Dear Members, Supporters, and Friends,

As we look back on 2023, a year that shook us with its local and global violence, many of our most cherished moments are those we spent sharing and reflecting on the power of words and stories with you. These were our bright spots: moments we gathered to listen and learn, moments we were inspired by the work of others, and moments we saw you reaching out and bringing people together for a book fair, writing group, reading, or discussion.

At MWPA, we focused on launching new community programs including Stories That Move Me and Write ME. We connected Mainers across geographic and socio-political divides, one through storytelling and the other in collaboration with the Maine State Poet Laureate and Maine Arts Commission, through writing and sending poetry letters. We expanded the reach of our educational offerings, bringing workshops, residencies, and literary events to more locations across the state. We also championed Maine’s writers and publishers, spread news of upcoming events, and awarded writers’ scholarships and residencies for further promising work.

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As we head into 2024, we are proud to serve over 1,650 members in all 16 Maine counties.

This year, we’ll keep opening doors for Maine writers and publishers. We’ll convene a team of community partners around the state to produce the 2024 Maine Lit Fest, and we’ll continue offering high-quality writing and publishing workshops, online and in-person, while working to keep improving our programs and processes so they’re more equitable, inclusive, and community-minded.

We are so grateful for your support, engagement, and ongoing creative and community work. Thank you for valuing Maine’s writers and writing.

With gratitude,

Gibson Fay-LeBlanc
Executive Director

Jim Krosschell
Board President

MISSION

Founded by a group of small presses and writers, Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance (MWPA) has worked for over 48 years to enrich the literary life and culture of Maine. We bring together Maine writers, editors, publishers, booksellers, and literary professionals at all stages of their careers to sharpen craft, create community, and celebrate great writing.
DEBORAH CUMMINS

In 2023, we lost poet, writer, and longtime MWPA Board Member, Deborah Cummins. Deborah served on MWPA’s board from 2015 until last summer, acting as Board President from 2016 until April 2023 and helping to steer MWPA through growth, a leadership transition, and Covid. We will miss her ideas and guidance and are grateful for the time, passion, and professionalism she and are grateful for the time, passion, and professionalism she shared with us. She will be greatly missed and will not be forgotten.

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This spring and summer, we collaborated with Maine State Poet Laureate Julia DeGraw to pilot her poetry project called Write ME. Over 120 participants learned the art of writing epistolary poems, or poems that are also letters, through free workshops held across the state. Participants were then paired with partners living in different regions of Maine to exchange poems by postal mail or email. Hundreds of new pieces of poetry resulted. Some poems were penned by seasoned poets, but many were authored by participants new to writing or writing in this way. At the end of the summer, poets gathered online to share highlights and excerpts from their exchanges.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: JILL MCLAUGHLIN — 2023 ILGENFritz SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

“I moved to Maine after working in book publishing in New York City. Hoping to find a literary community like the one I had lived in New York, I was thrilled to find MWPA and immediately started attending events. Receiving the Ilgenfritz Scholarship has completely reignited my writing project. With the help of the scholarship, I traveled to Rockefeller’s “Fireside” and spent two full days researching and writing, and connected with people also interested in my subject. I’ve had some breakthroughs and am once again really excited by the potential of the work!”

— Jill Mclaughlin

WRITING PROGRAMS REACHING MORE LOCATIONS ACROSS THE STATE

Since the pandemic, we’ve been steadily rebuilding our in-person programming across the state. This year, our workshops, retreats, and gatherings landed in towns and cities all over Maine and attracted more participants than ever before. Our GATHER program, which invites MWPA members and friends to meet and mingle six times a year at different Maine locations, hosted meetups as far north as Presque Isle and as far west as Norway. In-person workshops returned to Augusta, Belfast, Eastport, Farmington, Waterville, and other locations too. Our in-person writing retreats, Black Fly and Harvest, found new homes at the Schoodic Institute in Winter Harbor and Hillsfield Estate in Kingfield.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS LIKE THESE ARE A TREASURE TROVE OF STORIES

Educational programs like these include sponsored and co-sponsored events. At Bates College in Lewiston and the Bangor Public Library, we offered programming to all ages and backgrounds. We also hosted a series of hybrid workshops featuring the Telling Room where Hillholm Estate in Kingfield.

STORIES THAT MOVE ME

On Wednesday, October 4th at 7 PM, we hosted our first ever Stories That Move Me night at Hannaford Hall in Portland. This community event featured five storytellers, all with deep ties to Maine, taking the stage to share poems, plays, songs, and stories about significant people who have shaped their lives in a large, complex, and unforgettable tale. The night was invigorating and presented attendees with new opportunities to hear from community leaders who are treasure troves of stories but don’t necessarily see themselves as storytellers or writers. The event, which will return in 2023, raised money for backgrounds scholarships, fellowships, and free community programs and events.

CELEBRATING MAINE WRITING

The 2023 Maine Literary Awards were held on May 18th at the Olin Arts Center at Bates College in Lewiston and were also livestreamed via Zoom, allowing 200 winners, finalists, and viewers to tune in, in person or from home. Award winning books included a mystery featuring Georgea O’Keefe as the main sleuth, a work of true-crime nonfiction, a children’s book about rights, a memoir about a woman’s return to the woods, and a collection of stories about grief and survival featuring a Pemiscot family in Maine. Molly McGrath received the Distinguished Achievement Award for her “exceptional and steadfast contributions” to Maine’s literary arts as Publications Director at the Telling Room where she helped to publish more than 200 books and 4,500 young Maine writers. A complete set of submitted books was donated to the Charlise Holmes Memorial Library in Lowell.

OTHER NOTABLE HIGHLIGHTS:

In the fall of 2023, we published Sasha Goodstein’s poetry chapbook Centipede, the 2022 Maine Chapbook Series poetry winner selected by critically acclaimed poet Joshua Bennett. Goodstein’s launch at Longfellow Books in Portland featured her poetry alongside work by previous Maine Chapbook Series winners, Suzanne Langlois (poetry) and Brandon Dudley (fiction).

Winning the 2022 Maine Chapbook Series was transformative in the sense that I have been writing poetry for decades and needed to finally admit that publication idea held meaning. Recognizing that what is universal and deeply personal is how most of us drive meaning from our time here and I have MWPA to thank for providing me with workshops and a fellowship to Moriarity Arts to connect with other writers and focus and create.” — Sasha Goodstein

In November, we welcomed our third cohort of Ashley Bryan Fellows to MWPA. This group of five promising writers from BIPOC backgrounds joins twelve existing Bryan fellows in receiving free five-year memberships, free workshops, and networking and publishing opportunities.

Beyond the Numbers

WRITE ME: AN EPSILOGAL POETRY PROJECT

Poetry letter from the Write ME project.

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On Wednesday, October 4th at 7 PM, we hosted our first ever Stories That Move Me night at Hiland Farm Hall in Portland. This community event featured five storytellers, all with deep ties to Maine, taking the stage to share poems, plays, songs, and stories about significant people who have shaped their lives in a large, significant and unforgettable way. The night was energizing and presented attendees with new opportunities to hear from community leaders who are treasures of stories who don’t necessarily see themselves as storytellers or writers. The event, which will return in 2025, raised money for background scholarships, fellowships, and free community programs and events.

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Celebrating Maine Writing
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I moved to Maine after working in book publishing in New York City, hoping to find a literary community like the one I knew. I was thrilled to find MWPA and immediately started attending events. Receiving the Iglenfirth Scholarship has completely reignited my writing project. With the help of the scholarship, I traveled to Rocklands, spent two full days researching and writing, and connected with people also interested in my subject matter. I’ve had some breakthroughs and am once again really excited by the potential of the work! “ — Jill McLaughlin
Dear Members, Supporters, and Friends,

As we look back on 2023, a year that connected us with 98,293 people, many of our most cherished moments are those we spent sharing and reflecting on the power of words and stories. This year, we’ve created many stories that moved us. We are energized to continue our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work and will spend 2024 diving into a year-long equity assessment of our programs and policies. Our goal is to emerge from the process with concrete ideas of how to continue to increase equity and inclusiveness into our mission, programs, and strategic plan in the coming years.

Finally, we can’t wait to bring back the 2024 Maine Lit Fest in October. Showcasing a fresh slate of poets, writers, and illustrators, the 2024 Maine Lit Fest will feature a week of inspiring literary conversations, activities, and community events at locations across the state. In addition to Portland and Waterville, signature events will light up stages in Bangor, Brunswick, Farmington, and Presque Isle. We’ll start announcing the line-up this spring.

We are incredibly grateful for Without You! We Couldn’t Workshops, Conferences, & Retreats Organized 81 Participating Workshops, Conferences, & Retreats 1,434 Direct Support of Writers & Artists through Payments, Awards, and/or Scholarships 98,293 In The meantime, mark your calendars for the week of October 3rd through 12th. Maine Lit Fest will feature a week of inspiring literary conversations, activities, and community events at locations across the state. In addition to Portland and Waterville, signature events will light up stages in Bangor, Brunswick, Farmington, and Presque Isle. We’ll start announcing the line-up this spring. As we head into 2024, we are proud to serve over 1,650 members and writers to create and discuss work alongside peers who share similar experiences and/or hail from similar backgrounds.

We are thrilled to add a new fiction chapbook to our annual list of Maine Chapbook Series winners. Fiction writer Manuel Gonzales has selected Aliza Dubin’s short story collection as the winner of the 2023 Maine Chapbook Series. MWPA will publish this title in the fall. Submissions for the 2024 Maine Chapbook Series contest in nonfiction will open in September.

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Believe it or not, MWPA is turning 50 next year. We’ve begun dreaming of ways to bring Maine’s literary community together to mark this tremendous milestone. We hope to honor the organization’s history and the writers who shared the organization as well as celebrate what lies ahead.

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