

Literary mag marks 10th birthday



VICTORIA DIAZ

Did you know that "The MacGuffin" is alive and well and about to mark a 10th anniversary at Schoolcraft College in Livonia? What's a MacGuffin? Well, it's not a strange animal or an exotic rare plant. And it's not another rendition of a fast-food restaurant, either. It's a lively literary magazine, fast-growing in popularity with students and other readers across the United States.

In addition to selected Michigan bookstores, it can be found in shops as far away as Chicago and San Francisco. It counts among its contributors such literary luminaries as Diane Wakoski and Jim Daniels, together with many new, yet-to-be-established talents.

In the pre-MacGuffin days, literary journals at the college were essentially put together by students, and circulated mostly on-campus, according to editor and Schoolcraft College English professor, Arthur Lindenberg. When the veteran creative writing teacher was approached to lead the staff of the new, school-funded magazine, he had several ideas

about what direction he wanted it to take. "Basically, what I wanted to do was develop a magazine accessible both to students and to people on the outside — a quality magazine in which we'd publish the best work we could find," Lindenberg said. "I wanted to give writers the kind of exposure they wouldn't get if they were published just by an in-house journal. I wanted a magazine that would circulate nationally."

Along with that, Lindenberg emphasizes, he wanted to give staff members a real opportunity to gain editorial experience. "Students can work on the staff of 'The MacGuffin,' and get credit for doing that," he said. "It's a general requirement that they attend at least a semester's worth of meetings and that they submit not just in manuscript consideration and selection, but in some of the other labor, too."

Spare beginnings
In the beginning, the small staff worked out of a tiny, all-purpose, "spare room" just around the corner from Lindenberg's office in the Liberal Arts Building, producing a 64-page magazine twice yearly.

Today, the 10-member staff (Lindenberg, assistant editors, editorial assistants, and a business manager) do their thing in the much-larger meeting room otherwise designated for the

Schoolcraft College Board of Trustees. "The MacGuffin" is published three times a year now and runs to 144 pages (although the special 10th anniversary issue, now on sale, contains 160 pages of poetry, short fiction, and artwork). The 500-copy run, in contrast to sales 10 years ago, practically sells out every time, Lindenberg said. (Perhaps at least part of the magazine's success can be attributed to the fact that, except for some time off at Christmas, "The MacGuffin" crew — unlike many literary journal staffs — operates year-round.)

Anyone interested can submit work to be considered for publication in the periodical.

Lindenberg says he and his staff look for work that is "especially well-crafted."

"With a poem, for instance, we look closely at the way it is developed, at its focus, at the kinds of images the poet uses. With short fiction, we look for strong characters, plus a situation that is well-developed and defined.

"But we also look at something else — a more difficult thing to find. It's almost a mystical thing, really. Is some (work) crying out to be published? Or is it so much like so many other things that have already been published that it doesn't need to have its face shown among readers?"

Annual poet search
Through the years, "The MacGuffin," with help from the Michigan Council for the Arts and the Detroit Council for the Arts, has sponsored an annual "Poet Hunt," a statewide competition that awards cash prizes to three winners. Their work is read at an awards ceremony held on campus every spring, and the prize-winning poems are subsequently published in "The MacGuffin."

The mortality rate of literary journals across the country is notoriously high.

"I think our success may have a lot to do with the commitment the college has made to help us express good literature," he said. As to that odd name...

An instructor at Schoolcraft, using the pseudonym, Lloyd Drako, came up with the idea in a name-choosing contest for the periodical 10 years ago.

The mysterious Mr. Drako told judges that "MacGuffin" was a term once used by movie director Alfred Hitchcock to mean "what everybody was after." The title seemed to fit perfectly. Victoria Diaz, a long-time member of Detroit Women Writers, tracks the books and literary industry for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. You can leave a message for her on a touch-tone phone by dialing 953-9047, then her mailbox number, 1854.

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