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High Plains BookFest explores Murder, Mystery and Mayhem!

Readers and writers can celebrate their love of literature and mystery this fall at the 8th annual High Plains BookFest and High Plains Book Awards. The YMCA Writer's Voice and Parmly Billings Library are pleased to host this year's BookFest and Book Awards, which will be held October 7-10, 2010, at various locations around downtown Billings.

Murder, mystery and mayhem are perfectly haunting themes for an October celebration of books and literature! This four-day-long celebration includes presentations by published authors, panel discussions, a banquet featuring authors nominated for the High Plains Book Awards, and a mini-film festival which carries on the murder and mystery theme.

Panel discussions offer the public a chance to meet authors and provide dialogue between writers and readers. Audiences can learn how writers create different elements of their stories, such as plots, characters, etc. The ensuing discussion between a panel of authors and the audience is often a lively, informative examination that enlightens the audience about each author's unique way of building their stories.

Readings involve authors reciting passages from their books and interpreting, discussing and answering questions from the audience.

Festivities begin on Thursday, October 7, at the Western Heritage Center with "The Case of the Disappearing Last Stand," featuring Rocky Mountain College professor and historian Tim Lehman, who recently published *Bloodshed at Little Bighorn*. Lehman's novel vividly narrates the battle commonly known as Custer's Last Stand. In what may be the best known violent conflict between indigenous peoples of North America and the United States government, Lehman's compelling account will forever change the way we think about this legendary event in American history.

The Thursday evening event will be a unique theatrical staging of one of Montana's greatest mystery: the disappearance of the first governor of the state! *Coroner's Inquest into the Death on July 1, 1867 of Thomas Francis Meagher*, is a play written by Paul R. Wylie, based on his book, *The Irish General*. The play featured notorious Montana historical characters impersonated by some well-known Montana lawyers, historians, and author - all non-professional actors! The theatrics begin at 7pm at the Babcock Theatre.

Friday, October 8, the community is invited to experience mystery, detective work and a look at ghostly encounters in Montana's notorious haunted places. The day begins with a panel discussion with local mystery writers, hosted by Sue Hart, award-winning historian, author and professor at Montana State University-Billings. Other events include a panel discussion on detective mysteries and ghost hunting.

The High Plains Book Awards banquet is scheduled for Friday evening at the MSU-Billings Student Union building. Authors from around the country have been selected for honors in six different categories, including Fiction, Non-fiction, First Book, Zonta (women writers), Poetry and Emeritus- which recognizes one author for an entire body of work. These awards are based on writing style and the book's depiction of life on the High Plains, which includes Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, and the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The banquet is open to the public, tickets will be available at www.highplainsbookawards.org

Saturday's events will be held at the MSU-B downtown campus and feature panels and readings with regional murder mystery writers as well as the High Plains Book Award finalists. Saturday evening concludes with a Gala Reading at the historic Babcock Theatre in downtown Billings with mystery writers Margaret Coel and Craig Johnson.

The BookFest concludes Sunday, October 10, with brunch at the McCormick Café, where area poets and authors will have a chance to show off their own works during open mic. The event is hosted by the MSU-B literary magazine, *The Rook*.

Mystery writers interested in participating in the 2010 BookFest should mail or email a note to Corby Skinner, YMCA, 402 North 32nd, Billings, Montana 59101, or email to corby@skinnerbenoit.com.