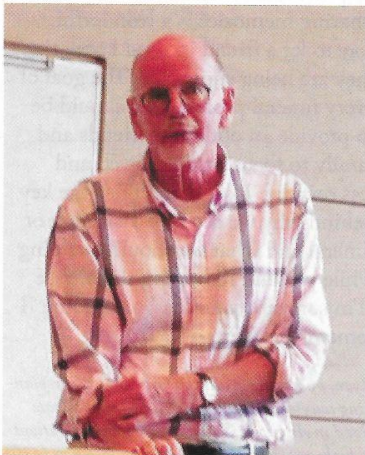


MARYLAND POET INSPIRES ACTION

By Kathi Edwards

According to the United Nations, 9.9% of the world's population is undernourished. That amounts to about 720 million people facing hunger. It is not just a problem in developing countries, but exists in the wealthiest of nations, including our own. The Poetry X Hunger initiative, launched by Hiram Larew, a resident of Churchton in Anne Arundel County, seeks to draw public attention to this issue through poetry.

Hiram is himself a poet, but as you can imagine, also held a "day job." He is now retired from a career working with the United States Department of Agriculture and for the United States Agency for International Development. Through his research and travel associated with this work, he became keenly aware of



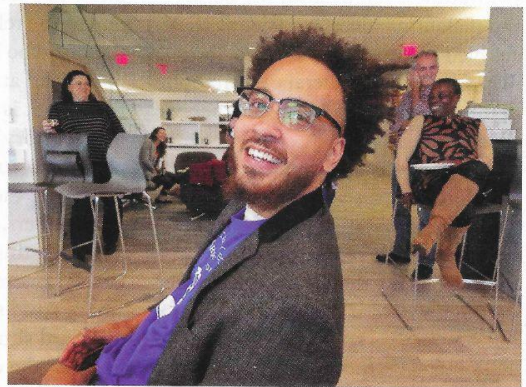
Hiram Larew discusses Poetry X Hunger with a gathering of hunger experts in 2019 in Washington. (Courtesy Hiram Larew)

issues such as hunger, food security and insecurity, nutrition, wellness, and obesity.

The nexus between hunger issues and poetry came to the forefront when Mr. Larew was invited by Oregon State University to give a lecture on hunger and poetry. Preparing for that, he says he found that there was "a wealth of poetry dealing with hunger of the soul, but when it came to hunger of the stomach, there just wasn't much out there." Later, in 2018, at the annual meeting of the Alliance to End Hunger in Washington, D.C., he says he was approached "out of the blue" by Vimlendra Sharan, the head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's North American Liaison Office. Sharan suggested that poetry might be used to inspire interest in combating world hunger. This evolved into a plan for poetry competitions in support of World Hunger day, which is held annually on Oct. 16. The UN provides support in the form of prizes to poets who write about this issue.

World Hunger Day was established to draw attention to the hunger problem and inspire action to com-

bat it. Events held in 130 countries around the world include exhibitions, cultural performances, concerts, contests, marathons, marches, food tastings, and demonstrations. The goal is to make agriculture and food distri-



Aaron R. of Arlington, Virginia, who won the United Nations 2019 World Food Day Poetry Prize, is pictured at John Snow and Associates (an international food security consulting firm) in 2020. (Courtesy Hiram Larew)

bution systems more efficient and sustainable. The Poetry X Hunger poetry competition has become a regular part of the annual festivities and attracts poets from around the world.

Mr. Larew also applied for and received a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council in order to create a website for Poetry X Hunger. The goal of this initiative is to convince the public that hunger can be eliminated and to motivate involvement in the cause. A major feature of the

website is the free electronic book, "Poets Speak Back to Hunger: An e-Collection of Poems from Around the World." Hiram reports, "We've also worked hard to make sure that those poems don't just sit on the website. I'm proud to say that many have been used by anti-hunger leaders and organizations, by houses of worship, by teachers and professors and on and on." Organizations fighting hunger or raising awareness of the issue are encouraged to explore <https://www.poetryxhunger.com/>. They can download and use all the poems and information on the website completely free of charge, for use during their meetings, and for messaging and fundraising efforts.

Perusing this website is an informative, entertaining, and inspiring adventure, designed to spur people into action. Many of the poetry selections also include an audio or video recording of the poet reciting their work. Different points of view are expressed. Some deal with the difficult personal experience of hunger, like this excerpt from "Testimony" by Brian Donnell James:

I was a teenage father then, with little money
 My wife and I saved our lunch so our son could eat
 And we went without a meal that day
 As night approached, we had hoped he would
 sleep until morning
 And with every twist and turn he made, my
 anxiety rose and fell
 But as toddlers do, he rose hungry
 Rubbing circles on his belly
 He was trying to be a big boy
 Trying to control the desperation,
 I saw in his eyes

Others like this excerpt from "Hunger Pains" by Aaron R speak to the need to get involved in doing something about the problem:

We spend millions of dollars for entertainment but that's another topic.

There's people who are out here starving,

we need to do something to stop it.

We spend money on wars, but we need to be at war with not feeding the poor,

this is a situation that we can no longer ignore.

Other features of the website include hunger related news, blog entries, links to video presentations, interviews, information about the current state of hunger, historical accounts of famine, poems by youth, and resources for teachers.

Hiram Larew is grateful for all who contribute and support the Poetry X Hunger initiative. Most recently, the Capital Area Food Bank and other similar organizations have offered writing residencies to poets to observe and then write about their operations. Hiram concludes,

"Poetry will never eliminate hunger. But we're proving that it can help by reaching hearts and minds."

Kathi Edwards is a retired elementary school science lab teacher. She spends her time volunteering at a pregnancy center, teaching Sunday school, playing handbells and singing in her church choir.

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2019 World Food Day Poetry Prize winners, From left -- Anne Harding Woodworth, Henry Crawford and Sharon Ingram, presented their winning poems in a gathering at the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington. The event was hosted by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. (Courtesy Hiram Larew)

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