Hertog Program Celebrates 10 Years of Mentorships

By Kristin Sterling

Most aspiring writers hone their skills through workshops, readings, classes or bursaries ideas off friends. But at the School of the Arts writing division, students have the opportunity to have an apprenticeship with distinguished New York writers in addition to learning from faculty. Each year through the Hertog Research Associateship Program, six students spend one semester working 10 hours a week for writers and receive a fellowship along with two hours of mentoring per week. The Hertog program, celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, is funded by Susan for the historic Hertog (S04/93) and her husband, Roger.

The fellowships are one of the writing division’s most coveted honors, with applications outnumbering fellowships six to one. The popularity of the program is not surprising given the literary Who’s Who of participants that has included Deirdre Bair, Peter Carey, Ron Chernow, Nelson George, included Deirdre Bair, Peter Carey, Ron Chernow, Nelson George, John Philip Santos, and Pulitzer Prize-winner Stacy Daniel Okrent, John Philip Santos, included Deirdre Bair, Peter Carey, Ron Chernow, Nelson George, Who of participants that has surprising given the literary Who’s Who of participants that has surprising given the literary Who’s Who of participants that has surprising given the literary Who’s Who of participants that has surprising given the literary Who’s Who of participants that has surprising given the literary Who’s Who of participants that has surprising given the literary Who’s

Hertog Fellow Kendra Hurley helped research. As far as we know, the Hertog apprenticeships are unique to Columbia’s M.F.A. in writing,” says Patricia O’Toole, an M.A. writing professor who has run the program for most of its 10 years. ’Because New York City is so rich in authors and because our students have such a wide range of talent and experience, we saw that we had an extraordinary opportunity to create a distinctive relationship between the M.F.A. coursework. Many of the writer-student relationships continue well beyond the fellowship, and writers who have taken part in the Hertog program have often helped our students get their work into print.

Research assignments vary considerably as fellow Fellows may find themselves searching birth records or immigration records, or conducting interviews or database searches. For fellows like second-year M.F.A. student Rebecca DiLiberto, assignments have extended far beyond the archives. In assisting biographer Marion Meade, journalist 50/51, with her latest work on satirist and novelist Nathaniel West, DiLiberto has visited the former Keenmore Hotel that West managed (now a single-room occupant building) and has gravitated to Queens, where Meade sent her with pruning shears to spire up the unkempt plot and take photographs.

“Many students get library assignments, but I’ve asked Rebecca to go out into the field and do things I usually do myself,” says Meade. “I have been very pleased that she is willing to do a lot of things—go out into the field, make cold calls and get people to talk to her.”

Beside the research experience, DiLiberto says the mentoring is an exceptional aspect of Columbia’s M.F.A. programs. “The mentoring for me is watching Marion work, Let’s her methods sink in through experience, we saw that we had an eye of someone who is a work- ing writer. It (also) means a lot that a student like Susan Hertog remem- bers their student-writer days and support our work and education.”

Above: student Rebecca DiLiberto and mentor Marion Meade. Right: mentor Geoffrey O’Brien with Suzanne Snider, S04/05.

By Grace Hong

Residents of the South Bronx will no longer have to trek north to stroll through a meadow. A new 100,000 square foot park is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2005 at the New York Botanical Garden. Researchers from Columbia have joined city officials, architects, building managers and mem- bers of the local community to dis- cuss urban zoning and ways to mitigate its effects.

Bolstered by recent studies showing that urban pollution causes myriad social and health prob- lems—even for fetuses in utero (see Vol 30 No 10, page 3)—archi- tects and urban planners are increasing the use of green-build- ing technology (the use of mater- als such as recyclables to create sustainable and environmentally friendly buildings) with their designs. Green Roofs. Cool City brought together an interdisciplinary group of commu- nity organizations and design pro- fessionals to discuss ways to com- bat urban pollution, particularly the phenomenon known as urban heat island.

Caused by an abundance of dark surfaces materials that absorb heat from the sun and a lack of vegeta- tion, urban heat islands raise the temperature from 2 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit higher than surround- ing rural areas. This increases the use of air conditioning and elec- tricity and raises pollution levels.

The commitment to green buildings has been a welcome change for urban residents and community development organiza- tions, who have long sought ways to reduce the effects of urban heat islands. For New York City, which has numerous green buildings but still suffers from the effects of urban heat island, Cooling City can bring a big step forward.

The conference highlighted research and development by the Cool City Project, launched at Columbia with funding from the Institute of Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP) and the New York Climate and Development Review to have green roofs.

The conference, majored Carter, executive director of Sustainable South Bronx (SSB), a community organization dedicated to environmental justice, intro- duced the South Bronx Green Roofs Demonstration Project (GDP). The American Banknote Building’s new roof is a prototype and control site for future research efforts by GDP. The rooftop meadow, scheduled to be completed in May, was designed in collaboration with the New York Climate and Health Project at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and IM White Site Architects, a renown New York City-based landscape architecture firm. Working with support from electric utility Con Edison and roofing material manufacturers Carlisle Syntec Systems and Coastal Specified Products, the American Banknote building roof project will offer innovative, green roof design as a foundation for promoting awareness, practical knowledge, energy savings and environmental improvement.

Michael Bally, Green Roofs director of the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, delivered the conference keynote address. Chicago boasts more than 80 municipal and private green roofs totaling more than one million square feet in various stages of installation. Chicago also recently adopted a policy encouraging, and in many instances requiring, all developments undergoing Depart- ment of Planning and Devel- opment review to have green roofs.

Cool City has supported this burgeoning initiative in New York City by researching the heat island effect, evaluating the energy and environmental impacts of the use of cool and green roof technolo- gies in the city and making research results publicly available.

Co-investigators of the project are now completing research for the New York Climate and Health Project, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-funded interdis- ciplinary study of the potential impacts on air quality and human health from changing climate and land use in the New York metro- politan area during the next 80 years. The results of this research will provide better tools for assess- ing the regional and local impacts of climate change on air quality and public health in cities across the nation.

For more information on this and other initiatives, visit www.iserp.columbia.edu.

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