

Storytelling extravaganza rolling into Tahoe

WordWave is a compilation of events that will bring storytellers from across the nation to Lake Tahoe for a three-day literary festival that goes well beyond traditional book readings.

It is Oct. 9-11 at Valhalla on the South Shore. Details about the various events are **online** as is the opportunity to purchase tickets, however some things are free.

Lake Tahoe News asked WordWave founder Kim Wyatt to share what the three-day event is all about. Besides being the force behind the literary event, Wyatt is owner of **Bona Fide Books**, an independent publishing house based in Meyers.



Kim Wyatt

LTN: *How did the concept of WordWave come about?*

Kim Wyatt: I was tabling with Jennifer Basye Sander at the AWP conference in Seattle. There were 10,000 writers there and we talked about how great it would be to have a literary event in South Lake Tahoe. We liked the model of San Francisco's Lit Quake, a weeklong lit event, and wondered if it might be feasible for Tahoe. And we came up with WordWave.

LTN: *What do you hope to achieve by having this three-day festival of story on the South Shore?*

KW: Of course we want people to come out to the Tallac Historic Site and hear great writers. But my personal goal is to highlight the fantastic talent we have in the region. The Sierra Showcase will feature Suzanne Roberts, Michael Makley, June Saraceno from Sierra Nevada College, Michael Branch (High Country News), Ann Marie Brown and Jeremy Evans to name a few. These are writers getting national recognition. And Reno's poet laureate, Gailmarie Pahmeier, will also make an appearance.

LTN: *Do people need to be a writer or voracious reader to enjoy the event?*

KW: No. We didn't want it to feel like an exclusive literary event, so we opened it up to storytellers in general, including plays. We held a playwriting contest, and received entries from around the world. We're excited to launch three new one-act plays on Oct. 10 at the Boathouse Theater – how cool is that? NEA storytelling fellow and Paiute elder Ralph Burns will talk about oral storytelling, and Washoe drummer Ben Rupert will present on drumming. Christian Kiefer (author of "The Animals") will present on songwriting. There is also a novel writing camp for kids, and Maker's Station. So, there is something for everyone – we want to encourage everyone to either tell their story, or at least see the value of storytelling.

LTN: *How did you decide which authors to invite?*

KW: Jennifer suggested Garth Stein, who wrote "The Art of Racing in the Rain," and when we mentioned it to a few people, they were thrilled. He had just published a book about a mansion in the woods, so we decided to have our fundraiser at the Grand Hall with Garth. A local programming committee—me, Bruce Rettig, and Suzanne Roberts—put out a call for abstracts to regional writers, and we got a great response, which shaped our Sierra Showcase. We decided to round it out with Pam Houston, Gayle Brandeis, and Camille Dungy, because they are

great writers and teachers.

LTN: *There is a nice mix of local and internationally known authors-panelists. Do you see this being more than a locals' event?*

KW: Absolutely. I go to writing events all over the country, and nobody else has our lake. It's the perfect site for a writer's getaway. I think WordWave could be an annual event that draws people from all over.

LTN: *Please explain what the Timber Ball–Steampunk in the Woods event is all about.*

KW: The Tall Timber Ball–Steampunk in the Woods is our fundraiser. We wanted to have a really fun, swinging party that was somewhat literary, and steampunk has its roots in Jules Verne. So there is a costume element, and we will be awarding a prize to the best look. Think Edwardian Burner. And rather than sit around banquet tables, we want people to move. So we hired a steampunk DJ who will spin electroswing—just try sitting still!—and the steampunk décor and our “curious” auction will have people talking. And there is a photo booth. Big fun. (You can pick up steampunk garb at Gaia-Licious here in town. They have goggles with wings!)

LTN: *The Makers Station is more hands-on and a different side of storytelling. What will people be able to do here? In this day of writing and reading on electronic devices, why is the history of print important?*

KW: People will be able to create their own books at the Maker's Station. And Ben Rupert will demo drum making, another form of storytelling.

The history of print is important because the book is the most democratic invention ever created—anyone can get their hands on a book and connect. Books teach us and help us feel less alone. The invention of the printing press radicalized the

world, bringing literacy and education to the masses. You really don't want to get me started ...

LTN: How many submissions did you get for the one-act play competition? How were they whittled down to the winners? How many will be read that Saturday night?

KW: We received 193 submissions to the one-act play competition, a huge success. Three brand new plays will be premiered on Oct. 10, and at least two of the playwrights will come in for rehearsal.

LTN: Prices are reasonable – from free to \$100 for the Steampunk. Is the money being raised enough to cover the expenses or are sponsors helping or is there a nonprofit component?

KW: We were committed from the beginning to have a free event, a public day with great events for readers and writers. Our hope is that the Steampunk Ball will cover expenses, but we have also received a lot of support from the community. We have a great pool of volunteers, with Denise Haerr heading up our hospitality committee. Valhalla Tahoe is our fiscal sponsor, and will receive a percentage of the proceeds.

Our fabulous sponsors include the LTVA, Valhalla Tahoe, the Friends of the Library, the Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra, the Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe, Paula Foley, Lennard and Cynthia Brown-Carlson, and Ronda and MJ Schaer and so many more. Organist David Brock is also hosting a fundraiser for WordWave. So we're trying really hard to make it happen and exceed expectations.

LTN: Do you anticipate this being an annual event? If so, would you mind sharing what might change in coming years?

KW: Yes, absolutely. We'll have to evaluate after this year and see what people liked, and want more of.

LTN: *Is there anything else you would like to add?*

KW: Just that I am super happy to be able to contribute to the cultural scene in South Lake Tahoe. There is mad talent here that everyone should know about. And that I hope people will come out for WordWave! There is something for every budget and every taste. I just want to get people excited about reading, and about telling their stories—it matters that we do.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report