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• Special to the Leader & Times Could a prize-winning poet be living just down the street from you? Come to the Poetry Coffeehouse Thursday and find out. The Coffeehouse, set for 7 p.m. Thursday at Seward County Community College/Area Technical School, will feature contest winners reading their poems aloud, live music, food, and, of course, coffee.

The college has sponsored a high school poetry contest in past years, but this is the first year to add a category for the general public, and the response was great, according to contest organizers Janice Northern and Bill McGlothing.

“We had 52 entries in the open category and 38 entries in the scholarship category,” said Northern, who teaches English at SCCC/ATS. “Some may think that interest in poetry is dying, but clearly we have a lot of folks who have something to say.

“As a reader and writer of poetry myself, that thrills me,” she added. “Poetry is meant to be shared. It started as an oral tradition, a way to share stories and history, and that’s just what our contestants are doing, sharing their stories.” Winners will be notified by late Monday and will be announced publically at the Coffeehouse. “

We were fortunate to secure a knowledgeable judge who is a talented writer, and I think he had his work cut out for him, Northern said.

Contest judge Michael Shewmaker of Lubbock, Texas, was recently awarded a prestigious Stegner Fellowship by Stanford University. Shewmaker is currently a PhD candidate in poetry and a part-time graduate instructor at Texas Tech University. He is also associate editor of the journal 32 Poems. Shewmaker has poems published or forthcoming in Southwest Review, The Dark Horse, The Southern Poetry Anthology, Yale Review, Sewanee Theological Review, Measure, American Arts Quarterly, and elsewhere.

In addition to reading their poetry, contest winners will take home some prizes. First and second-place winners in the scholarship category (for high school juniors and seniors) will each receive a \$100 SCCC/ATS scholarship. First through third places in both contests will be awarded cash and other prizes, including Pizza Hut and Spencer Browne’s coupons.

The Coffeehouse has always been well-attended, but Northern expects a bigger crowd may turn out this year because of the additional contest.

“I think folks will be in for a treat,” she said. “ We had all kinds of entries: rhyming, non-rhyming, narrative, lyrical, free verse, sad and funny poems. This will not be a stuffy evening.”

Winners to read at Poetry Coffeehouse Thursday; public invited

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In addition to contest winners, several SCCC/ATS students will read poetry and provide live music. Hot and iced coffee, lemonade and gourmet hors d'oeuvres will be served.

The Poetry Coffeehouse will begin at 7 p.m. Thursday in the music wing of the Shank Humanities Building on the main SCCC/ATS campus. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call Terri Barnes at 620-417-1451.

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