

Retired UNC Pembroke Professor Shelby Stephenson Named Poet Laureate of North Carolina

By Administrator

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RALEIGH, (SGRToday.com) - Benson resident and retired English professor and editor of Pembroke Magazine Shelby Stephenson will become North Carolina's newest Poet Laureate. He will be installed at a ceremony in February at the State Capitol.

Stephenson retired in 2010. In 2001, North Carolina honored him with a North Carolina Award for literature, the state's highest civilian honor. Stephenson was inducted this year into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame and was honored in 2011 with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine. Other awards include the Oscar Arnold Young Award from the Poetry Council of N.C., the Bellday Poetry Prize and the Brockman-Campbell Award. From 2004 to 2005, he was the Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet.

"I am thrilled at the choice of Shelby Stephenson as North Carolina's poet laureate," said Susan Kluttz, secretary of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources in announcing the selection. "He received many strong nominations, backed up by his impressive resume. He is a wonderful representative of the outstanding poets that flourish in our state. I look forward to working with him in the coming years."

Kluttz led the panel that reviewed the nominations.

Stephenson has published many collections of poems, including *The Hunger of Freedom*; *Family Matters: Homage to July, the Slave Girl*; *Fiddledeedee* and *Plankhouse*. His accomplishments extend to music where he and his wife, Nin, have sung on four CDs together.

The North Carolina poet laureate acts as an ambassador of N.C. literature, using the office as a platform from which to promote N.C. writers and the potentially transformative qualities of poetry and the written word.

Stephenson hopes to pursue three projects during his tenure: writing workshops in assisted living and retirement communities, raising awareness of local archives and family histories, and promoting writings about farming and farm life in North Carolina.

All of these projects are inspired by Stephenson's personal life. He recently settled his wife, Nin into assisted living 'where she has met people with wonderful stories.' In family papers, he discovered the story of July, a 10-year-old slave girl sold by his great-great-grandfather that spurred him to write the award-winning *Family Matters: Homage to July, the Slave Girl*. Finally, Stephenson grew up on a family farm where the Future Farmers of America and 4-H exposed him to 'the world beyond' his home.

Other panelists included poet Tony Abbott of Davidson, a professor emeritus of English at Davidson College and author of seven books of poetry and two novels; Bob Anthony, curator of the N.C. Collection and the director of the N.C. Digital Heritage Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; writer Randall Kenan, a professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Loraine Hale Robinson, English department emerita faculty at East

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Carolina University, long-time senior associate of the North Carolina Literary Review and board member of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Society; Kevin Morgan Watson of Winston-Salem, the founder of Press 53, a publisher of poetry and short fiction; and former educator Carolyn York, president of the North Carolina Poetry Society and former president of the Lee County Arts Council.