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Gateway College to provide a stage for first poetry jam, blues concert

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Gateway Community and Technical College will host its first "Blues, Poetry Jam, and Open Mic Night" Nov. 29 at its Park Hills campus.

Gateway hopes to offer blues music, student poetry, humor and plenty of audience participation.

Riverbank Poetry Project performance artist John Kraimer will take the stage at 6:30 p.m. to give his unique perspective on poetry with a comic twist.

"He is probably the most notable person in the Greater Cincinnati area for promoting poetry in the schools as something that is fun," said Rocky Neelly, Gateway's activity director. "He's funny and his poems have meaning."

After Kraimer's performance, the stage will be turned over to any aspiring poets.

"Most of our students are just like first and second year students at UC or NKU," said Neelly. "They are searching for what they want to be in life. They are taking Comp I and anatomy and physiology. They are becoming nurses, policemen and business leaders. We just offer technical majors, too. And poets can come from any walk of life. Robert Frost was a farmer."

The evening is co-sponsored by the English department. English Professor Melissa Fry uses poetry as her first assignment in English 101 to build confidence and break the ice.

Gateway students, "though not what you would typically think of poets, have incredible moving, inspiring and humbling stories to tell," said Fry. "I bet they don't think of themselves as capable of writing poetry but with events like this, they could come to see poetry as a venue for self expression."

Fry says poetry should be available to everyone.

"I think we need to get away from the notion that poets are these educated, ivory tower intellectuals," said Fry. "The whole spoken word movement has really given power to the people, so to speak, and allowed writers, especially untrained, nontraditional poets, a forum, structure and support to talk about their lives and their issues."

Although Fry hopes to turn the jam into a regular monthly event, she's unsure of this month's turnout.

"I don't really know how many will have the guts to read," said Neelly. "I've had dozens say they are coming to see it. Some just for the pizza, I'm sure. But there is excitement right now. This is a new thing for Gateway."

Gateway also aims to keep the event family-oriented and inappropriate acts will be gonged off the stage.

Bluesmen Mike Tucker and the Digits will provide live music.

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