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Aspiring writers pick up writing, publishing tips at fest

By Kesha Williams Correspondent
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Authors (l-r) Sharon Burtner, Blair Jackson and Shane Wilson sign copies of their books during College of The Albemarle's fourth annual Literary Festival, Thursday. The authors also shared tips on writing and how to get a book published. [Kesha Williams photo](#)

Aspiring authors gathered at College of The Albemarle's Elizabeth City campus on Thursday to pick up both writing and publishing tips during the college's fourth annual Literary Festival.

Event organizers assembled a cast of published authors to discuss the challenges of writing as poets, novelists and playwrights. Two sessions ended with authors autographing copies of their books and encouraging attendees to read on and write on.

The event also included a Scrabble contest won by Jermaine Barnett, a student at Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Early College. Barnett was presented a \$100 Visa gift card for winning the event by Dr. Joshua Howell, assistant professor of English at COA.

Children's book author Blair Jackson of Elizabeth City was the first of three speakers who met with the students and aspiring authors. Jackson, a retired librarian, said forming and completing an interesting storyline is only part of the writing process. Children's book authors also need to have a good working relationship with a talented illustrator, she said.

Aspiring authors also need to prepare for the financial expenses associated with publishing and distributing a book, Jackson said. The lessons she learned while preparing her first book for publication, "The Tanglewood Fox," led to a smoother publishing of her second children's book, "Captain Al and Big Blue," she said. That book, inspired by decades of memorable, coastal Carolina experiences with her family, is also a tribute to her late brother, Captain Allan Foreman, a former charter boat captain.

Sharon Burtner shared a selection of her poems with the audience. Her topics ranged from the challenges of romantic relationships to the startling realizations one has during life-altering moments such as marriage, divorce or the death of a loved one.

Shane Wilson, a Fayetteville-based author and English instructor at Fayetteville Technical Community College, talked candidly about the different approaches writers take to completing their books.

Wilson said he was a competent night-owl writer for years but now feels more comfortable writing during the morning. Some authors need total silence to concentrate while others find their writing groove with a bit of background noise going on, he said. Chuckling, Wilson said his own writing hours sometimes include a bit of blues music and whiskey.

The main thing aspiring writers need to remember, he said, is that "inspiration strikes in a flash and you have to act on it immediately."

"We only have a limited amount of time do something with that inspiration because it starts to fade as quickly as it strikes," he said.

Eric Hause, owner of Outlife 757, a magazine that tells the stories of Hampton Roads' LGBTQ community, was the festival's keynote speaker. He read excerpts from his own personal writings which he said he plans to include in a memoir he wants to write.