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People & Places: Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award

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Posted: Sunday, November 27, 2016 12:00 am



Billy Collins, former U.S. Poet Laureate, is the winner of the 2016 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award. SUZANNAH GILMAN/Courtesy

By James D. Watts Jr. Tulsa World | 0 comments

Billy Collins has always been a firm believer in poetry in public places.

He helped create "Poetry in Motion," which placed poetry-adorned posters in major transit stations in the New York City area.

"I'm also working on starting a poetry channel for Delta Airlines, where people could listen to poetry while they're flying around the country," Collins said. "And I'm working with United Airlines to include poetry in their in-flight magazines.

"I just want to get poetry out of the classroom, off the shelf and out into the world," he said.

Collins will likely engage in putting his own poetry out into the world when he comes to Tulsa this weekend to receive the 2016 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award.

Collins will receive the prize — a \$40,000 cash award and an engraved crystal book — at a black-tie ceremony Friday at the newly renovated Central Library.

Collins is the first poet to receive the Helmerich Award, which has been presented by the Tulsa Library Trust since 1985.

Several of the honorees have written poetry, such as Joyce Carol Oates, Wendell Berry, John

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Updike and Margaret Atwood, but are better known for their prose fiction and nonfiction.

Collins will also take part in a free public event at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, also at Central Library. Copies of Collins' books, which include "Ballistics," "The Trouble with Poetry" and the recently published "The Rain in Portugal," will be available for purchase.

Event details: Awards dinner, 6:30 p.m. Friday. Public presentation, 10:30 a.m. Saturday at Central Library, Fourth Street and Boulder Avenue.

Attire: Awards dinner is black-tie.

Sponsors: Tulsa Library Trust

Tickets: Awards dinner, \$175. To reserve, call 918-549-7366. tulsalibrary.org

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