

# Seattle Bookfest Takes Off!

After a six year absence, a bona fide book festival returns to Seattle

by Paul Sweum



The first annual Seattle Bookfest took place in October. It was rekindled from the ashes of the Northwest Book Festival, which first began on the Seattle waterfront in the 1990s and last ran in 2003.

Seattle has long been well known as a book and author-friendly city. However, unlike other Northwest book events such as Wordstock in Portland and the Montana Festival of the Book in Missoula, it had not hosted a major citywide book festival since 2003 when the popular Northwest Book Festival lost its funding and folded. Writers, readers, bookstores, and small presses missed having the annual literary bash ever since, so it appears that a void has been filled.

Paul Doyle, the owner of the Columbia City Theater, was the organizer and prime mover behind Seattle Bookfest. Co-sponsored by the Columbia City Business Association and the Rainier

Chamber of Commerce, it lacked corporate sponsorship...so the event became a grassroots effort with funding and volunteer support coming from the community, the Seattle School District, the Seattle Public Library, and enthusiastic exhibitors.

Seattle Bookfest took place at the old Columbia School near Rainier Avenue. It featured over 60 local authors; among them best-selling publishing phenom Garth Stein, mystery writer Mike Lawson, literary maven Nancy Pearl, women's fiction celebrity Jennie Shortridge, and national award-winning poets Sam Hamill and Judith Roche. It showcased over fifty exhibitors ranging from local bookstores such as Third Place Books and Fremont Place Books, as well as nonprofits like Friends of the Library, and small but influential publishers like Copper Canyon Press, Black Heron Press, and Fantagraphics. It also included a long list of panels, workshops, and special events including a Scrabble tournament, a spelling bee, bookbinding demos, and a workshop on "how to write a novel in a month." Local food merchants were on hand to feed the several thousand visitors who came over the weekend of October 24–25.

PNW-ASI members were involved, and helped with the planning and operations of the event. Cheryl Landes assisted writing author bios, while I was able to lend a hand with press releases, poster graphics, publicity, and the overall signage plan. I also unexpectedly fell

into the role of de facto videographer, making my rounds capturing various activities as they happened—while also assisting authors and publishers with various things such as stage setup—sometimes even while filming! Time permitting, some sort of video (perhaps in a series of online vignettes) should be out in 2010.

The weekend was a big success when one considers that admission was free (donations were accepted) with attendance pushing 4,000. The old charm of the Columbia School gave this first Seattle Bookfest a rather appealing "indy feel" that we hope is repeated and built upon in years to come!



*About the author: In addition to indexing, Paul provides over 15 years of technical communications and writing experience, which also involves a career as an*

*environmental and town planner. Paul's a native to Seattle, where he currently lives, and plans on retiring to Arizona someday. In his spare time he engages in local and national issues involving planning and conservation. Some of his hobbies include baseball, travel, collecting folk art, and stained glass. Find out more about what Paul has to offer at [Top Hat Word & Index](#).*

