

Community Spotlight on the Phoenix Writers Club

Group celebrates 100 years

The Phoenix Writers Club was formed in 1926 and is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

How, when and why was the club founded?

We were started in 1926 by a group of women journalists who were denied entry into the all-male press club.

So, the women started their own club! There were authors, journalists and poets, all ready to share their love of writing.

The Club's first president, Gertrude Bryan Leeper, was the women's editor of the Phoenix Gazette and one of the Club's founders. Leeper was also one of six women elected to the Arizona state Legislature (Maricopa District 7).

These women were so successful in their duties, fears rose that they would "take over the state."

Leeper is quoted as saying, "Women were not trying to take men's places. They are merely trying to find places of their own."

On Oct. 2, 1933, Margaret Wheeler Ross gave a report on a poetry convention held in Denver.

The ASU library archives hold the Margaret Wheeler Ross papers, a collection in four boxes spanning six decades that can be viewed by appointment, and you can still find some of her work at poetryexplorer.com.

In 1955, Marguerite Graper was instrumental in having National Poetry Day proclaimed by Governor McFarland.

Who can join?

We welcome writers of all genres and writing levels. Whether you have never written anything except a school paper or have published multiple books, PWC welcomes you.

Membership is \$40 a year, from October through September. We meet monthly in central Phoenix, and each meeting features a speaker on topics that impact writing and publishing.

The monthly meeting fee of \$10 for members and \$15 for guests includes light refreshments, our speaker, and camaraderie with fellow writers.

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Above, "Sunday Off Central" Midtown block party, D'Anne Pientka, June Powers, Deborah Partington. Below, at the 2026 Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts, from left, are: Deborah Partington, Cindi Reiss, Beth Johnson and Navissa Kaiser. (Photos courtesy of Phoenix Writers Club)



What is the club's mission?

Our mission is to provide a space where writers and readers can join together, discuss, and grow their skills and knowledge in the craft of writing.

We have been 'Writers Helping Writers' since 1926.

What events and activities are being planned for the club's 100th birthday?

At our monthly meetings, we have been presenting historical stories of some of the instrumental women who started the club, events held, community involvement, publications, etc., from the past 100 years.

In March, for Women's History Month, we presented the

winners of the PWC Centennial Founders Contest, "Pioneering Spirit." Last year, our contest's theme was "Formidable Women," and our winners presented at the Blue Guitar Festival and are featured on our website and Substack.

In November, we are planning a celebration showcasing our history through skits, displays, costumes, food, and drink, as well as a keynote speaker from the writing community.

We will also be sharing our history at the annual Blue Guitar Festival in November.

Want more information? How to contact us

- Phoenix Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/phxwritersclub/>
- Phoenix Writers Club: website phoenixwritersclub.com
- Substack: <https://phoenixwritersclub.substack.com/>



Phoenix Writers Club board members include Beth Johnson, secretary; Ilsa Manning, social media; Navissa Kaiser, treasurer; Cindi Reiss, president/membership chair; and D'Anne Pientka, newsletter/critique group. Not pictured are Eric Miller, website; and Jeff Callan, historian. (Photo courtesy of Phoenix Writers Club)

Phoenix Writers Club

By Cindi Reiss

Way back in 1926, some newspaper gals with gumption
said, "Let's join the Phoenix Press Club." The nerve of their assumption!
The men gazed at them with smiles and smirks, but said they were not allowed.
"We're all professional journalists here, so you dames are in the wrong crowd."
Those feisty ladies were not dismayed; they knew their talents were great,
So they formed their own little writing club, and men were not on the slate.
Gertrude Bryan Leeper became our club's first president and
She was soon an Arizona legislator and women's editor of the Phoenix Gazette!
The women were writers of poetry and prose, bringing characters to life in skits,
They'd dress up in costumes to entertain and inform, all the while using their wits.
During war years, the women held a silver tea to raise funds for British Relief.
And later helped veterans with writing classes to help them live with their grief.
National Poetry Day was established in October of '55.
Governor McFarland had Marguerite Graper to thank for this coming to life.
In the 60's, we offered workshops to members and the public for free
And continued to publish our own works in another anthology.
Our newsletter began in the 70's and is very well read to this day,
It's informative, witty, and telling as our editors do not go halfway.
In the 90's, a barrier was broken as the club first admitted men,
As women, we understood that discrimination wouldn't happen again.
In 2001, a celebration was held at our library, Burton Barr.
Then, five years later, for our 80th gala, a children's book was the star.
Several members wrote of a nine-year-old girl who goes on a fantastical trip,
It debuted at our party as we dressed by decade, and Marshall Trimble spoke with much zip.
Arizona turned 100 in 2012, and we were 86.
BetteLou Tobin wrote a play about our long history in Phoenix.
Restaurateur Jack Durant came to life through Mabel Leo's books
They were adapted into a play, then a movie, as she overlooked.
We supported literacy in the schools by becoming PencilPALS
Corresponding with 5th graders with mailed letters for morale.
Our members write fiction, memoir, poetry, and flash
History, children's, Sci-Fi, with panache!
We collaborate with many conferences and groups,
ASU, Blue Guitar, and POP, are a few.
Now our Centennial is upon us, 100 years in the making.
And Phoenix Writers Club is still going strong, for our talents cannot be mistaken.

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Cindi Reiss' writing journey shifted from skits and programs during her career as a clown and actor to poetry that has fun with rhyme on some days, then delves into memoir pieces on others. Her poems have been published in Paradise Review; Inkwel 2022 Anthology, "Roots, Shoots and Blooms"; ASPS 2022 Sandcutters; Haiku Expo: Arizona Matsuri; Phoenix Oasis Press, "Beyond Boundaries: Tales of Transcendence." Cindi is President of Phoenix Writers Club, which will celebrate its centennial in 2026 and welcomes writers of all genres. She has lived in Phoenix for 50 years but still considers herself a Jersey girl at heart. Her husband, three children, two sons-in-law, four grandchildren and 120-pound granddog keep her grounded in the Arizona desert.