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Contact: Kevin Clark  
Cal Poly English Department  
(805) 756-2506; [kclark@calpoly.edu](mailto:kclark@calpoly.edu)

## Cal Poly English Department Names Creative Writing Contest After Longtime Professor Al Landwehr

SAN LUIS OBISPO – In recognition of longtime English professor Al Landwehr and his dedication to Cal Poly's creative writing students, the university has named its annual Creative Writing Contest the Al Landwehr Creative Writing Contest.

Landwehr created the contest 35 years ago as a way to encourage and showcase the talents of not just English majors, but student writers all across campus. Little did he know that three-and-a-half decades later the contest would bear his own name, said English Professor Kevin Clark.

The announcement was made Saturday night during Open House at the annual reading by this year's student prize winners.

Landwehr began teaching at Cal Poly in 1970 and retired last year. A teacher of fiction writing and literature, he won the university's Distinguished Teaching Award in 1998.

"When I came here, I was surprised we didn't have a contest," he said. "Since no one else had thought of it, I made the suggestion to the English Department. They loved the idea."

He gave the contest extra zest by finding prize money for the winners in fiction and poetry. Various donors such as the Michael Gamber Memorial Fund to Knowlton Brothers Fine Furniture in Nipomo have contributed to the fund.

"Al Landwehr was my mentor here," Clark said. "Not only is he a brilliant, nationally published writer of fiction, but he was a signature teacher who found ways to make student writers believe in themselves. And no one I have ever met talked about teaching with as much reverence as Al."

Jennifer Ashley, a local writer and teacher, also has high praise for Landwehr's teaching skills. "He always expected much from me," she said. "He always challenged me and his other students. He found unconventional ways of being encouraging. He was simultaneously honest and inspiring."

For nearly four decades, Landwehr's short stories have appeared in numerous magazines and journals, including Playboy, Redbook, New Letters and Negative Capability.

Clark says that Landwehr's "idiosyncratically comic fiction penetrates beneath the surface of everyday events to see humanely into the foibles of ordinary people. In the end, he shows us that there is no such thing as 'ordinary.'"

According to English professor Carol MacCurdy, "When Al came to Cal Poly, he practically was the English Department. I can't think of anyone who loved fiction writing or teaching it to students more."

Originally, the student newspaper, Mustang Daily, published the contest's winning stories and poems. In 1991, when the Mustang Daily could no longer afford to print all the winning work, the literary magazine Byzantium was begun by Landwehr's student Jocelyn Webb. Since then, Landwehr and Clark have alternated as advisor to the prize-winning journal.

Landwehr earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of Missouri in 1970. He and his wife, Lynne, raised their two daughters, Catherine and Sarah, in San Luis Obispo.

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