

Stet

Independent Writers of Chicago

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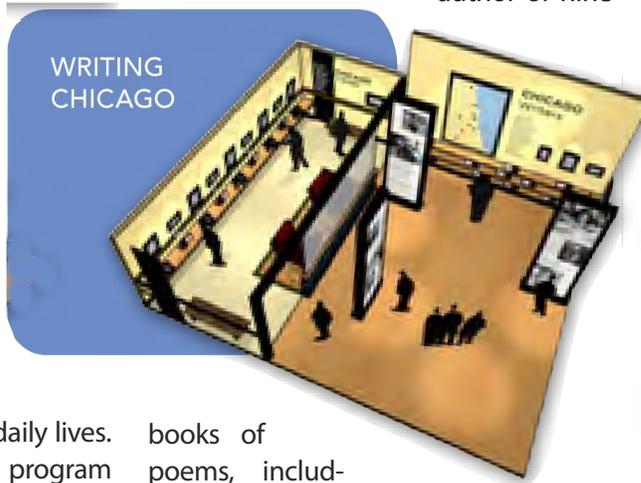
MARCH MEETING PREVIEW

Chicago Scores New American Writers Museum

In 1920, H.L. Mencken wrote in a magazine that Chicago is the "Literary Capital of the United States." Nearly a century later, Mencken's pronouncement is going to be reaffirmed with bricks and mortar. Chicago will be home to the first national museum in the United States dedicated to American writers — the American Writers Museum. The museum will be dedicated to engaging the public in celebrating American writers and exploring their influence on our history, our identity, our culture, and our daily lives. Come to the March 11, IWOC program for an insider's view of conceptual plans for the museum. (Drawing above is an early rendering of the Chicago room.) The program features American Writer's Museum Executive Director Nike Whitcomb and the Chair of the Chicago Literary Council, Reginald Gibbons.

Nike (pronounced Nicky) Whitcomb is a highly-regarded advocate for nonprofits in every sector, serving as consultant, feasibility expert, and fundraiser for many arts and cultural institutions. Fundraising is her immediate, chief duty with

the writer's museum. Gibbons, recipient of literary honors and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and others, is author of nine



books of poems, including *Creatures of a Day*, *Slow Trains Overhead* and *Chicago Poems and Stories*. He also is a professor of arts and humanities at Northwestern University.

Whitcomb assures us that writers past and present and all genres of writing will be represented in the museum. "We're looking for temporary space for the first five years or so," adds Whitcomb. "We're hoping to be open late 2015 or early 2016. All of that is dependent on

fund-raising." Space is being considered along or near Michigan Avenue.

For the year ahead, the American Writers Museum is developing some popup exhibits and is partnering with the Chicago Historical Society on an exhibit about Chicago authors. When the writer's museum opens, it will have dynamic state-of-the-art exhibits, theater space, and meeting rooms. Chicago writing clubs and organizations like IWOC will be able to do author readings, book signings, and other events.

The March program is a chance for IWOC members not only to learn about plans for the museum but also to get involved as museum members, volunteers, or fund raisers. Whitcomb also has been asked to speak about opportunities for freelance writers in the philanthropy field. Based on her experience consulting with hundreds of organizations, she says freelancers were used 20 percent of the time to write the case-for-support and similar materials.

Don't miss this program to learn about what is sure to become a first-rate cultural attraction for the city of Chicago and

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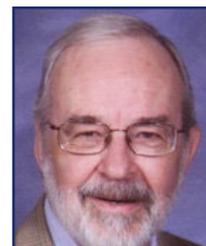
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Talk to Us!



I'm about halfway through my term as your IWOC president, and I'm a bit puzzled: I don't really know what you want. I don't know how you want IWOC to serve you. Short of making a hundred or so phone calls, I have no good way to hear from you other than via our website.

I have the troubling feeling there may be several members who regard our organization's leadership as (1) closed, (2) distant, (3) irrelevant, (4) mired in the past, (5) all of the above. I'm stumped when it comes to breaking out of the 20/80 mold, in which 20 percent of the members participate and 80 percent just kind of ride along.

I truly regret that there are so many members whose profiles I read in the directory but about whom I know nothing more. I've seen names of some people listed for more than a decade, but I still have never met them — and I've attended IWOC programs and events regularly for more than 30 years. I suspect other board members are in the same boat.

Don't be concerned that someone is going to pounce on you and drag you kicking and screaming toward serving on a committee. All of us on the board would like some assurance, though, that we're doing what

you want us to do, that you're satisfied with the benefits we've put together: the monthly newsletter, the programs, whatever. You can find the names of all the board members on the Stet masthead; drop one of them a line and tell them you're out there.

For those of you who haven't attended a meeting in a while, what would get you downtown? Or is downtown too far to go? We tried moving some

We Need Your Help

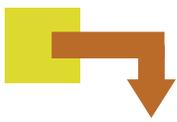


meetings around to various suburbs some time ago, but eventually abandoned the effort — and it was an effort — because after more than a year, it didn't appear to be working. It failed to bring

distant or new members into the larger group and did nothing to forge connections between the few who showed up at a suburban meeting and those who attended downtown meetings. Connections are what generate business. Obviously, we did it wrong. So if traveling into the city is a problem for those of you who live at some distance from midtown, what would you suggest? Are you interested in a traveling IWOC Road Show? Where, how often, and what would it be? Let us know.

How about the newsletter? You're reading it now; do you find it helpful and engaging? Is the format what you

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President's Column *CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2.*

expect from an organization like ours? Would you like to see your name in *Stet* occasionally in order to increase your Google hits?

Are there programs, activities, and events that other organizations you belong to provide that you'd like to see IWOC take a shot at? Should we offer workshops and seminars? If so, what topics would be most appealing to you?

Believe it or not, the board does actually talk about these things. We're serious about being responsive and making IWOC the kind of organization that provides what its members say they want and need. We've all committed to devoting an entire Saturday in May to planning what we're going to do during next year and the next two years and the next three years. Please be a part of that planning by sharing your ideas and suggestions with us. I promise we'll listen and not put you on a task force or a committee — although it's always nice to see a few volunteers.

Let me lead off by offering some thoughts of my own. See what you think of them.

It strikes me that perhaps we're focusing on the wrong audience. There are a number of other writers' organizations in greater Chicago competing for much the same audience. What if IWOC were to aim higher and direct its programming and activities toward writers who have been in the independent small business game for three, five, 10, or 15 years — a kind of graduate-level group of professional communicators rather than freelanc-

ers or staff persons who are just starting out and are looking for assignments just about anywhere they can find them?

We've devoted dozens of programs to those kinds of writers, people who hope to break in by accepting jobs that provide clips and credits but very little in the way of a living rate. We've had mentoring programs and student

now be used and reused in several applications. Democratization of publishing means that the content you create may find life in an annual report, collateral marketing piece, website, or tablet app. Former hourly rates and project estimates are probably no longer applicable. Do you know how to charge and protect your rights in new markets?

The profession has changed radically. The way we worked five years ago may not cut it with clients today. IWOC could be the vehicle that carries you across that bridge.

So what do you think? Is it time for IWOC to break out of our comfort zone and become a more relevant professional association? I've spoken with some members who were true stalwarts of the organization in years past but no longer participate in any IWOC activities. When I asked them why, they told me that they've moved on from working job to job. They now bill themselves as consultants and, using the basic skills that they learned from IWOC programs and fellow members, provide a far broader range of services to their clients — while charging rates they would never dreamed of charging when they first joined. One member (I'm not going to use names) landed a simple writing assignment through IWOC that over the years has led him into the top management ranks of a huge city agency where he now has a major proposal under review. Another refocused her writing skills into training programs that she presents all across the country. In my own case, my writing has morphed first into writing books and now into book publishing.

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Help IWOC focus on what we do that works

And refocus on new strategies for the future

outreach events. Maybe it's time to offer meatier programs that focus on acquiring collaborative tools, such as new technologies and strategic business practices, that will give independent practitioners a truly competitive edge.

Are you still using Microsoft Word exclusively? Have you tried Google Drive, which allows multiple users to work together in real time from remote locations? As you write are you tailoring your output for different platforms? Are you fluent in new terminologies; do you structure your writing differently from the way you did only a couple of years ago? What was once nothing more than a feature article may



Follow IWOC on Twitter

As you can see from the article below, Twitter can be much more than a vehicle for egocentrics to tell what they had for breakfast. Tweets can make things happen, and they can give you valuable information that you can act on instantly. Did you know that our webmaster immediately tweets every new job listed on Writers' Line? Anyone can see the tweets, but only members can access the job listings. Other important info gets tweeted too. To be up to the minute on IWOC's "breaking news," get a Twitter account if you don't have one, then follow IWOC using @IWOCWriter. To get WL tweets immediately so you can score that made-for-you job before anyone else does, turn on "mobile notifications," then follow the directions to set up your smartphone. ■

— The editor

All Aboard for a Free Writer-in-Residence Roundtrip

Amtrak has more enticements than pushing bloody Marys at 9 a.m., though they do that. The company has begun offering a tantalizing and unique — we do mean **unique** — opportunity for writers. It's mind-boggling! Amtrak recently started giving writers a *free* long-distance roundtrip on the train. The idea is that writers like writing, and they also like trains, so voila! put them together and you get a writer writing on a train. Well, yes, but what's in it for Amtrak?

"What does one have to write," you say suspiciously. Well, actually nothing. Amtrak wants this to be an "organic experience" so there's no real writing requirement. But if you're not a social-media maven, you'd better become one fast. Though the details have yet to be firmed up, the plan seems to be that the writer will be mainlining the social media during the trip. Tweeting, Facebooking, etc., while merrily riding

the rails will give Amtrak lots of friendly and free PR.

Here's what we know about this gig so far: Amtrak believes a train is a "creative environment," so presumably a clever writer will bombard Twitter and other social media venues with nicely worded comments about the joys of the trip. But Amtrak won't require the writer to write something for publication or even anything train-related. (New York City-based writer Jessica Gross, the woman who took the guinea-pig ride, did, however, write an article for *The Paris Review*.) But Amtrak says the goal is to build a "mutually beneficial relationship with the writer." All they ask is that said writer send out a few tweets while on the train and do an interview for the company's blog at the end of the trip.

Amtrak clearly wants folks with a knack for words, but the company doesn't care

what kind of writing background the writer has or whether he/she has been published. Julia Quinn, social media director for Amtrak, says "the difference between a journalist, a published author, a blogger — those lines are continually blurred by the Internet." It's the tweets and the after-trip interview that count, you see. Hence, Amtrak's lack of interest in what one writes or even *if* one writes, while choo-chooing along.

Apparently, the writer can choose any long-ride destination to which Amtrak connects, but it appears that one can't weasel a week's vacation in the Big Apple, for example. From what we've read, the traveler needs to hop aboard to return to the starting point as soon as possible.

At the moment, the writer-in-residence program is free, and Quinn says they hope to keep it that way, but Amtrak's bottom line could dictate low-cost if it becomes necessary.

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IWOCers Get Blogging Tips from a Pro

To blog or not to blog? Is it the platform for you?

Blogs can offer writers and other professionals many opportunities to increase their visibility, credibility, and income potential. But, as IWOC member and speaker Barbara Barnett explained at the February 11



IWOC meeting, whether you choose to create a blog or a different online platform, be ready to Engage, Amplify, Buzzify™.

How to Get Started

Ask yourself why you want to establish your own blog. Don't do it if it's for money, because you won't earn much from the blog itself. It's what you do with the blog in other areas that can lead to bucks. Don't be disappointed if you don't get much traffic, because fame (page views and "hits") usually come over time.

Some writers prefer contributing to online magazines rather than establishing and maintaining a blog.

- Blogs (or other online platforms you own) focus on a particular interest or expertise of yours. While your blog will evolve, start by determining your niche, passion, or a subject you really want to write about. As Barbara says, "Find your personal corner of the blogosphere and don't be afraid to experiment." Although you might not earn any money from a personal blog, you will control the content and approach.

- Online magazines, created and edited by journalists, offer you another opportunity to increase awareness and develop your credentials. While you cannot control the content, and you probably won't be paid any bucks, "You are," as they say, "what you publish."

To clarify the difference between an online platform and an online magazine:

An online platform, such as a blog, is your personal stage. You created and



programmed it; you own it; and you control the content and appearance. Barbara Barnett recommends WordPress as the easiest content management system for a blog.

An online magazine is simply a magazine that only appears on an online website. It may also complement a paper version, such as a newspaper or magazine. Writers and other professionals contribute articles that could increase their public visibility and the possibilities of paying assignments. However, the writers have no control over content and how it will finally appear after editing.

When creating a blog, start writing by identifying and talking to your targeted readers; establish common

ground and build on it. In other words, if you want your blog to lead to paying assignments, Barnett suggests it's time for you to use social media to Engage, Amplify, Buzzify™.

Engage!

Engagement means making connections and being reciprocal. Look for forums, platforms, social media – Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Linked-In, Technorati, Digg, Delicious, Ezines, BlogTalkRadio, -- that you can contribute to with comments, guest posts, or interviews for your blog or online articles.

Amplify!

Explore the many opportunities to get your message out and spread the word on other social media such as BlogTalkRadio, YouTube, or Vimeo for your online videos or on specialty sites such as BlogHer. You can also develop an app for your blog (e.g., Google Apps).

Buzzify!

Start evangelizing and spreading the word, because "build it and they will come" does not apply to blogs.

Now, about Ads

Besides personal interaction on social media, you can earn more by monetizing your blog through ads you pay for and that appear on other sites. Check

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**IWOC WELCOMES
NEW MEMBER
ADRIENNE
LEVATINO**

Many veteran IWOCers are now applying their skills to large, comprehensive projects in which writing is still an important component but only part of much larger assignments.

Again, what do you think? Where do you want IWOC to go?

We've already incorporated new endeavors that I couldn't have dreamed would ever have happened when I first joined IWOC. We have a fantastic website. We're present on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. We're recording our programs and making them available as pod-



casts on our website. We'll present a workshop on writing press releases at the upcoming Creative Chicago Expo, which we'll record and present as a podcast. Have you checked out our podcasts? There are now three terrific recordings on our site: maximizing the potential of your LinkedIn profile, presented by Brandon Lewin; marketing your services, particularly with online resources, presented by Sue Koch; and becoming a successful blogger, presented by Barbara Barnett. You can listen and follow along with PowerPoint slides.

Please talk to us. Write to a couple board members (does anyone still use the phone?) and let them know what you want IWOC to do for you. ■

Wanted! Program Chair Volunteer(s)

Karen Schwartz has been our able program chair for a long time, but now she's in need of a respite. Ever thinking ahead, though, she has programs lined up until July. We're sending out an early call for someone to replace her. What's in it for you should you choose to accept this assignment? The satisfaction of doing something for an organization that's in the business of helping writers like you, of course, but you'll also get three free areas of expertise/specialties listings in your profile, plus you'll have higher visibility among other IWOCers, and that often leads to referrals.

You'll have a committee (past chair, Stewart Truelsen, Jim Hodl) to help you select topics and recruit speakers — the principal job of the committee — so you won't be going it alone. You can also augment the committee with people of your choice if you want to, or you can get someone to co-chair with you. The program people are not responsible for planning the Winter Holiday Party or IWOCFest.) Please consider volunteering for this post. Contact Karen Schwartz at writerKS@sbcglobal.net. ■

Stet Wants to Hear From You Too

Over the past few years, *Stet* has gone from a four-page, black-and-white, snail-mailed newsletter that contained little more than info about the previous, current, and upcoming meeting to one that's eight-pages (or more), full-color, and on-line-delivered. Plus, I've added lots of features and completely redesigned the look. But, do you read it? Sad to say, I know that some of you don't. Please tell me what would entice you to put eyeballs on it if you're one of those.



Here are some things I'd like to know from faithful readers and skippers alike: 1) Do you read it online or print it out? 2) What feature(s) do you like best? 3) What do you usually skip over? 4) What would you like to see more of, e.g., hardware/software reviews, tips for working with Word (or some other program), info about websites relevant to writers, more Mac-related articles, or what? Would you like a monthly profile on one of our members? Is the typeface a readable size and color?

I'm open to any and all suggestions. Please give me some feedback. This is *your* newsletter, and some of you do comment, but I know there are lots of terrific ideas out there in your vast and clever minds. So give 'em to me! ■

— The Editor



**GREG WAS NO LONGER
LIVING IN THE PAST.
HE WAS LIVING
IN THE PRESENT.**

Did you know...



Some fun facts about the merry month of March:

March gets its name from Mars, the Roman god of war. The first month of the year in the early Roman calendar marked the start of the fighting season. March 15th is the Ides of March and is associated with the assassination of Julius Caesar. Such brutality for a month that's supposed to go out like a lamb.

March Madness costs businesses approximately \$134 million in lost productivity. An estimated 3 million employees will watch three hours of the basketball tourney at work according to Challenger, Gray & Christmas. Hmmm, bracketology or work? Not a tough choice.

Read Across America Day is March 2nd, on Dr. Seuss' birthday. Theodor Geisel was caught drinking gin at Dartmouth by the dean, who fired Geisel from his editor's position at the university's humor magazine. He continued to contribute under the name Seuss. It's fun to have fun but you have to know how.

Drinking, parades, and general merrymaking on St. Patrick's Day began in America, not Ireland. St. Pat wasn't even Irish; he was a Brit. And the myth of his driving snakes out of Ireland has been debunked because the Emerald Isle is much too cold for the reptiles to exist there. An entire holiday built on lies. ■

— Katherine Mikkelsen

February Recap: IWOCers Get Blogging Tips from a Pro

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out Google's Business Solutions for AdSense, as well as pay-per-click approaches and Amazon Associates on Blogger.

How has this worked for Barnett?

- Barnett has been writing for almost 30 years.
- In 2005, she started following *House*, the TV show, writing essays about it on a "live journal," not the same as a blog.
- Her few hundred readers per day grew to thousands a day.
- In 2007, she applied to Blogcritics.org for an unpaid position on the online magazine. She was given access to writers of the show and became the most popular writer on Blogcritics.
- She also attracted a literary agent from New York who had been following her blog. In 2009 *Chasing Zebras*, her book about *House*, was published.

■ This success led to a paying position on Blogcritics in 2010, as well as two other books.

■ Besides working for Blogcritics and writing books, Barnett maintains two blogs: Let's Talk TV Live on BlogTalkRadio.com, as well as GrannyCentric.com.

Barnett explains that she knows bloggers whose content/focus and visibility lead to ongoing paying assignments and new opportunities. Other professionals (an accountant, for example) successfully repurpose their blog content into profits via self-publishing, article assignments, or books.

If you want more feedback, feel free to contact Barbara Barnett at: sas-mom1@gmail.com; 847-302-0895; BarbaraBarnett.com. Or click [HERE](#) to listen to a podcast of the entire program. ■

— Sally Chapralis

Remembering Nancy Parsegian



Longtime members of IWOC will be saddened to learn of the death of Nancy Parsegian in February.

Nancy joined IWOC in the early days. She was always an

extremely active member who could be counted on to help out whatever the task. A crackerjack editor, Nancy also set such a high standard as IWOC

treasurer, it was years before anyone would hear of her giving up the job.

When she retired, Nancy left IWOC, but many members still kept in touch. Some years ago, she moved to Ecuador with her son Philip Ruffolo and daughter-in-law Janice. Her e-mails from there had the same warmth and good humor we all remembered. Plus there were fascinating details of her new life there.

If you would like to get in touch with the family, send e-mails to Janice Ruffolo at j.ruffolo@nowif.net. ■

Another Worthwhile Software Utility for Writers

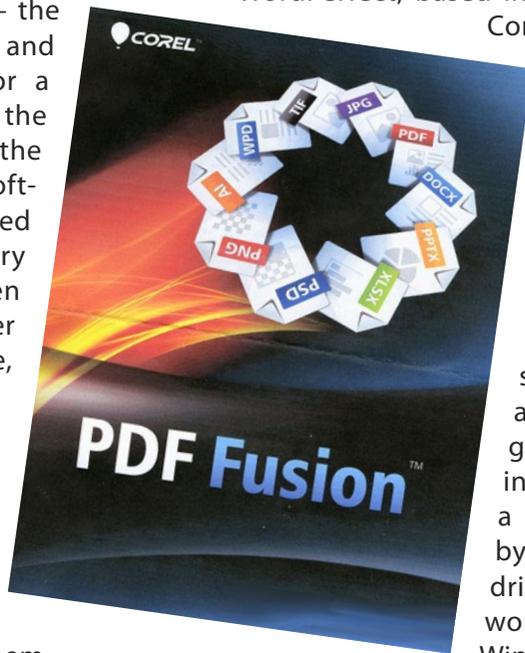
Corel PDF Fusion / Windows versions 8 to XP / \$70 list, as little as \$23 online vendor price / 2011 rev.

In today's document transmissions, files created by PDF (Portable Document Format) are the gold standard. This Adobe-developed program has proved to be invaluable when the objective is to send a document that exactly replicates the original regardless of the content — the layout, type faces, and even illustrations. For a good many years, the Reader element in the full Adobe Acrobat software package enjoyed an exclusive territory and especially so when the Adobe Reader was spun off as a free, downloadable utility.

But that was then and the landscape is different today. A whole collection of PDF readers serves the marketplace, and a good many of them are not only free but contain features not offered by Adobe's version. Two of them, tested and approved, are from Nitro and Foxit. But, there's more to just reading a transmitted document. There's the matter of creating a PDF file as well as editing what you receive. In these instances, you need more robust programs. Creating PDFs has become much easier in terms of convenience and cost because some word processing programs now include this as a "save" option. An early adopter, WordPerfect, has offered a PDF conversion for the past several versions of its office suite with a choice as to the level of exactness wanted. Four choices range from low file size (on-

line use) to very large file size (commercial printing). However, there are even more variations available for PDFs.

A particularly valuable utility happens not to be from Adobe but from Corel, the present-day developer of WordPerfect, based in Canada. It's



Corel PDF Fusion, only for Windows users but not limited as to any particular word processing program installed. It's a hefty program requiring more than a half-gigabyte of hard drive space but works with any Windows operating system from XP

ating on up. Included are three main sections — viewing, assembling, and editing, with each of them providing substantial capability. The View component can display content that was prepared from any of 100+ file formats whether or not the formats (text or image) are installed anywhere on the user's own software collection. It's possible to adjust both the page size and scrolling speed if you're perusing a lengthy document for certain portions.

The Assembly function is pure simplicity. You can select elements from a variety of documents, pasting them into a new page to create

a new document for almost any use — such as spreadsheets, projected presentations, etc — working with whatever formats in the originals you encounter. It's easily done by drag-and-drop operations. When finished, you then can save the file in either PDF, XPS, or DOC format, adding summary information and password protection if desired. It therefore follows that a multi-page document can be produced with the entire assembly rendered in one format, which permits sharing work using a common file choice. A batch-style converter allows for easy multi-page conversion when the project is complete and ready for transmission or publication.

Editing joins the above operations with a number of options. In addition to standard editing functions (change, comment, redact, highlight, strike-out, underline), the user can create hyperlinks, bookmarks, and watermarks. The depth of editing options doesn't equal that of the full Adobe Acrobat software but for users not directly engaged in the publication business it surely will suffice. And, considering the significant difference in purchase price, Corel PDF Fusion has a convincing argument for choosing it.

Support is available via the Corel website using the Q&A section or direct technical contact. As for "how-to" guidance, there is no printed user manual furnished even if you buy the CD rather than a download. It's available only via Internet access. Not surprising, it is of course downloadable as a PDF document. ■

— Richard L. Eastline

New American Writers Museum Board Amtrak and Ride Free

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1.



an inspiration to all present and future writers. Disregard what Mencken had to say about his own profession; he was such a cynic. He asked, “Why, then, do men and

women engage in so barbarous and exhausting a vocation? What keeps them from deserting it for trades that are less onerous, and, in the public eye, more respectable?” IWOC members are far more upbeat about their craft. Come to the meeting and see for yourself. Visitors are cordially invited on Tuesday, March 11. Networking with snacks and beverages begins at 5:00 p.m., followed by the program at 6:00 p.m. The meeting is free to IWOC members. Nonmembers



pay \$10 with online preregistration or \$15 at the door. After the meeting, all attendees are invited to join the group at a buy-your-own dinner at nearby Frankie’s Scalloppini, where we will continue to chat and network.

IWOC meetings are held in the Page Smith Room at the Gratz Center, 126 E. Chestnut, adjacent to the historic Fourth Presbyterian Church. Discounted parking is available after 5:00 p.m. (with validation coupon from the Gratz Center reception desk) at 900 N. Michigan Avenue. See you there! ■

— Stewart Truelsen

Board Amtrak and Ride Free

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4.

Though Quinn set up the program, it wasn’t her idea initially. It began with an interview with writer Alexander Chee in *Pen America* in which he said, “I still like a train best [for writing]. I wish Amtrak had residencies for writers.” The aforementioned first-rider Gross tweeted (to Amtrak) her mutual longing for such a program. Remarkably, Amtrak not only responded but also got on board with the idea. (Gross apparently was faster on the tweet than Chee because he has yet to take the ride, though he is signed up to go.

As one might expect, there’s already been tremendous interest in the program. So how does one apply? Right now, Amtrak is a social media program through-and-through, so writers and Amtrak meet through Twitter and start their negotiations from there. It’s possible that the company might later set up an online application portal or a panel to review applicants, but if you’re rarin’ to go, smooth out your feathers and tweet. All aboard! ■

— Joen Kinnan

“The road to hell is paved with works-in-progress.” — Philip Roth

In the next issue. . .



- **April 8, IWOC Monthly Meeting:** IWOCer Brent Brotine and Laurel Johnson will present a program on direct-mail marketing.
- **President’s column:** Don’t miss reading what’s on Jim Kepler’s mind. It’s always interesting and sometimes provocative.
- Helpful tips on software, hardware, and/or just plain biz practices, and much more.

