

Lunch 4 Literacy 2023

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of March 27, 2023)

The Lunch 4 Literacy Luncheon held on Tuesday, March 21, 2023, was the 31st annual luncheon put on jointly by the ALTRUSA Club of Oak Ridge and the Breakfast Rotary Club of Oak Ridge. It was again a fun and enjoyable event that raised funds for literacy.

Kim Michele Richardson, bestselling author, was the featured speaker. She has published five historical fiction novels and an award-winning memoir.

She lives in Kentucky and writes historical fiction set in familiar surroundings, with characters easily identifiable with the rural Kentucky setting. The two books featured in this program were: *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* and *The Book Woman's Daughter*.

Both books feature strong women overcoming adversity from the color of their skin (blue-skinned people) to more common difficulties women encounter when alone and often faced with challenges it seems men do not as often encounter. Kim Michele skillfully presented these women in a manner which caused the reader to readily identify with them and their difficulties.

The box lunches provided for the networking period prior to the event was provided by Birdwell Catering and were exceptionally good, as observed by many who enjoyed the meal together. And, of course, the cookies from Doubletree were amazing. The networking portion of the event provided time for participants to mix with others and to catch up on the latest happenings.

After the lunch and networking ended, the attendees entered the auditorium for the main program which featured a review of the Sponsors and the \$32,218 in grants awarded in 2022. It is expected that 2023 will reach or even exceed that amount.

The generous support provided by sponsors this year continues the tradition of strong support for literacy.

Sponsors included:

ANGEL Sponsors: ALTRUSA; IB3 Global Solutions; ORAU; Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary; OMEGA Technical Services; Roy Cooper and Bonnie Carroll; and TN Bank;

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Sells Homes! Realty Center; Pinnacle Financial Partners, Oak Ridge; Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services; Vacuum Technology, Inc.; and Warren and Judy Gooch

Special Thanks to: Birdwell's Catering, Inc.; Doubletree of Oak Ridge; and Oak Ridge Schools

2022 Literacy Grant Recipients: Norwood Middle School, Norris Middle School, Lake City Middle School, Clinton Middle College & Career Academy, Oak Ridge schools (Nathan Hale Author Visit); Friends of Literacy (Literacy To Go Packs); Dutch Valley Elementary (Reading Enrichment Preschool outreach – Future Pioneers); Emory Valley Center (Math and literacy games, toys, and books); Roane Imagination Library (One book each to 1,500 Children); Grand Oaks Elementary (200-250 books for school library, Book Tasting for up to 200 students, Connecting Literacy to Art); ADFAC (School backpacks and supplies); Glenwood Elementary (Books to Reduce Truancy); Boys & Girls Club N. Anderson County (Spring Rookie Readers in Rocky Top & Clinton); and, Clinton Middle School (Graphic novels for school library, Verse novels for classroom). The 2023 recipients will be selected later when the funds available are known.

The talk provided by Kim Michele Richardson was informative and entertaining. She is proud of her Kentucky heritage and does not hesitate to support the language of the region, even when the publisher and editor insist on change, she refuses. Good for her, I like the expressions of the Kentucky and Tennessee region as I believe it helps place us appropriately in the region.

My accent is often recognized as Tennessee and I am often asked, “which part of Tennessee are you from?” You do recognize that Middle Tennessee and East Tennessee accents and words are not the same. Never would you hear someone from Middle Tennessee say “you’uns” it is “Y’all.”

Questions from the audience focused on her choice of the Troublesome Creek area and what the culture was in the 1930’s as well as what is it like today. She explained both eras and noted that recent flooding in the area had a significant impact on the region. Another audience member wanted to know other books she had written.

Kim Michele has written five historical fiction novels and she spoke to the other three, *Liar’s Bench*, *The Sisters of Glass Ferry*, and *GodPretty in the Tobacco Field*. She has also written a memoir, *The Unbreakable Child*.

Another insight into Kim Michele Richardson can be seen by the note she sent about the Moonlight School. <https://www.aol.com/news/she-founded-adult-education-moonlight-163942617.html>

And

<https://www.appalachianhistory.net/2017/12/kentuckys-moonlight-schools.html>

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She also has created Sly Rabbit, a writers / artist residency which provides scholarships and a food stipend to writers who qualify and are seeking a “contemplative and tranquil place to work and create.” <https://www.kimmichelerichardson.com/the-shy-rabbit-tiny-home-writers-scholarship>

In her research into Kentucky history and especially women's role in it, she found a woman who could be considered the founder of Adult Literacy Education in the United States. From the second link above, “Cora Wilson Stewart (1875-1958) was an elementary school teacher and county school superintendent in eastern Kentucky's Rowan County who, in the fall of 1911, decided to open the classrooms in her district to adult pupils.”

From the first link above: “On Sept. 5, 1911, Cora Wilson Stewart (1875-1958) opened her first Moonlight School in Rowan County, Kentucky. That first night 1,200 adults showed up. They came in droves from Kentucky's dark hollers, needle-eyed coves, and tree-thick hills. Born in Farmers, Kentucky, Stewart led the nation's first official campaign to fight adult illiteracy.”

Kim Michele was so impressed with what Cora Wilson Stewart had done that she purchased a grave marker for her 65 years after her death. So you see, she has a deep and abiding fascination with Kentucky women who have achieved great results helping others.

The hybrid method using Zoom allowed participation by those who could not attend in person. I often note that the only good thing to come out of COVID is Zoom or other virtual platforms that allow remote access for meetings and events such as this.

While the Lunch 4 Literacy Luncheon is enjoyable and fun for all, the primary intent is to raise money for literacy. It is rewarding to see the many ways the funds are utilized to promote learning in the special area of reading.

The “Lunch 4 Literacy” fundraising luncheon has historically been one of the most successful and popular events in Oak Ridge. It has become an annual tradition in March that many look forward to enjoying.

The purpose of the joint effort is to provide grants to help improve literacy in Oak Ridge and Anderson and Roane counties. Each year the grants are awarded to selected recipients.

Coleader Amber Roberts said, “I am continually humbled and proud to be a part of the Lunch for Literacy team. Every year this dedicated group of volunteers works tirelessly to put on an engaging program with delicious food in a beautiful setting. The last three years have been especially challenging as they have had to work around public health concerns, but they have pulled it off to keep the lunch going strong. I am so thankful for the generosity and the commitment to literacy in our community. I am also inspired by

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the talented educators who put the grant funds generated by the lunch to use preparing our community's next generation."

Coleader John Roberts said, "This was my first year in an official capacity with the Lunch for Literacy. It is truly an honor to be asked to serve in a leadership role for such a great cause. It is impressive and impactful that two organizations have joined forces for 31 consecutive years to make a significant difference in our community as champions for literacy. It is a massive endeavor with many moving parts requiring the collaboration of numerous people. The culmination of this collective effort is readily visible in the eyes and voices of the children, which makes it all worthwhile. I look forward to helping facilitate the continued success of the Lunch for Literacy next year.



Kim Michele Richardson speaking via Zoom to the audience answering questions Ray Smith posed to her

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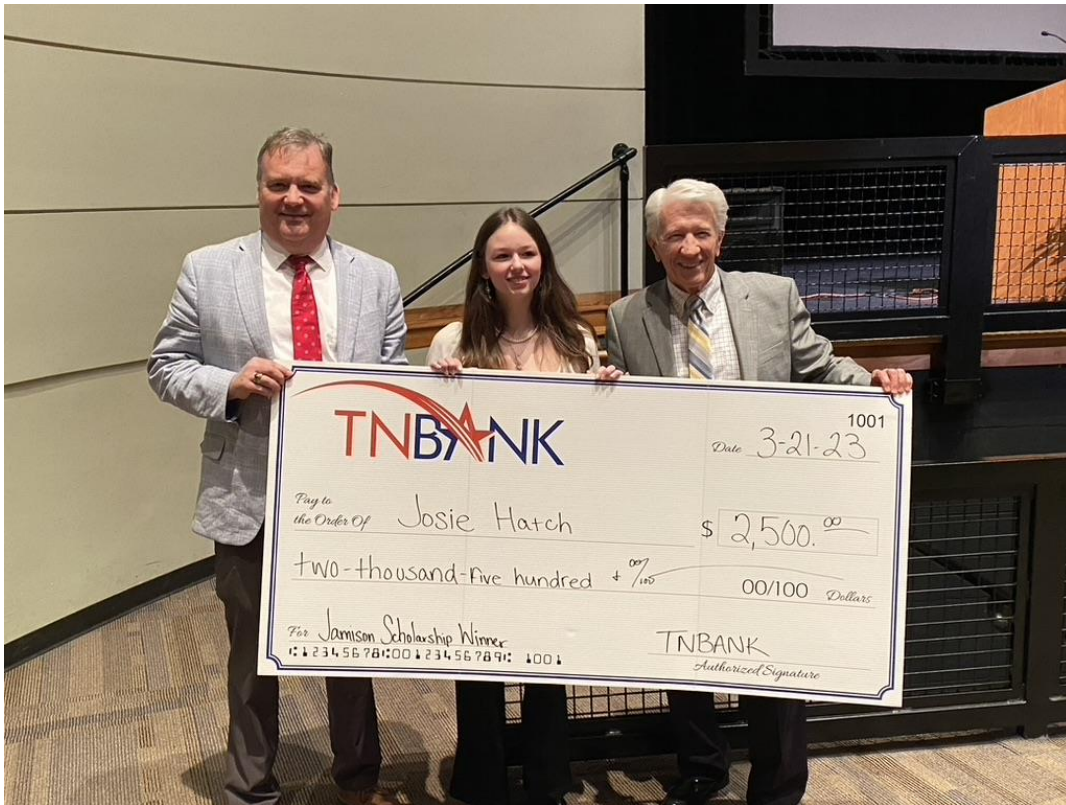
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Lunch 4 Literacy Co-chairs, John Roberts (Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club) and Amber Roberts (ALTRUSA)

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From left is Mark Holder (TN Bank President), Jozy Hatch (scholarship recipient), Frank Jamison (scholarship named in his honor)

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A good crowd enjoyed excellent box lunches and a time to spend in conversation with friends