

A little verse goes a long way

Poets will have works on display aboard Pierce Transit buses

By EVE DUMOVICH

Commuters now have rhythms and words to ponder as they ride aboard Pierce Transit buses.

Under the Tacoma Arts Commission-sponsored Bus Poetry for People project, 15 poems, written by poets from the Puget Sound area, will be displayed aboard the buses for the next five months.

Each month three separate poems will be hung in the advertising space inside 33 buses. Since the buses change routes routinely, almost everyone who uses the system will have a chance to read a poem or two.

"They (transit officials) project that some 7 million people will see these poems," said project organizer, Jeff Hartzler, a member of the Tacoma Writers' Club who is active in the local poetry scene.

The 15 poems to be displayed were selected after a contest which drew 288 entries from throughout the state.

Judges were performance poet Noel Newland of Sequim and nationally known poet, Laura Jensen of Tacoma.

"We received a lot of high quality poems. Only a few were submitted which could be considered 'in poor taste,'" said Jensen, author of several poetry books, most recently, *Memories*, published by Dragonsgate Press.

"I looked for the really differ-

ent and original poems," she said, adding that the judging took about eight hours, plus an afternoon of discussion with Newland and Hartzler to select the finalists.

Poets whose work will be displayed in the buses are Cynthia Pratt of Lacey, Carol Gordon of Olympia, Amelia Haller, Matthew Levesque, Terry Travis and Orpha Siehl, all of Tacoma; Shelley Calabrese of Vashon Island; Sheila Bender, Joan Fiset, John Brummet and Debie Sykes, all of Seattle; Kevin Miller of Gig Harbor, Janet Graves of Everett, Jeanne Severtsen and Drusilla Hobbs of Tumwater.

Yesterday, 11 of the 15 poets were each presented with a \$25 check and a certificate of achievement in the arts by Arts Commission president, John A. Moore. The ceremony took place during a break in the the Wednesday Summer Pops! concert in Fireman's Park which featured the Skyline Drifters.

Four recipients who were unable to attend the event will receive their awards later, said Moore.

Pierce County Transit Bus 533 was on display at the park, with the 15 poems on display inside.

"It's terrific fun," said poet Gordon of Olympia as she wandered between bus seats to read the poems.

"It's the only contest I entered the day after I recieved the infor-

mation," she said.

"I think it's an excellent idea," said poet Severtsen of Federal Way. "It gives a lot of people who don't have the chance to see poetry, the chance to read it accidentally."

Hartzler said he came up with the idea for the project a year ago.

"I do a lot of bus riding," he said. "I decided poetry is an art object, and should be displayed."

He presented the idea to members of the Tacoma Writers' Club who drafted the proposal for a grant from the Tacoma Arts Commission.

A year and \$1,900 later, the project has been completed, with assistance from Screen Graphics and Washington Transit Advertising.

"We basically looked for very good poems," said Hartzler. "The poems finally selected were written by the common citizen as well as by professional poets."

"These are visual poems, they contain lots of images. The poems were selected for display according to the season — like Drusilla R. Hobbs 'Blackberries' in the buses this month."

He said poems were chosen which most people would enjoy, and that overly intellectual literary-quarterly-style poetry was avoided.

Most of the poetry is in contem-

porary blank verse, but Tacoman Orpha Siehl's "Salute to Autumn" is rhymed and lyrical. It contains the lines:

*Dust motes floating in a shaft of late sun
A spider's scintillating web —
just spun
Corn stalks are cut, red apples in the bin
A golden day to bring the harvest in....*

Kira Bacon, director of the Tacoma Arts Commission said the project had special significance because "It's very difficult to stage the literary arts for a wide public. It's an excellent idea."

She added that it "would be wonderful" if the project could become an annual event.

Hartzler said he'll run his own personal survey on the effectiveness of the poetry by "riding the buses and listening to what people are saying."

Meanwhile, Tacomans can take their minds off bills, sore feet, stuffy air and the elbow of the person beside them by reading poems like "After Work" by Kevin Miller:

*My daughter greets me,
hands extended
like a guard
in a zone defense,
on a team
of baby buddhas.*



Jeff Hartzler and Kira Bacon inspected a poem