

National Storytelling Network

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

NSN BOARD VOTES TO HOST 2028 NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE IN GREATER SALT LAKE CITY



Rishi Nixon
President & Chair of the Board of Directors
National Storytelling Network

I am thrilled to announce that the NSN Board of Directors has unanimously voted to host our 2028 National Storytelling Conference in partnership with the Utah Storytelling Guild, Story Crossroads, and Weber State University, in the beautiful greater Salt Lake City area.

The conference will be led by **Rachel Hedman**—the brilliant executive director of NSN partner organization Story Crossroads and former co-chair of NSN's Youth-Educators-Storytellers Alliance—and **Dr. Vincent Bates**, professor of teacher education at Weber State University and co-chair of their annual storytelling festival, home to the largest youth storytelling showcase in the United States!

We are looking forward to the wonderful vision and leadership Rachel and Vincent will bring to the National Storytelling Conference, particularly in guiding programming informed by their decades of work in the area of engaging youth with storytelling.

Image Credit: *Thomas Wozniak, Weber State University*

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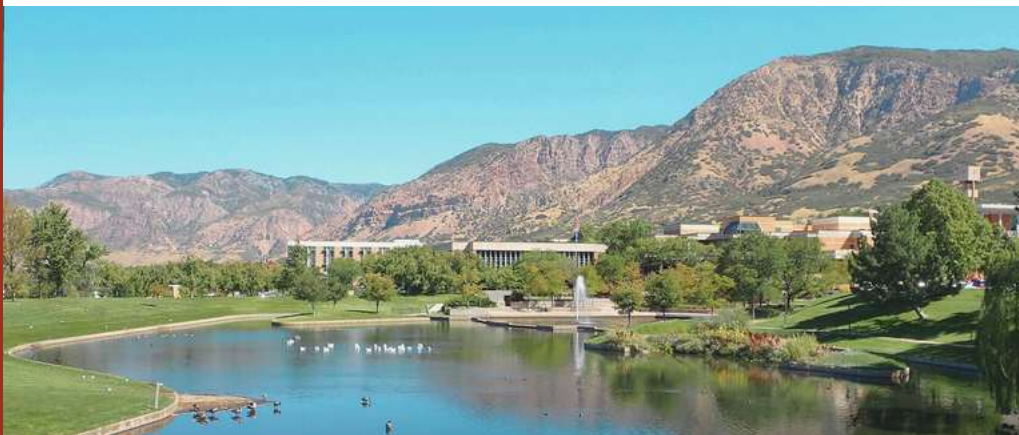
National Storytelling Calendar

The Story Beast

DID YOU KNOW?

NSN Board of Directors meetings are open to all members!

Read minutes and learn how to attend [here](#).





The **NATIONAL**
STORYTELLING NETWORK

invites you to the

2026 NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

Prairie Voices

HONORING HERITAGE
INSPIRING TOMORROW

July 23 – 26 · Canyon, Texas
West Texas A&M University



JOIN US for **NSN's 50th**
ANNIVERSARY!

*Scan QR or visit storynet.org
to learn more and register.*

Image credit: Clinton Steeds; Palo Duro Canyon, vectorized.

*15 minutes away from conference, Palo Duro Canyon is
the largest in the U.S. after the Grand Canyon! Reserve a
spot to visit Palo Duro on the NSN ECO Tellers' guided
field trip, with your conference registration.*

NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

ENJOY THE BEST OF STORYTELLING WITH US!



Caleb Hubbard & Trudy Hanson
Conference Co-Chairs
National Storytelling Network

The countdown has begun! As you make travel plans to attend the NSN Summer Conference scheduled for July 23-26, 2026 at West Texas A&M's campus in Canyon, Texas, here are some tips for making the most of your conference experience:

- Plan to register **BEFORE** the end of May—click [here](#) for the details!
- Volunteer! Complete the online volunteer form on the conference website. Volunteers will be notified of their assignments by May 14.
- Sign up for the tour of Palo Duro Canyon. For the admission price of \$8.00, you will have the opportunity to see the Grand Canyon of Texas!
- Browse through the conference schedule posted on the conference website and begin planning which programs you want to attend.
- Enjoy the Regional Storytelling Concert on Thursday night.
- Enjoy the National Storytelling Concert on Friday night.
- Enjoy the Oracle Award Winners concert on Saturday night.
- Support the performances of those who were chosen for Fringe Performances!

Featured Tellers -Regional Concert On Thursday Evening



Featured Tellers -National Concert On Friday Evening



FRINGE Tellers



- Plan to attend one of the Special Interest Group meetings scheduled for noon on Saturday. Your NSN membership includes membership in one of our SIGS, so take advantage and learn more about their programs. SIGS include:



Environmental Storytelling (ECO)

Storytelling that enriches and advocates for a natural world.



Producers And Organizers (PRO)

Storytelling events do not happen without effort.



Storytelling In Organizations (SIO)

Narrative insights into the contemporary business scene.



Youth, Educators And Storytellers (YES)

Teaches to tell, and tells to teach.

THE CONFERENCE BOOKSTORE CAN DISPLAY YOUR WARES!

The Conference Bookstore can sell your products. But we need to know in advance who is bringing materials. All bringing materials for the bookstore are expected to volunteer for two hours at the conference. **You can sign up to bring materials at the volunteer form link [here](#).** Check the box “I am bringing merchandise to sell in the bookstore.”

PLACE AN AD IN THE CONFERENCE PROGRAM!

Program ads are available for as little as \$90 (1/8 page). Take a look at the link below and see if there is a price range that suits your advertising needs. Let the conference goers hear about your work! **Learn more at the link [here](#).**

QUICK LINKS

[VIEW SCHEDULE & REGISTER!](#)

[RESERVE AN AD IN THE PROGRAM](#)

[VOLUNTEER OR BRING BOOKSTORE MERCHANDISE](#)

ORACLE AWARDS

RECIPIENTS OF THE 2026 ORACLE AWARDS



Mary Hamilton
Chair, ORACLE Awards Committee
National Storytelling Network

Once a year the National Storytelling Network honors the contributions of individuals who have spread the joy, innovation, and timeless importance of storytelling. How? Through our ORACLE Awards! Let's celebrate these twelve individuals and learn more about them!

THE ORACLE DISTINGUISHED NATIONAL SERVICE AWARD is presented to those who contribute their time and energy in an exemplary manner on the national level to forward the work of the National Storytelling Network.



Katie Knutson

2026 ORACLE DISTINGUISHED NATIONAL SERVICE AWARD

According to Jeff Doyle and Jennifer Otto, Katie “has consistently worked to expand the scope of storytelling nationally, with the goal of making our community one which welcomes and encourages storytelling by and for everyone.” Katie was chairing the 2020 National Storytelling Conference when the pandemic hit. Erin Loverlin wrote, “What could have been a scaled-down response to crisis instead became a vibrant festival that deepened connections and expanded opportunities for storytellers and audiences around the world. Although many are to be credited with the success of CONNECTED, Katie’s ongoing commitment to community, talent for engagement, and sincere passion for service were foundational to the National Storytelling Network during an internationally challenging time.” Pam Schweitzer wrote, “Katie’s energy and support for storytelling has no borders.” Read about her service on storytelling organization boards in her bio below. Howard Lieberman concluded his support letter calling Katie, “a tireless worker on behalf of all storytellers everywhere. She is a jewel in the storytelling crown.”

Katie Knutson has spent her adult life serving the storytelling community. This includes 5 years as Executive Director of Northeast Storytelling (NEST) and extensive Board service: 3 years for NSN (one year as Chair), 7 years for YES (4 years as President), 6 years for Northlands, and 7 years for Story Arts of Minnesota. She also Chaired the 2020 NSN Conference Committee – in initial plans for Atlanta, and then forging a new virtual conference after COVID shut everything down. The resulting NSN Connected Conference was the largest, most diverse storytelling conference in US history, featuring 262 storytellers from around the world, spanning every US region and every continent (except Antarctica).

In her 25 years as a storyteller and 18 years as teaching artist, Katie has delivered residencies, performances, and classes to around 40,000 children and adults on four continents. Katie wrote/curated the New Voices column in Storytelling Magazine for 9 years and contributed to three storytelling books. Find out more about Katie and her performing/teaching work at ripplingstories.com.



Jessica Piscitelli Robinson

2026 ORACLE DISTINGUISHED NATIONAL SERVICE AWARD

At recent National Storytelling Conferences, Jessica’s extraordinary service from behind a camera has made our Conferences available virtually for those who would like to attend in person but need to attend from home. Rishi Nixon noted that Jessica’s “recording work distinctly and indistinctly enhance the connection between listener and recorded performer.” Heather Forest stated that “Jessica has not only graced prominent stages with her storytelling but has created both online and live opportunities for others to thrive.” In Lyn Ford’s words, Jessica “supports the work of other storytellers, and encourages listeners to open their minds and hearts to the cultural diversity and uncommon beauty of unique voices and ways of sharing, through her work as Founder and Executive Director of Better Said Than Done. . . Its online events have drawn international viewers and tellers.” Of her event producing, Ed Stivender observed, “Her selflessness and sharp eye in presenting up-and-coming talent is remarkable.” In March 2026, Better Said than Done produced the 7th Women’s Storytelling Festival with twenty storytellers and nine emcees.

Jessica Robinson is the Founding Executive Director of Better Said Than Done, the organization behind the Women’s Storytelling Festival. In addition to producing storytelling shows since 2011, Jessica has performed at Exchange Place at the National Storytelling Festival, on WGBH’s “Stories from the Stage,” and for Artists Standing Strong Together, Six Feet Apart Productions. She has also told stories at three National Storytelling Network (NSN) Conferences and four Good Liars Club Festivals. Jessica was featured at the Stone Soup, the Washington Folk, the Allegheny Highlands, the Florida, and the Hampton Storytelling Festivals and is a 2023 Regional Service and Leadership ORACLE Award recipient.

Jessica’s stories can be heard on radio and podcasts, including Risk! She is a teaching artist, leading workshops for Story Crossroads, the Story Center at the MCPL, libraries and community centers, and through Better Said Than Done online. Jessica’s Guide to Personal Storytelling (published October 2024) is available through Story Crossroads. Jessica is the author of the urban fantasy novel Caged (published 2019), as well as the memoir-in-stories, Stages: My Life in Stories (published 2024).

THE ORACLE INTERNATIONAL STORYBRIDGE AWARD is presented to those who promote the building of bridges between countries through the use of storytelling and/or storytelling events. While many tellers tell internationally, only a few build the relationships that truly create bridges between cultures and people.



Jeff Gere

2026 ORACLE INTERNATIONAL STORYBRIDGE AWARD

Jeff Gere’s years of bridge building made it possible for NSN’s 2020 virtual conference to be truly international.

As Katie Knutson wrote in support of Jeff’s nomination, “In all, we featured 262 storytellers from around the world at the Connected Conference; this number would have been less than 1/4 of that without Jeff’s outreach.” Linda Yemoto wrote, “For twenty-six years Jeff produced the Talk Story Festival in Hawaii, inviting tellers from around the world to share their talents with audiences of the islands as well as championing local and Native Hawaiian voices. He did more than anyone else to provide this important sharing of cultures in the Pacific.” According to Alton Chung, Jeff “travels extensively making friends and spreading Aloha wherever he goes. He fosters and builds upon those relationships, providing opportunities for tellers from other countries to share their stories and talents with new audiences in Hawaii and the US.”

Jeff Gere blends talents as painter, puppeteer, and mime into performances which have electrified audiences in Hawaii for 30 years. Jeff’s physical energy, morphing elastic face and voice characterizations make his shows events. Jeff becomes his stories!

Born on Halloween, Jeff performs constantly. He produced/hosted/ told in the Talk Story Festival, Hawaii’s biggest storytelling celebration (26 years), Story TV (23 years monthly), Talk Story Radio (2 years weekly, Hawaii Public Radio.) He produced statewide tours, story camps & conferences. He performed at the National Storytelling Festival in 2010 and was in residence in 2013.) While working full time for Oahu’s Parks Department, he managed to tell stories in Spain, Hong Kong, Turkey, Vancouver & the Yukon. After retiring in 2014, Jeff continued telling around the world and added Thailand, China, India, Japan, Australia, Taiwan, Java, Romania and Kenya to the long list of places he has told stories. During the pandemic, he began creating local, national & international virtual events as a performer & producer. He produced Story Retreats on Kauai in 2023 and 24. He has over 200 videos on YouTube, and he also does shadow puppets. jeffgere.com • jeffgere1031@gmail.com



Margaret Read MacDonald

2026 ORACLE INTERNATIONAL STORYBRIDGE AWARD

Margaret Read MacDonald’s bridge building is beautifully described in an award support letter by Korean teller Alicia Dongjoo Bang, who wrote, “She has participated in festivals, conferences, and community gatherings throughout Korea, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Myanmar. In each place, she did not arrive as a visitor passing through, but as a listener and companion—building genuine relationships, mentoring emerging storytellers, and encouraging them to speak from within their own languages, histories, and cultural roots.

Margaret’s contributions have never been limited to keynote appearances or singular events. Rather, she has consistently invested in long-term connection. She has helped cultivate structures of trust and continuity, modeling how storytellers can honor difference, learn collaboratively, and grow as an interconnected international community without losing their local voices.”

Margaret Read MacDonald has shared tales and offered her "Playing with Story" workshops in over 55 countries. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Mahasarakham, Thailand, 1995-1996. For Libraries Unlimited Press, she solicited storyteller authors and edited collections from Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand. As a festival producer, Margaret was able to feature tellers from Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Quebec, the UK, and Thailand. Her many folktale collections bring folktales from around the globe to English speaking audiences.

THE ORACLE TALKING LEAVES AWARD is presented to those members of our community who have made outstanding contributions to the literary body of storytelling.

Joseph Sobol

2026 ORACLE TALKING LEAVES AWARD



Joseph Sobol's enduring impact on our storytelling community includes writing our history in *The Storytellers' Journey: An American Revival*, founding the peer-reviewed academic journal *Storytelling, Self, and Society*, and many additional publications. Milbre Burch wrote, "His perspective as a practicing storyteller and his insightful and eloquent scholarship have made him welcome within the storytelling community and deeply respected within academic circles." Dr. Hannah B. Harvey wrote, "It is difficult to say where the field of storytelling studies would be without the contributions that Dr. Joseph Sobol has made over his lifetime of dedicated writing, research, and practice in storytelling." And David Novak opened his letter of support with "Dr. Joseph Sobol tells us who we are."

*Joseph Sobol's doctoral dissertation on the American storytelling revival was published in 1999 by the University of Illinois Press as the award-winning book *The Storytellers' Journey: An American Revival*. He is a co-founder of the *Storytelling in Higher Education Special Interest Group of the National Storytelling Network*, and a co-founder and co-editor from 2004-2022 of the interdisciplinary journal *Storytelling, Self, Society*. His 2005 book *The House Between Earth and Sky: Harvesting New American Folktales*, from *Libraries Unlimited/Teacher Ideas Press*, is a step-by-step guide to doing *Folklore and Storytelling residencies for secondary school ESL classes*, along with a selection of international folktales collected in the *Chicago City Schools*. From 2000 to 2017, Sobol coordinated the *Storytelling Graduate Program at East Tennessee State University*. After that, he directed the *George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling at the University of South Wales* from 2017 to 2022. In 2020 he published *Liars, Damn Liars, and Storytellers: Essays on Traditional and Contemporary Storytelling*. He is now happily retired from academe, and lives in *Amenia, New York* with his wife, *Mitzi*.*



Kevin Cordi

2026 ORACLE TALKING LEAVES AWARD

Judy Sima & Kevin Cordi co-authored *Raising Voices: Creating Youth Storytelling Groups and Troupes*. Karen Wendt claimed, “Writing a book that can help teachers, librarians, and storytellers to get young people to tell stories is powerful. This isn’t just talent; it’s a deep commitment to our youth.” Katie Knutson wrote, “Over 113 youth Storytelling groups in the United States, Japan, and Canada were documented as a part of the pre-work of *Raising Voices*. Countless more have been formed since the publication of the book.” *Raising Voices*, winner of an Anne IZARD Storytellers’ Choice Award, made a significant impact in our community. *Raising Voices* was Judy and Kevin’s first book together, but they have each contributed to the body of storytelling literature.

Kevin Cordi wrote two more books on the art of storytelling (see titles in his bio below), contributed to thirteen books with chapters on topics such as social action stories and ensemble storytelling. His writing is so prolific, nominator Katie Knutson admitted, “I was not able to include the three pages of Kevin’s peer-reviewed articles or the page of reviews he has written, but I think you get the idea.”

*Dr. Kevin Cordi is a storyteller who doesn’t just tell stories — he tosses them into the room and invites everyone to play. A writer, educator, and champion of the oral tradition, Cordi explores how stories shape who we are and how we listen to one another. He holds a Ph.D. in Storytelling and Education from The Ohio State University and teaches storytelling, literacy, and education at Ohio University Lancaster. Kevin is the author of *Playing with Stories: Story Crafting for Storytellers, Writers, Teachers and Other Imaginative Thinkers* and *You Don’t Know Jack: A Storyteller Goes to School*, and co-author (with Judy Sima) of *Raising Voices: Creating Youth Storytelling Groups and Troupes*. His books celebrate the power of story in learning and life. Much of his work focuses on youth, helping young people discover their voices and the courage to tell their own tales. Wherever there’s a curious mind and a circle forming, Kevin is likely nearby — asking the next great story question.*



Judy Sima

2026 ORACLE TALKING LEAVES AWARD

Judy Sima contributed to books including the August House Book of Scary Stories, *The Storytelling Classroom: Applications Across the Curriculum*, and four books published by National Storytelling Press. In over thirty published articles, she addressed such topics as using storytelling to teach science, teaching tolerance via storytelling, and engaging parents as storytellers.

Judy Sima has spent more than 50 years bringing stories to life with passion, creativity, and heart. She began her career as a public-school teacher, where she discovered the power of storytelling as a tool to inspire learning, spark imagination, and connect with students. She has also mentored others, teaching people how to effectively share stories of their own. Over the decades, Judy has shared stories in many forms, including folk, traditional, and contemporary tales, each delivered with her signature colorful style and vibrant presence. She has told deeply personal stories as well, including her mother’s journey to the United States. Her performances captivate audiences of all ages, blending wisdom, humor, and humanity. She previously received a Regional Service and Leadership ORACLE in 2005 and Distinguished National Service ORACLE in 2013, further recognizing her lasting impact. Through her work, she has not only entertained but also preserved traditions and inspired others to find their voices through storytelling.



Jack Zipes

2026 ORACLE TALKING LEAVES AWARD

“He is an ally worldwide to those who are seeking to find out more about the origins of the written texts of traditional tales we rely on, and how they have been changed, and viewed,” wrote Laura Simms in support of this award. Maria Asp wrote, “I cannot think of another person who has given so much to the literary body of storytelling and led with tireless conviction, care and creativity over a lifetime of study and mentorship.” In his nomination letter Loren Niemi wrote, “While most storytellers associate him with his translation and scholarship of the Brothers Grimm and other European folk and fairy tale traditions, Jack Zipes interests in the function of stories and storytelling in the larger culture is broad, deep, and deeply humanitarian.”

Jack Zipes is professor emeritus of German and comparative literature at the University of Minnesota. He has edited more than one hundred collections of fairy tales and written many books about fairy tales and children’s stories. He has also translated major classical tales by the Brothers Grimm, E. T Hoffmann, Charles Perrault, and Guiseppe Pitré. In 1995 he founded Neighborhood Bridges, a storytelling program for students in public schools with the Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis, which ended in 2015.

THE ORACLE REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP AWARD is presented to those who have made a significant contribution to their local or regional Storytelling community and/or have used Storytelling to make a significant contribution to the larger community in which they live.



Tim Livengood

2026 ORACLE REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP AWARD

Tim Livengood co-leads the Washington D. C. area Grapevine Storytelling series. Jessica Robinson wrote that at the Washington Folk Festival, “Tim manages booking the storytellers for all 18 or so hours of storytelling, scheduling their time on stage, and running the tent. . . Without Tim, that performance space wouldn’t be there, and Mid-Atlantic area storytelling wouldn’t be represented at the largest area folk festival.” Jane Dorfman wrote, “Tim runs single handily the storytelling at The Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival, rain, shine, or, frequently, mud.” Margaret Chatham wrote about Tim telling eclipse stories and the science behind them, collecting moon stories and relating them to moon observations, and mixing storytelling into science presentations across the USA from Washington, DC to Hilo, HI. Dr. Jeff Goldstein, Center Director, National Center for Earth and Space Science Education wrote, “Tim’s gifts in both research and storytelling are remarkable. . . In all programs, Tim used his mastery of storytelling to change how attendees of all ages viewed scientists, science, and human exploration – not as a boring endeavor, but as an exciting, emotional – even spiritual experience that was wondrously human.”

Tim Livengood is a planetary scientist and storyteller. When a storytelling club started at work, Tim’s wife said, “go do that thing you do, to other people”, and so he did.

Somehow this transformed into longtime service on the Boards of Voices in the Glen, and the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, which further led to the creation of the Grapevine Storytelling Series in the Takoma Park area of Washington, DC, with longtime partners Renée Brachfeld and Noa Baum, as well as programming storytelling for the Washington Folk Festival. For five years, Tim worked for the Challenger Center for Space Science Education on a team developing education modules for K-12 schools, leading teacher workshops, and presenting Family Science Night programming for audiences as small as three and as large as 1700. Storytelling skills have come in very handy when projectors broke and while cooking up model comets. Tim also teaches astronomy classes at University of Maryland, and led storytelling for several years at the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival.



Leslie Shelley

2026 ORACLE REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP AWARD

“She has served so faithfully on the Georgia Storytelling Network Board of Directors for 5 years, assisting with the Georgia Storytelling Conference in 2023 in Marietta, Georgia, and served as the Hosting Festival Coordinator for the Georgia Storytelling Network with the National Storytelling Network for the 2025 National Storytelling Conference in Kennesaw Georgia” wrote Gwendolyn J. Napier in an award support letter. Indeed, Leslie Shelley brought the Georgia Storytelling Network to the attention of National Storytelling Network members through her stellar work co-chairing our 2025 Conference with Rishi Nixon. Through her activity in the Georgia Storytelling Network, Leslie built relationships. Rishi noted that, “... Leslie recruited, with ease, scores of tellers she had known for years to volunteer for the conference. Her contacts allowed her to borrow festival infrastructure from the Georgia Mountain Storytelling Festival, cross-promote, and add a third organizational cohost of our conference: the Kuumba Storytellers of Georgia.” Current Georgia Storytelling Network President, Gwendolyn J. Napier wrote “She is dedicated and committed to every and any projects, events, programs even down to sharing stories in festivals, schools, backyards, or a barn. It’s always done with excellence and from the heart, with a smile regardless of the length of time or long hours.”

Born in the foothills of North Georgia in a very rural agricultural community, Leslie Shelley grew up surrounded by stories. Stories of life all stitched together with a liberal sprinkling of tightly held superstitions passed down from Appalachian ancestors. It wasn’t until college that she realized everyone didn’t share life through story, but that everyone sure needed story. Leslie performs throughout Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Alabama. Her story mission is one of hope and healing through sharing stories of life. Leslie currently serves on the board of GSN and NSN. She served as co-chair of the 2025 National Storytelling Network Conference held in Georgia. Leslie retired in 2022 after 20 years with the local school district and serves on the board of the local retired educators association. Her greatest critics and most genuine inspirations come from seven grand little men who keep life filled with questions, adventures, and fun.



Steve Tate

2026 ORACLE REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP AWARD

Steve Tate "... is a 'jewel of a human' whose contributions have left an indelible mark on North Carolina and the wider storytelling world" wrote Connie Regan-Blake in a support letter for this award. In addition to his North Carolina Storytelling Guild board service and his hosting of a weekly STORY ZOOM (see both in his bio below), he's an active member of the Old North State Storytelling Festival Committee helping with publicity as well as attending to the myriad tasks that keep such events running smoothly. He mentors other tellers. He works with refugees from war-torn regions. Connie Regan-Blake wrote, "Steve understands that for those displaced by conflict, being able to tell one's story is a fundamental part of reclaiming agency and dignity." Milbre Burch wrote, "Steven Tate lives a life of service through his storytelling and his community activism. Let us recognize his skills in bringing people together in divisive times through the power of story."

The Rev. Dr. Steve Tate grew up on land once at the heart of the world's largest Tall Grass Prairie, rooted in a family of Illinois farmers — and "Big Talkers." His Daddy's stories planted a seed that never stopped growing.

Steve left the farm for higher education, was ordained, and earned his Doctor of Ministry. For twenty years he practiced pastoral counseling, becoming Executive Director of the Samaritan Center in Minneapolis. In 1995, he and wife Lee followed a wild dream to an abandoned North Carolina tobacco farm and built the beloved Goat Lady Dairy.

Now retired, Steve serves as Past President of the NC Storytellers Guild and current Membership Coordinator & Treasurer. In 2020, he co-founded the Monday STORY ZOOM — now in its sixth year with 100 storytellers nationwide meeting weekly for story-sharing and feedback. He has performed five times at Connie Regan Blake's "A Slice of Life" in Black Mountain, and studied with Donald Davis, Megan Wells, and others.

His warm, intimate stories of farm life, animals, and the universal human experience entertain, educate, and inspire.



Chester Weems

2026 ORACLE REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP AWARD

"Chester's service reflects leadership rooted in action rather than title." Michael Brundy, Tejas Storytelling Association/TSA President. Valerie Kimble wrote, "In Oklahoma, where Chester resides, he has served the Territory Tellers in myriad capacities: as a Board member for several terms, leading the association in fund raising, program innovation, and outreach." Chester has organized retreats, won grants, included other tellers in performance opportunities he has secured, served on anthology development committees, developed publicity materials, written newsletter articles, used his own Zoom account to offer practice sessions to other tellers and hosted Zoom events.

He has used his professional photography skills in support of storytelling by taking action photos and headshots of tellers at events, then offering those photos at low prices or for donations with funds going to support storytelling organizations in Oklahoma and Texas. In 2025 TSA presented him the Martha Len Nelson Special Services Award, “recognizing that above-and-beyond kind of special service that some people are willing to offer to TSA and to the storytelling community in general.”

Chester Weems is a retired educator and Oklahoma storyteller. A member of Oklahoma’s Territory Tellers for over 30 years, he has a fondness for family stories, his own and others. An award-winning photographer of fine arts and people, he likes to photograph storytellers in action and has provided headshots and action photos for many storytellers.

He has served on the Territory Tellers Board and as Treasurer, Vice-President and President. Chester has also been a Tejas member for many years, serving a term on the Board, on the Zoom Tech Team and as a Masterclass presenter. He has been a member of NSN and PRO-Sig for many years and served as the NSN regional representative. He also holds memberships in Missouri’s RAPS and Mo-Tell and Colorado’s RMS.

Chester is an advocate for encouraging the collecting of family stories and has assisted others in recording their family stories. He also likes to tell stories, though he has said his stories got better when unencumbered by the need for truth.

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The 2026 ORACLE Awards Ceremony will take place at 7 p.m. on Saturday, July 25, 2026 at the National Storytelling Conference at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas. Award recipients will tell stories in a concert immediately after the presentation ceremony.

ORACLE Awards happen because NSN members nominate their peers for recognition. This year nominations were submitted by: Jen Whitman, Rishi Nixon, Jane Dorfman, Janel Woodland, Jeff Doyle, Jennifer Otto, Fran Stallings, Katie Knutson, Delanna Reed, and Loren Niemi. Without their efforts writing a nomination and soliciting letters of support, there would be no ORACLE awards. The NSN ORACLE Committee members—Mary Hamilton, Toni Simmons, Cora Newcomb, Drea Douglas, Nancy Tolson, Ray Christian, and Emily Stamets—deeply appreciate the work of those who nominated colleagues and those who wrote letters in support of the 2026 NSN ORACLE Awards.

Looking ahead, think about those in our storytelling community who you believe deserve recognition for their contributions. Visit storynet.org/awards/oracle-awards to learn more about the awards process. Write your nomination and gather letters of support. You’ll be able to submit your nomination online during the two-month awards submission window November 10, 2026 – January 10, 2027.

NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

RECIPIENTS OF THE 2026 KATHRYN TUCKER WINDHAM SCHOLARSHIPS



Margaret Read MacDonald
Chair, Kathryn Tucker Windham Scholarship Committee
National Storytelling Network

We are pleased to announce our five 2026 Kathryn Tucker Windham Scholars. Look for these lively folks at this year's National Storytelling Conference. They have much to offer! For 2026, Dada and Helen are our first Kathryn Tucker Windham New Teller Scholars!

Jodi French-Burr from West Virginia is retired from the National Park Service. She strives to raise awareness of heritage storytelling.



Nicholas Pawlowski is president of Story Arts of Minnesota. He founded Story Table Foundation, a non-profit that promotes mental and emotional well-being through interactive storytelling.



Helen Yang, a Silicon Valley artist, is a storyteller at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum. She is founder of Visionary Arts and Visionary Friends.



Mary Louise Hughes is a Salt Lake City teller with a special interest in personal and family stories.

Dada Maheshvarananda is a yogic monk, president of The Asheville Storytelling Circle, and director of the Prout Research Institute.



NSN PRO SIG presents



WHO'S NEXT?: A SUCCESSION PLANNING WORKSHOP

THURSDAY May 14, 2026 - 6 pm (Central)

\$15 (\$5 For PRO members)

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

It's never too early to plan for leadership transition!

Learn how Storytelling Arts of Indiana navigated succession while moving from cofounder leadership to a successor—what worked, what didn't, and lessons learned.



Ronan Marra

- Executive Director of Storytelling Arts of Indiana.
- Previous Artistic Director of Storefront Theatre of Indianapolis & CoArtistic Director of Chicago's Signal Ensemble Theatre.
- Directed, written, or produced over 60 productions



Ellen Munds

- Retired from Storytelling Arts of Indiana in 2024.
- Managed all operations, including finance, marketing, programming, fundraising, volunteers, board relations, and more as the organization's sole employee

Storytelling In Organizations Presents: Stories Inside Words

Hosted by: Artem Mushin-Makedonskiy

When: Thursday, May 28th 2026

Time: 12:00 p.m. - 1:15 p.m. EDT

Where: Zoom

By the end of the webinar session participants will be able to:

- Understand that differences of meaning of the same word are not just possible but also valuable
- Use storytelling to help groups communicate more effectively when discussing common goals.



Facilitator: Madelyn Blair, Ph.D.

Author and Host of Unlocked Podcast on YouTube

Faculty at Columbia University

Division Chief at the World Bank

Website: www.madelynblair.com

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Free to SIO Members and Non-Members



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May 20-22 | Online



CHIEF STORY OFFICER CONFERENCE

Three days on storytelling as a tool for leadership and business growth

in partnership with



THE HEALING STORY ALLIANCE PRESENTS

Social Justice in Action:



The Kindness of Stories

Emcee



MILBRE BURCH

SUNDAY
MAY 17TH
7-8:30PM EDT

ON ZOOM!

Community Tellers



RANGIRA BEA GALLIMORE



ALDO CIVICO



LAURA SIMMS



JOHNNY MOSES



RAFE MARTIN

FREE!
Registration Required
Donations Welcome!



NATIONAL STORYTELLING CALENDAR

MAY 2026 STORYTELLING EVENTS

Registration information [linked](#) in titles when available.

New Hampshire Storytelling Alliance | Granite State Story Swap with Featured Kim Weitkamp

May 2, 2026 | 8:00 am – 4:30 pm Eastern

Benz Community Center | 18 Heard Road, Center Sandwich, New Hampshire

Virginia Storytelling Alliance Gathering with Bil Lepp

May 2, 2026 | 2:00 pm – 7:00 pm Eastern

Virtual

True Tales Live Storytelling Workshop Series

May 5, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Eastern

Virtual

Better Said Than Done Spring Storytelling Workshops

May 6, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm Eastern

May 20, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm Eastern

May 27, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm Eastern

June 3, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm Eastern

Virtual

Better Said Than Done | The Fair Folk Tales

May 7, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm Eastern

Virtual

Voices in the Glen Story Swap

Saturday, May 9 | 7:30 – 8:30pm Eastern

Falls Church, Virginia

Please RSVP to margaret.chatham@verizon.net

Shoals Storytelling Festival

May 14 – 16, 2026

Florence, Alabama

NSN Producers & Organizers Special Interest Group (PRO SIG), with Storytelling Arts of Indiana, presents:

Who's Next?: A Succession Planning Workshop

May 14, 2026 | 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm Central

Virtual



Laura Packer | Crafting and telling difficult stories: A workshop for storytellers, writers and others

May 14, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Central

May 21, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Central

May 28, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Central

Virtual

Laura Packer | Myths Retold: The Cradle of Civilization (Summer) Storytelling Concert

May 17, 2026 | 3:00 pm – 4:15 pm

Virtual

Narativ Leadership Story Talks Live - The Stories That Shaped Us

May 21, 2026 | 11:00 am – 12:00 pm Central

Virtual

True Tales Live Storytelling Show “Making Change”

May 26, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:15 pm Eastern

Virtual

NSN Storytelling In Organizations Special Interest Group (SIO SIG) presents:

Stories Inside Words with Artem Mushin-Makedonskiy and Madelyn Blair

May 28, 2026 | 11:00 am – 12:15 pm Central

Virtual

Patchwork Storytelling Guild | EarthWoven: Stories of Connection, Creation, and Wonder

June 2, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

June 9, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

June 16, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

June 23, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

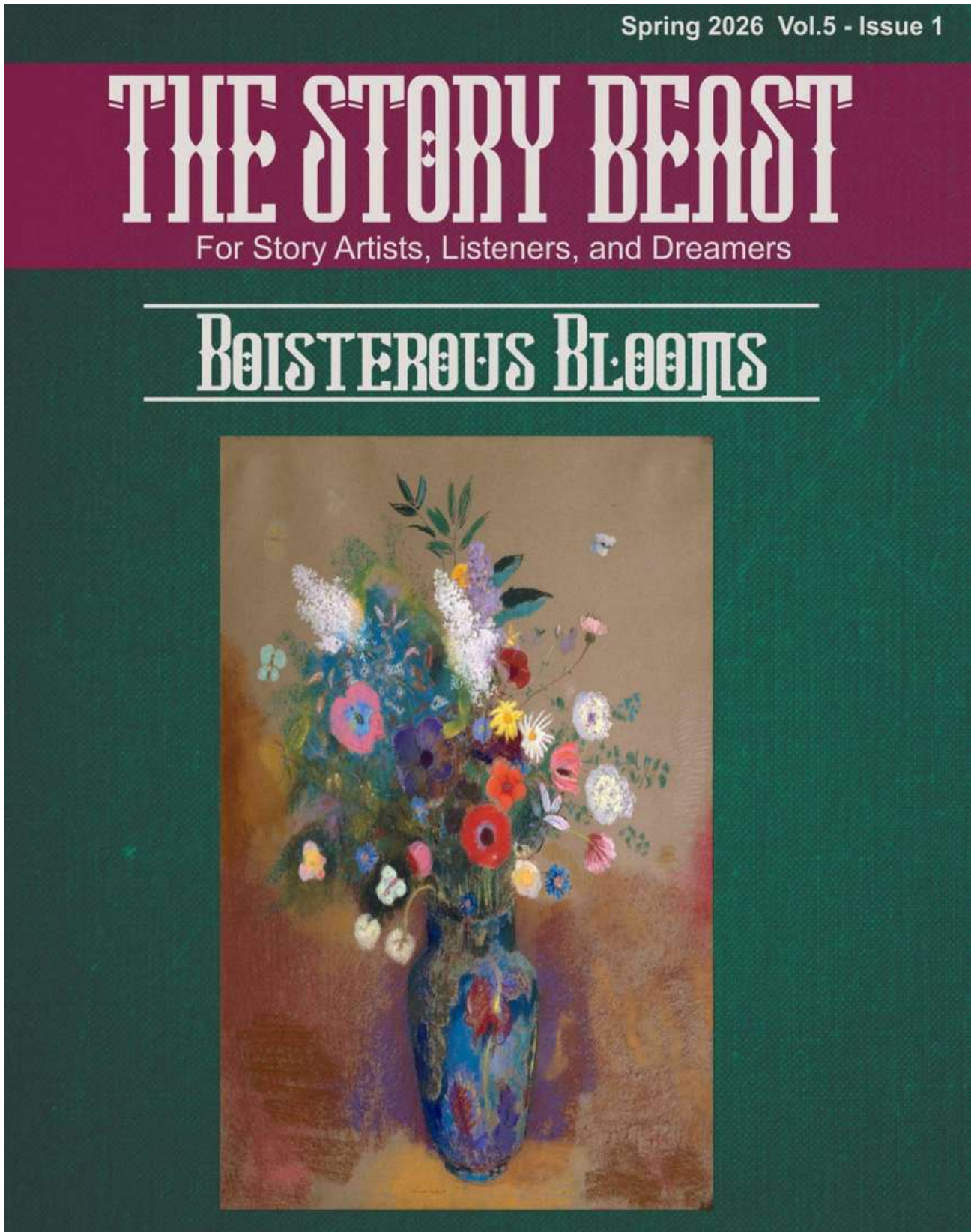
June 30, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

Virtual

THE STORY BEAST

Click the cover below to access the Spring 2026 Story Beast issue: *Boisterous Blooms*.

Visit storybeast.org for submission information.





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Send us your events, articles, opportunities, storytelling, or storyteller news, and more in an email to newsletter@storynet.org to go out to the national storytelling community!

1. Contributions due on the 25th of the month.
2. Membership in the National Storytelling Network *not* required.
3. Content subject to editing and inclusion in final issue not guaranteed.
4. If you are the author of your contribution, please also attach a headshot photo of yourself to go next to your byline.