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Mayor names two Madison Poets Laureate

By [Leah Linscheid](#)

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Madison Mayor [Paul Soglin](#) honored two local writers Monday by announcing their new positions as poets laureate.

Sarah Busse and Wendy Vardaman have agreed to share the volunteer position, Madison Arts Administrator Karin Wolf said. The positions entail creating poems for particular functions at the request of the mayor's office, including important city events or honoring a visiting dignitary.

She added poets laureate also serve as advocates for poetry in the surrounding communities on behalf of the city.

"They frequently go to schools, jails, nursing homes or any public gathering place to get people fired up about words, literacy and poetry," Wolf said. "Our last poet often did workshops to help people find their voice with words."

Fabu, a former Madison poet laureate, created a program that displayed poems from area high school students on Metro buses. Wolf said Busse and Vardaman would likely strive to continue this and other city programs created by past poets laureate.

Busse and Vardaman are co-editors of Verse Wisconsin, a poetry magazine that has a visible online presence nationally and internationally, Wolf said.

Busse discussed her excitement about taking the poet laureate position, and said she is looking forward to carrying on the work of previous poets.

"Wendy and I are hoping to continue the work of Fabu," Busse said. "She did a lot of work putting poetry in the public where you wouldn't necessarily expect to see it. She worked to get poetry into publications around town, and she was instrumental in getting poems on sidewalks on Willy Street."

Busse said she and Vardaman would focus on partnering with institutions around the city to develop new programs.

Busse also expressed her interest in emphasizing the importance of poetry in communities.

"I have really been thinking about what role poetry can play in specific fabrics of life and what role it has in the public square," Busse said. "We're used to thinking of poetry in bookstores, but what role does poetry play in a more public institution? That's what I'm thinking of right now as we begin this adventure."

The poet laureate position entails a four-year term, Wolf said. The position dates back to 1977, when Madison was one of the first cities in the nation to begin appointing the position.

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