

'The Newtowner':

A Literary Reflection Of Our Town

By Nancy K. Crevier



Taking a seat in the C.H. Booth Library, where the idea for the new literary and arts journal germinated, are five of the seven founding editorial team members of *The Newtowner*. From left is Brenda McKinley, Maureen Wilson, Georgia Monaghan, Kerri Williams and Lisa Schwartz. — Darren Wagner photo

Doodlers and dreamers, painters, playwrights, poets, and all who find fulfillment in pen and ink will soon have a venue for publishing original works, whether they are previously published or new to the arena, when *The Newtowner*, an arts and literary magazine dedicated to the talent of Newtown, is launched the winter of 2010.

The quarterly journal will come to life under the direction of editor and one of seven founders, Sandy Hook resident Georgia Monaghan.

"It's a novel idea," said Ms Monaghan. "I've never heard of a literary journal dedicated to just one town. There are regional and state journals, but I think that this is the first in Connecticut featuring the talented writers and artists of just a single town," she said.

She is undaunted by the fact that such a literary journal has never existed in this town, and surprised, as well.

"Newtown has a unique literary, artistic and community spirit that makes it ideal for a journal of this kind," she said. "I think that no one ever thought you could focus on just one place, but there is so much literary and historical interest that is rich in Newtown, that I believe it is sustainable," said Ms Monaghan.

"I think that we are becoming so global with Facebook and the like, that people are looking for a sense of community and belonging to a supportive community. The literary journal is a response to that longing. It can be a print publication that is a focal point," Ms Monaghan said. "So many small towns don't even have a local paper, but Newtown does. *The Newtowner* is the cultural side of that," she said.

Ms Monaghan was born and raised in Australia, and graduated from the University of Sydney with a degree in English Literature, European and American History, and Education. She interned at *The Sydney Morning Herald* and radio station 2CH. For fifteen years, she taught English Literature, Creative Writing, History, and Drama in various private high schools, and was promoted to Head of English. As office manager to a photography business while living in the Whitsunday Island region of Australia, Ms Monaghan became a

travel writer. She has been published in Australian magazines and newspapers, and has traveled extensively. She moved with her husband and two children to Sandy Hook in 2008, and teaches and facilitates the C.H. Booth Creative Writing Group. Currently, she is working on a literary novel set in Australia.

She believes that her strong background in writing, travel, and photography, as well as the strength provided by the six other founders of *The Newtowner*, will provide the direction and skills needed to bring the journal to print.

She put forth the idea for the journal earlier this year at the writing class she teaches, and was stunned by the positive response.

"I hardly had the words out of my mouth and the heads started nodding," she said. "There's been a lot of enthusiasm."

"The Quaint & The Cosmopolitan"

Ms Monaghan is joined in her effort by Kerri Williams, former managing editor of *The Norwalk Citizen-News*. Ms Williams, who will serve as the features editor for *The Newtowner*, was also "Living" editor for *The Darien News Review*, and has written for *The Norwalk Hour* and *The Taunton Daily Gazette*. A freelance writer for regional newspapers, Ms Williams is a creative writer, as well.

"Georgia and I are neighbors who met through a book club. She inspired me to join her writing group, and her enthusiasm is infectious," Ms Williams said.

"Lisa Schwartz described our goal as a combination of the quaint and the cosmopolitan, and I think that kind of sums up Newtown," said Ms Monaghan. Lisa Schwartz will join the volunteer staff as the poetry editor. Active in local politics and community affairs since moving to Newtown in 1993, she has worked for Fordham University School of Social Work and the New York State Society on Aging as a consulting editor for journal articles and organization newsletters. She graduated from Hofstra University with a degree in French, and is a poet, writing both in English and French.

Brenda McKinley, technical services librarian at C.H. Booth Library, has focused most of her writing on technical fields, recently branching out into creative writing. Ms McKinley will be the creative non-fiction editor at *The Newtowner*.

Tracy Hubbard is the creative director at Optima Group and has extensive experience in conceptual development, branding, copy development, and print production. She has won numerous awards for her design work and has worked for notable design firms. Ms Hubbard joins *The Newtowner* as art director.

Julie Stern has taught English in the inner city of Manhattan, and spent 29 years teaching Humanistic Studies and Philosophy at Western Connecticut State University. She serves as the theater reviewer for *The Newtown Bee* and previously wrote a tennis column for the paper, as well. She is the author of *A Readers' Guide to the Short Novels of Joseph Conrad*, and has written two thrillers for her granddaughters. Ms Stern teaches mystery writing to young adults at the library and leads reading and discussion series for adults. Ms Stern will be an advisor and columnist for *The Newtowner*.

The Newtowner will be funded by advertising, said Ms Monaghan.

"We hope that because it has such a town spirit that local businesses will see it as a way to give back to the community," she said. Maureen Wilson will coordinate advertising. A student of journalism and English literature at the University of Florida, Ms Wilson has

worked locally in business and sales, and has recently turned her passion for food and wine into a personal chef business.

Ms Monaghan is pleased to have her husband, Darren Wagner, on staff as photographer. Mr Wagner managed several photographic studios before creating his own studio, Wagner Photography. He has won awards for his wedding and dance photography and clients have included Italian *Vanity Fair*, *The London Telegraph*, and the German magazine, *Aftenposten*.

Writer and librarian Andrea Zimmermann will serve *The Newtowner* as an advisor. Ms Zimmermann is the author of *The Case Files of Detective Laszlo Briscoe*, *Eleanor Mayer's History of Cherry Grove Farm*, and co-author and editor of the *Newtown Oral History Project*. She is a former writer for *The Newtown Bee* and a freelance journalist for *The New York Times Connecticut Weekly* section, and for regional magazines.

While Ms Monaghan feels the core staff is strong, the journal continues to seek additional volunteer advisors, editors, reviewers, and publicity officers, as well as others to round out the positions needed to get the journal off the ground.

"I would love as many people as possible involved in nurturing this idea into fruition," said Ms Monaghan. "I see it as a real community-based literary and arts project."

High school and college students with an interest in journalism, literature, or the arts are welcome to join the staff of *The Newtowner*, said Ms Monaghan, and all volunteers will contribute as much or as little as they desire.

The Newtowner is encouraging submissions from all writers and artists, said Ms Williams.

"The journal is for every level of writer and reader, unpublished, famous, or anything in between. We are looking for a balance of new and accomplished artists," she said, "and we know that Newtown encapsulates the well-known authors alongside the never-published writers."

Along with showcasing writers and artists of the town, *The Newtowner* hopes to include regular features, Ms Monaghan said. Fiction, poetry, memoir, travel writing, young writers and artists, essays, cartoons, and cover art are among the areas being solicited for publication. *The Newtowner* website will also offer additional space for publishing works that do not fit into each quarterly issue, she said.

Profiles of new and established artists, book reviews, art reviews, and an online book club are also in the plans for *The Newtowner*, as is a directory of arts and literary groups, and a calendar of literary events.

The mission of *The Newtowner* is "to give Newtown writers, both new and published, a voice and an outlet for their work where it would be received and responded to by other local writers and residents," said Ms Monaghan. "I would love to see the journal as a gathering point for all the writers of this local region."

The Newtowner has been gestating for nine months, and it is time now to give birth to the idea, said Ms Monaghan.

"We've given ourselves enough time, I think. This is the time and the place. There's no other way to go but forward."

The first quarterly edition of The Newtowner will launch with the November/December 2010 issue. For information on joining the team or for submissions, visit TheNewtownerMagazine.com.