

## Silicon Valley seeks its first-ever poet laureate

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Quick. What rhymes with Clara?  
Yogi Berra.  
Father Junipero Serra.  
The goddess Hera?

It's time to get your assonance in gear because the Arts Council Silicon Valley is searching for the first-ever poet laureate of Santa Clara County. It's a sweet gig: to elevate the status of poetry in the valley, a place far more famous for high-tech than haiku.

"Contrary to popular belief, there is a vibrant poetry scene here," says Diem Jones, director of programs at Arts Council Silicon Valley, which has joined forces with the county and the county library to launch the project. "That has not been our reputation, but hopefully this program can help change our image."

Local arts aficionados hope to raise the profile of the region as a place where innovation and discovery are not limited to technology. They say the valley is teeming with wordsmiths eager to capture the universe in, well, verse.

"San Francisco has a poet laureate. The state has a poet laureate. The nation has a poet laureate. Why not have one here?" says Bruce Davis, executive director of the Arts Council.

Applicants for the post must be published poets who have lived in Santa Clara County for five years. It's a two-year term with a modest \$4,000 stipend and a mandate that includes community outreach as well as polishing couplets. Projects could include a poetry blog or a school poetry contest, both of which might attract the iPod generation. The mission is to make poetry pop even for those who don't know Baudelaire from Barack.

"We want the poet laureate to represent us and the art form," says Davis, "as well as be a champion for literacy in the community."

For those of us whose exposure to Homer is limited to "The Simpsons," a laureate can make art seem less elitist and more approachable. A laureate can reach out to the average Joe (of six-pack and plumber fame).

"It's a democratic and accessible way into the sometimes too-mandarin world of poetry writing," says Rebecca Black, a poet who teaches at Santa Clara University. "There are future U.S. poets laureate sitting somewhere in the Bay Area and writing right this moment. I'm sure of it."

Still, Davis says he is well aware that some may question the practicality of spending lucre on limericks at a time when the economy is languishing.

"People say, 'How can you do this at a time like this?' I say, 'How can we not?' "... Now is the time to celebrate life and creativity. Now is the time to raise the profile of arts here."

Indeed, Davis sees the arts as a way to bring the community together, to find solace in hard times. In an age where people are deluged by the digital, he believes in the power of poetry to enrich the human experience.

"The magic of poetry is that it takes us out of our daily lives and into a different place," he says. "Poetry puts life to rhyme."

If the official poet of Santa Clara County ends up immortalizing home, sweet home in a poem, so much the better. The result might be a sonnet that captures the pulse of life here in the valley. Might we suggest: A Valediction Forbidding Blogging? To His Soy Mistress? Ode on a Grecian URL?

"Right now there are many local poets writing about the valley, about the transition from agriculture to technology and our changing status in the world," Jones notes. "I think the great Silicon Valley poem is still out there."

The poet laureate, who begins his or her term in April, will be announced in March. So far, officials say, there has been a lot of buzz but no applications (details at [www.artscouncil.org](http://www.artscouncil.org)). However, Jones suspects most poets are hard-wired to wait until the last minute and then make a mad dash to the deadline, which is Feb. 17. In the immortal words of Homer, "Doh!"

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