



Newsletter



January – February

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of St. Louis Poetry Center is to promote poetry and its appreciation, and to stimulate the writing of poetry, in the St. Louis area.

Sign up for email updates at eblast@stlouispoetrycenter.org

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Visit our website stlouispoetrycenter.org

THE ST. LOUIS POETRY CENTER NEWSLETTER

The newsletter is a quarterly publication of the St. Louis Poetry Center, 3301 Washington Ave., St. Louis, MO 63103, newsletter@stlouispoetrycenter.org

Member events, readings and kudos are printed as a benefit of Membership. Join using the back of this newsletter, or using PayPal at stlouispoetrycenter.org/membership

JANE ELLEN IBUR, POET LAUREATE OF ST. LOUIS, WANTS OTHERS AT THE MIC

When Jane Ellen Ibur, the poet laureate of the city of St. Louis, addressed Webster University arts and science grads at their May 11 commencement, she characteristically shared the stage with two lesser-known poets, in absentia.



Ibur read work by Alexander Thornton and Johnell Bell, who had participated in a poetry workshop that she led for many years in the St. Louis County Jail. Both men are now serving long prison sentences—life in Bell’s case.

“Johnell wrote me recently that the class in poetry had saved his life,” Ibur said to me over lunch. “To make that statement when you are serving a life sentence is amazing, isn’t it?”

That’s what Janie, as her friends call her, lives for—the amazement that comes when people who might never consider themselves poets write something that surprises them, pleases them, and liberates them. Janie has led countless poetry workshops with inmates, the homeless, veterans, retirees, children, teenagers, and other folk for more than 30 years, frequently under the auspices of St. Louis Poetry Center. On top of that labor of love, she has published her own award-winning work in journals, anthologies, and two collections—*Both Wings Flappin’, Still Not Flyin’*; and *The Little Mrs./Misses*.

Ibur’s commitment to building a community of poets made her a natural choice for the city’s two-year post as poet laureate. She sat down with me at Café Nova in South St. Louis to talk about her new role and her life as a “poetry missionary.”

—Robert Lowes
Coordinator of the Beverly Hopkins Memorial Contest for High School Students

Janie, what are your duties as poet laureate, and what are your personal goals in this role?

I think I have to do six readings a year, and I think I’m at five already (chuckle). But I’m not about how many readings I can give. I’m about how many readings I can share with people who have never been at a microphone. So I want to get members of the community who have not spoken. St. Louis is so black and white, but it’s so misleading. It’s got many other colors and communities. Those are the people I want to bring out—Vietnamese, Indian, Bosnian. I know somebody in many of those communities that could be a connection to doing a workshop.

(interview continued on p. 6)

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Mark your calendar for these upcoming St. Louis Poetry Center events

1/19 | SUNDAY WORKSHOP
Alison C. Rollins (submissions due 1/12)

1/20 | RIVER STYX READING SERIES Kathryn Davis, Alison C. Rollins & Jeffrey Thomson

1/28 | POETRY AT THE POINT
SLPC Board Presidents: Dwight Bitikofer, Ted Mathys, Mary Ruth Donnelly, Robert Lowes & Keith Byler

2/3 | OBSERVABLE READINGS
T.J. Jarrett & Gillian Parrish

2/16 | SUNDAY WORKSHOP
TBA (sub. due 2/9)

2/25 | POETRY AT THE POINT
Beth Gordon, Susie Morice & Agnes Vojta

3/1 | SUBMISSIONS DUE Hopkins High School Contest and SLPC Nash Contest

3/3 | OBSERVABLE READINGS
Justin Phillip Reed & Diana Khoi Nguyen

3/15 | SUNDAY WORKSHOP
Kathryn Nuernberger & Jenny Molberg (submissions due 3/8)

3/24 | POETRY AT THE POINT
Jo Schaper, Phillip McClenton & Steve Nagle

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ted Mathys
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Jennifer Adams

Dana Levin

Nancy Powers Pritchard

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Erin Quick*

Jason N. Vasser-Elong

Glendal Wallace

Amanda Wells

**ex officio, non-voting*

*Thank you to the following whose board term ended recently. We appreciate his service:
Joshua Kryah*

STAFF

Erin Quick
Executive Director



Welcome Dana Levin, new St. Louis Poetry Center Board Member

Dana Levin is the author of four books of poetry, including *Banana Palace*, a finalist for the Rilke Prize. A grateful recipient of honors from the NEA, PEN, and the Rona Jaffe, Whiting, and Guggenheim Foundations, she serves as Distinguished Writer in Residence at Maryville

University in St. Louis. Dana is honored to join the board of the venerable SLPC, oldest poetry center west of the Mississippi. She's excited about collaboration and invention for future SLPC programming.

RIVER STYX READING SERIES

January 20
High Low
7 p.m.



Kathryn Davis



Alison C. Rollins



Jeffrey Thomson

St. Louis Poetry Center is excited to partner with River Styx in support of their January reading.

HIGH LOW
LITERARY ARTS CAFE

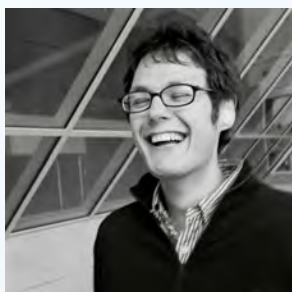


ST. LOUIS POETRY CENTER'S 2020 JAMES H. NASH POETRY CONTEST

First Prize: \$500
2 honorable mentions

First place winner will receive a newsletter feature. First place and honorable mentions will all receive a website feature, and will be published in and receive a free copy of St. Louis Poetry Center's annual chapbook.

2020 Contest Judge:



Ilya Kaminsky

Ilya Kaminsky was born in Odessa, former USSR, now Ukraine. He is the author of two books: *Deaf Republic* (Graywolf), a finalist for the 2019 National Book Award in Poetry, and *Dancing in Odessa* (Tupelo). He has served as co-editor and/or co-translator of *Ecco Anthology of International Poetry* (Harper Collins), *Dark Elderberry Branch: Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva* (Alice James) and many other books. His work has appeared in *New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Best American Poetry Anthologies* and elsewhere, and has received many honors, including the Whiting Writer's Award, the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Metcalf Award, the Dorset Prize, a Ruth Lilly Fellowship, and the *Foreword Magazine's* Best Poetry Book of the Year award. His poems have been translated into numerous languages and his books have been published in many countries including Turkey, Holland, Russia, France, Mexico, Macedonia, Romania, Spain and China, where his poetry was awarded the Yinchuan International Poetry Prize. He lives and teaches in Atlanta.

Guidelines

- Open to all current SLPC members, and to current residents or students in the St. Louis metro area living within a 100-mile radius of St. Louis City
- Submit up to 2 typed poems per entry, any form and length
- Simultaneous submissions are allowed, but previously published or award-winning poems are not eligible (including those that have appeared on social media, websites, blogs, etc)
- Additional poems will be accepted with additional entry fees
- Entry fee is \$10, make checks payable to St. Louis Poetry Center (NOTE: entry fee waived for current SLPC members, free entry with new/renewed membership)
- Enclose a cover sheet that includes: name, address, phone number, email address and the titles of the poems submitted
- Name and address on cover sheet only, no identifying information on poems
- Contest results will be announced in **April** (NOTE: to be notified by mail, include self-addressed stamped envelope with entry)

First place and honorable mentions are invited to read their poems at St. Louis Poetry Center's annual Poetry Concert.

How to Enter

Submit entries online at:
www.stlouispoetrycenter.org/nash-contest

Submit entries by email* at:
nash.contest@stlouispoetrycenter.org

Mail entries with entry fee and SASE to:
St. Louis Poetry Center
Nash Poetry Contest
3301 Washington Ave. 2D
St. Louis, MO 63103

Entry Fee: \$10 (free for SLPC members)

**If emailing submissions, please attach poems & information sheet as separate Word or PDF documents. Include a copy of your entry fee receipt or new/renewed membership receipt with your poems (if applicable).*

**ONLINE, EMAIL & POSTMARK
DEADLINE: March 1, 2020**

For more information:
www.stlouispoetrycenter.org/nash-contest

Sunday Workshops

NEW VENUE!

High Low

Conference Room 3301
Washington Ave. St.
Louis, MO 63103

St. Louis Poetry Center's signature program, the Sunday Workshops are lead by a guest poet critic, who provides critique on a selection of pre-submitted poems. All poems submitted will receive written comments.

Guidelines: Submit one poem, one page in length. Provide name, mailing address, and email address. Those submitting poems are expected to attend the workshop.

To submit poems by mail:
Workshop Submission
St. Louis Poetry Center
3301 Washington Ave. 2D
St. Louis, MO 63103

To submit poems by email:
sunday.workshop@stlouispocetrycenter.org
"Workshop Submission" in subject line
Attachment as PDF or Word document

January 19

(submissions due January 12)

1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.



ALISON C. ROLLINS

Alison C. Rollins, born and raised in St. Louis city, currently works as the Lead Teaching and Learning Librarian for Colorado College. She is a 2019 National Endowment for the Arts Literature fellow. Her poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Indiana Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Poetry*, *The Poetry Review*, *TriQuarterly*, and elsewhere. A Cave Canem and Callaloo fellow, she is also a 2016 recipient of the Poetry Foundation's Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship. In 2018 she was the recipient of a Rona Jaffe Writers' Award. Her debut poetry collection, *Library of Small Catastrophes* (Copper Canyon Press) is available now.

February 16

(submissions due February 9)

1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

POET CRITIC TBA

HIGH LOW

LITERARY ARTS CAFE

OBSERVABLE

NEW VENUE!

High Low

Listening Room

3301 Washington, 63103
Grand Center Arts District

Curators:

Jeff Hamilton
and Joshua Kryah

Donations of
\$5 welcome

Please note:

Venue is wheelchair
accessible

February 3



TJ JARRETT

TJ Jarrett received a BA from Wellesley College and an MFA from Bennington Writing Seminars. She is the author of *Zion* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2014), winner of the Crab Orchard Open Competition, and *Ain't No Grave* (New Issues Press, 2013). She works in software development and lives in Nashville, Tennessee.



GILLIAN PARRISH

Gillian Parrish is an assistant professor in the MFA in Writing program at Lindenwood University in St. Louis where she directs the visiting author series. The author of a book of poems, *of rain and nettles wove* (Singing Horse Press), and a co-translator of *Long River* (Tinfish Press), a collection by contemporary Chinese poet Yang Jian, Gillian's creative work has appeared in various journals and anthologies including *They Said: An Anthology of Collaborative Writing* (Black Lawrence Press) and *Counter-Desecration: A Glossary for Writing in the Anthropocene* (Wesleyan University Press). A chapbook, *cold spell*, will appear soon from the DUSIE Kollektiv, and an essay is forthcoming in *Far Villages: Welcome Essays for New or Beginner Poets*.

HIGH LOW

LITERARY ARTS CAFE

Poetry at the Point

The Focal Point, 2720 Sutton Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63143

The fourth Tuesday of every month
Reading at 7:30 p.m.

Curator: Andrea Scarpino

poetry.point@stlouispoetrycenter.org

January 28

DWIGHT BITIKOFER



Dwight Bitikofer is a St. Louis poet and publisher. Bitikofer's poems have been published in *Natural Bridge*, *Oberon*, *Crossing the Divide* and elsewhere. Bitikofer also does "Po-Jazz" performances with local jazz artist Raven Wolf. A world traveler, Bitikofer is a native of a central Kansas farm his grandfather began around 1910. These roots have influenced many of his poems.

TED MATHYS



Ted Mathys is the author of *Null Set*. A new collection, *Gold Cure*, is forthcoming in 2020. The recipient of fellowships and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and St. Louis Regional Arts Commission, his work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *BOMB*, *Boston Review*, *PBS NewsHour*, and elsewhere. He teaches at Saint Louis University, curates the 100 Boots Poetry Series at Pulitzer Arts Foundation.

MARY RUTH DONNELLY



Mary Ruth Donnelly is author of *Weaving the Light* and *Tomb Figure*. Her work has appeared in *Sou'wester*, *Bad Shoe*, *Natural Bridge*, *River I-70 Review*, *The Scaldy Detail* (Ireland) and elsewhere, and in *Breathing Out*, produced by her women's poetry collective, Loosely Identified. She retired from Southwestern Illinois College, where she taught literature and rhetoric.

ROBERT LOWES



Robert Lowes is a poet whose work has appeared *The New Republic*, *The Christian Century*, *Big Muddy*, *December*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, and elsewhere, as well as *Floodstage: An Anthology of St. Louis Poets*. He coordinates St. Louis Poetry Center's high school poetry contest. A free-lance journalist and newbie guitarist, Robert lives with his wife Sandra and their notorious tomcat Jerry in University City, MO.

KEITH BYLER



Keith Byler is a native St. Louisan and a mostly retired physician who spent ten years in Emergency Medicine and 20 years in private practice. His writing is often informed by his professional experiences as well as his love of the natural world. His poems have appeared in *Emergency: True Stories From the Nation's E.R.'s*, *Hurricane Blues*, *Margie*, *Untamed Ink*, *Floodstage*, *Thema*, as well as his medical school newspaper, *Still Kickin'*. He is also a winner of the Metro Arts in Transit 2008 Poetry in Motion contest.

February 25

BETH GORDON



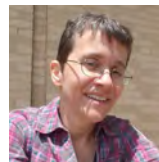
Beth Gordon is a poet, mother and grandmother. She recently left St. Louis, MO after 19 years and now resides in Asheville, NC. Her poems have been nominated for Best of the Net and *Pushcart*; and published in numerous journals including *Into the Void*, *Noble/Gas*, *Five:2:One*, *SWWIM*, *Verity La*, *Califragile*, *Pretty Owl Poetry* and *Yes Poetry*. She is the author of the chapbook *Morning Walk with Dead Possum*, *Breakfast and Parallel Universe*, published by Animal Heart Press. She is also the Poetry Editor of *Gone Lawn*.

SUSIE MORICE



Susie is kin to avid readers, artists, and musicians, contributing to her love of wordplay. She writes music and lyrics that she twangs on her Martin guitar and has written oodles of educational baloney, continuing to do that for the Santa Fe Center for Transformational School Leadership and the Institute for School Partnership at Wash U. But it is when she takes to the page to craft images for poems that she puts voice to her growing up on a farm, her travels, and a lifetime of learning. She's been hooked on poetry since 8th grade, winning slots in three categories in the Missouri State Poetry Society's 2014 Winter Contest.

AGNES VOJTA



Agnes Vojta grew up in Germany and now lives in Rolla, Missouri where she teaches physics at Missouri S&T. She is the author of *Porous Land* (Spartan Press, 2019). Her poems recently appeared in *Red River Review*, *Minute Magazine*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *The Blue Nib*, *As It Ought To Be Magazine*, *Former People*, *Gasconade Review*, *Thimble Literary Magazine* and elsewhere.



(conversation with Ibur continued)

And these would be workshops where you read your poems, and the students read theirs?

Absolutely.

As opposed to “Here’s our star, sit back and listen.”

Uh huh. I have enough poems that I can read different ones every night for 20 years, but I don’t need to do that.

The last couple of years my pace has been cut down to doing workshops with vets with post-traumatic stress syndrome and depression at Jefferson Barracks (Veterans Administration hospital). Those are some of the people I want to get up to the mic. I think their therapist suggested that they take a creative writing class. I’m sure some of them came thinking “What is this nonsense?” And then it changed their lives.

What kind of exercises do you give them?

The same I do with anybody else. I teach formal poetry with high expectations. I treat everybody like a poet, like they’re intending to be a poet.

I’ll say, “Today we’ll write a pantoum.” I’ll give them a subject, and let them mind-map their way out of it. I don’t care if they stay on the subject. I care if they get some words on paper. I give them templates for all these forms that they can follow. I give them time to write it. They’re writing in class and they have to read it in class, too. And they’re writing first drafts. A lot of the work of poetry is revision, so I encourage all of them to bring their poems back in (to the next class), and we can work on it.

What’s the change you’ve seen in your vet students?

They might come in beaten down, head lowered. Then they write something, and read it to the class and get all this support, and their face changes. They’re lighter. It doesn’t mean the heaviness isn’t there. It means they have a place to channel it. They are lighter. Because they’re getting it out and sculpting it. Then it’s the poem. It’s not them. They’re smiling while they’re writing this heavy stuff, because they’re getting it out and they like what they’re writing.

They’re saying things they never expected to say?

That is the point. At the end of the day you have written something that surprises you.

Part of what’s healing is doing it together. I can’t tell you what a rush it is to write with a group of people, and to get to know them. I feel like I write my best stuff then.

You’ve said in various interviews that poetry saved your life. What does that mean?

I have lived my life with the parasitic twin of depression.

Join the club. I’ve struggled with it all my life, too.

It’s a bitch, man. Poetry saved my life, but I couldn’t keep it to myself. It gave me this vision of seeing other people who had a dark passenger, you know, and I wanted to give them the gift of poetry. I’m like a poetry missionary.

Besides conducting workshops with vets and inmates, you’ve taught elementary school kids how to write poetry. What’s that like?

I once took a class of third, fourth, and fifth graders (in North County) to Tahiti to teach them about figures of speech. I went in wearing a cape and I had this wand that lights up. Where is Tahiti on the map? What kind of geography does it have? Let’s talk about fish. How big is a humpback whale? I’d teach them about similes that way. And then they had to become some kind of sea creature. They had to draw and color it. They had to describe it in a poem. It was magic. It was crazy. Kids were checking out books on underwater stuff from the bookmobile. Those kids are unlikely to go to Tahiti, and yet they went there with me.

What advice would you give to teachers about teaching poetry?

Take a writing workshop. Do it. Just don’t teach it. Do it. Then you can understand some of the problems that (students) might have. And read poetry. Maybe every teacher should get Poetry 180, edited by Billy Collins. It’s an anthology that can turn you on to poets that you might not have heard of. You will find somebody that you can identify with.

(interview continued on p. 7)

Know a young poet?

Submissions are now open for St. Louis Poetry Center’s
2020 Beverly Hopkins Memorial Poetry Contest for High School Students

FIRST PRIZE \$225
SECOND PRIZE \$125
THIRD PRIZE \$75

Contest coordinated by Robert Lowes, hopkins.contest@stlouispoetrycenter.org
For more info and submission guidelines: stlouispoetrycenter.org/hopkins-contest



JUDGE:
Jericho Brown
SUBMISSION DEADLINE:
March 1, 2020

(conversation with Ibur continued)

I wonder whether public school teachers who must “teach to the test” have any time and energy left over for creative writing.

I think teachers in public schools are heroes. They should be honored and be paid what they're worth. They should exchange pay with professional athletes. My hat is off to every teacher that struggles to teach poetry, and may not have time to go to workshops.

You've been associated with the St. Louis Poetry Center for many years. What advice do you have for this organization as it continues to pursue its goal of cultivating poets, and audiences for poetry?

Be aggressive about getting poets into the schools. And let them be themselves so kids can see individual people. We are not poetry robots. It's exciting to see different people come into the classroom—a variety of ages, styles, and races. One visit can do it. It can turn somebody on.

Kudos

Walter Bargan has several poems recently published: “A Mouse of Trouble” in *I-70 Review*, “Realpolitik” in *The American Journal of Poetry*, and “Which brings us to one certainty...” in *Vox Populi*. His book *Until Next Time* was published in October 2019 by Singing Bone Press.

María T. Balogh's poem was one of the winners of the 2019 MetroLines Poetry Contest.

Katelyn Delvaux has a poem forthcoming in *Thimble Literary Magazine*.

Marie Chewe Elliot's poem was one of the winners of the 2019 MetroLines Poetry Contest.

Robert Lowe's debut collection of poetry *An Honest Hunger* is forthcoming in fall 2020 from Wipf & Stock Press.

Ted Mathys's new collection of poetry *Gold Cure* is forthcoming in fall 2020 from Coffee House Press.

Paul Stroble's poem was one of the winners of the 2019 MetroLines Poetry Contest. His new collection *Walking Lorton Bluff* is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Community Readings and Events

MetroLines Poetry Bash Feb. 11, 5:30 p.m. at High Low, 3301 Washington Ave., St. Louis 63103, Free. Readers include the winners of the 2019 MetroLines poetry contest and featured poet Jane Ellen Ibur.

Poetic Justice Open Mic - 2020 Kickoff. Jan. 26, 7:30 p.m. at High Low, 3301 Washington Ave., St. Louis 63103. Hosted by Corey Black, vibes by Michael Franco. \$15, tickets available for purchase through Metrotix.

River Styx Reading Series. Jan. 20, and Feb. 17, 7:00 p.m. High Low, 3301 Washington Ave., Admission \$5. Reading on Jan. 20: Kathryn Davis, Alison C. Rollins & Jeffrey Thomson. Reading on Feb. 17: Natalie Scenters-Zapico & Alan Shapiro.

Spartan Press Showcase. Feb. 23, 5:00 p.m. at CBGB, 3163 South Grand, Free. Readers include: Jason Ryberg, Jeanette Powers, Jim McGowin, Daniel W. Wright, Stefene Russell, Mackenzie Thorn & Denmark Lane.

Stone's Salon. Feb. 13, 7:00 p.m. at High Low, 3301 Washington Ave. A monthly gathering of writers, musicians and educators from St. Louis and beyond curated and hosted by Rabbi James Stone Goodman. Free.

Erin Wiles book launch - *Angels Drive All My Ubers*. Jan. 30, 6:00 p.m. at Dunaway Books, 3111 S. Grand Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63118. Free.

Open Mics

Every Monday - Venice Café, 1903 Pestalozzi. 9 p.m. 21 and over.

Every Tuesday - Acoustic music and spoken word open mic at The Wolf, 15480 Clayton Road, Ballwin. 7 p.m. Hosted by Steve Perron.

Every Wednesday - Stone Spiral Coffee & Curios. Poetry and music in Maplewood at 2500 Sutton Blvd. 8 p.m.

Every Last Sunday - Poetic Justice, venues vary monthly. Hosted by Corey Black. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. \$15-\$25 ticket price.

Quarterly - St. Louis Writers Guild has a poetry and prose open mic at Novel Neighbor, 7905 Big Bend Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63119. 7 p.m.



St. Louis Poetry Center
 3301 Washington Ave. 2D
 St. Louis, MO 63103
www.stlouispoetrycenter.org

Sign up for email updates at eblast@stlouispoetrycenter.org

JOIN ST. LOUIS POETRY CENTER

SLPC Membership benefits include:

- **Submit to SLPC’s Annual James H. Nash Contest and its Annual Concert**
 - **Online and newsletter professional event promotions**
 - **Reduced registration rates for fee workshops**
 - **Other benefits vary depending on membership level**
- Student \$15 (available to full-time students)
 - Young Friend \$30 (available to ages 18-35)
 - Individual/Senior \$50/\$45
 - Professional Poet \$75
 - Benefactor \$100 - \$499
 - Laureate \$500 - \$999
 - President’s Society \$1000 - \$2,499
 - Loy Ledbetter Society \$2,500+
 - I would like to provide additional support to this historic organization. Please receive my tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____.
 - Please receive my tax-deductible donation of \$ _____ in (memory of / honor of) _____.

Joining SLPC helps fund our various readings, workshops and outreach programs. Help us grow by mailing this form and a check payable to SLPC to: St. Louis Poetry Center, 3301 Washington Ave. 2D, St. Louis, MO 63103, or visit www.stlouispoetrycenter.org/ membership and use your credit card or PayPal account. Your donations are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

We hope you will consider making a recurring donation through our Monthly Giving Program. Monthly giving is an easy way to show your support while providing SLPC with sustaining funding throughout the year. Make your contribution today!

Monthly Giving Program \$ _____ /month*

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Email _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

* See new monthly giving options at stlouispoetrycenter.org/membership