Fishtrap Inc.

Fishtrap had its beginnings in 1987, when writers Kim Stafford, of the then-new Northwest Writing Institute, and Peter Sears, who was at the Oregon Arts Commission, convened a Northwest Writers Gathering at Lewis & Clark College in Portland. Writers George Venn, David Memmot, and Rich Wandschneider represented Oregon's east side at the Gathering. The next year, with encouragement from Stafford and Sears and help from Alvin Josephy, who owned a ranch near Joseph, the Gathering was moved to Wallowa Lake. It was renamed Fishtrap, and Wandschneider became the director.

The first Summer Gathering at Fishtrap, whose theme was "Western Writing, Eastern Publishing," brought together Western writers Kim Stafford, George Venn, Craig Lesley, Bill Kittredge, James Welch, Terry Tempest Williams, and Ursula Le Guin. Josephy, Marc Jaffe from Houghton Mifflin, and Naomi Bliven from the *New Yorker* represented eastern publishing. Herb Mitgang of the *New York Times*, and Gary Fisketjon and Ann Close from Alfred A. Knopf came soon after. Building writing and reading events around themes, and gathering poets, novelists, journalists, publishers, librarians, and people from the writing world became the hallmarks of Fishtrap.

Fishtrap is governed by a local board of directors and is advised by a group of writers from across the region. More than 300 writers have read and taught workshops at Fishtrap since 1988. Part of Fishtrap's success is its location in the northeast corner of Oregon. At Wallowa Lake, near the geographic center of the Northwest, the geology and geography are stunning. It is a place where the last Indian War and exiled Chief Joseph are kept in living memory.

In addition to the Summer Gathering, Fishtrap hosts week-long summer workshops; the Winter Fishtrap Gathering, devoted to writing and issues of public policy; the Fishtrap Fellows Program; and the Imnaha Writers Retreat. It publishes an annual anthology of workshop writing, and hosts The Big Read, a month-long community reading of a book recommended by the National Endowment for the Arts. Fishtrap offers college English classes at Fishtrap College. It also hosts the Children's Writing Workshop, lectures, readings, and occasional workshops in Wallowa County. The Eastern Oregon Writers in Residence Program serves schools and communities in Wallowa, Harney, Klamath, Wheeler, and Gilliam counties.

The newest Fishtrap program is a year-long workshop in the novel, begun at Summer Fishtrap 2008, with Jane Vandenburgh as instructor. John Daniel began the first year-long memoir workshop at Summer Fishtrap 2009. Fishtrap is also cooperating with The Dalles Arts Council to produce a spring "Fishstock" event featuring songwriters who have taught and performed at Fishtrap. Marv and Rindy Ross, Kate Power, and Steve Einhorn headlined the first Fishstock in May 2009.

In 2001, Fishtrap purchased the historic Coffin House in Enterprise, which serves as the Fishtrap office and the venue for lectures, readings, and workshops. Summer Fishtrap continues to be held at the Wallowa Lake Camp and Retreat Center, and Winter Fishtrap uses the historic Wallowa Lake Lodge. Long-time Development Director Rick Bombaci stepped into the executive director's job in 2008, and Rich Wandschneider moved to a part-time position to establish the Alvin Josephy Library of Western History and Culture, to be housed at the Coffin House.

Written by Rich Wandschneider

Further Reading:

Fishtrap. http://www.fishtrap.org/

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