



COMMENT

PRINT

E-MAIL

SHARE

Vegas Valley Book Festival: Finding our own voice

Local writing scene is displayed in works of authors, professors and journalists

By [Kristen Peterson](#) ([contact](#))

Wednesday, Nov. 4, 2009 | 2 a.m.

In its eighth year the Vegas Valley Book Festival is plucking from local waters for most of the five-day festival that begins today in downtown Las Vegas.

Some speakers and panelists are flying in from out of town. The rest are residents, some of whom belong to UNLV's esteemed literary programs. That includes award-winning author E.L. Doctorow, the UNLV Elias Ghanem chair in creative writing, who is a keynote speaker and will read from and discuss his works.

Georgia Neu of Nevada Humanities, who serves on the festival's literary committee, said it was time to focus on the volume of talent — writers and programs — in Southern Nevada.

"The local writing scene is very good right now," she says. "Our area deserves that focused attention.

Here is a sampling of who's participating:

1. UNLV

Douglas Unger, who co-founded the MFA in Creative Writing International program and Schaeffer Ph.D. with Creative Dissertation, is one of three writers telling stories about Las Vegas in "City of Second Chances." His works include "Leaving the Land," a finalist for the Pulitzer and Robert F. Kennedy awards, and "Looking for War and Other Stories."

Visiting and award-winning writer Donald Revell, who teaches creative writing, reads poetry in the courtyard at the Fifth Street School, and young Canadian fiction writer and playwright, Leah Bailly, who is pursuing an MFA in fiction writing, is one of the writers participating in the festival's collaborative serial novel, "Restless City."

Vu Tran, a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and a Schaeffer fellow in fiction at UNLV, who also contributed to "Restless City," will read the final chapter of that novel.

Tran teaches literature and creative writing and is the recipient of the 2009 Whiting Writers' Award for his short stories.

English professor John Irsfeld also wrote a chapter of "Restless City." Claudia Keelan, who is poet and editor of Interim, will recite poetry at



CHRIS MORRIS

Front row: Douglas Unger, E.L. Doctorow, Claudia Keelan, Michael Green Back row: Vicki Pettersson, Vu Tran, Keith Brantley

In Today's Sun

- [Poet laureate headlines Vegas Valley Book Festival \(11-4-2009\)](#)

Sun Archives

- [Comic book literature unmasked at festival \(11-6-2008\)](#)
- [Vegas Valley Book Festival #7 still on the books \(5-29-2008\)](#)
- [Bookstores aren't our thing, but Vegas has literary life \(2-27-2008\)](#)

Beyond the Sun

- [Vegas Valley Book Festival](#)

the Fifth Street School courtyard and at a downtown gallery.

2. Valley voices

The wide range of nonacademic writers includes Geoff Schumacher (“Howard Hughes: Power, Paranoia & Palace Intrigue” and “Sun, Sin & Suburbia: An Essential History of Modern Las Vegas”) and playwright Brian Kral, whose more than 20 works include a play about the bombing of Hiroshima, “Paper Lanterns, Paper Cranes.”

Former showgirl Vicki Pettersson turned herself into a New York Times and USA Today best-selling author with her Vegas-based fantasy books.

3. Spoken

Poetry and performance will meet First Friday in “The Sin City Sonneteer Spectacle.” Local writers will climb aboard a trolley that stops for readings at downtown locations. Haiku with Mayor Oscar Goodman will kick it off. Writers, performers and poets will include Revell, Dayvid Figler, Jeff Grindley, Elizabeth Quiñones-Zaldaña and Keith Brantley. Brantley is host of the West Las Vegas Arts Center’s long-running Poets Corner and member of the Westside Poets, Izulu Poets and Griot Nation. Jarret Keene (“Monster Fashion” and “A Boy’s Guide to Arson”) and Keelan will host.

4. CSN

The College of Southern Nevada’s literary crew will include Michael Green, history professor and author of “Freedom, Union, and Power: Lincoln and His Party During the Civil War” and “Nevada: A Journey of Discovery,” Green will sit on a panel for “Great Characters from Las Vegas History” with Schumacher, author Jack Sheehan and veteran journalist Myram Borders.

H. Lee Barnes, a novelist and short story writer, teaches English and creative writing at CSN. Barnes will be on a panel with English professor Richard Logsdon, senior editor of the literary magazine Red Rock Review, and professor Tina D. Eliopulos, staff editor of the Red Rock Review.

5. Comics

Las Vegas artists wrote and illustrated stories for the hardcover comic “Drunk: A Book About Bar Stories.” The impressive 128-page anthology of offensive, dark, endearing, vulgar and hilarious tales of alcohol is a project of Las Vegas residents Michael Ogilvie, Sean Russell and Michael Todoran.

A panel for “Drunk” will be part of the event’s Comics Festival and its exhibit will be on display at Alios, 1217 S. Main St.