



'In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean' to celebrate literary icon



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A stone's throw from the cabin his family has owned for nearly a century, a group of Seeley Lake residents is holding a festival honoring a Montana literary icon.

"We feel like we're long overdue to honor the works of Norman Maclean," said Jenny Rohrer.

Rohrer is the coordinator of the "In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean" festival,

which will have its inaugural celebration in Seeley Lake this summer, July 10-13.

Maclean, author of a book synonymous with Missoula and western Montana called "A River Runs Through It" spent much of his childhood in Missoula, where his father John was the reverend of First Presbyterian Church. Rohrer said in 1922 the family built one of the first cabins on Seeley Lake.

"Norman would come back from the University of Chicago for a few months every year in the summer, and write longhand on the deck of his log cabin on Seeley Lake," she said.

Those writing sessions became not only his seminal work, but also a series of short stories and novellas, as well as "Young Men and Fire," the nonfiction work published posthumously that detailed the men who died in the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire.

Rohrer said the festival was arranged to celebrate the work of the man she called "Montana's most recognizable author," and rose out of a group of artists in Seeley Lake called Alpine Artisans who regularly hold author readings in town, including those done with Maclean's son John, who will also be a keynote speaker at the festival.

The festival begins with a dinner reception on the nearby Blackfoot River on Friday, July 10, when attendees can meet some of the speakers who will be a part of the weekend.

Saturday is devoted to the impact of "A River Runs Through It," and Sunday is for "Young Men and Fire," Rohrer said.

In addition to his son, Maclean's grandson Noah Snyder will be a featured speaker.

Alan Thomas, the editor of “Young Men and Fire,” as well as Pete Dexter, author of National Book Award-winning “Paris Trout” who wrote a story about Maclean called “The Old Man and the River” that appeared in Esquire magazine are some of the other speakers on tap for Saturday’s events, which take place at the Double Arrow Resort.

Both days of the weekend, the organizers have put together tours of Maclean’s favorite local fishing holes. During an open mic portion, organizers will be inviting locals on stage to speak about the Maclean family. And of course there will be a screening of the film adaptation of “A River Runs Through It” on Saturday.

“We found a person who was his cleaning lady for 20 years, and a business teacher at Seeley-Swan High School who typed his handwritten manuscripts,” Rohrer said.

She said Maclean and “A River Runs Through It” are touchstones recognized not just around the country but across the world as quintessentially Montanan.

“One of the people working on the festival was in Machu Picchu and said they were from Montana and the person went ‘Oh, ‘A River Runs Through It?’” she said.

The rest of the weekend will be largely devoted to “Young Men and Fire” including talks from Laird Robinson, who collaborated with Maclean on the book and was a close friend later in his life.

“He was working for the Forest Service, and he put his job on the line to uncover the alleged cover-up,” Rohrer said.

While she and the other organizers are hard at work putting together the first of what is planned to be an annual event, Rohrer is already looking to the future.

“One reason we called it ‘In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean’ is after this first year we plan to honor other authors who have been influenced by Maclean,” she said.

A festival called “In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean” is set for July 10-13 in Seeley Lake.

More information about the festival, including tickets and a full schedule of events, is available online at www.macleannotsteps.com.