

Fox Valley

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Elgin resident Catherine Andorka is a member of the Chicago-North chapter of the Romance Writers of America.

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Romance writers find support through local groups

By Mike Danahey
STAFF WRITER

The song goes that there are 50 ways to leave your lover, but members of the Romance Writers of America (www.rwanational.org) can probably offer up hundreds more. If you'd like to find out about those tricks — or tricks of the writing trade — the suburbs are home to two chapters of the group, Chicago-North (www.chicagonorthrwa.org) and Windy City (www.windycityrwa.com).

Chicago-North chapter

Chicago-North meets at the Des Plaines Public Library on the second Monday evening of the month. The last Monday of the month the group meets at the Arlington Heights Historical Society.

Chicago-North President Ruth Kaufman said the group has about 90 members, all but one of them women, with between 20 and 25 showing up for each meeting. The group is open to "anyone in pursuit of the art of romance writing," said Kaufman, who has written eight such stories, one of which was runner-up in an online contest.

You can sit in on two sessions before being asked to pay dues, which are \$25 a year for the local club and \$75 a year for the national organization. Those sessions include once a month bringing in a guest speaker who might give pointers on getting published or pointers on details such as getting the terms right for the weapons used in a tale. Other sessions focus primarily on critiquing each others' works, while a third meeting each month is a business session.

Quite a few members of the Chicago-North group have found success in the genre. Among them are Susan Elizabeth Phillips, who was inducted into the Romance Writers of America Hall of Fame in 2001; Mary Alice Monroe, a New York Times and USA Today best-selling author who has been nominated for industry awards for her work; Harlequin author Margaret Watson; and

award-winning bestselling author of romantic suspense tales Patricia Rosemoor.

Elgin resident Catherine Andorka, who has one published romance novel to her credit, is a member of the group, too, and enjoys the chocolates served at meetings.

"We eat it to celebrate our sales and reward our writing accomplishments. We have it to console ourselves over our rejections, and we use it as incentive to reach our goals. But seriously (not that I'm not serious about the chocolate), it's all about the support. We critique each other's work, we attend signings and buy books from those who are published, and we offer advice to those who are not yet published," Andorka said. "Most of all, we encourage each other. As a former magazine editor, I know rejection is not personal. But as a writer, it always feels personal. And no one understands a misunderstood writer like a fellow misunderstood writer."

Andorka has been writing since 1979, including work for True Story, True Confessions and Modern Romance. Such publications were "a great medium to learn to plot and tighten my writing." She also spent time as editor-in-chief of the Weddingpages Bride and Home Magazine, which is now called Chicago Weddingpages.

She defines a romance novel as "a story about two people who come together, whether by choice or circumstances. They don't always like each other at the start, but eventually they develop mutual respect and love. Their relationship is built on far more than having goo-goo eyes for each other. ... These are people who are experiencing internal and external conflict, but despite the odds they learn to work through their issues and live their lives to the fullest potential, each exercising their unique powers and talents with the full support of the other. ... At the same time all of this is happening, together they are striving to reach shared goals and dreams so they can be together forever. Unlike mainstream fiction with romantic elements, a strict category

romance always has a happy ending."

The Windy City chapter

The Windy City chapter meets every second Wednesday of the month at the Naperville Municipal Center and on the fourth Wednesday of the month at the Lisle Library. The latter meeting includes discussions, critiques submitted by volunteers, as well as speakers on the topic of writing. Chapter dues are \$20 (plus the \$75 to join the national organization).

Chapter President Dyanne Davis got involved "a little over 10 years ago. I was still working as a nurse and one of my patients learned that I had dreams of being a published author and wanted to read my work. She later asked me if I would go with her to a writers meeting and asked if I would like to partner up with her. That didn't work. But I remain grateful to her for persuading me to go to the meeting."

Davis said the chapter has 77 listed members, several of them from out of state, and one male.

"For the past two years, we've had a new book at every meeting and will have until the middle of '07. It's very good for our members who are getting published, maybe not so good for the wallet," Davis said.

Davis has three books that are out already, six more due out over the next 18 months and others slated for 2008.

"We have had many successes in our chapter with out published and yet-to-be published members. They have won writing contests in many categories. I have won an Emma for one of my books, and one was bought by a book club as a selection and is available in hardcover. We have several members who have also had this honor," Said Davis. "We also have a New York Times bestselling author, three Rita winners and a host of other awards. Our members have every job imaginable. We have doctors, nurses, lawyers, a scientist, a retail business owner, teachers and librarians."

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— Catherine Andorka, romance writer