

WELL-VERSED

PAGE 15 WILL SHOWCASE YOUNG POETS IN PARRAMORE.

BY CATHERINE HINMAN

Poetry in Parramore? You bet! On Friday, March 13, in the historically African American neighborhood of Parramore, passers-by on Terry Avenue will hear a cadence of recitations emanating from the front porch of The Monroe—a restaurant that boasts a 4,000-square-foot covered outdoor patio.

The lunchtime event, slated for 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., is Page 15's fifth-annual Pop-Up Poetry in Parramore celebration—a showcase of youthful talent that the creative-writing nonprofit has nurtured throughout the school year. Guests may register for free (but limited) tickets on the organization's website.

"These are young people living in Parramore with a variety of different challenges," says Julia Young, Page 15's founder and executive director. "To hear their poetry—and so much of it is inspiring and uplifting and positive—your faith in humanity is just restored."

Last year's event drew about 150 people, including students, educators, board members, donors and friends. And these days, Page 15 has a lot of friends.

Young—an Orlando native with a bachelor's degree in business from Tulane University and a heart for kids, books and philanthropy—founded Page 15 in 2008. She named her program in honor of her grandmother, a fellow reader whose rule was to never abandon a book until she had read at least through page—well, you can probably guess the number.

Page 15 was originally supported by the Urban Think Foundation, named for the Urban Think! Bookstore, which was an eclectic independent bookseller in Downtown Orlando that closed in 2010. In the beginning, Young's tiny band of writing educators were truly Parramore pioneers.

But as Orlando's intensive revitalization strategy for the underserved downtown neighborhood has taken hold in the last decade, Page 15 has been able to strengthen and focus its efforts through new relationships.

The organization's program space at Orlando's Downtown Recreation Center, where it all began, is within walking distance of Orange County Public School's Academic Center for Excellence, a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade community partnership school that opened in 2017. Most of the kids in Page 15's after-school program, the Young Writers Society, come from ACE.

The University of Central Florida, which opened a shared campus with Valencia College in Parramore in 2019, provides space for Page 15's summer camps, as well as a generous stream of volunteers and interns. UCF's Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA) prints books for Page 15.

The Monroe restaurant, where Pop-Up Poetry is staged, supports Page 15 by providing the event space. It's part of Creative Village—an ambitious mixed-use development



At Pop-Up Poetry on Parramore, on-the-fly "typewriter poet" Marquis Lee (above) will help Page 15 founder Julia Young (facing page) gather thoughts and phrases from attendees for a collaborative poem to be read at the end of the event. Young, who has a heart for kids, books and philanthropy, started Page 15 in 2008.

around the 2.3-acre Luminary Green Park—that completed its first phase in 2022.

Developer Craig Ustler, who's in partnership with the City of Orlando, is building Creative Village on the former site of the Amway Arena and has been a big supporter of Page 15. "It's exciting to be the only ones," says Young. "On the other hand, it's really tough."

The Pop-Up Poetry program includes lunch and presentations that are planned—but in a loose sort of way. Readings will include those by young people whose work may have been published in Page 15's annual anthology or who are members of the creative writing class at Evans High School, with whom Page 15's staff and volunteers work.

But others in the audience participate, too. In 2025, Orlando's District 5 Commissioner Shan Rose read a poem. The city's poet laureate, Camara Gaither, is always a special guest.

Also this year, with the help of Marquis Lee, Orlando's poetry-on-the-fly "typewriter poet," Young plans to collect thoughts, phrases and words from the audience to create a collaborative poem that will be read at the end of the event.

Page 15 works with young people on all forms of creative expression, but Young says poetry is the best medium for a public presentation. "Poetry is very accessible to people," she says. "It doesn't have to be this formal relationship to sonnets and stanzas."



COURTESY PAGE 15



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Page 15 today has a staff of five as well as many volunteer writing coaches. In 2024, it served more than 600 youth, primarily from ACE as well as Evans and Jones high schools, through its in-school and after-school programs and summer camps. It has moved its offices to the Grand Avenue Neighborhood Center, which was previously Grand Avenue Elementary School, built in 1926 and renovated in 2022.

The March Pop-Up Poetry event is not the first time the students stand up before a group to read—though this one may be their largest audience. Every teaching session includes writing, editing and readings before their peers, says Page 15 Program Director Paul Driscoll, who describes it as “creative communion.”

Sharing provides motivation and validation, he says, and builds empathy while establishing human connection. “These little moments really change the trajectory of a life,” he notes.

Driscoll came to the organization 11 years ago after 14 years at Lake Highland Preparatory School. There he taught mostly eighth-graders who came to class with advanced verbal skills. He took his years of experience and teaching methodology to Page 15 for the “kids who really need it.”

But jumping in wasn't as easy as he had imagined. He

first had to build trust and establish an environment of acceptance. No one is graded. Hopes, dreams and emotions (happy or sad) are all valid subjects. He found his charges bursting with unrealized potential.

Says Driscoll: “All I am asking them is to be themselves out loud: Tell me how you feel and think and put it into words.” From the Writing Gallery on Page 15's website, here's how a student named Ja'Niya described Page 15 in an excerpt from a longer poem:

*A comfort place where I can relax
And let my stress out.
The same comfort place where I
Write little poems I love.*

Writing is a journey of self-discovery, notes Driscoll. Once Page 15's young literary artists feel safe, there's no holding them back. Pop-Up Poetry in Parramore is always evidence of that. “I think we have some of the best poets in the country, and they are eighth-, ninth- and tenth-graders,” he adds.

For more information about Page 15 or Pop-Up Poetry in Parramore, call 407.422.8755 or visit page15.org. ■