

## The written word

# Conference speakers pass on tips for success

By Angie McKellar  
special writer

Oakland University recently hosted 450 professional and aspiring writers at the 21st Annual Writer's Conference, sponsored by Detroit Women Writer's

and Oakland University.

Writers, publisher's representatives and marketing people led sessions designed to assist the neophyte and the published writer.

Conference attendees can select from lectures on drama, fiction, non-fiction, poetry,

books for children and teens, travel, newspaper writing, and marketing. Deciding which to attend in the time allocated was often a difficult choice.

Richard Thomsen, artistic director of Lansing's Boardwalk Theater, who selects six new plays annually, said, "There are more opportunities for playwrights today than at anytime since the 1920s. My best advice for those who want to write for the movies is to read comics. Keep it simple and direct. When your play is ready, invite friends into your living room and read to see if it makes sense. If you think it's ready, send it off."

Theater market lists may be obtained from Theater Communications Group, and the Dramatists' Guild, both of New York City.

AGENT RICHARD Curtis of Richard Curtis Associates, departed from the usual advice when he advised book authors to submit their manuscripts simultaneously.

"Why? Because half of the publishers won't read it anyway, and a quarter of them aren't going to get around to reading it for six months. If you should be so lucky to get more than one offer, get an agent. He is experienced in handling multiple offers."

"Query letters are important, of course. Send a brief cover letter with your manuscript. The book idea must sound fresh, something the editor doesn't have. Add a footnote that you are submitting simultaneously. Make your manuscript clean and professional. There is a school of thought that says: can't spell, can't write. Non-fiction can get by with an outline and sample chapters."

"The typical children's book writer has other income sources," he said. "You cannot be in the field just for money."

Julie Candler, automotive editor of Woman's Day Magazine and a widely read writer for numerous other magazines, commented that writing should be viewed like a small business with productivity the primary goal. "Schedule your hours efficiently," she said. "Since starting to free lance I've maintained an office away from

home to insure a good workspace. I think this is particularly important for women who are otherwise subject to myriad interruptions, and it also helps to give an image of professionalism rather than that of a homemaker working for pin money. Generally, the best business people are well organized and self-disciplined."

ELMORE "Dutch" Leonard is perhaps this area's most prolific book author. He aims for five clean pages in a 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. day — a schedule that has helped produce over two dozen novels. A number of them have been made into movies. He usually finishes a book in about four months, writing in long hand first and revising as he goes along before typing the first draft.

Doris Scharfenberg told listeners interested in travel writing to "train your brain to look for a new and different angle. The field is very competitive and hard work. Look for a fresh approach. Put punch into your query. Show what you have in mind. You must plan ahead a minimum of 10 months. Some magazines schedule even farther ahead. Avoid travel clichés: What I did on my vacation... gateway to... hub of... Four-seasons paradise, etc."

"PICTURES ARE A MUST in travel articles. I carry two 35-mm cameras, one for color (slides), and one for black and white. I use Tri-X for black and white and Kodachrome 64 for color. Don't trust Chamber of Commerce literature entirely. Sometimes the brochures tend to over-glamorize and are not updated. The information should be checked out."

"Ask questions about hotel rates, meals, gas, where the reader can write for more information. Don't let rejections discourage you. I can remember very clearly the day I got four articles back. But, eventually they were all sold to other magazines."

George Woods, children's book editor for the New York Times, selects about 2,000 books annually for reviews, and has been in the business for 30 years.

"Children's books need a basic education, such as a boy experiencing his

first snowstorm. Play the part of being a child, reach for the little boy or girl in yourself," Woods advised. "Don't buy expensive books for small children. Hard cover prices are getting out of hand. Paperbacks are going to be our salvation. I believe that our books should be produced in America, not abroad. Our publishers do a better job."

Helen H. Balmer was conference de-

signer/coordinator. Carolyn Hall is current president of Detroit Women Writers.

"Anyone interested in the 1983 conference may ask Oakland University to be included in next year's mailing list," Hall said. And she added that her organization is sponsoring a two-day workshop conference in March — open to anyone. Contact the Detroit Public Library for details.



MINDY SAUNDERS/left photographer

## Needlepoint artistry

Loucille Zack (left) and Ellie Cloutier, area needlepoint artists, will hold two exhibits of their unusual works. The first will be at The Community House, 380 S. Bates, Birmingham, 1-8 p.m. next Wednesday. The second will be at the Muirwood Clubhouse, Grand River and Drake, Farmington Hills, 1-5 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 14. Pictured with them are two of the 50 artists. Many of the works from their business, One of a Kind, are commissioned pieces.

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