

Local writers join forces in November

By Kit Tosello
Correspondent

Bestselling author John Green once remarked that novel writing is “a profession for introverts who want to tell you a story but don’t want to make eye contact while doing it.” Indeed, many of us envision writers pecking away at their keyboards while holed up alone, perhaps even teetering on the brink of madness.

But some aspiring novelists in Sisters Country have lately defied that stereotype, emerging from isolation to work together in a public space, united by a common goal; they each endeavor to pen a complete novel during the month of November.

Local participants in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), an annual novel-writing project that brings together professional and amateur writers from all over the world, have been spotted congregating at Suttle Tea, engaged in “write-ins,” roughing out their manuscripts in an atmosphere of accountability and encouragement.

Among them is Nancy Whitlatch, who has long dreamed of a local writers’ community.

“I participated in NaNoWriMo last year and had a lot of fun,” she said. “I went to write-ins, but there were none in Sisters.”

So when the NaNoWriMo challenge came around again

this year, Whitlatch volunteered to host the first-ever Sisters write-in. Lo and behold, a handful of like-minded writers showed up.

Whitlatch finds that writing in community increases her productivity.

“You wouldn’t believe how many things I’ve started,” she said. “I can’t focus at home. It’s hard to stay committed. But when I’m working in a place without a lot of commotion, I’m really into it. Having others there, I can see them all typing away. Even when I’m stuck, it motivates me to keep going and at least get some words down.”

Whitlatch’s current work-in-progress, a young-adult novel featuring a group of teenagers, was birthed from a short story she wrote in a community-college writing class.

In accepting the challenge to write a 50,000-word novel in 30 days, participants must adopt the mindset that their first draft doesn’t have to be perfect; it just needs to be written.

Jill Dyer is doing just that. At press time, the Sisters resident had logged 22,900 words in the first two weeks of November — well on track to make her goal.

“I’ve heard it said that the only way to become a more successful writer is to write. Both NaNoWriMo and the Sisters write-in have helped me do that,” she said.

Dyer isn’t messing around. “Honestly, I just want to challenge myself. Writing fiction feels like a leap. NaNoWriMo is a way to hold myself accountable as well as track measurable progress.”

Prior to this first attempt at a novel, Dyer had completed a non-fiction book about prayer as well as focusing on poetry. One of her poems was recently a finalist in a national writing contest sponsored by the Oregon Christian Writers.

“The Sisters write-ins are great because they’re local, at one of my favorite places to write, and inspire me to know I am not the only one in Sisters attempting this novel-in-a-month idea,” she said.

Once registered, NaNoWriMo participants become part of a supportive online community, together tracking their progress, receiving pep talks from successful authors and opportunities to meet up with other area writers. The Bend region of NaNoWriMo currently has 756 members.

Now in its 18th year,



PHOTO BY KIT TOSELLO

Working on a novel is not necessarily a solo endeavor.

the nonprofit organization “teaches you to believe that your story matters, to trust the gambols of your imagination, and to make the blank page a launching pad to explore new universes. That’s important because when we create, we cultivate meaning. Our stories remind us that we’re alive, and what being alive means,” says Grant Faulkner, executive director of NaNoWriMo.

In addition to accountability and motivation, Whitlatch has also gleaned some new tricks of the trade from her fellow writers.

“We shared resources,” she said. “This is what writing groups do for each other.”

But one simple discovery has especially fueled her creativity anew. “There are other writers in Sisters!”

In faith that the November write-ins are only the first chapter, Whitlatch plans to keep showing up for the fledgling writers’ group. On Thursdays at 1 p.m. for the foreseeable future, Whitlatch will hold a table at Suttle Tea and welcome not only NaNoWriMo participants, but any others who want to give writing in community a try. Contact her at nwhitlatch@gmail.com.

For more information about NaNoWriMo, go to www.nanowrimo.org.

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