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**SAL NAMES KAREN MAEDA ALLMAN OF ELLIOTT BAY BOOK COMPANY, AND BILLIE SWIFT, JOHN MARSHALL, & CHRISTINE DEAVEL OF OPEN BOOKS AS FOURTH ANNUAL SHERRY PROWDA LITERARY CHAMPION AWARD WINNERS**

**SEATTLE, WA – February 23, 2017:** At their annual Words Matter benefit gala on March 23, 2017, Seattle Arts & Lectures (SAL) will present the fourth annual Sherry Prowda Literary Champion Award to Karen Maeda Allman, Community Relations and Events Coordinator, and Bookseller at Elliott Bay Book Company, and Billie Swift, John Marshall & Christine Deavel, new owner and immediate past owners respectively of Open Books: A Poem Emporium.

SAL and the selection committee chose Allman, Swift, Marshall, and Deavel for their fervent work in support of books, book lovers, and local independent book sellers. Allman has been working with Elliott Bay Book Company for 18 years, helping to curate their reading series which often includes at least one author event per day either in Elliott Bay’s reading space downstairs, or out in the community in collaboration with SAL, Town Hall Seattle, Seattle Public Library, and many other literary arts presenters. Poets, partners and co-owners Marshall and Deavel opened Open Books in 1987 as a general interest bookstore with a large poetry selection. When they made the move to Open Books’ current location on North 45<sup>th</sup> Street in Wallingford, they reopened the store as a poetry-only independent bookseller. In early March 2016, Marshall and Deavel announced their intentions to retire and sell the store. Swift, a fellow poet, and a devoted store patron since 2009, offered to purchase the store and became its new owner on September 1, 2016. Swift has continued Marshall and Deavel’s incredible legacy, adding a few touches of her own including an increased presence on social media, and bringing back events at the store.

“We are so proud to get to celebrate Karen Maeda Allman and Open Books this year as our 2017 Prowda Literary Champions. Both Karen and Open Books have extraordinary histories of passionate advocacy on behalf of readers and writers, and we’re thrilled to shine a spotlight on their outstanding work,” said Ruth Dickey, SAL Executive Director.

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: Rick Simonson of Elliott Bay Book Company; Mary Ann Gwinn, *Seattle Times* Books 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 Chris Higashi, former head of the Washington Center for the Book and our 2016 Prowda Award winner.

**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) Series, SAL Presents, Hinge, Sherman Alexie Loves; and Writers in the Schools (WITS), an award-winning reading and writing program that places professional writers in public elementary, middle, and high schools. For more information about SAL, visit [lectures.org](http://lectures.org).

Photos available upon request.

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