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SEATTLE ARTS & LECTURES NAMES BOOKS TO PRISONERS AND AMY WHEELER, OUTGOING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HEDGEBROOK AS SEVENTH ANNUAL SHERRY PROWDA LITERARY CHAMPION WINNERS

Seattle, WA— February 3, 2020: At their annual Words Matter benefit gala on April 3, 2020, Seattle Arts & Lectures (SAL) will present the seventh annual Sherry Prowda Literary Champion Award to Books to Prisoners and to Amy Wheeler, outgoing Executive Director of Hedgebrook. SAL and the Prowda selection committee chose Books to Prisoners and Wheeler for demonstrating true commitment to our region's community of readers and writers.

Amy Wheeler is a playwright, theatre artist, teacher, and arts nonprofit leader. She led Hedgebrook, based on Whidbey Island and in Seattle, for 16 years— most recently as Executive Director (2006-2019), and previously, as Board President (2003-2006). Under Amy's leadership, the renowned Pacific Northwest nonprofit organization grew from a writers-in-residence program supporting 60-80 women writers a year and a Playwrights Festival, to a global community of several thousand influential alumnae who are authoring change in the literary, theatre, film and music worlds, as well as every sphere of public discourse through their TEDTalks, OpEds, blogs, podcasts, webinars, on Broadway, in concert halls, and stadiums, even in Congress. Hedgebrook's commitment to equity is embodied in the more than 80% of alumnae who are women of color, as well as LGBTQ and gender non-conforming.

Over the past decade, Hedgebrook's programs expanded to include a residency for Songwriters, Labs for Screenwriters and Documentary Filmmakers, and Y-WE Write, a summer writing camp for girl and non-binary writers produced in partnership with Seattle nonprofit Young Women Empowered. Amy innovated robust earned revenue programs, such Master Classes and Salons produced on Whidbey and in international locales (villas in Tuscany, Goa, and Karjat India to date), that are contributing to Hedgebrook's sustainability.

As a playwright, Amy is an alum of Hedgebrook and Yaddo. Her plays have been produced and developed nationally, including: The Guggenheim Museum and

The Greenwich Street Theatre in New York, Seattle's Theatre22, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Portland Center Stage's JAW West Festival and Stark Raving Theatre. Two of her plays are published in Rain City Project's Manifesto Anthologies.

Born and raised in Oklahoma, Amy holds a BGS from the University of Kansas, an MFA from the Iowa Playwrights Workshop, and an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from Cornish College of the Arts. She's taught playwriting at the University of Iowa, Cornish College of the Arts, Freehold Studio Theatre Lab, Hugo House, and in ACT Theatre's Young Playwrights Program. She lives on Whidbey with her wife Kate, an artist and writer, in a 110-year-old Dance Hall lovingly restored by Kate.

Books to Prisoners is a Seattle-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster a love of reading behind bars, encourage the pursuit of knowledge and self-empowerment, and break the cycle of recidivism. They believe that books are tools for learning and for opening minds to new ideas and possibilities, and engage incarcerated individuals with the benefits of reading by mailing tens of thousands of free books to inmates across the country each year. In 2015, the City of Seattle recognized Books to Prisoners as a Human Rights Leader.

Books to Prisoners was founded in the early 1970s and is sponsored by [Left Bank Books](#). As one of the largest and oldest prison book projects in the country, Books to Prisoners works in partnership with other groups that support prisoner literacy and promote social justice. Though their headquarters are in Seattle, [they have three associate organizations](#)—Portland Books To Prisoners, Books To Prisoners Olympia, and Books to Prisoners Spokane—who offer opportunities for volunteers and donors outside of Seattle.

The Prowda Literary Champion Award is named for Sherry Prowda, SAL's founder and first Executive Director. It was created to honor Prowda's vision of a future in which imaginative acts such as reading, writing, and creative thinking are indispensable to a curious, engaged, democratic society, and her leadership as a champion of the literary arts. Each year, the award celebrates the individuals and organizations that make Seattle an outstanding place for writers and readers.

The Prowda Award Selection committee was comprised of local literary luminaries: Paul Constant, co-founder of *The Seattle Review of Books*; Mary Ann Gwinn, former *Seattle Times* book editor; Linda Johns, children's book author and Fiction Librarian at the Seattle Public Library; Jennie Shortridge, local bestselling author of *Love Water Memory* and co-founder of Seattle7Writers; and Rick

Simonson of Elliott Bay Book Company.

About Seattle Arts & Lectures: Founded in 1987, Seattle Arts & Lectures champions the literary arts by engaging and inspiring readers and writers of all generations in the Puget Sound region. SAL's programs include the Literary Arts Series, Poetry Series, Women You Need to Know (WYNK), Journalism Series, SAL Presents, Hinge, Local Voices, Summer Book Bingo, the Youth Poet Laureate (YPL) program, and Writers in the Schools (WITS). For more information about SAL, visit lectures.org.

Photos available upon request.