

PROFILE

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New Poet Laureate hopes to inspire youth

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A local teacher has been named Tofino's new Poet Laureate.

Heather Hendry has officially kicked off her two-year tenure as the town's third literary leader, following predecessors Christine Lowther and Joanna Streetly.

"I'm very happy to have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of my friends and mentors Chris and Joanna who I look up to," Hendry told the Westerly News.

The Wickaninnish Community School teacher said one of her key goals in her new role is to engage young voices by merging her devotion to teaching with her passion for writing.

"I wanted to share my love of poetry with the younger generation," she said. "The art of writing is being lost a bit to the social media world, so I'm hoping to help create more of a balance within our younger kids and inspire and support them."

She added that writing can be a therapeutic form of expression and a source of beneficial breathing room away from quick paced, screen-based environments like social media and video games.

"The art of writing kind of slows it all down and I see it less and less in the classroom, so it makes me a little bit nervous for our future generations," she said.

"The connections and relationships that I have are a younger generation and having that access point to the elementary schools and the high school creates a newer opportunity for the Poet Laureate Program to reach a different community."

She added that with COVID restrictions easing, she is excited to create avenues for "getting people back comfortable connecting with each other and coming together" through public events, like poetry slams and open mics.

"It creates that support in a way that brings your craft to life. For myself, before I joined the Clayoquot Writers Group, I was a very siloed writer. I didn't feel comfortable sharing and I didn't see it leading to



Tofino's new Poet Laureate Heather Hendry puts pen to paper inside the Wickaninnish Community School library. (Andrew Bailey photo)

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anything other than my own personal enjoyment, but the minute you share, I feel like the poem takes on a new life

and actually comes to life and then you're able to help people," she said. "I feel that writing is so therapeutic. People connecting through shared experiences is really important, so if we could offer more of those opportunities within our community, I think, we would all become more unified and just a stronger voice, especially on matters of the community."

She added she is excited to hear and share different perspectives on community life, particularly on the town's current housing crunch and how its affecting local youth.

"What's our town going to look like for these youth? Is there a place for them? Is there a future for them here?" she said. "I'm experiencing the crunch as well. I don't know what my future looks like in Tofino or if it's possible in Tofino. So, I'm interested to explore that side of it as well."

The program is funded through the District of Tofino and Hendry said she is heartened to see her local government supporting the arts.

"I'm super grateful to the District of Tofino that they even value the arts community and they prioritize

this funding to keep it alive," she said. "It feels sometimes that we're just tourism, tourism, tourism... I think it is really important and it shows that they're supporting the community, the people that live here year-round who make the community, not just the visitors. I think it's great that they're considering the locals in a very tourism specific town."

She encourages any residents wanting to learn more about the program or participate in local events to follow the Tofino Poet Laureate Facebook and Instagram pages.

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