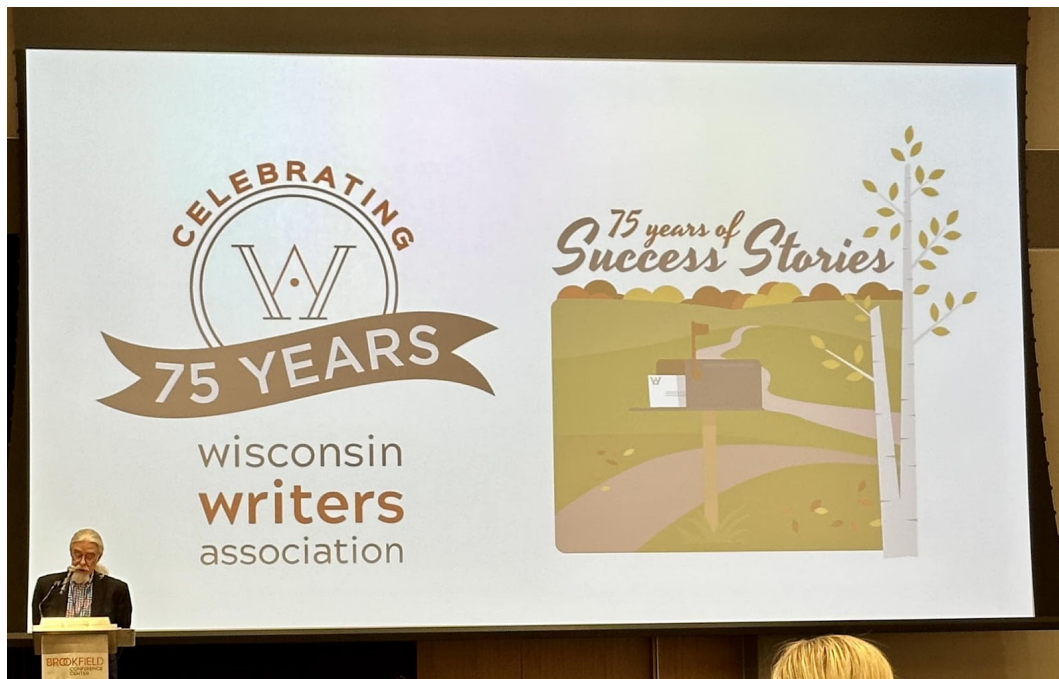
Events Committee Chair: Christy Wopat

Committee Members: Barry Wightman, Laurie Scheer, Heidi Blanke, Nicholas Chiarkas, Kenneth Humphrey, TK Sheffield, Ad Hoc: Shannon Ishizaki & Kim Suhr

Christy received
the Fidelia Van
Antwerp Award



WWA Annual Conference: Our 75th Year!



The conference was held over two days, beginning on October 6 with events throughout downtown Waukesha at local businesses and on October 7 at the Brookfield Conference Center.

Friday Highlights

- *Waukesha mayor
- *Seeing everyone wandering around downtown Waukesha
- * The WWA Merch!
- *A variety of sessions on research, social media, marketing, publishing. Intimate groups and happy participants!
- *Open mic and FANTASTIC musical group

The photos throughout this report are from the conference, where members enjoyed various sessions on the craft and business of writing, inspiring keynote speakers, an open mic night, and more. Participants delighted in the camaraderie, seizing the opportunity to connect and share experiences.

Saturday Highlights

- *Every. Last. Speaker. Was amazing
- *The venue was GORGEOUS. Light and sparkly.
- *The food was outstanding
- *We had a giant 75 and a HUGE, GLORIOUS banner!
- *The community and camaraderie felt FABULOUS!

Thank you to our incredible volunteers on the Conference Committee:

Conference Committee Chair: Barry Wightman

Members: Christy Wopat, Laurie Scheer, Heidi Blanke, Nick Chiarkas, Ken Humphrey, TK Sheffield, Shannon Ishizaki (Orange Hat Publishing), Kim Suhr (Red Oak Writers).



Jade Ring Contest

The first Jade Ring Contest took place in 1949. Heavily involved in its inception was J. L. Kraft of Kraft Foods, a businessman and poet who had a deep interest in collecting semi-precious stones. He designed the jade ring, the sought after first-place award of the contest. While the design of the ring has evolved over the years, the desire of Wisconsin writers to share their work through this forum has remained constant.

Awards for first place, second place, third place, and honorable mention:

Fiction

First Place: Mary Beth Danielson – *How Crow Got Out of Jail*

Second Place: Bert Kreitlow – *Abandoned school*

Third Place: Brea Ruddy – *Shine On, My Light*

Honorable Mentions:

- Robb Grindstaff – *Error: Memory File Corrupted*
- Jo Ann Opsahl – *Goose Girl*
- Elizabeth Feil – *Safe Haven*

Non-fiction

First place: Vacated due to rules violation

Second place: Nancy Jesse – *Waiting Room*

Third place: Jeffrey Lewis – *The Night was Dark*

Honorable Mentions:

- Prasannata Verma – *Fugitive*
- Lisa Poliak – *The Visible Woman*
- James Bonilla – *Learning Grace from Mrs. Reed*

Poetry

First place: Susan Huebner – *Variation on a Theme*

Second place: Mary M Brown – *Another Aubade*

Third place: Yvette Flaten – *Fade to Black*

Honorable Mentions:

- Tad Phippen Wente – *At the Nursing Home*
- Kathleen Van Demark – *Postcards from Death*
- Mike J Orlock – *Morphine-dipped Dreams*



Judges for the contest were:

Fiction – *Christine DeSmet*

Christine is a writer, writing coach, and an award-winning author and scriptwriter. For many years she helmed the Writers' Institute and the Write-by-the-Lake Writer's Retreat as well as online writing courses at University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she was a Distinguished Faculty Associate of writing. She writes the *Fudge Shop Mystery* series and the *Mischief in Moonstone* novella series.

She is a member of Blackbird Writers, Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, Writers Guild of America East, Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators, and Wisconsin Writers Association. Christine shares writer education and news posts regularly on Facebook.

Nonfiction – *David McGlynn*

David is the author of three books, *The End of the Straight and Narrow*, *A Door in the Ocean*, and *One Day You'll Thank Me*. He's a frequent contributor to *Men's Health* and *Swimmer* magazines, and his recent work appears in *The American Scholar*, *Narrative*, *River Teeth*, *The New York Times* and elsewhere. He lives in Madison, Wisconsin and teaches at Lawrence University.

Poetry – Angela Trudell Vasquez

Angie is the current city of Madison Poet Laureate (2020-2024) and the first Latina to hold the position. Angie received her MFA in poetry from the Institute of American Indian Arts in 2017. Recently, her poems have appeared in *The Slow Down*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Poem-a-Day*, *About Place Journal*, and several anthologies.

In 2018 she was a finalist for the New Women's Voices series and her collection, *In Light, Always Light*, was published by *Finishing Line Press* in May 2019. *Finishing Line Press* also published her fourth collection of poetry, *My People Redux*, in January 2022. In the summer of 2021 she became a Macondo Fellow or a Macondista. She is the current chair of the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission.

Longtime Member Greg Peck,
reading his work at the open
mic. Everyone who put their
name in got to read!



Credit: Christa Bruhn

Membership Committee

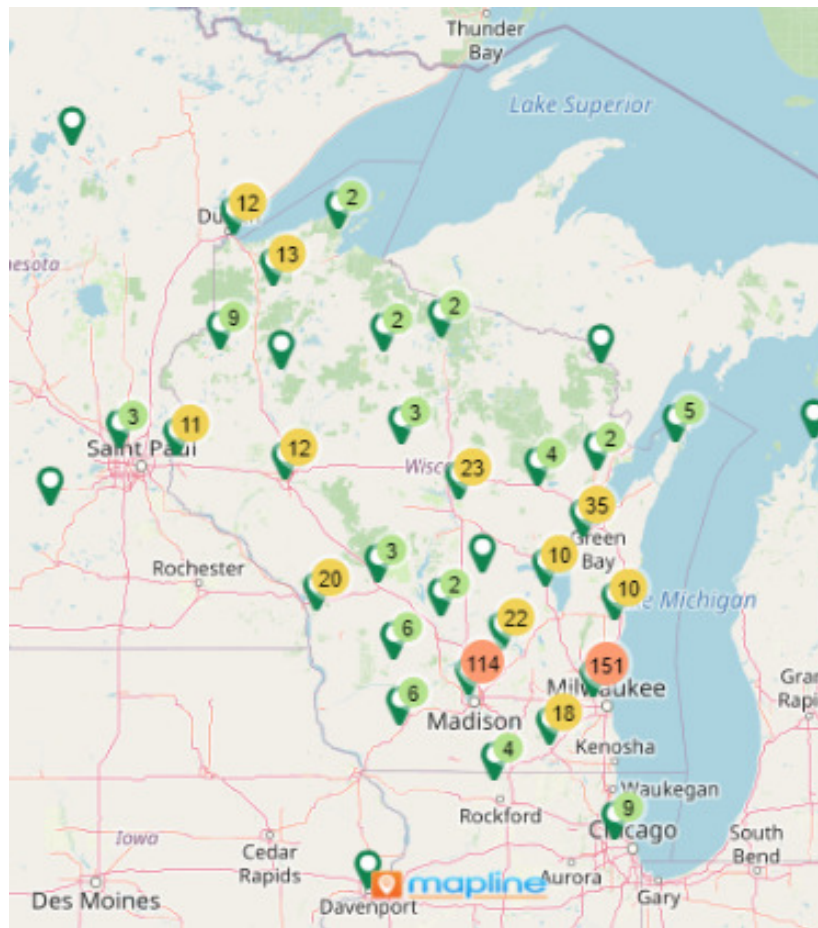
The year 2023 saw membership increases greater than the three prior years combined. From 2020 through 2023, membership has grown by 65%. One-year annual memberships are the most common, followed by annual recurring memberships.



In this table, you can see our growth in each membership level from 2020 to 2023:

Membership levels	Active members			
	Start	End	Diff #	Diff %
Individual (1 year)	247	388	141 ▲	57.09 ▲
Individual (1 year - recurring payments)	26	96	70 ▲	269.23 ▲
Individual (5 year)	41	51	10 ▲	24.39 ▲
Business	13	13	0	—
Life Time	10	11	1 ▲	10 ▲
Family	11	13	2 ▲	18.18 ▲
Business (recurring payments)	3	6	3 ▲	100 ▲
Student	4	5	1 ▲	25 ▲
Family (recurring payments)	0	4	4 ▲	—
Summary	355	587	232 ▲	65.35 ▲

Our visual directory of members offers another way for writers to connect with each other.

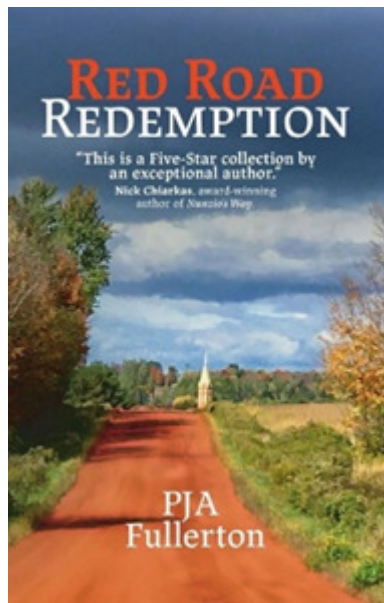


Warm thanks to our generous Membership Committee volunteers:
Membership Committee Chair: Catherine Gove
Members: Deborah Cook, Beckie Gaskill, Julie Shea

Publications Committee

WWA Press

Since our launch in November 2022, the Press has published two books: a memoir, *Gravedigger's Daughter* by Debra King; and a short story collection, *Red Road Redemption*, by Pamela Fullerton.



Sales through December of 2023 in public markets are 87 total for *Gravedigger's Daughter* and 157 for *Red Road Redemption*.

A third book, a memoir about teaching school recently in Platteville, is scheduled for release in June 2024. A fourth book, a novel this time, has just been added to the 2024 calendar, with plans to release the book in conjunction with our Fall Conference in October.

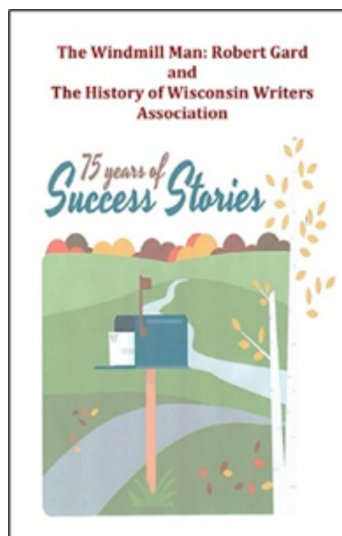
Creative Wisconsin Magazine

The storied magazine supporting the publishing dreams of Wisconsin Writers Association members released three online issues in 2023 and will issue three online issues in 2024 as well. Each issue is sent to contributors and members. The magazine is also available in print format through Amazon for those who wish to purchase print copies. WWA is exploring subscriptions for a print version of the magazine.

75 Years of Success Stories

75 Years of Success Stories was published in celebration of WWA's 75th anniversary and made available at the Fall Conference. This book is a republication of past WWA histories and includes *Robert Gard: The Windmill Man* by LaMoine MacLaughlin; the 50th Anniversary booklet; a previously unpublished early history of the organization by the late Paula Delfeld; and an encapsulated history of the past 25 years.

To honor the anniversary, a nearly complete list of past Jade Ring winners was compiled and put on the website. Lists of previous board members and officers are in progress.



WWA Member Book Reviews

Book reviews by fellow authors are a top benefit for WWA members, and the program continues to grow since its inception by Lisa Lickel in late 2019. Six books were reviewed that year. In 2020 there were 22 reviews, and there were 25 in 2021. In 2022, that number grew to 31 reviews. In 2023, WWA received 43 requests for book reviews. These reviews are posted on the WWA website and various other channels. Sincere appreciation to Kathleen Waldvogel, who facilitates the book review program, and serves as liaison between authors and reviewers.

Heartfelt gratitude to these dedicated Publication Committee volunteers:

Chair: Lisa Lickel

Members: Kathleen Waldvogel, Rebecca Swanson, Luella Schmidt; readers for the Press include Barry Wightman, Steve Wilton, Joanne Nelson, and Dave Rank

Vision Team

In 2021, an adhoc Vision Team Committee was charged with advancing recommendations that would set the course of WWA for its future endeavors. The team reviewed and made extensive updates to WWA's bylaws and studied the current mission in order to craft a vision statement and establish core values for the association's consideration.

Workshop on Editing, at Martha Merrell's Bookstore



Mission

The Wisconsin Writers Association is a non-profit organization that encourages, educates, celebrates and promotes writers through its programs and services.

Vision

WWA will provide all writers in Wisconsin, the surrounding region, and beyond the resources and community-building opportunities to help them achieve their literary goals.

Values

Exhibit a culture of inclusiveness, generosity, community and learning to support writers as they pursue the craft of writing.

Inclusiveness – WWA will welcome writers regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, digital/technical ability, religion, sexual orientation or economic status.

Generosity – WWA will be a prudent steward of its finances to ensure that group activities, educational offerings and conferences are made available at the most reasonable price possible. In addition to fiscal generosity, WWA will encourage its members to be generous of their time when encouraging and mentoring their peers and contributing to volunteer activities that advance WWA's goals.

Community – As it has from its inception, WWA will foster a community of writers that will actively encourage each other to pursue their literary goals.

Learning – WWA will offer a robust calendar of learning opportunities that reflect members' expressed preferences, which will give them the tools to improve and enhance their writing abilities.

Thank you to these talented Vision Team Committee volunteers:

Co-Chairs: Thomas W. King, Russ Klingaman

Members: Julia Nusbaum, Kenneth Humphrey, Valerie Biehl, Debra R. King, Laurie Scheer, Rebecca H. Swanson

Midwest Writers Room Podcast

Luella Schmidt and Ken Humphrey launched Midwest Writers Room Podcast this year. The podcast hosted six writers in 2023, and will publish more interviews with writers and industry experts in 2024.



WWA Virtual Critique Groups

WWA's Virtual Critique Group program launched in January 2023 with a trial series led by Writing Coach Laurie Scheer. That first round of six sessions proved so successful we added a strictly fiction group with Laurie and a poetry group led by former Wisconsin Poet Laureate, Marilyn Taylor in the spring. In the fall, we expanded further with an additional novel writing critique group led by the Editor of Creative Wisconsin, Lisa Lickel. The feedback from participants was positive, the demand strong, and we've been able to keep the cost to participants low while, at the same time, providing adequate compensation for the facilitators. The WWA Board approved the continuation of the program for 2024. We plan to offer four different series in winter, spring, and fall.

Here's what some participants had to say about the Virtual Critique Group program:

"My critique group helped me improve my writing skills immensely. I'm still in contact with our leader and many of the members."

Ted Fearson

Children's Author and WWA Critique Group Participant

“A critique group has been a recipe for improving my writing, a confirmation that I am a writer, a means to motivate me to write daily, but most of all, the experience of writers encouraging writers.”

Rose Bingham

Author of *Life Through My Eyes*, *Buy the Little Ones a Dolly*, and *Say It Isn't So and Then Make Lemonade*

“The WWA Critique Program is simply the smartest and most cost-effective investment writers can make in themselves.”

Frederick Poss

Author of *Murder on Big Stoney Lonesome* and WWA Critique Group Participant.



Creative Writing Program

Beginning March 2024, WWA offers a new Virtual Creative Writing Program. This first series focuses on a full spectrum of writing craft skills for both fiction and non-fiction writers. The curriculum is designed in particular for emerging writers but will appeal to established writers as well. The four two-hour sessions will take place weekly during the month of March and offer WWA members the opportunity to interact with their writing peers and course instructor, Laurie Scheer, via Zoom meetings.

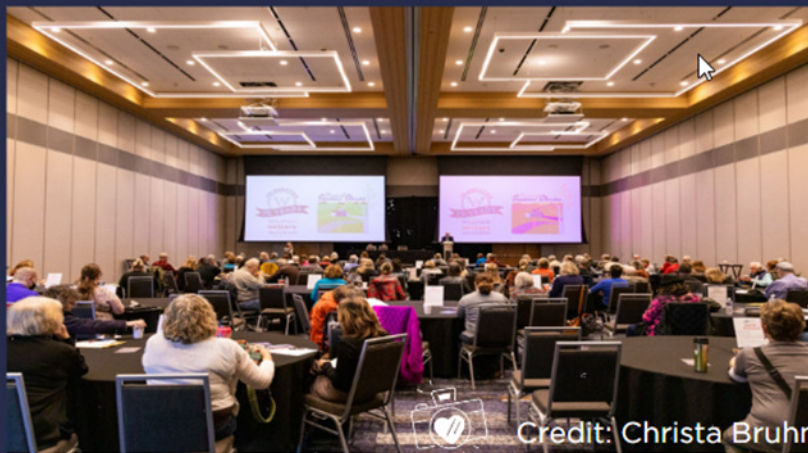
Supporting the Literary Community

We are fortunate to have so many writing organizations in our vibrant literary community. We know our writer members like to explore the many classes, conferences, retreats, and events available throughout our region. With that in mind, we proudly supported these organizations in 2023: Chicago Writer's Association, UW Eau Claire Foundation, Shake Rag Alley, Lakefly Writers Conference, HerStry, Woodland Pattern, and Write On, Door County.

Operations Report

WWA Operations Director Ken Humphrey focused on several significant projects:

- Launching and co-hosting the Midwest Writers Room podcast, which includes recording, editing, and publishing bi-weekly episodes to all common podcast platforms. Six episodes were published in 2023 and featured WWA authors.
- Stabilizing event management processes to provide consistent support for programs like Virtual Critique classes, the new Creative Writing Program, and monthly WWA offerings.
- Maintaining the programs launched in 2023, such as the Visual Member Map and Event calendar, along with website additions like the rotating "Need to Know" panel on our homepage.

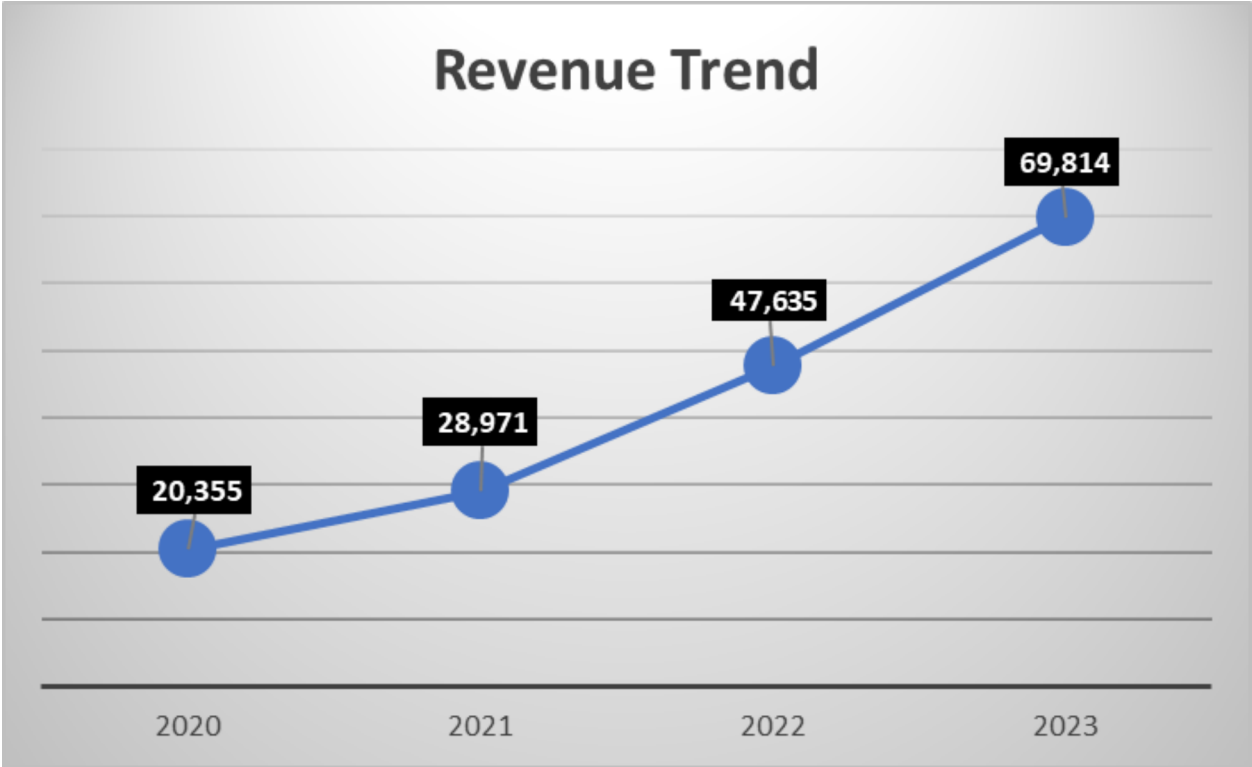


A view from the back.
Sitting by genre was a big hit!

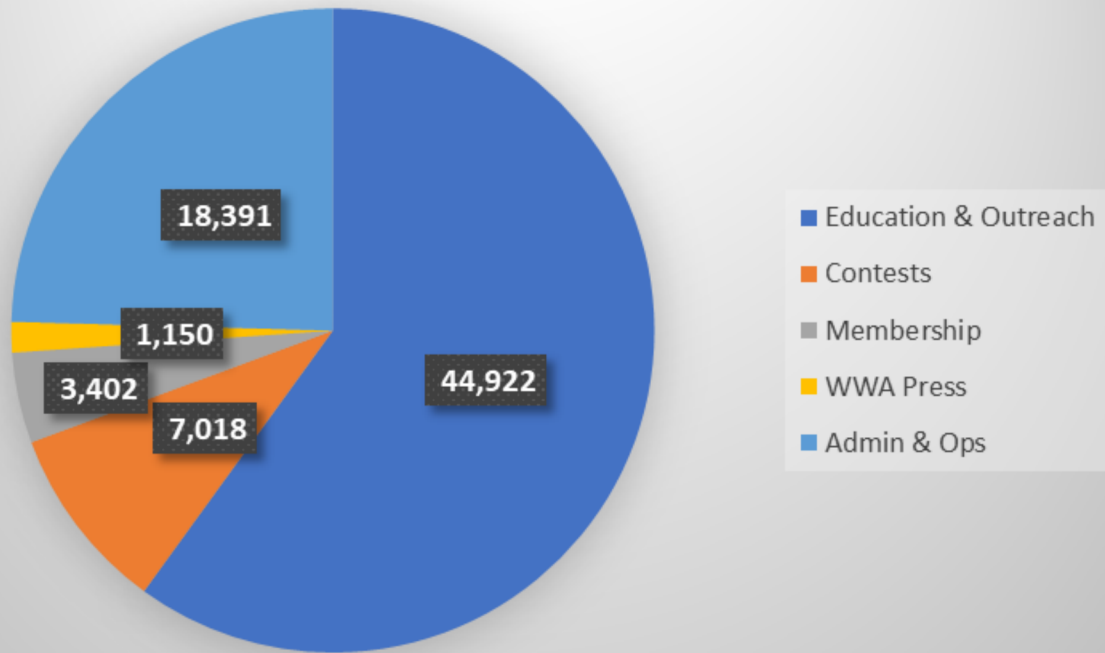
Financial Snapshot

Sources of Revenue:
Memberships \$20,065
Education & Outreach \$38,910
WWA Press \$1,089
Donations \$3,990
Writing Contests \$5,760
Total Revenue: \$69,814

Total Expenses: \$74,882
Net Loss: \$5,068
Administrative expenses as percentage of revenue: 26%



2023 Expenses



WWA Board of Directors as of this report's publication date:

Luella Schmidt, President / Treasurer

Laurie Scheer, Vice-President

Christa Bruhn, Secretary

Nick Chiarkas

Russ Klingaman

Margaret Rozga

Jennifer Rupp

Rebecca Swanson

Kathleen Waldvogel

Barry Wightman

Looking Forward

WWA reached a landmark year in 2023 with our 75th Anniversary. We celebrated with the launch of our popular Virtual Critique Groups and the new Midwest Writers Room podcast. In 2024, we are excited to offer a new Creative Writing Program that will appeal to emerging and experienced writers alike.

Be sure to mark your calendars for the 2024 Fall Conference, October 25-26 in picturesque La Crosse, where we will offer an exciting lineup of speakers, sessions, and activities to enrich your writing journey.

Please visit www.wiwrite.org for more details. If you appreciate what this organization is doing to support and celebrate writers, please consider making a tax-deductible donation or becoming a volunteer.

A Note of Appreciation

WWA wishes to acknowledge the many donors, sponsors, volunteers, and members who wholeheartedly gave their time and resources to keep our association a vital and respected resource for all of the writers, authors, and aspiring authors in our region. You are the lifeblood of the organization and without you, we would not exist. We are grateful.