



the

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New Illinois Poet Laureate Named

After a lengthy search, a Bradley University professor of English was recently selected the Illinois poet laureate. From a field of 26 candidates, the search committee chose Kevin Stein, who brings a solid background in poetry to this position. Stein has won numerous awards for his professorial work and as a published poet.

Stein received his appointment in a ceremony at the Illinois State Library, Gwendolyn Brooks Building in Springfield in December. Stein's appointment will be somewhat different from that of the previous three poet laureates. The position will be for a four-year term instead of for a lifetime." Stein will be required to give at least four public readings a year and travel throughout the state. In naming Stein Illinois' latest poet laureate, Governor Blagojevich states "We will entrust Kevin to be the caretaker of our literary past. We'll also ask him to cultivate our literary future."

He was awarded the 1991 National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship, the 1998 Indiana Review Poetry Award, as well as being nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 2001, to name a few. Stein has also written five books of poetry, three books of literary criticism, and his poems and essays have appeared widely in journals such as *The Kenyon Review*, *TriQuarterly*, and *American Poetry Review*.

In an effort to bring poetry to as many people as possible, Stein would like to create a "Poet Laureate's website featuring the work of Illinois poets, including audio and video performances by Illinois poets. Stein hopes the website will be "lively and informative, a kind of virtual coffeehouse poetry reading." The website will also feature Youth Poetry and provide links to other poetry sites. Additionally, the new poet laureate plans to use the radio, as well as to visit schools, libraries, nursing homes, and poetry clubs around the state as part of his means of

"making poetry accessible and available to people in their everyday lives."

Governor Blagojevich believes that Stein's poems are "uniquely Illinois... mix satire and stoicism, and provide narratives of hard work and hard knocks." As poet laureate, Kevin Stein hopes to demonstrate that "however challenging, poetry need not be cold or aloof." He explains that "poems are made of us and our culture, that beautiful, beguiling, befuddling human blend. Whether in praise or lament, poems celebrate what it is to be human." Kevin Stein resides in Dunlap, Illinois with Deb, his wife of nearly 25 years, and their two children.



Photo courtesy of Bradley University

A Little History Lesson

The word "laureate" comes from the laurels crowning the heads of famous poets in Ancient Greece. The poet laureate assignment has a long history in England going back to 1616 when King James I gave playwright, poet, and critic Ben Jonson poet laureate status and granted him a pension. Jonson had been writing works that were complimentary to the queen and king for the court since 1605 until his relationship with the court was formalized in 1616. There appears to be some contradiction as to who is the first real poet laureate.

Some sources claim Ben Jonson as the first, while others maintain John Dryden, who was appointed in 1668, is the first poet laureate. When Britain's current Poet Laureate Andrew Motion was asked for his opinion via email, he responded "I say [John Dryden], because the terms of his appointment were more nearly like the present day terms." There have been 19 or 20 poets laureate (depending on who you believe was the first) since its inception in the 17th century. John Dryden also became the first and only poet to be fired from the post for becoming Roman Catholic and refusing to vow allegiance to the Protestant King William III.

By the 19th century, poets laureate were no longer required to write poems in praise of the kings, which offered them the freedom to write about topics and ideas that appealed to the poets. The royal web site www.royal.gov.uk explains the responsibilities of the poet laureate as one who “expresses public feelings, marks important events, and underlines the importance of poetry in society.”

Although a poet laureate’s duties are not written down or specifically defined, usually he writes poems marking special Royal events like weddings, deaths, or anniversaries or significant moments in a nation’s history. Professor Motion, who has held the position since 1999, has written poems about the Queen Mother’s 100th birthday and her death, as well as the Queen’s Golden Jubilee. Professor Motion is attempting to use the Internet to create a Poetry Archive, similar to Illinois’ new poet laureate’s attempt to reach more people via today’s Internet technology.

Poets Laureate in the United States

The national poet laureate is appointed annually, by the Librarian of Congress, and he or she earns a stipend of \$35,000 a year. The annual stipend is funded by a gift from Archer Milton Huntington (1870-1955), the son of one of the builders of the Central Pacific Railroad. Huntington also founded the Hispanic Society of America in 1904 and is quite a historic figure in his own right. The poet laureate serves a term from October to May, unless he or she is reappointed. He or she offers an annual lecture and poetry reading and usually introduces poets in an annual poetry series, but otherwise, specific duties are kept to a minimum.

From 1937 to 1986, the official title was “Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress”, but an act of Congress in 1985 changed it to Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. The position was originally established in 1937, modeled after the centuries-old position in England. Last August Louis Gluck was appointed the latest Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. Unlike the British equivalent, which has had no female Poets Laureate, several women have been appointed to the post in the United States. Billy Collins, who served as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry from 2001 to 2003, explains the significance of the term “laureate” for the public’s consciousness: “Poetry is easier to understand if you have a head of poetry, just like a country needs a leader.”

Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia have their own poets laureate. Few states, however, offer a stipend. According to an article from *Poets & Writers Magazine* titled “The United State of Poets Laureate”,

Rhode Island pays a mere \$1,000 a year while California bestows \$10,000 upon its poet laureate. The article’s author, Denise Hart, finds that the length of terms tend to vary from two to five years to life (Florida). In her research, she also concludes that most states do not require poets laureate to adhere to any clearly established parameters for the position. According to Hart, the poet laureate is usually appointed by the state’s governor’s office along with another branch of state government, a state agency, or a community group.

A conference was held in April 2003 for poets laureate from all around the country. The conference, “Poetry and Politics: Nations of the Mind”, was the first ever of its kind. At the conference, over 30 poets laureate gathered to “discuss the ambiguities and perceived responsibilities of being a state-endorsed poet.”



First Day, Container Corporation of America, June 1972

When the bleak break room smokers asked,
“What you run?”, I answered “the half
and quarter mile,” to which response

they burst in furious, gut-clutching
yucks and howls. “No, boy,” one said,
“what machine you run?” and I got it.

Both the joke I’d innocently made
and the joke I was: high-school-Harry
among the balding, unionized sublime.

“Slitter 66,” I said, and their blue
ballooning guffaw burst in rarefied air,
everyone exhaling Lucky Strike at once.

Eighteen, big-haired and mutton-chopped,
brand new black pocket tee taut over
my still tight gut, I thought they saw

the future in me and shuddered
at their vision. Or was it their past,
themselves before the war to save

democracy -- resplendent in white shirt
and dungarees -- now pot-bellied and shot?
The young think things like that.

How could I know the guy whose job I took
came home boxed from Vietnam,
a war I fought in TV news clips

and the peace marches of us blessed
 with high draft numbers? I ate alone:
 mother's cold meat loaf, bruised banana,
 a Coke that gave me the jitters.
 When the horn burped, I lit out for work
 like the apple polisher I'd planned
 to be, though not before those men
 who'd seemed too gray had heaved me
 in a tin bin of cardboard scrap
 and slammed the lid, their fists beating
 rhythm to the heart thumping my throat.
 Whatever republic we were then,
 its pulse beat among us,
 though no one would say
 the word. Sprawled head first
 among mis-cuts and discards,
 the dross of a process I'd yet
 to learn – man, this was a start.

Poem by Kevin Stein



Tame Primary Results In Few Surprises

Only two years ago, all 177 seats in the General Assembly were up for grabs due to the redrawn legislative map. In sharp contrast to 2002, there are fewer races this election year. The March 16th Primary results were certified by the State Board of Elections on April 16. The only contested Senate race occurred in former Senator James "Pate" Philip's (R-23) district. Ray Soden, appointed to replace Senator Philip, decided not to run. State Representative Carole Pankau (R-49) won the Senate seat by 54.29%. No incumbent Senate Democrats faced any opposition in the Primary. There were seven contested races for the House Republicans; one of those, District 107, involved a write in candidate, who received a mere 49 votes. Twenty-three House Democrats were involved in contested races, and only one incumbent, Representative Charles G. Morrow III (D-32), lost his Primary race to Milton Patterson.

The closest contest of the Primary had to be the Republican contest for House District 58. With 5,542 total votes cast, Marc Brown of Deerfield narrowly defeated David Wasserman from Northbrook by 82 votes. He will

face Representative Karen May in the fall.

In the House, 23 Democrat and 26 Republican representatives faced no challenges in the Primary and will have no opposition in the General Election. One Republican House member, Representative Suzanne Bassi (R-54) and nine House Democrats had opponents in the Primary, but will not face further challengers in the fall. Fifty-nine races for the House and 11 Senate races will be determined in November's General Election. Since the election results were certified, seven State Senate candidates and 22 candidates for the House of Representatives filed to be on the ballot in November.



Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn Makes Trip to Utah to Right a 160 Year-Old Wrong Against Mormons

In 1846 thousands of Joseph Smith's followers were expelled from Nauvoo, Illinois, a thriving community along the banks of the Mississippi River. Led by Brigham Young, the Mormons began the 1,300 mile trek to present-day Utah after Governor Thomas Ford ordered them to leave the state. Two years earlier, a mob had murdered Latter-day Day Saints (LDS) Church founder Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in a jail in Carthage, Illinois. Almost 160 years after the forced exodus, the Illinois House of Representatives approved House Resolution 793 on April 1st by a voice vote. An earlier version of the resolution offered an apology for the expulsion of the Mormons, but was later changed to merely express regret. Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn led a delegation on April 7th to Salt Lake City to deliver the resolution at a news conference. Accompanying Quinn was the resolution's sponsor Representative Daniel Burke (D-Chicago); his brother, Chicago alderman Edward Burke; and the alderman's wife, appellate court Justice Anne Burke. According to the Salt Lake Tribune, LDS church leaders were presented with a copy of the resolution at the LDS Church Administration Building in Salt Lake City. Rebuilding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Nauvoo Temple was completed in 2002.



People In Transition

Governor Rod Blagojevich appointed former **Governor Jim Edgar** to the position chairman of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Foundation.

Roxanne Nava has been appointed Assistant Director of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. She will primarily be responsible for implementing Opportunity Returns, Governor Blagojevich's economic development program. She had been appointed Director of the Department of Financial Institutions last year by the Governor.

Peter Vina has been named a deputy director of the Department of Public Aid. He has been serving as acting State Fire Marshal since last July.

J.T. Somer, a third generation firefighter and retired chief of the Salem Fire Department has been chosen as the new nominee for Illinois State Fire Marshal.

Fernando Grillo has been appointed Secretary of Financial and Professional Regulation. Last summer Governor Blagojevich had appointed Grillo director of the Department of Professional Regulation. This is the new agency created by Governor Blagojevich; it still awaits approval by the legislature. The new agency combines the Departments of Financial Institutions, Insurance, Professional Regulation, and Office of Banks and Real Estate.

Tony Rossi, the former Clerk of the House, has become the executive director of the Capital Development Board. **Mark Mahoney**, who was elected an alderman in the city of Springfield last year, has recently been appointed Clerk of the House.

Marybeth Johnson has been chosen to be in charge of the consolidated media relations offices in Springfield and Chicago. Johnson worked for the Chicago public affairs firm of Serafin and Associates. Governor Blagojevich issued an executive order requiring public information officers at agencies under his control to be centralized under CMS.

In Memorium



The Dean of the Illinois Senate, **Senator Vince Demuzio** died on April 27th of colon cancer. He served in the legislature for almost 30 years, representing District 49- Carlinville. According to the State Journal-Register, almost 750 people came to pay their respects at his funeral, including Governor Blagojevich, Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley, the constitutional officers, legislative leaders, lobbyists, friends and family. Senator Demuzio has been a senator since he first took office at the age of 33 in 1974 and rose to the rank of Senate Majority Leader last year. One example of his commitment to Downstate Illinois was his participation as one of the original "Crazy Eight." The "Crazy Eight" was a group of senators, who successfully sought more leadership and committee chairmanship positions for downstate legislators by stalling the Senate President election.

He is survived by his wife Deanna, son Brad, daughter Stephanie, his mother, and four grandchildren. Deanna was appointed on May 5th to fill the seat left vacant by her husband. She was sworn in on Tuesday, May 11th. Her name was also put on the November ballot.

Other original "Crazy Eight" members included former **Senator Terry Bruce**, former **Senator Ken Buzbee**, former **Senator Vivian Hickey**, former **Senator Jerome Joyce**, former **Senator Bill Morris**, former **Senator Dawn Clark Netsch**, and former **Senator Don Wooten**. Former **Senator George Sangmeister** joined the "Crazy Eight" during the 80th General Assembly.

