

Writers Education Committee

When the Writers Education Committee gets together, the energy in the room is palpable. Ideas bounce around as enthusiasm builds. Before long, though, the group really gets down to work, developing stimulating and motivating programs and then assigning the actual details to subcommittees, who make each event happen.

"The Writers Ed committee grew out of my conviction that one of the functions of the Guild should be to provide opportunities for writers to learn from one another," says co-chair Jeff Melvoin. "Professional groups in other fields—doctors, lawyers, insurance, you name it—make continuing education a priority. I thought the Writers Guild should do so, as well."

Says member Laurie Hutzler: "I teach screenwriting at the UCLA Film School in the graduate program, so I'm really interested in educating and empowering writers. Knowledge is power, because it opens up more choices and more opportunities."

The Writers Education Committee is a large committee, co-chaired by David H. Balkan and Melvoin. Current members are Heather Ash, Tim August, Karen Bercovici, Tom Blomquist, Jeremy Bollinger, Amy Cabranes, J. Larry Carroll, Mark Chambers, Carlton Cuse, Andrea Davis, Peter Farriday, Valerie Horwitz, Laurie Hutzler, Jerry Jackson, Danita Jones, Cindy Lichtman, Judith Lutz, Patrick Moran, April Pesa, Maria Elena Rodriguez, Chuck Rose, Todd Samovitz, E. Jeff Smith, Alex Sokoloff, Sydnie Suskind, Tom Swyden, Bill Taub, Carol Tenney, Roy Woods and Josan Wright.

Thomas Swyden was searching for a way to stay involved in activities that would be helpful to writers. After reading "A Call for Volunteers" in the June 2002 issue of Member News, he began looking for the best fit for his personal interests. "It only took one meeting with the Education Committee to realize this was the committee for me," he says. "It is led by a pair of dynamic co-chairs in David and Jeff, who oversee an articulate and energetic group of very diverse writers from every niche in the Guild. As anyone who attended any of the last three events organized by this gang can attest, they know what writers want to know, and do their best to find people with those answers."

Carol Tenney also read the Member News article, which inspired her to join. "As an attorney, I always did pro bono work," she says, "so it made sense to me to get involved, especially in a way that could help change the things that writers need to have changed."

"To me, it's imperative that writers have more influence and say so as to how others interpret our work. The end result is that the director, the producer, and the bottom line would all benefit. I hate when I hear people in and out of the industry—writers and non-writers—state as an immutable fact that writers have no power over

our own projects or careers, and no influence in the industry—unless we become writer-directors. That's defeatist and self-perpetuating. I think of my work on the Writers Education Committee as the antidote for that kind of thinking."

Says Tom Blomquist: "I think being a member of this committee really comes down to finding ways to carry on with Jeff and David's vision for empowering writers by providing meaningful educational opportunities and craft seminars at no cost to Guild members."

The way the committee functions is this, according to member April Pesa: "Writers come up with ideas for possible educational events and present these ideas at the monthly meetings. But a writer doesn't have to think of an event of his or her own. He or she can simply provide feedback on ideas that other writers put forth and can help plan future events."

"Once a writer comes up with an idea for an event and that idea is approved, he or she will chair a subcommittee to plan the event. The subcommittee consists of other writers who want to help with planning. I'm currently co-chairing a subcommittee with Maria Elena Rodriguez. We have a total of five other writers helping us organize this event. At the monthly meetings, we give the Writers Ed. Committee updates on the progress we're making in organizing the event. They offer us feedback and suggestions."

"Being involved is more fun and rewarding than

I had anticipated," says Cindy Lichtman, expressing a view common among committee members.

Karen Bercovici seconds the emotion: "It knocks me out that I get to be involved in the creation of events I'd be so delighted to attend. The members of the committee are smart and generous, uniquely so. Those in charge set just the right tone. I leave every meeting happy in my chosen field."

Carlton Cuse: "The Writers Education Committee programs are a free service provided to you as a WGA member. As the work of the committee grows, we hope to see these educational programs stand alongside health insurance and credit self-determination as another important benefit of Guild membership."

Maria Rodriguez: "This is the WGA version of UCLA Extension. Sure, there are lots of classes you can take at IFP, AFI, UCLA and USC—but our courses are free to members. Take advantage of this."

"I am delighted with the quantity and quality of our committee members," says Melvoin. "They are lively, imaginative writers from a broad spectrum of the Guild's membership whose common goal is to provide entertaining, informative programs for their peers. It has been a pleasure to watch

the committee grow and evolve. My role and David's role have changed from instigating programs ourselves to managing and guiding others' ideas for programs. We invite anyone with good ideas and a willingness to roll up their sleeves to join us."

For further information about the Writers Education Committee, contact staff liaison Sharline Liu at (323) 782-4776 or sliu@wga.org.

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— Laurie Hutzler

