

Poet's Night Out Shows Us Why We Still Love Poetry

By: Sydney Boettcher

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TRAVERSE CITY – This February, Writers Studio student Sydney Boettcher was selected as a winner in the 2025 Poet's Night Out competition, a poetry writing competition sponsored annually by the Traverse City District Library. Contestants submitted their poems to the Poetry Foundation where they were judged anonymously. Winning poems are published in a limited-release chapbook, and winning poets are asked to perform their poems at the Poet's Night Out event at Kirkbride Hall in the Village Commons.

The event was MCed by Paul Stebleton, published author and owner of Landmark Books, a book store tucked away in a corner of the Village Commons that specializes in rare, local, or otherwise hard-to-find books. Stebleton read a few poems of his own poems to kick things off.

"I wouldn't say it took off the pressure," said Boettcher in an interview with Isabelle Planondon, "but it was a nice way to start the night."

One at a time, Stebleton would call poets up to the stand. And one at a time, they would share what they had written.

The first half of the event was for poets who were up for the two audience's choice awards. After they finished performing, everyone in attendance marked on their ballot who they believed had the best performance.

"It was a very warm and welcoming environment. My favorite part was listening to others' poems. There were so many incredible poems," Boettcher went on to say.

Boettcher also cited several of his favorites, including *The Standing People*, *Shoveling Snow*, and *A Son Does This*.

There was a brief intermission part way through, letting guests stretch their legs, use the restroom, or get refreshments at the cookie table.

After the intermission, two of the judges took the stand to read their poetry. "I did not expect the judges to read, as well," Boettcher said. "One of their poems was about an old friend he had that had died and it was beautiful. It should be in this chapbook!"

After the judges finished their readings, Stebleton returned to the stage to welcome the rest of the poets onto the stage. Boettcher said he was, “so nervous, my knees were shaking... Also didn’t help that I was the first one to go after the intermission, so I had to reset the vibe.”

In attendance with a group of students on a field trip were two more winners. Their school was closed that day for a snow day, and they had all piled into the English teacher’s van to get here. “One of the kids who was there on a field trip came up to me after the event and asked me to sign my poem in her chapbook,” Boettcher recalled. “I was thinking ‘oh my gosh, this is great. I hope it happens more in the future.’”