



'RAW BONES AND STYLE'...Gwen Samuels, left, and Gretna Wilkinson shared the stage at the Carriage House Poetry Series reading at the Kuran Center in Fanwood.

Poets Celebrate Black History Month at CHPS

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

FANWOOD—Two African-American women poets from New Jersey recently shared a passion for their craft at a poetry reading in celebration of Black History Month.

Gwen Samuels of Rahway and Gretna Wilkinson of Red Bank were the featured poets at the reading, which was sponsored by the Carriage House Poetry Series (CHPS) and held in the Kuran Arts Center on February 13.

Ms. Samuels, a public-school teacher for 22 years, also works as a court interpreter and translator. Her poems speak to the African-American experience, especially that of the African American woman. In "Colored Girl Valentine," which won an award in a recent Fanny Wood Poetry Contest, she relates what it feels like to be the only "colored girl in the fifth grade."

Ms. Samuels's poems are a study of the African-American experience within a wide context. She writes of the future in "What Scares Me" and she tells of the past in "Ode to the Triays of Amelia," in which she elaborates on her roots and heritage.

"The Fanwood community offering me the opportunity to express my experiences as an African American woman through poetry brought the spirit of this month to the level of everyday people, the grassroots. It allowed us to really open and change hearts for the better," Ms. Samuels said upon her participation in the reading.

Ms. Samuel's poetry has won awards in the annual Allen Ginsberg Poetry Contest and the *Paterson Literary Review*. Her poems have been published in several *Cave Canem Anthologies* and she has been a Cave Canem Fellow twice. She is also a Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Scholar.

Ms. Wilkinson was born and raised in Guyana, South America. She currently teaches creative writing in the Visual and Performing Arts Academy at Red Bank Regional High School. She holds a doctorate degree in Literature from Drew University and she wrote her doctoral dissertation on the works of Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black woman to win

the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry.

Ms. Wilkinson's poetry has been collected and published in "Shhh ... I'm Thinking" released in 1996 by Hummingbird Publications. In her poem, "Raw Bones and Style," Ms. Wilkinson talks about writing poetry against a ghetto backdrop. "A Prayer for Mother's Day" is a young child's heartfelt plea for her mother's protection.

"The evening (at the Carriage House) was a reminder of the power of poetry to affect lives," Ms. Wilkinson said.

Longtime Fanwood resident Adele Kenny established CHPS, which is a satellite of the Fanwood Arts Council, in December 1998.

Since then, hundreds of poets, both published and unpublished, have read at CHPS readings.

The distinguished poet, Susanna Rich, founder and producer of the online radio program, "Poets on Air" will read her poetry on Tuesday, March 13, at 8 p.m. in the Kuran Arts Center, located on Watson Road (adjacent to Fanwood Borough Hall, off Martine Avenue).

The reading is free and the public is invited to attend. For more information, call (908) 889-7223 or (908) 889-5298.

Rich to Read Poetry In Fanwood, March 13

FANWOOD – The Carriage House Poetry Series invited the public to attend a poetry reading on Tuesday, March 13, at 8 p.m. in the Kuran Arts Center on Watson Road (adjacent to Fanwood Borough Hall, off Martine Avenue).

Featured will be poet Susanna Rich. Ms. Rich is the founding producer and host of the online radio program "Poets on Air." Her poetry appears or is forthcoming in dozens of publications, including *English Journal*, *The Evansville Review*, *Feminist Studies*, *The Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Kaliope*, *Nimrod*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, *Phoebe*, *Porcupine*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Tijeret*, *Willow Review* and *Zone 3*.

The Carriage House reading is free to the public. An open mic will follow the featured performance, and the public can bring poems and join in the reading. For information, call (908) 889-7223 or (908) 889-5298.

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LES MARMITONS - CRANFORD CHAPTER

cial, and I just went online and found out that Les Marmitons had a chapter in New Jersey. I always enjoyed cooking, and after joining, it opened my eyes to many recipes and cooking techniques."

Mr. Nelson's wife, Debbie Miller Nelson, like most of the wives, admitted to not having any talent in the kitchen – unless opening a can of Spaghetti-Os counts as "cooking." But she does know a thing or two about wine.

Better known as "The Wine Goddess" on nj.com's website, blog.nj.com/wine_goddess, Mrs. Nelson and her husband selected six different wines to accompany each course of the evening's fare. To complement the pear salad, a St. Urbans-Hof Riesling 2005 from Mosel-Saar-Ruwar, Ger-

many was chosen.

The morning after the dinner, her blog entry recapped the event, listing the entire menu and the wine pairings, where she described the Riesling with the salad, "The off-dry flavors of citrus and mineral balanced the sweetness and acidity in the salad. Every-

one seemed to flip over this pairing." After each course, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson took turns identifying the accompanying wines and their respective attributes.

A skilled public speaker, Mrs. Nelson works for an advertising agency by day, and in her spare time runs her own wine-tasting party business (wine-tastingparty.com). Mrs. Nelson fancies herself an "edutainer" and believes learning about wine should also be fun.

Under normal circumstances, Les Marmitons's sommelier, Chip Frank, would have done the pairing for the evening, but a work conflict prevailed. At the event, his friend Mike Carberry of Scotch Plains, who is also an Army Reserve Operations Officer, told *The Leader/Times* that it was Mr. Frank who introduced him to Les Marmitons.

Mr. Carberry noted that he does 90 percent of the cooking at home, and that his wife, who is expecting their first child very soon, is "pretty happy with the arrangement."

Indeed, all of the wives at the Valentine's Day dinner said they were more than content to remain out of the kitchen, although one or two did admit to looking at cookbooks from time-to-time. Some of the women even like to bake. But their husbands, the merry men of Les Marmitons, are the ones who are on fire.

Editor's note: The recipes from the event will be posted in the near future on goleader.com/lesmarmitons/valentines_event. If viewing online, click here. Bon Appetit!



Capers for Tapenade

Downtown to Display Youth Art this Month

WESTFIELD – Residents and visitors in Westfield this month will once again find the downtown store windows decorated with an array of art created by local public-school students.

For the 12th consecutive year, 57 downtown merchants will celebrate the nationally proclaimed Youth Art Month by displaying works of art produced by approximately 350 students from the Westfield Public Schools.

Student art includes paintings, drawings, sculpture and painted furniture designed by students of all ages from each of Westfield's nine public schools.

Linda King, Fine Arts supervisor, commended students, teachers and local merchants for making this annual event possible. "This exhibition is just a sampling of the wonderful art created by hundreds of Westfield students under the direction of our 21 art teachers," she said.



REDEEMER...Connor Regan performs in the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts Music Studio/Redeemer Lutheran School combined recital.

NJWA Music Students Play in Redeemer Recital

WESTFIELD – New Jersey Workshop for the Arts Music Studio students, who study with Ted Schlosberg, had the opportunity to display their various talents at a recital held at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Westfield.

Spanning grades from pre-kindergarten to grade 9, the February 11 recital showcased the techniques the children have learned since their enrollment this fall at both the Music Studio and at the Music Studio outreach program at the Redeemer Lutheran School.

Musical selections, for beginning students, included playing pieces from the Mueller/Rusch Book I and Suzuki Books I, II, III, and IV. Other recital selections included works by composers such as Mozart, Paganini, Bach, Suzuki, Dvorak and Bastien.

Members of Violin Class A who performed included Sam Schappel, Alex Mezzomo, Samantha Rachel, Natasjia Taylor and George Pappas.

'Green Dance' Benefits People with Disabilities

WESTFIELD – On Sunday, March 11, the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities will host the 9th Annual St. Patrick's Day "Green Dance" for people with disabilities.

The Westfield Community Room, located in the Westfield Municipal Building, will come alive with DJ music and dance led by Golden Note Entertainment, Inc. Snacks and refreshments will be served throughout the event, which runs from 3 to 5 p.m. Advance registration is required.

"This is a wonderful program designed exclusively for people with disabilities, giving them the opportunity to socialize, meet new friends and have fun on the dance floor with a DJ," said Union County Freeholder Chairwoman Bette Jane Kowalski, liaison to the Union County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. "The Green Dance is one of a variety of recreational programs we offer to meet the needs of people with disabilities, and since it's a St. Patrick's Day theme, participants are encouraged to wear green."

Some programs, organized by the county's Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities, coming this spring and summer include: March 10 – "Dis-

cover Trailside," Maple Sugaring at the Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside; March 24 and June 2 – two sessions of "Culinary Delights" cooking class at the Classic Thyme Cooking School in Westfield; May 12: "Spring Fishing Derby" at Echo Lake Park in Mountainside; and two sessions of "Ceramics for People with Disabilities," on April 10 and 17, and June 19 and 26, at the Gregorio Center in Linden.

Another program held every Tuesday and Thursday from April 17 through November 13 at Runnells Specialized Hospital in Berkeley Heights is "Post-Stroke Exercise," non-stressful exercise for people who have had a stroke or have a physical disability.

Participants must complete a registration form and submit payment for programs with a fee, prior to the program date. Walk-in registrations will not be accepted.

To be put on the mailing list to receive information about these and other programs for people with disabilities, call Program Coordinator Sharon Gentile, at (908) 527-4806 or (908) 527-4900. For other program information, visit the Union County website at ucnj.org.



SHE'S A WINNER...Laura Patterson of Mountainside whoops it up at last year's Mountainside Parent-Teacher Association fashion show and gift basket raffle. The annual event will be held today, Thursday, March 8, at L' Affaire Restaurant. All proceeds will pay for enrichment programs in the pre-kindergarten to grade 8 district. This year's theme is "The Oscars." The winners for best in costume design are Lord and Taylor and Cozy Tuxedo.

TAKE THE STAGE

FW Singer/Actress Graham Dons New Boa for Role in *Seussical*



By SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

FANWOOD – She's been impersonating others for years. In fact, Margaret Graham, Maggie for short, remembers impersonating Carol Channing when she was just a kid.

"It's the actress in me, I guess," she told *The Westfield Leader and The Times* in a phone interview. "As a little kid I would mimic Carol Channing and people told me how amazing it was."

It was so amazing that the Fanwood resident put it all together in a one-woman, one-hour long cabaret show, *Carol Channeling* that ran consecutive February weekends at The Starving Artist in Ocean Grove.

Ms. Graham not only starred in the show, but also was the writer of the original material. "I started putting it together last August," she explained, and has a separate version of it for Christmas time called, *Carol Channeling Carol*.

It has run in three different venues. Ocean Grove, a small cabaret in Greenwich Village and Joe's Pub in Manhattan were the settings for this multitalented actress, who, along with her husband, Steve, also an actor, and two children moved to Fanwood five years ago.



Margaret Graham

"We just needed to be in the NYC area for the theater and decided with great schools and accessibility to events, this was the place for us."

"I'm the youngest of eight children, the daughter of an opera singer, so I constantly heard all of the greats when I was growing up," she said.

Her recent show includes such familiar names as Barbra Streisand, Judy Garland, Bernadette Peters, Julie Andrews, Patti LaPone and Kristin Chenoweth.

In all, the actress plays 11 characters in her act.

Letting no grass grow under her feet, Ms. Graham is currently rehearsing for the role of Mazie (the bird with only one tail feather) in *Seussical, the Musical* being produced by the Growing Stage in Netcong.

Mrs. Graham said she met her husband while they were both in a version of *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. He joins her in the cast of *Seussical*, playing the role of The Cat in the Hat in the musical show that runs weekends from now through April.

"After doing my one-woman show with 11 characters, it actually is a nice break to play just one character," said the actress on *Seussical*. "I feel like I'm on vacation."

POPCORN™



The Astronaut Farmer: Hollywood, We Have a Problem

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 popcorns

The Astronaut Farmer scores easy points by being the sort of movie that allows viewers to "insert personal fantasy here." That is, by substituting your very own flight of imagination for ex-astronaut Charles Farmer's (Billy Bob Thornton) dream to travel into space, one is apt to put aside that director Michael Polish's dabble in wish fulfillment never really does take wing.

Compounding the warm and fuzzy hoodwink, the invitation to daydream surrounds its protagonist with a loving, supportive family that has come to accept Dad's obsession. It's their reality. Hey, maybe it's not so crazy that Mr. Farmer has all by his lonesome built a spacecraft now awaiting take-off in the barn of his little Texas ranch.

Of course, hardly anyone else is as understanding. Take NASA, for instance. Sure, some of the folks back at the agency sympathize with old Charlie. The pilot/aerospace engineer was well on his way to the heavens when a family tragedy forced his dismissal from the program. All the same, the Feds can't help but feel they own the franchise for space exploration.

Thus, it only follows that the FBI dispatches a pair of agents to keep watch on things. Demonstrating the sort of demeanor and confidence that Heckyll and Jekyll were so proficient at exuding, they are of necessity followed by an army of bureaucrats and law-enforcement types.

The media descend. The town is abuzz. The supermarket proudly informs, "Charlie Farmer buys here." The carnival atmosphere grows. Human nature sets its opportunistic trajectory. Whether in favor of his plan to blast off from the little hamlet or not, he's the cause celebre. And there is always a profit to be made when strong wills are in opposition.

Meanwhile, adding a note of harsh reality just to ground the reverie, what better way than that old favorite, the mortgage? Charlie has fallen behind in his payments. Loans, evidently to finance the building of his rocket ship, amount to more than \$600,000.

Hey, that's not bad considering that NASA spends hundreds of millions on similar projects. Nevertheless, the bank is neither concerned with Charlie's thrift nor his ingenuity.

When an extension is denied, the frustrated astronaut responds with a brick through the financial institution's front window. Charlie is ordered to undergo a mental exam with the local therapist, apparently a former lover. He gets a lawyer.

The hometown thing gets a little

cute, a tad comical and a bit funky. But not in a contributively surreal sense, the way the magical burg in Scotland made possible the chimera that takes hold in Bill Forsyth's *Local Hero* (1983).

Here, there is only the real and the outlandish, with very little conjectural gray between the dipoles. Certainly it's a credit to the human spirit that we believe, if just for an instant, that Charlie Farmer might realize his mission to orbit the Earth. However, a little more artistic imagination to propel that possibility would have been in order.

Likewise, the subplot is mired in the usual ramifications. Remember that loving, supportive family a few paragraphs back? Well, when it looks like they might lose the farm, even we romantics begin to question the wisdom of Charlie's tilting at spacelark.

After all, this isn't Paul Muni in *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1935) or Edward G. Robinson in *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (1940), scientists fighting to save humanity in spite of its catcalls. It's just a guy who'd like to go into outer space. Sure, you'd love that new red Ferrari...but not if it meant separating your adoring brood from that comfy brownstone on Sutton Place.

The screenplay, written by twin brothers/filmmakers Mark and Michael Polish, simply isn't compelling enough to leap over the obvious indulgence. We become more interested in just how these fellows are going to end their movie than whether or not the astronaut Farmer will actually realize his quixotic passion.

Assuming the homemade ship doesn't just crash and burn, it's still doubtful those powers that be will allow Charlie his objective. At this juncture, the film tries to curry favor by poking jabs at Big Brother.

Rumor has it that the gov'mint has missiles aimed at the spaceship. How dare they deter a citizen from his destiny among the stars, even if it does mean igniting \$50,000 worth of black-market rocket fuel?

Constitutional scholars and guardians of our civil liberties might be able to inject their expertise here. As with much of the movie, the script quite conveniently leaves that little point of law up in the air, adding yet one more reason why *The Astronaut Farmer's* mission to entertain remains largely unaccomplished.

The Astronaut Farmer, rated PG, is a Warner Bros. release directed by Michael Polish and stars Billy Bob Thornton, Virginia Madsen and Max Thieriot. Running time: 104 minutes.

County Invites Public To Performances, Exhibit

COUNTY – The annual Union County Teen Arts Festival will take place on Thursday and Friday, March 15 and 16, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on the Cranford campus of Union County College (UCC), located at 1033 Springfield Avenue, opposite Nomahegan Park.

The Teen Arts Festival showcases the artistic and creative abilities of Union County's youth. Students from more than 50 public and private schools participate at the festival each year. The public is invited to attend and enjoy the accomplishments of our talented teens.

"The 2007 Union County Teen Arts Festival is a wonderful example of how public and private partnerships support the Arts," Freeholder Chairwoman Bette Jane Kowalski said.

At the Teen Arts Festival, students participate in performances, master classes, interactive workshops and critiquing seminars led by professional artists in all disciplines – visual arts, music, theatre, dance and creative writing. All performances are open to the public. Assistive services are available on request.

The event is coordinated by the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs and hosted by UCC.

Anyone interested in attending the Union County Teen Arts Festival should contact the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs at 633 Pearl Street, Elizabeth 07202; call (908) 558-2550 or e-mail culturalinfo@ucnj.org for a program brochure or other information. NJ Relay service users should call 711.



I LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEARTS...The American Heart Association got a Valentine's Day greeting this year from the Beechwood Elementary School in Mountainside. Under the supervision of Health and Physical Education instructor Deborah Weiss, students, teachers and family members helped to raise \$7,841 to fight heart disease. During the weeklong event, the children jumped rope for health and obtained private donations, some of which were matched by their families' employers. Pictured with the check are Assistant Principal Thomas Conroy, Will Jennings, Jenna Attanasio, Parker Eicke, Sam Messler and Mrs. Weiss.