



## Local

# Around Town: Willy Street Poetry offers 'lasting testimony'

STORY

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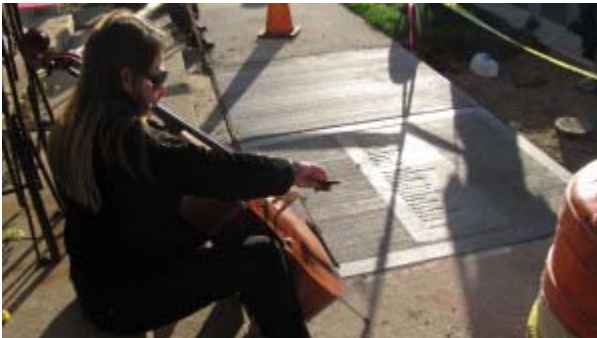
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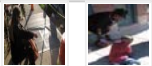
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Samara Kalk Derby — State Journal

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Angela McJunkin, the subject of John Tuschen's poem, "Angela's Cello," performs as part of an unveiling celebration of Williamson Street Poetry In Sidewalks, a new public art project.



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There's long been a certain poetic quality to Williamson Street and now there's poetry embedded in its sidewalks.

In front of Broom Street Theater, 1119 Williamson St., is a poem by its longtime artistic director, Joel Gersmann, who died in 2005 at age 62.

The theater's new artistic director, Heather Renken, did a dramatic reading of the brief poem for about 20 people who showed up Sunday for an unveiling celebration of Williamson Street Poetry in Sidewalks, a new public art project.

It's called "Suicide Letter":

Last night

I almost died

on an overdose

of life.

P.S.

I'm ready

For my next fix

"Joel could be so long-winded, this poem is so short," remarked Sharon Kilfoy, who serves as public art committee chairperson for the Marquette

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Neighborhood Association, which helped make the project possible.

Gersmann's poem is one of four poems that were stamped Friday and celebrated Sunday with a walk

to each location spread across seven blocks of Willy Street.

Former Madison poet laureate Andrea Musher cut some construction tape and read an excerpt of her poem, "The War's First Sunday," engraved into the sidewalk at 1441 Williamson St., in front of the home of Carl DuRocher.

Musher said she hoped the poetry project, inspired by St. Paul, Minn.'s program, Everyday Poems for City Sidewalk, can become a "thing" all over Madison.

"It's kind of a pilot for more poems in this neighborhood or potentially in other neighborhoods," said Karin Wolf, Madison's arts program administrator, who spearheaded the project.

Businesses Weary Traveler and Plan B put up most of the money for the poetry stamps, which cost about \$700 each, an amount Wolf called affordable.

"Everyone wants the bean from Chicago, but it's a \$23 million project," Wolf said about Cloud Gate, the widely photographed bean-shaped sculpture at Millennium Park in downtown Chicago.

Fabu, Madison's current poet laureate, read her poem, "Southern Love," inscribed on the sidewalk in front of the Weary Traveler, 1201 Williamson St.

"The best part about being Madison poet laureate has been to promote poetry in schools, in prisons, in churches, festivals, every venue you could possibly think of — and now to be embedded in a sidewalk," Fabu said. "It's a lasting testimony to poetry."

Suni Caylor, partner to John Tuschen, Madison's first poet laureate who often handed out his poetry on State Street, read his poem, "Angela's Cello," inscribed on a sidewalk square at 853 Williamson St.

"Tuschen always believed that art belonged in the hands of the people and poetry belonged in the streets," Caylor said.

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