

Newport Poetry Trail Pays Homage to State's First Poet Laureate

By [Door County Pulse](#), [Peninsula Pulse](#) – May 12th, 2015



The Newport Poetry Trail features up to 18 poems on 10 permanent poetry displays spread out on the Rowleys Bay and Monarch trails.

There are few better settings to enjoy the beauty of poetry than in the great outdoors. When a gentle breeze blows through the trees and chirping birds add to the natural ambience, focusing on the words and intent of a poet is that much easier.

In Door County, one of the best places to do that is on the Newport State Park Poetry Trail. Currently in its sixth season, the trail has brought dozens of poets from near and far to the tip of the Door Peninsula.

It was introduced to the woods of Newport State Park on July 1, 2010 as a collaborative effort between the park, Newport Wilderness Society, and three Door County poetry groups (The Unabridged Poetry Group, Word Women Poetry Group and Wallace Critique Group).

Each exhibit features up to 18 poems on 10 permanent poetry displays spread out on the Rowleys Bay and Monarch trails. Every year, three exhibits are put on display: one featuring the work of local students (and occasionally statewide student winners included in the annual Wisconsin Poets' Calendar), another featuring the works of one of the three critique groups that contributed to the trail's creation, and the third featuring the work of either the current Door County Poet Laureate or of well-known Wisconsin poets.

The current display, posted in early May by poetry trail coordinator Nancy Rafal, includes work by students of Gibraltar Schools and also pays homage to Ellen Kort, the first Wisconsin Poet Laureate (2000-2004), who passed away April 21, 2015.

“It seemed with Ellen's death that we needed to celebrate her also,” Rafal said.

To date, the entire program has been completely volunteer driven. The themes of the poetry displayed have also grown from being nature-centric to encompassing so much more and Rafal hopes that the trail will continue to grow through inclusion of more critique groups and non-affiliated poets.

But for now, giving people the opportunity to walk the trails and enjoy nature at its finest are good enough for her.

“People need a time to reflect and for some people, not having words, just being out in nature is really unsettling,” Rafal said. “I think that the poetry trail can help people ground themselves.”

After a number of years volunteering for the trail, Rafal is currently in the process of turning it over to Write On, Door County and its executive director Jerod Santek.

Santek, who has helped with the trail in the past, sees the Newport Poetry Trail as Door County’s take on “Poetry In Motion,” a collaborative effort between the Metropolitan Transportation authority and the Poetry Society of America. Since 1992, that public literary program has placed poetry in transit systems of cities throughout the country that, according to the program’s website, is “helping to create a national readership for both emerging and established poets.”

“Poetry in unexpected places is really wonderful, especially for people who don’t take the time to read poetry,” Santek said. “A lot of areas and large metropolitan areas have poetry on the bus or poetry on the subway ... I think that poetry in beautiful nature settings go hand-in-hand really well. Maybe better than they do in a crowded subway or train (laughs). It gives people a time to read and think about it when they’re not distracted by a whole lot of surrounding noise and stimulation.”

To contribute to the Newport Poetry Trail, mail checks payable to The Newport Wilderness Society, P.O. Box 187, Ellison Bay, WI 54210.