

Literary aspirations

Writers' Group meets at LBI branch of Ocean County Library

By **SUSAN BLOOM**
 For NJ Press Media

Margaret Hawke, 70, loved writing for a nursing magazine during her career and always dreamed about writing a novel. Upon her retirement, the Beach Haven resident joined a writing group in Barnegat but longed for a forum where members could get into more depth. So, in 2006, she started her own.

Five years later, the Writers' Group that Hawke founded is still going strong, meeting at the Long Beach Island branch of the Ocean County Library on the first and third Tuesdays of every month from November through April and weekly May to October.

"We usually have eight to 12 regulars who attend year-round and as many as 20 attendees in the summer months," Hawke said. "The group represents talented individuals of all ages, from college students to retirees, as well as writers of all types, from professional authors and editors to aspiring novelists, poets and bloggers. Everyone is welcome to join."

According to Hawke, each two-hour session is led by a different group member sharing a point of information, such as a writing technique, a new website or a personal development.

Members are then divided into two groups, where they're encouraged to read their work aloud, critique others' work, or just listen and learn.

"We discuss how we feel about each piece of writing and the imagery it evokes," Hawke said. "It's a very relaxed atmosphere, but we do have a few rules. For instance, we tell our members not to apologize for anything they've written, and also ask that members

refrain from critiquing someone's content. And of course, no talking while being critiqued."

The value of being part of the Writers' Group is acknowledged by Little Egg Harbor resident Barbara Blank. Though a bit hesitant to join two years ago, she said "the warm greeting I got from the people there made me feel at home immediately. The following meeting, I brought my first presentation and began a journey of discovery.

"The group's collective knowledge and experience has greatly improved my writing skills, and I've truly benefited from their critiques, which are offered in a positive manner," Blank said.

For group member Richard Morgan, 63, who joined shortly after he and wife, Pat, retired to Beach Haven in 2009, the group has provided the support and encouragement he needed to publish a book of poetry in June.

"The feedback I've gotten from others has definitely helped me develop as a writer," he said.

According to Blank, participation in the group also has offered many opportunities for personal development.

"Joining the Writers' Group has been one of the best things I've done for myself," she said, a sentiment which pleases no one more than founder Hawke.

"Everyone is so enthusiastic about what they're doing, and the group's chemistry is great," Hawke said. "I just love the dynamics and what I see happening here."

The Writers' Group meets at the Long Beach Island branch of the Ocean County Library, 217 S. Central Ave. in Surf City. For more information, contact the library at 609-494-2480.

UPCOMING EVENTS

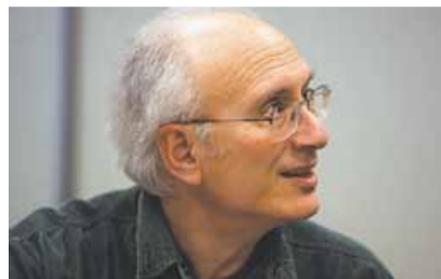
(Open to the public):

OPEN MIC NIGHT:

At 7 p.m. April 27, the Writers' Group will host an open mic night at the LBI branch of the Ocean County Library in Surf City. Attendees can read anything they've written to the group for up to five minutes.

WRITERS' WORKSHOP:

From 1 to 3 p.m. May 9 at the LBI branch of the Ocean County Library in Surf City, the Writers' Group and the Friends of the Island Library will offer a writers' workshop featuring guest speaker, editor and critic Kathryn Craft discussing tips to help writers "Get That Story Moving" and keep their readers hooked.



Richard Morgan of Beach Haven.



Kim Trotto of Little Egg Township.



Barbara Blank of Little Egg Harbor.



The writers' group looks over a member's work. (STAFF PHOTOS: TIM MCCARTHY)