

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Local authors demonstrate sole and soul

"It's funny, I don't feel like a writer," said Suzanne Manji of Troy.

Her poetry and descriptive prose, however, points to the contrary.

Because we all use words to explain, describe and relate our experiences, all of us are storytellers and writers to some extent.

There are some like Manji, however, whose words about coming to terms with the death of her father transcend the page, and conjure a world of pain and compassion.

Her poetry blends a melancholy melody of words with the longings of the heart:

*On a metal plate
your name looked strange —
soon to be in polished rock,
your name cut in, like a scar
close to the bone.*

Yet there are also some writers like Manji who never have seen their words in print. Writers without readers are like singers without an audience. Ink without paper.

Entrepreneurial ingenuity and advances in desktop publishing are proving that the Information Age has done for a democracy of voices what the assembly line did for the auto industry.

Manji and eight other local writers have published an anthology, "Up from the Soles of Our Feet," with the assistance of Plain View Press of Austin, Texas, which began 20 years ago publishing a new voices series.

The method of publishing followed by these writers reveals a practical path whereby writers see their names in print and let readers — not publishers — decide the merit of their work.

Intangibles of publishing

Meeting twice a month for more than a year, the group of writers were guided by writing guru Margo LaGattuta of Rochester Hills.

LaGattuta, who runs a successful writing communications business, selected nine

local writers from submitted manuscripts. In the past three years, she has also edited two other similar anthologies.

"It's a struggle for writers to be published, there just aren't enough publishers for writers," said LaGattuta. "In effect, the anthology is like a chap book that the writers can use to create a book of their own work."

While the Plain View Press plan calls for the writers to pay for printing costs, it's not a case of vanity publishing where anything, regardless of quality or content, is published.

These writers are compelled by the

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Winter time cure: The Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular chases away the winter blues Jan. 14-19 as hundreds of carvers compete for \$10,000 in cash prizes and scholarships with sculptures spanning a wide variety of subject matter.

VANISHING ICE ART WARMS HEARTS OF VIEWERS SCULPTURE

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Visitors might think they're at the 1998 Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan, when they arrive at the Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular Jan. 14-19.

Aaron Costic's 20-foot-long by 15-feet-high carving of the interlocking rings, however, were meant only to commemorate the fact that five out of eight American carvers invited to the Winter Olympics will be testing their skills in Plymouth. Of those carvers, 1996 world champions Ted Wakar of Canton and Jim Bur Jr., an Eastpointe resident who grew up in Livonia and graduated from Churchill High School, will compete in the professional individual category (see accompanying story).

Michael and Sandra Watts have been working out at the gym for the last few months to prepare for the six grueling days when they coordinate the competitions making sure each of the 400,000 pounds of ice are in place and ready to carve. More than 500,000 visitors are expected to attend the event featuring professional, amateur and student carvers. Recognized as the oldest and largest ice carving event in North America, the Spectacular includes competitions, a 24-hour light show, a Family Warming Center to provide respite from the cold and hunger, and a Fantasyland of animal ice carvings including a 16-foot tall giraffe by John Fitzer of Westland.

"It's kind of an Olympic training camp for ice carvers," said

Michael Watts, who's excited by the fact Plymouth's reputation as a world-class event is growing. "This is the best crew of carvers we've had. This is the event to carve in."

Teams and individuals from across North America and Japan

will compete for more than \$10,000 in cash prizes and scholarships. For the first time in a major competition, the American Culinary Federation and the National Ice Carving Association will both sanction the events. Certified Master Chefs Miles



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BUESALA

Olympic hopefuls: Ted Wakar and Jim Bur Jr. will compete against ice carving teams from around the world in two separate championships in Japan.

Sculptors go for the cold

LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

For the last six weeks, award-winning ice carvers Ted Wakar and Jim Bur Jr. have spent hundreds of hours drawing, constructing models and practicing for the Plymouth International Ice

Sculpture Spectacular, Jan. 14-19, and for two contests in Japan.

Wakar, an executive chef employed by Marriott Management at Ford Motor Co., and Bur, a product informa-

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Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular

What: More than 500,000 visitors are expected to attend the 16th annual Plymouth event featuring competitions for professional, amateur and student carvers. Recognized as the oldest and largest ice carving event in North America, the Spectacular includes a Fantasyland of animal ice carvings in The Gathering on Penniman across from Kellogg Park, a 24-hour light show, and a Family Warming Center to provide respite from the cold and hunger. For more information about the spectacular, call (734) 459-0969 or visit the Internet site at <http://oonline.com/plymouthice>

When: Wednesday, Jan. 14 to Monday, Jan. 19. Hours for the warming center are 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, Jan. 17-18 at the Masonic Lodge on Penniman.

Where: Kellogg Park and the parking structure in downtown Plymouth.

Birmingham Winterfest

What: Sponsored by the Principal Shopping District, Winterfest is an exhibition of ice sculptures including one of a Victorian house. For more information, call (248) 433-3550.

When: Thursday, Feb. 5 to Sunday, Feb. 8. Ice carvers begin creating ice sculptures Thursday evening and will work to complete their pieces by Saturday morning.

Where: Held in two locations: Triangle area where Woodward and Old Woodward converge, and Shain Park, north of Merrill, east of Bates in downtown Birmingham.

Cihelka, a Bloomfield Hills resident who retired from the Golden Mushroom; Dan Hugelger, an instructor at Schoolcraft College; and Austrian born Helmut Holzer from Atlanta are among two teams of judges awarding artistic and technical points to carvers.

Students and instructors from Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills, Schoolcraft College, Livonia; Henry Ford Community College, Dearborn; Macomb and Monroe community colleges as well as Plymouth, Romulus and Catholic Central High School in Redford look forward to learning from the masters.

As educational coordinator for the Spectacular, Richard Teeple will assist college and high school students with their pieces at the time of competition. Teeple, a chef instructor at Henry Ford Community College, along with his students will carve one of the major displays in The Gathering. The 40 blocks of ice will feature characters Subzero and Motaro from Mortal Kombat video game and films.

"The event is an opportunity to educate the community about ice carving that it's more than just finished pieces," said Teeple, a Plymouth resident competing in Frankenthum Feb. 6-7. "But it's also a place for amateur carvers to learn. It's a theater to study everyone else's talents."

Even though Oakland Community College students will not compete, chef instructor Dan Rawlson also believes the Plymouth event is an opportunity to expand ice carving skills. A team

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AT THE GALLERY

Thewes comes up from the underground

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

On his drive to teach an art history class to a group of junior high students, an indelible image came to Tom Thewes.

In a busy world that he describes as "filled with noise," driving often allows Thewes the time to find a quiet moment whereby he can recite the rosary. A practice, said Thewes, that reflects his desire for certainty rather than strict religious devotion.

During the drive to his teaching assignment, it became apparent to Thewes — a painter inspired by cubism and comic books — that a wreath of syringes would be the modern-day equivalent to a crown of thorns pinned to Jesus' head.

In his Royal Oak studio, Thewes points to the result of the epiphany: a painting that depicts Jesus with syringes stuck into his head, and through his hands and feet. If some Christians find it sacrilegious, anarchic or Kevorkian-like, then they might not be looking deep enough, he said.

Provoking viewers of his art to "look deeper" has become Thewes' most pressing challenge.

Working with an airbrush and a range of media, including wood panels, sandpaper and canvas, Thewes' most recent edgy portraits, "Sandpaper Sally," are currently exhibited at C Pop Gallery in Royal Oak.

Although associated with low-brow underground

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Soulful: Suzanne Manji's sculpture appears on the cover of "Up from the Soles of Our Feet."



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

Cutting edge: Tom Thewes combines found-objects, cubist-style painting and computer-enhanced images in his art.