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**THE BOSTON GLOBE**

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**LITERARY FESTIVAL LAUNCHED  
APRIL EVENT DRAWS 60 WRITERS, POETS**

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Article Text:

When Vicki Hendrickson heard of a national decline in the number of people reading literary fiction, especially among the most educated, she found it "a pretty sad tale."

She aims to change that with a literary festival. "We have a wealth of writers and book lovers in this community, and we are really going to celebrate that," said Hendrickson, director of Newburyport Adult and Community Education.

After a year of planning, the first Newburyport Literary Festival was officially announced last week. The festival, scheduled for April 28 and 29, will feature 60 writers at readings, panel discussions, and interactive workshops at 40 downtown locations. All events will be free, except for an opening night gala, which will cost \$50.

"This could be a really big thing, bigger than Yankee Homecoming," said author Andre Dubus III of Newbury, referring to the city's annual summer festival that attracts thousands of people.

The literary festival will pay tribute to his father, the late Andre Dubus of Haverhill, the author of nine books of fiction and two collections of essays. Dubus died of a heart attack in 1999 at age 62.

Many of the authors participating in the festival attended a weekly writers' group Dubus held at his home for 12 years.

"He was a writer's writer," Hendrickson said. "You want someone writers are going to connect with. It lends credibility to the project."

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Also boosting the festival's credibility is the list of prominent writers scheduled to participate, including Pulitzer Prize winner Richard Russo, Andre Dubus III, Keith Ablow, Frieda Arkin, Jane Brox, Ed Emberley, and poets Rhina P. Espaillat and X.J. Kennedy.

Many live locally. Others are coming from Maine, Cambridge, and New York. Editors, agents, and publishers are also expected.

Events will focus on poetry, mystery and crime writing, science fiction, sports writing, nature writing, historical fiction, fiction to film, young adult fiction, and children's books and illustration.

"We wanted to have wide appeal and address a lot of genres," said Hendrickson.

Also part of the festival will be a daylong visit by young adult author Lois Lowry to the Nock Middle School in Newburyport on April 28. Seventh- and eighth-graders from several local schools, including the Immaculate Conception School and River Valley Charter School, both in Newburyport, and Triton Regional Middle School in Newbury, will participate. "The Giver," one of Lowry's 30 books, is often included in middle school curriculum.

Opening ceremonies at the Firehouse Center will focus on "Remembering Andre Dubus," with an informal discussion moderated by his son. Presenters will include Russo, editor Bill Goodman, and agent Philip Spitzer.

The ceremonies will be followed by a gala at Nicholson Hall at the Greek Church in Newburyport. At a press conference announcing the festival last week, Dubus thanked organizers for honoring his father.

"One of the beautiful things, the poignant things, about writing is the writer dies, but if the writing is good the writer lives on," said Dubus. "I have complete confidence my father is going to live a long time through his work, but it's always gratifying to know new people are discovering his work."

Collections and books by the late Dubus, a master of the short story, include "Separate Flights" in 1975, "Voices from the Moon" (1984), "Broken Vessels" (1991), "Dancing After Hours" (1996), and "Meditations from a Moving Chair" (1998).

His story "Killings" was the basis of the 2001 movie "In the Bedroom," starring Sissy Spacek, which was nominated for five Academy Awards.

Andre Dubus III is the author of several novels, including "House of Sand and Fog," a finalist for the 1999 National Book Award. It was also made into a 2003 movie starring Ben Kingsley and Jennifer Connolly.

"I go to a lot of literary festivals as a writer," Dubus said. "I think it's a smart business move for any city that can hold it. They can bring in thousands of people, once the word gets out."

And, he said, Newburyport is "the perfect setting." Hendrickson said she expects 2,000 to 3,000 people to attend the festival. "We're ambitious," she said. "We think this is a pretty cool thing."

The festival is sponsored by the Institution for Savings in Newburyport and the Newburyport Five Cents Savings Bank, with additional support from the Provident Bank. Partners in the festival include the Newburyport Public Library and the Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce. The local Historical Society and Art Association are also involved, as are local bookstores.

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"It's a wonderful project," said Dorothy LaFrance, head librarian at the Newburyport Public Library. "The library celebrates reading every day, but to have it in a more formal way in the community is exciting."

While studies such as one published by the National Endowment for the Arts show that reading is declining, "it's not in Newburyport," according to LaFrance.

Last year, she said, the library circulated more than 265,000 items, making it "one of the busiest libraries in the Merrimack Valley."

Hendrickson said there will be more festivals in the future.

"It is not something we are going to do once and stop," she said. "When people read, the statistics show they have a greater tendency to become involved in the community in many ways in the cultural community, the political community, and with civic opportunities. We want that in our community."

For more information, visit [www.newburyportliteraryfestival.org](http://www.newburyportliteraryfestival.org).

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