

Julie McDonald: Evening with Authors raises more than \$4,000 for Hope Alliance



Speakers Olivia Hawker, Garth Stein and Matt Young are pictured on stage in this photo provided by Sandy Crowell.

Commentary by Julie McDonald / For The Chronicle September 16, 2024

Nearly a dozen fiction and nonfiction authors chatted in the TransAlta Commons on Sept. 6 with people who enjoy reading and signed books during an Evening with Authors, sponsored by the Lewis County chapter of the Association of American University Women (AAUW).

Centralia College English instructor Matt Young moderated the hour-long conversation with Garth Stein, author of “The Art of Racing in the Rain,” and Olivia Hawker, who wrote “One for the Blackbird, One for the Crow.” Young is the author of “Eat the Apple: A Memoir,” published in 2018, and a novel, “End of Active Service,” released in June.

The entertaining evening, which drew easily more than 100 people, many from the Southwest Washington Writers Conference, featured raffle baskets, a no-host bar and food graciously donated by local restaurants.

“I thought it was a very classy event!” said Nancy Leventon, an AAUW member from Chehalis. “It was well planned and organized, as well as being visually stunning with the decorations, the tables, the lovely appetizers from local providers, and the dialogue with the three authors was fun and entertaining. I hope that we can do this again!”

The event was designed to replace the organization's annual LUNAFEST film festival, which featured short films created by women or focused on them. All money raised by the \$20 entrance fee and tickets sold for the raffle supports Hope Alliance, a nonprofit that helps survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, and AAUW scholarships. When the Luna Company stopped producing the films, AAUW members looked for another way to raise money and decided on an Evening with Authors.

The evening proved successful enough to raise about \$4,400, similar to what early LUNAFEST events brought in and more than post-COVID-19 film festivals, according to AAUW Treasurer Donna Loucks.

I was impressed that Libbie Grant, who also writes under the pen names Olivia Hawker and Libbie Hawker, had the energy to engage so well with people that evening after teaching all day at the Southwest Washington Writers Conference. She taught nearly 70 writers how to outline their novels before they begin and how to write a bestseller. As coordinator of the Southwest Washington Writers Conference and Friday master class, I was plum tuckered out by the time the evening arrived — and even my phone had died! Stein, energetic and entertaining, presented a keynote and taught a workshop at the conference the following morning.

Bobbie from Book 'N' Brush of Chehalis graciously staffed the bookstore where readers could buy books and have them signed.

Sharon Lyons, an AAUW member from Toledo, commended local businesses for providing hors d'oeuvres.

"Not one of them said 'no,'" she said. "If we didn't get food from them, they gave us a gift certificate,"

Jo Martens, of Centralia, the AAUW member who headed the organizing committee, said she was impressed by the time, effort, and initiative of AAUW volunteers who made her job much easier. "People just took the initiative to just follow through with great results. I just couldn't believe how smoothly everything came together, and it was really just membership stepping forward and doing this," she said.

"I thought it was a great event," AAUW member Maree Lerchen, of Centralia, said. "My guest is not necessarily a reader — she doesn't have time — but she loved it. She had a great time and visited with the authors. I hope we do it again."

"I think it would be nice if we could do it again next year," Martens said. "I guess we just take it back to membership and see what they say."

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