

er Parishes Picayune

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Project cultivates budding poets

By JUDY CREEKMORE
Contributing writer

For several years Bernard McGhee wrote poetry, satisfied with having put his ideas on paper.

"I'd put them some place and no one else would ever hear them," said McGhee, a senior at East St. John High School in Reserve.

Last year he found an outlet for his work — Project: Poetry. Through the program, McGhee and other young poets at East St. John High have the chance to share their creations, learn more about the craft and discuss life as a poet with others who know the satisfaction of finding just the right words to express themselves.

"It's given me a chance to share," McGhee said. "I like hearing other people's poems and seeing what's in other people's heads. Some of my favorite poets are people I know."

Project: Poetry evolved last year from discussions East St. John teacher Philippe Ernewein had with students about music and poetry. They began giving him poetry between classes.

"I think they just needed an outlet," Ernewein said. "There aren't places you can go today to just share your poetry and feelings and social commentary and concerns like in the old days of town squares."

Ernewein stresses that students write a daily journal and encourages them to express themselves.

"I used to write when I was in the mood, but it (Project: Poetry) taught me to think about things that happen to me and develop my ideas," said David McClung, a 10th-grader.

McClung's poem "Time of Day" will appear in Volume 2 of "inkdancer review," a local literary magazine that will be

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Students listen intently during a recent poetry reading at the Book Cellar book store in LaPlace.

STAFF PHOTO BY BEN DUKE

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available in January.

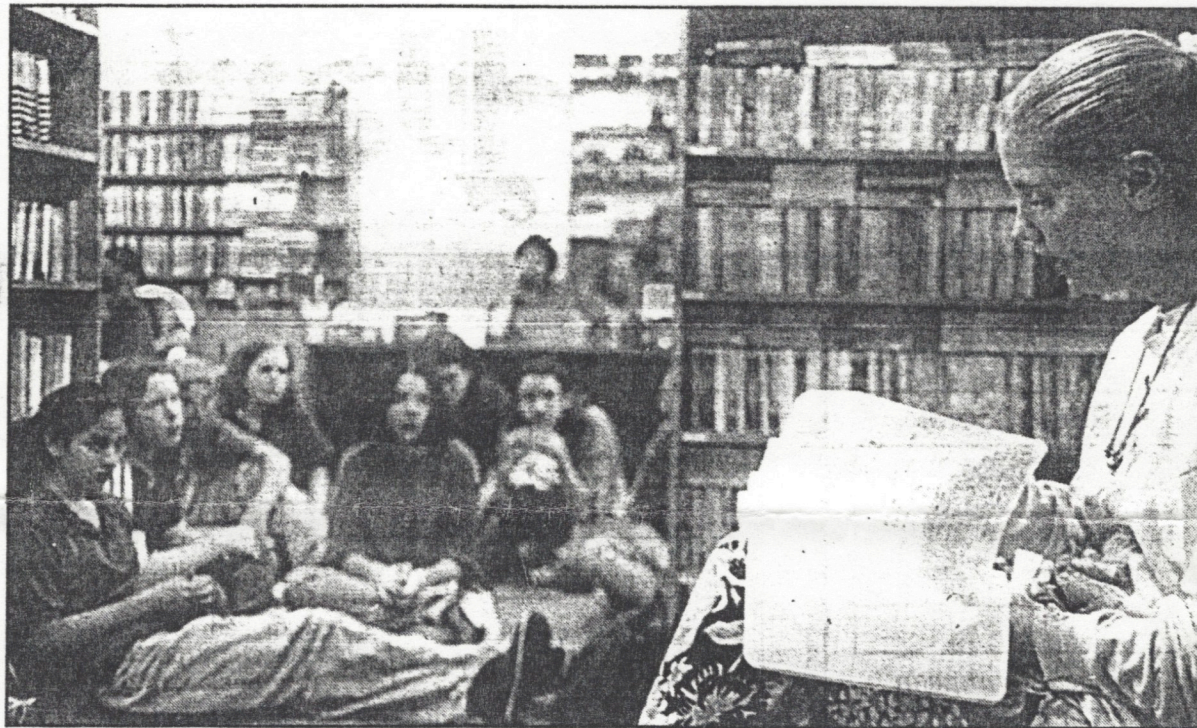
Morning meetings are held at the school. Monthly workshops and readings, which are open to the public, also have become part of the project.

A core group of 12 to 20 students meets twice each week before school to tell jokes, share newspaper and magazine articles and discuss poetry.

In workshops, participation is limited to 10 people to maintain an intimate setting. Poets are invited on a rotating basis. After a few workshops, participants graduate and new members come in.

With the opening of the Book Cellar in LaPlace last summer, Project: Poetry has found a place to present its work to the public. Though students are featured, all poets are invited to participate.

"Public readings are a lot of fun," McGhee said. "I like to hear others besides ESJ students



Isabelle Theriot reads from her collection of written thoughts at the Book Cellar.

STAFF PHOTOS BY BEN

and I like to hear the different styles of writing. Sometimes I try them on some of my own work."

With so many accomplishments, the group's goal in the near future is to publish members' work, and the program is seeking grant money to publish a book.

Fans support beginning writers

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The beginners shared their work tentatively — quickly or quietly — uncertain of its reception.

But for Project: Poetry members, most of whom have read their poems publicly, there was the confidence of acceptance and support they knew would come from the audience.

Sixteen local poets, most from East St. John High School in Reserve, shared their words of love, frustration, vengeance and a little humor, with about 40 people at the fourth public readings sponsored by Project: Poetry recently at the Book Cellar in LaPlace.

Many of the compositions dealt with divorce, destruction, sex, hypocrisy and frustration in general.

"They write it because it exists," said Philippe Ernewein, an East St. John teacher and founder of the program. "I think it's a very healthy thing that they

do write it. It's a therapeutic process."

Demyan Gaens used his break from Rally's to tell of love and inspiration, then hurried back to work.

Andrew Baldwin put his offering about cheating, drinking and death to music. His work is featured in the current edition of " Gestures," a literary journal for students sponsored by Teach for America.

Founding members Isabel Theriot and Ron Hall, along with Baldwin, Nicholas Mene and Darren Usry, offered a wide range of styles and thoughts. They also are frequent participants in before-school Project: Poetry meetings at the school.

"There is more confidence coming across in their poetry," Ernewein said. "Their works are becoming closer to truth and real, true expression. If you want to know how young people are feeling, listen to their poetry because it's the truest, purest form — it's coming directly from their hearts."

Tony Aucion twist words and phrases into new creations at the poetry reading.

