

Community and Visiting Writers Get Involved

Surprise Valley

Writers' Conference A Hit

By Sue Edmondson

Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt of an article that first appeared in the Mountain Echo under the headline shown above. It is reprinted here with permission of the author. The Surprise Valley Writers' Conference was held in Cedarville last September with approximately 90 people attending the William Kittredge keynote dinner.

...I received an email that a four-day writer's workshop and conference was scheduled in September. When I checked out the website, I was pretty surprised. The fiction workshop leaders were top writers — Sands Hall, Roy Parvin and John Reed. Gerald Haslam had been recruited for the non-fiction group and Sacramento Poet Laureate Julia Conner was to lead the poets. Not only that, but William Kittredge, a noted

writer and professor, who also co-produced the movie "A River Runs Through It" was tapped as the keynote speaker.

Several other things stood out. Scheduled lectures included local color—a historical perspective of Modoc, and agriculture, two dinners were part of the package, we'd take an interpretive field trip/walk with Forest Service experts on Cedar Pass Trail and a couple of nights were scheduled for open mic sessions (think of them as karaoke for writers).

I signed up, still thinking in the back of my mind that it wouldn't really happen. Who would drive all the way to Cedarville, a tiny town seated in the base of the Warner Mountains? I was worried that so few people would sign up that the conference would be cancelled. That notice never came. Instead I received one that said it was a sell-out — all 50 slots were filled.

The most surprising thing, though, wasn't that the conference happened, or its impressive line-up, but the way the community and the writers became involved. Locals came to the dinners and open mic sessions; writers explored the area and learned about rural lifestyles. An indication of the broad support for the conference is found in the list of "partners." Among them were the Modoc Resource Advisory Committee, the Modoc County Office of Education, the Modoc County Cattlemen and the USDA. A grant from Poets and Writers magazine through the John Irvine Foundation partially funded Kittredge's speech.

Writers commented that it was the best conference they'd attended. Michael Croft, conference director, said it "exceeded his expectations by a wide margin." Surprise Valley Chamber President Sharlene Minto

said, "I think it's wonderful. The conference brought in a lot of interesting people."

Cedarville resident Janet Hill, who attended the non-fiction workshop said, "I wouldn't have had the opportunity to do something like this but for the conference. It's been great."

At the end of his speech, Kittredge said the conference was a wonderful addition to the community and that he hoped it would continue.

Barbara March, co-founder of Modoc Forum, was thrilled when she learned that Julia Conner had offered to return to teach poetry to local children. "For me, it means that people who don't normally come together are coming together. To think of exposing kids to something like that makes me feel better than everything else said today."