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Publishing insiders head to Austin to scoop up talent

Writers' League of Texas Conference does for writers what SXSW has done for musicians

Austin, TX – For decades, Austin has been the muse of many a songwriter, launching careers of aspiring artists at South by Southwest and the Austin City Limits Music Festival. Already widely renowned for its music scene, Austin now turns its focus to another area of the arts – its literary prowess, which is garnering national attention.

Aspiring Texas writers have historically headed to the Big Apple to shop their manuscripts to publishing powerhouses, but now the tables have turned. Thanks to the success of other homegrown writers – Lawrence Wright, Sarah Bird, Kinky Friedman and Bookslut's Jessa Crispin, to name a few – the Texas Book Festival, and a well-connected writers' community, publishing insiders around the country are finally tuning into Austin.

On June 20-22 at the Writers' League of Texas (WLT) annual Agents & Editors Conference in Austin, aspiring literary stars will get their chance. The conference attracts top talent from around the industry, providing authors coveted one-on-ones with publishing insiders, the chance to network with fellow writers, and maybe even a book deal.

"Agents and editors regularly tell us how impressed they are with the level of talent and the quality of writing that they find here in Austin, and this keeps them coming back," says John Pipkin, WLT Executive Director. "The conference has become an important recruitment and networking tool for many agents who are looking for new talent."

This year's conference features Sara Nelson, Editor-in-Chief of *Publishers Weekly*, as the keynote speaker; editors from Crown Publishers, Thomas Dunne Books, and Seal Press; literary agents from Sterling Lord, TriadaUS, Full Circle Literary Management and other top agencies; as well as 350 aspiring authors. Programs will include lectures by agents and editors and panel discussions on a variety of literary topics. One panel, devoted to landing press for authors and their books, boasts industry media from *Publishers Weekly*, Mediabistro's GalleyCat blog, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Austin American-Statesman* and Austin's NPR affiliate, KUT-FM.

Now in its 15th year, the Agents & Editors Conference provides an educational forum where writers at any stage in their career can learn more about the publishing industry and how to achieve their literary goals. In addition to panels, lectures on a variety of writing and publishing topics are offered to attendees.

The 2008 conference will be Pipkin's last event in his current role. Like many authors in the WLT, Pipkin has been working on a novel, which was recently sold to Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. Stepping into the role executive director is Cyndi Hughes, who was founding director of the Texas Book Festival from 1996-2003 and is a longtime Austin literary advocate.

Since 1981, the WLT has promoted literacy and elevated the art of writing, benefiting both writers and readers. A non-profit corporation, it is funded in part by the City of Austin, Texas Commission on the Arts, and National Endowment for the Arts. With approximately 1,500 members nationwide, it is composed of published and unpublished writers as well as those who recognize the written word as art and simply love to read.

Advance registration is required for attendees. To register or for more information on the conference, visit the WLT website, <http://writersleague.org/events/conf.html>, or call the WLT office at 512-499-8914.

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