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Writing to go right on with cash infusion

CT Young Writers Trust Reactivates operations

BY JIM MOORE

HARTFORD — A statewide writing contest for teens is on track to survive its brush with insolvency.

Volunteer directors of the CT Young Writers Trust, the nonprofit organization that runs the statewide high school writing contest in conjunction with the state university system, received word Wednesday that cash is on the way.

Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs Louise H. Feroe told board members the university system's annual \$10,000 contribution to the cause had not been forthcoming because of uncertainty about whether the contest could survive.

"We were under the impression that there were no other sources of funding this year," Feroe said.

Uncertainty about the continued availability of volunteers to assist with fundraising and administration of the contest itself was another issue, she said, and three of the four state university presidents she recently surveyed were unwilling to "stick their necks out" for and dedicate significant resources, including staff time, to the contest.

The contest has fielded about 6,000 submissions and awarded nearly \$200,000 in prize money since it was founded in 1998 by the late James B. Irwin Sr., a Litchfield resident who created the contest and lent his company's name, IMPAC, to the program.

The company's 2004 bankruptcy, and Irwin's subsequent death, created a hole in the contest's roughly \$20,000 budget. Since 2008, the state university system has been the largest single sponsor.

Litchfield resident Andy Thibault, who maintains an online news blog and serves as chairman of the contest board, said Wednesday another major donor has been identified, a philanthropist willing to donate \$10,000 to cover the cost of hiring staff. The board

agreed by consensus to hire past judge and writer Ron Winter as the new executive director, and board member Carol Thibeault, a Branford real estate agent, agreed to serve as administrator. Each will be paid \$5,000 per year from proceeds of the still-anonymous donation.

Entry forms for 2011, long delayed and recently thought impossible, will soon begin flowing to high school teachers around the state, pending agreement by the four college presidents. Feroe said she will confirm that detail quickly.

Attorney Bill Crowe, who has served as both judge, legal advisor and sponsor of the contest, said his firm would be able to help with any funding shortfalls. Crowe pushed to keep the contest going in 2011.

The contest may or may not continue in its previous scope for the coming year. Prizes of up to \$1,000 have been awarded in years past, with county and statewide winners chosen. Organizers agreed they would delay that decision until the number of submissions and amount of available cash are known.

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Note: *Ron Winter also will remain a Director at Michael J. London & Associates.*