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HEADLINE: Free Literary Events Mark the Return of The Writer's Loft in January

MURFREESBORO, Tenn.—MTSU's The Writer's Loft is back, and as always, the public is invited to come along.

The next session starts January 28 with a full day of literary activities planned for the downtown branch of the Nashville Public Library.

"A key part of our mission is a public service component, and we have worked hard to make The Writer's Loft available to everyone in Tennessee and even in Kentucky and beyond," said Lance Ikard, director of Professional Development and Personal Enrichment at MTSU and administrative/creative director of this low-residency certificate in creative writing.

From 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., the program is limited to Loft students, mentors, and alumni, but Ikard said that starting at 1:00 p.m., members of the public are invited and encouraged to attend the events, including the presentation of certificates to new graduates, public readings given by Loft students and mentors, and now something new: two literary lectures.

Nashville-based novelist River Jordan will give a lecture entitled "Experiencing the Publication Process." Jordan is the creative force behind *In The Writer's Room* (writing classes, workshops and related events), as well as the author of *Gin Girl*, published by Livingston Press in September of 2003. In addition, HarperSanFrancisco published her latest novel, entitled *The Messenger of Magnolia Street*, on January 1, 2006.

And Portland, Oregon writer Charlotte Rains Dixon will present a lecture entitled "Linking Short Stories." Dixon holds a Master of Fine Arts in Writing from Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky, and has been published in *Somerset Studio*, *The Oregonian*, *Interweave Knits*, and numerous other publications. She is preparing her first novel (*Language of Trees*) for publication, and she has been a participating member in such organizations as Northwest Council of Writers, Oregon Literary Coalition, Willamette Writers, and Oregon Writer's Colony.

Both Jordan and Dixon are mentors with The Writer's Loft.

"Our mentors are essential to the program's success," said R.L. Burkhead, the founder of The Writer's Loft and an integral part of it as coordinator of marketing and development. "While the public can attend some of the literary events, the most valuable aspect—the mentors—is available only to our students; there is still time for people to sign up for the program and to be a part of something special."

"Studying creative writing in a low-residency format is the ideal situation because writers should be home writing, not sitting in class," said Dixon. "A mentor in a low-residency program respects the student's writing on its own terms and exists to guide that writing to excellence."

"Almost every good writer has a mentor at some point in his or her career," said mentor and aspiring novelist Jason Hunt. "Take Hemingway, for example; where would he have been without Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, and F. Scott Fitzgerald?"

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Each professor, or "mentor," is given no more than five students to work with throughout the three-month session, and the students mail packets of writing to their mentors approximately every four weeks. In turn, the mentors evaluate the work and send the writing back to the students with detailed comments.

A couple of the mentors are with MTSU's English Department while others work from their homes in Louisiana, Oregon, Alabama, and Tennessee. Some mentors possess M.A. degrees in English, and one has a Ph.D., but most have earned Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Writing degrees from schools in Vermont and Kentucky. In addition to being part of The Writer's Loft's administrative support team, Burkhead earned a MFA in Writing at Spalding University, where he finished the manuscript for his first novel (*the e-pistle*): "Our mentors work out beautifully," Burkhead said, "because they know how it feels to be creative writing students who work with mentors."

"Anyone serious about the craft of writing can submit an application," Ikard said. "Our goal is to help people improve, whether a person is 85 years old or just getting out of high school."

The Writer's Loft's tuition is \$3,000, which covers all three sessions.

"The students are encouraged to pay as they go," Burkhead said. "If a student thinks that he or she may not take all three sessions one after the other, then paying \$1,000 at a time is the best approach."

For a complete 2006 schedule and additional information, please call The Writer's Loft at (615) 898-5651 or check it out online at:

www.mtsu.edu/~theloft.htm

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