

Montana Center for the Book Prize

Awarded in 2017

Classics Behind Razor Wire

Classics Behind Razor Wire founder Zach Stenberg teaches classic literature and leads writing workshops at the Deer Lodge Prison in Montana.

"For me," writes Stenberg, "literature is my salvation in a sense. I read classical literature because it teaches me how to be a better man. Inmates in prisons are hungry for knowledge—any kind of knowledge. Perhaps prisons are the best settings today for the liberal arts. Through books, a person can teach themselves anything they want and choose to live a life outside prison, a person can live an enriched life in prison and be free at the same time."

32nd Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering & Western Music Rendezvous

When she's not out driving cattle, Karen can be found guiding the reins of the [Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering & Western Music Rendezvous](#) as the executive director. The nonprofit organization is dedicated to preserving and celebrating the heritage of the American cowboy of the Upper Rocky Mountain West. The cowboy poetry gathering is the second oldest in the country and Kuhlmann is always looking for new performers and entertaining ideas.

"The four-day event is unique and dearly loved by cowboy poets, musicians, artists, attendees and volunteers. We want to keep the quality of the event high and maintain the authenticity we've worked to achieve over the years. We're proud to produce an event that contributes to the economic well-being of Lewistown and showcases our history and heritage," Karen says.

Plant A Seed...READ!

Plant a Seed...READ! lays the foundation for the next generation of emotionally healthy and literate children in rural Montana. The Havre-based nonprofit supports children and families by enhancing literacy, language and social/emotional skills from birth to age five. Plant a Seed...READ! serves Blaine, Hill and Phillips counties, including the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy reservations.

Lorraine Verploegen serves as the organization's volunteer executive director, and only staff member. Driven by research that proves that reading to children from birth aids in vital brain development and strengthens the parent-child bond, the nonprofit strives to enable more success in the classroom and

beyond through their various programs and events. Visit www.plantaseedreadmt.org to learn more or to get involved.

Wild Rose Center

When April Chalfant-Martin became the director of the [Wild Rose Center](#), she hung a sign on the door that read, “Enter as guests and leave as friends.” Nestled in the Wolftooth Mountains on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation and bordering the Crow Indian Reservation, the community and women’s retreat center strives to develop awareness and connectedness across cultures.

April had the idea to install Little Free Libraries in the five districts on the reservation as a way distribute books for their R-Rez Reads program but didn’t fully anticipate the impact they would have. “The farthest community we reach out to is Birney, 50 miles from the Center, which has no services,” she writes. “No store, no gas, no pay phone (if such things still existed) but they do have a Little Free Library. I see the kids circling on their bikes in the summer, waiting for me to fill it, and I make a special effort to put in daring adventure books. Or books that are crafty and DIY—these are kids who still use their imaginations and I want to foster that excitement of learning something new or laying along the river in the shade when your mind is far away fighting tigers in a jungle.”

April write, “The use of books, reading and knowledge is just a small component of what the Center is capable of. We hope that we can create small changes that help to have big impacts within the community and those surrounding it.”

The Writer's Voice

The Writer's Voice, an independent program of the Billings Cultural Partners, was founded in 1991 to assist emerging writers in their artistic and professional development, support accomplished writers, and provide public programs that challenge the traditional definition of the literary arts while enriching all sectors of the community. Their mission is to provide access to the literary arts in non-traditional communities and opportunities for active engagement between writers and audiences.

Functioning as an all-volunteer organization, the Writer’s Voice is used their award from the 2017 Montana Center for the Book Prize to fund and host a monthly series of readings by contemporary regional writers at Art House Cinema in Billings. “The casual environment provides an excellent opportunity for conversation between the author and audience members,” writes volunteer director, Corby Skinner. Writers have included former Montana Poet Laureate Tami Haaland (*What Does Not Return*), Wyoming poet David Romtvedt (*Dilemmas of the Angels*), and Helena writer and publisher Aaron Parrett (*Maple & Lead*).