

Inspiration and java conspire to create lively weekly event

By Mary Beth Gillam
Athens NEWS Writer

The lights are low. The people sitting at comfortable tables in the cozy back room of the Donkey Café are sipping their cappuccinos and mochas in quiet anticipation of the next person to take the microphone.

As Sage, an aspiring poet, steps on the stage, his nervousness is apparent, but the 25 or 30 people in the audience are encouraging and supportive. He warms up by reading a haiku from the movie "Fight Club." His confidence builds as he continues with his own poem, and the audience is his when he reads the last line: "Beauty is an event."

When he leaves the stage and walks back to his seat, the audience is clearly moved.

What impresses them is not only Sage's age (he is a student at Athens High School), but also that he could capture the theme of the evening so eloquently in just four words.

It is exactly the type of thing that Bret Lyons had in mind when he held the first poetry reading at the Donkey in June. The readings were held every other week during the summer under the name "Speak Words." They were so successful that Lyons now holds readings every Tuesday night. He also changed the name to "Designated Space."

"The beauty of getting on the stage is that anything goes," says Lyons. "The stage is your designated space." For some people, Lyons says, that space could be a confessional or a soapbox, and for others it might serve as a venue to explore performance poetry.

Doctor John, one of the poets featured in Tuesday's reading, says, "Reading and speaking here is a sort of communion. It's a sharing of experiences and sometimes vulnerabilities."

Anyone can sign up to read, and everyone is welcome, including those who prefer to just listen. The readers range from experienced poets such as Harpo, whom Lyons calls "street poet extraordinaire," to high school students like Sage, who earns extra

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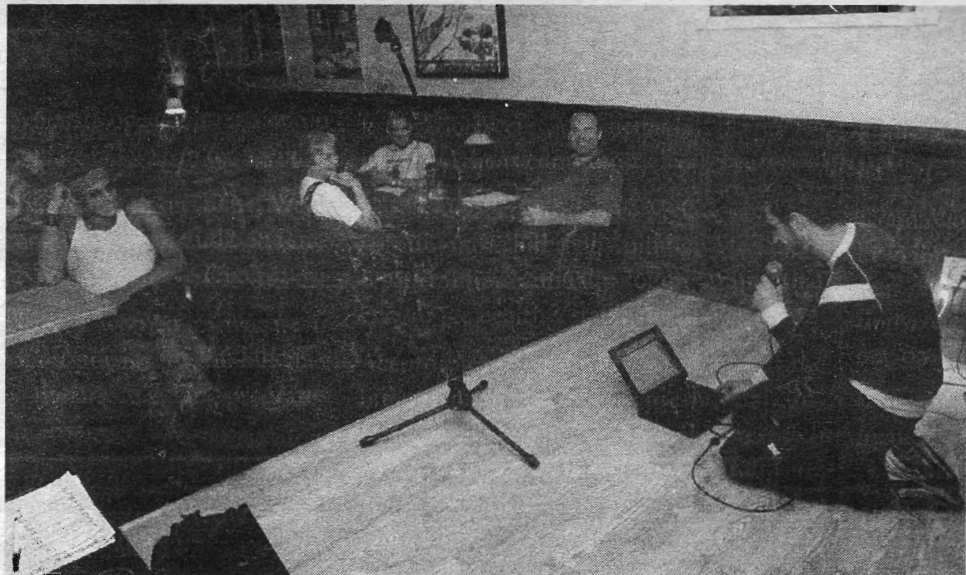
credit for participating.

Lyons introduces the readers, and usually ends the evening with his own contribution. Everyone gets two to four minutes to read poems or simply to say what's on their minds. That may not seem like a long time to some, but Lyons says the idea is to keep the readings fresh, and keep people coming back every week.

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The slams will be held monthly, and Lyons says he is planning other special nights, such as a kids' night or a parents' night, and he is open to suggestions.

Sign-up begins each Tuesday at 8:30 p.m., and the reading usually gets started around 9. The event lasts about two hours with one short break. For more information, look for Bret Lyons at the Donkey Café.



Joe Robb, left, recites a poem during the spoken-word/poetry reading at Donkey Coffee on Tuesday, Sept. 17. Photo by Chelsea Lobser.