

2023 Lakefly Writers Conference Report

The Lakefly Writers Conference was held May 5-6 at the Oshkosh Convention Center. There were 107 paid registrants, up from 76 in 2022, and close to the record attendance of 114 writers in 2019.

Total attendance was 146 and included 25 speakers and 14 volunteers; 45 attendees stayed at the Best Western Premiere at least one night.

The average price to attend was \$70; discounts were offered to Wisconsin Writers Association members (per our partnership agreement) and students. Fees will increase in 2024.

Writing Contests

The Lakefly Conference began accepting submissions for the Lakefly Writing Contests in January. We offered four categories, including one for students, and awarded cash prizes in the amounts of \$100, \$75 and \$50 to first through third place winners. We received 278 entries that were judged by members of the community. To reduce printing costs, we created a downloadable booklet of winning entries that was made available on the Lakefly website when winners were announced at the conference.

Speakers

Best-selling Wisconsin mystery writer Beth Amos was the keynote speaker. In partnership with The Grand, we were able to bring in Michael Perry at well below his normal fee, and conference attendees received a discount on tickets to Perry's musical performance at the Grand on Saturday night.

Other speakers included UW-Oshkosh professors Dr. Jordan Karsten and William Gillard; nationally known writing coach John DeDakis; Oshkosh Poet Laureate Thomas Cannon; and former editor of *Wisconsin People & Ideas* Chris Chambers.

Program topics included bone identification, writing for middle grades, the pitfalls of self-publishing, techniques for writing a crime-thriller, how to create a worthy antagonist, world building, successful book marketing, and how to "write Wisconsinably."

In 2024, we will be using a \$750 grant from the Oshkosh Foundation/Wisconsin Arts Board toward stipends for speakers who live in Winnebago County.

Add-ons

We offered a wonderful assortment of add-ons on this year, including one-on-one free author website consultations with Dandelion Web Marketing and Consulting. Kate Penndorf of Much Ado About Writing offered free critiques, with writers submitting their work prior to the conference for her review. The Wisconsin Writers Association, Page Turner Literacy Agency and Orange Hat Publishing took pitches throughout the conference.

New this year, an Oshkosh photographer and professional make-up artist teamed up to offer professional photographs that could be used for book jackets, author websites, businesses cards, etc. For \$75, participants received five digital images. Due to demand, some people were turned away, so this offering will be expanded in 2024.

An online scheduling software, Calendly, was utilized to allow people to register their consultation, pitch and photography session in advance. Both the providers and their attendees expressed appreciation for the tool.

Traditionally, a room is reserved at Becketts on Friday night for dinner and socializing. While it's usually attended by conference participants who came alone, it has gained popularity and in 2022, Becketts was overwhelmed. To correct that in 2023, reservations were made at four downtown restaurants and attendees signed up Friday afternoon. After the last session of the day, volunteers escorted folks to their respective restaurants, and ushered them to the Library when it was time for open mic.

The open mic continues to be a success. About 50 people attended and 21 people shared their work, which put the event at 2.5 hours. Everyone loved the OshPop "Lakefly Crunch" flavored popcorn that was offered as a refreshment.

Lakefly Marketplace

The Lakefly Marketplace is a Saturday-only event where attendees, for a small fee, can have a table to sell their books. Tables are available for sale to non-attendees for a higher fee, and speakers get a free table as part of their compensation. In addition, our add-on guests need space to perform their service. This year, 47 tables were required, and additional space was rented to accommodate the demand.

This expense was unexpected. Additionally, the Marketplace is only open to those attending the conference, so there is a limited customer base. After some discussion with the Convention Center and Lakefly Planning Committee, the Committee decided to modify how we are using the space we regularly rent and offer a Lakefly Book Fair in 2024. This one-day event will be free and open to the public.

Although in the same building as the conference, the book fair will also be promoted as a stand-alone event. Vendors will be charged a flat fee, regardless of whether they attend the conference. A book fair has the potential to raise an additional \$1,500 in revenue and could be the precursor to something larger with involvement from other community partners.

Financial

Revenue

Endowment	
(\$10,000 allocated)	\$7251.08
Registration	\$6,047.89
Wis Writers Assoc	\$500
Total Revenue:	13,789.97

Expenditures

Best Western (venue, food)	\$6282.64
Hotel -Speakers	\$2048.01
Speakers – stipends	\$2700
Printing	\$1025
Contest Awards	\$900
Refreshments, Open Mic	\$249.07
Door prizes	\$196.12

Calendly	\$55.74
Name Tags	\$42.39
Ad – WI People and Ideas	\$300
Total Expenses	\$13,798.97

In summary, the conference appears to be back to pre-pandemic attendance. It is unknown yet what the recent sale of the Best Western Hotel will mean for the conference, but food costs are expected to rise. To that end, the Planning Committee continues to look for ways to reduce costs and increase revenue while still fulfilling the mission of offering a quality writers conference at an affordable price.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Percey