

ARTS

Poetry in devotion: Committee seeks nominations for next statewide ambassador



OCTOBER 01, 2012 7:00 AM • [GAYLE WORLAND | WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL | GWORLAND@MADISON.COM | 608-252-6188](#)

In a race that's decidedly more gentle than the one for the White House, Wisconsin will soon choose its next Poet Laureate.

Not that the job hasn't borne its own share of political upheaval in recent years. Shortly after taking office, Gov. Scott Walker did away with the state's official Poet Laureate post, redlining the annual \$2,000 that the state Poet Laureate Commission received

from the governor's office — money the commission passed along for the poet's travel expenses around the state.

The move came as a surprise. For months, the laureateship was in limbo — until the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters stepped forward in May 2011 and gave refuge to the post “for the foreseeable future.”

The Academy is currently accepting nominations for Wisconsin's 2013-15 Poet Laureate through 4 p.m. Friday.

The state's prime poet will receive a small stipend for travel, thanks to donations from individuals and literary groups, two weeks of an artist residency at Shake Rag Alley in Mineral Point, and the chance to put his or her work — and passion for poetry — in the state spotlight.

“The whole point of my job is to go around and promote Wisconsin poets and poetry,” said Bruce Dethlefsen, the state's Poet Laureate through the end of 2012.

“Last year I did 72 events. It was wonderful — busy,” he said.

A retired librarian, Dethlefsen made it his goal to visit small public libraries with poetry, often sparking new local writing groups and ongoing open mics in the process.

He also visited many classrooms.

“I give them permission to be artists,” he said of his school visits. “I wish that some man would have come into my seventh-grade class and said, ‘I know some of you think a little differently and you might be artists. I give you permission to try your best to follow that