

'New York' comes to OU for writers' conference

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By RENE SKOGLUND
Special Writer

Love of writing brought hundreds of aspiring and professional writers together for the 32nd Annual Writers' Conference of Oakland University on Saturday, Oct. 16. They shared experiences, offered advice and generated enthusiasm for their craft.

The conference, sponsored by Oakland University's Division of Continuing Education and the Detroit Women Writers, has established a history of presenting some of the best nationally and locally recognized writers and editors to its public.

"We can't take the whole crowd to New York, so we get New York to come to us," said Carolyn Vosburg Hall, past conference chair and one of this year's speakers.

Hall, a Birmingham resident, is a former art critic for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and author of several art-related books. She designed the current conference brochure, using a photographic still life of her own study as the visual theme.

Conference theme

According to Julia Grice, this year's conference chair, excellence is the theme that has made the conference one of the largest in the country and enables it to attract speakers with "stellar credentials." In the past, the conference has hosted such prestigious speakers as Alex Haley and Joyce Carol Oates.

"We spend all year looking for presenters," said Grice, a highly successful mystery writer who lives in Auburn Hills. "We look for somebody warm, down-to-earth and humorous... someone with practical knowledge of techniques."

The conference's planning committee found those exact qualities in Michigan author Tom Kakonis, the event's keynote speaker. Kakonis, who lives in Grand Rapids, has written several crime novels and has earned top recognition from the Literary Guild and the New York Times Book Review. His anecdotal presentation packaged valuable information about the discipline it takes to achieve a successful writing career.

Kathleen Spring of Huntington Woods paid special attention to Kakonis' speech. Writing is going to be her career. She recently graduated from Wayne State University with a Journalist-of-the-year award.

"There are always top-quality people who speak, and I'm always impressed," said Spring, who has attended the conference for the past three years. "I always walk away with not only a bundle of information but a whole new, refreshed enthusiasm for my chosen career. It just makes me want to go out there and do it."

Judging from the size of the crowd, many writers share Spring's enthusiasm. Attendance was estimated at well over 400 for Saturday's conference and at 135 for Friday's individual workshops and manuscript critiques.

All ages attend

It also was apparent that writers represent a broad range of ages. Spring, who volunteered her age as "mature," said: "I bet a lot of people have come here as the result of a mid-life crisis and decided that writing is really what they want to do for the rest of their lives."

Not everybody who came to the

U-M teacher plans free lecture at OCC

University of Michigan philosophy teacher Frithjof Bergmann will give a free speech on the theory of new work 2 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 27, at Oakland Community College's Farmington Hills campus.

Topic areas will include exploring new technologies and their potential for start-up business and self-employment, and the role of education in the requirements and strategies needed to prepare young folks for the work world of the future. Call Kelly Masters at 471-6392 for additional data.

conference had designs on a writing career. Birmingham senior Kathleen Jolly said attending the conference for the last three years has made her a better reader. "I think it's a wonderful way to unlock your creativity and learn the process of writing, which makes you appreciate reading."

Christian Janssen, 20, of Auburn Hills is just beginning to think about career choices. He attended the conference for the first time, and he did it on crutches.

He is recovering from a third-story fall from a balcony. His mother, who accompanied him, hopes he'll give serious consideration to writing. It's less dangerous than toppling off of balconies.

When asked what he thought about the conference, Janssen, who is writing a horror novel (not about his fall), replied, "It's great. The type of input I've been getting is just fabulous for whatever will come up later."

George Dila of Orchard Lake

writes for a living. He has worked in the advertising field for many years and currently teaches a creative writing class in Birmingham. He attends the conference every year not only to "be reminded of techniques" but for pragmatic reasons: "getting into the loop, making those contacts and widening your groups of people you know in the business."

Help for all
True to its purpose, the 32nd

Annual Writers' Conference provided instructions and inspiration to writers of all disciplines: novels, short stories, poetry, romance and true-life journalism. According to Carolyn Vosburg Hall, they all come "to sip at the well."

But is everyone who drinks an instant success? According to Joan Shapiro, there's no such thing.

Shapiro, a home-grown Birmingham romance writer and

ebullient speaker at this year's conference, attended the conference for the first time 10 years ago. She credits the experience as being the catalyst in her career. It led to her association with The Romance Writers of America. Talent and many years of hard work lie behind a string of successful novels.

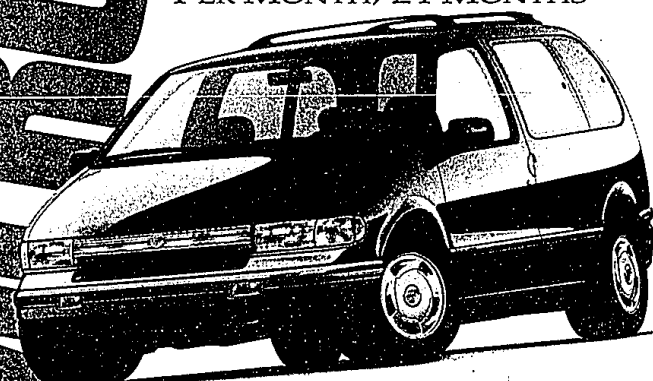
Shapiro laughed when asked about her present fame. "It only took nine years before I was an instant success."

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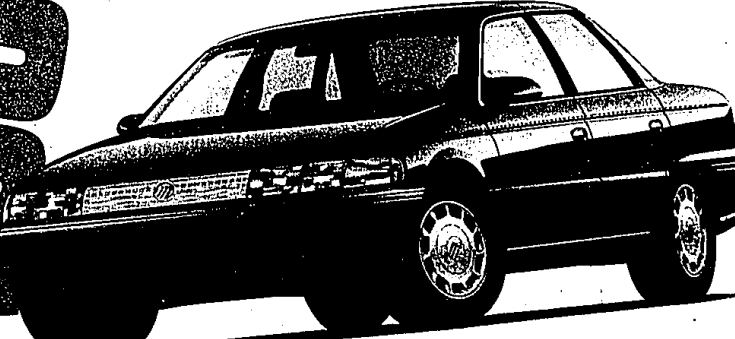
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