



646 County Square Drive, Suite 154, Ventura, CA 93003-0436
805.658.2213 805.658-2281 Fax
vcarts@apcbell.net www.vcartscouncil.org

For Immediate Release

Contact: Friday Gretchen at 805 889-3320 or corvidempres@gmail.com

Phil Taggart has been named as Ventura County's second poet laureate by the Ventura County Arts Council.

The Ventura County Arts Council is pleased to announce their selection of Phil Taggart as the county's second Poet Laureate; he will serve for two years as official poet and ambassador to the community for poetry. Mr. Taggart will be inaugurated with a ceremony on Feb. 5, 2016 at 5:30PM in the Atrium Gallery of the Ventura County Government Center with a reception to follow, and the public is invited and encouraged to attend.

Phil Taggart has published three collections of poetry. His most recent is *Rick Sings*, which deals with his brother's struggle with schizophrenia. His other two books are *Opium Wars* and *Cowboy Collages*, an art book collaboration with Texas artist Ann Harithas. Taggart is a poet of social engagement, who uses a lean essential line to craft poems that look hard at the world around him. Mary Kay Rummel describes his work in *Rick Sings* as "an eyewitness, heart witness report from the edges" in which his brother is a guide "through the restricted urban spaces where those with mental illness are allowed." His poetry uses comic elements as a release; often, he authors wry, satirical poems that engage with events of the day through humor. Poet Ellen Reich said, "His risky, edgy poems find their way to radiance."

Phil Taggart enjoys a long history as a supporter of the arts in Ventura County. He has hosted readings at various locales since the early nineties, and currently runs Thursday Night Poetry, a weekly open mic and featured reading at the E.P. Foster Library in Ventura. Taggart served as poetry editor for ARTLIFE limited editions for nine years and is now an editor/publisher of the poetry journal *Askew* with his wife, Marsha de la O. He has served on various boards and commissions, including Ventura Avenue Days Steering Committee, Turning Point Foundation, and the City of Ventura Cultural Affairs Commission. In 2009, Taggart received a Champion of Mental Health award from the Turning Point Foundation for his work in bringing awareness of homelessness and mental illness through poetry, photography and video. He has also received the Ventura Mayor's Arts Award and the Ventura County Arts Council Art Star Award.

Ten years ago Taggart started the Askew Poetry Video Project to record and archive California poets. After recording well over two hundred poets, the project morphed into two TV shows aired locally all over Southern California. An accomplished videographer, he has also recorded dozens of local authors; all the interviews are

archived on the Askew Poetry Journal YouTube page. He enjoys working with young people in video production and all areas of the arts, but most especially poetry.

The tradition of the poet laureate reaches back to the ancient Greeks who crowned their most celebrated poets and athletes with laurel wreaths. England has had a poet laureate since Geoffrey Chaucer first enjoyed the mantle in the 14th century; Italy's tradition dates back to Petrarch in 1341. The United States established its laureateship in 1937, and California appointed its first laureate in 1915. Phil Taggart's laureateship will coincide with the newly appointed California state laureate, Dana Gioia, who was announced on December 4th. Currently, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Los Angeles County have poet laureates, among many others in the state.

Margaret Travers, Executive Director of the Ventura County Arts Council, says, "We've been very pleased to bring a laureateship to Ventura County. Mary Kay Rummel was a wonderful first Laureate for the county, and she's staying on in an emeritus role to help Phil Taggart as he implements the second laureateship. Many communities are establishing their own laureateships to promote community awareness of the literary arts and to encourage community members to develop their own creative interests.

The position of the poet laureate is largely voluntary and no tax dollars will be spent. It's the work and enthusiasm of a committed community of artists and writers that makes this possible. All funding is generated through contributions and sales of the book *Defying Gravity*, which celebrates four wonderful writers in their 80s and 90s who would have been laureates had the program started earlier. Polly Bee, Joyce LaMers, Elnora McNaughton, and Doris Vernon, the authors of *Defying Gravity*, were declared Literary Treasures by the Ventura County Supervisors back in April 2013. Since that time, two of them have passed on, Joyce LaMers and Elnora McNaughton: the laureateship honors their memory."

More information about Phil Taggart is available at his website: philtaggart.com

He can be seen reading his work on YouTube.

The **Ventura County Arts Council**, a 501c3 public benefit organization, supports and strengthens the arts throughout Ventura County by fostering a healthy environment in which the arts and culture can thrive and be accessible to all; by advocating for sustained and increased funding for arts and culture; by developing cultural infrastructures and shaping public perception about the arts and culture; by promoting quality arts education and learning through the arts in public and private schools; by providing a clearinghouse of resources; by promoting dialogue and mutual support among arts organizations and artists; and by serving as a liaison and advocate for its local constituencies at a regional, state, and national level. The VCAC serves county artists, arts organizations and arts in education outreach programs by forming strong partnerships with arts supporters, businesses, foundations, and community leaders. Margaret Travers, Executive Director, (805) 658-2213