

**ROPEWALK WRITERS RETREAT  
RECEIVES SUPPORT  
FROM RUTH LILLY**



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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The Ropewalk Writers Retreat, an annual conference for aspiring and established writers, has received a \$50,000 gift from Mrs. Ruth Lilly of Indianapolis, Indiana. Her gift to the Ropewalk Retreat is in response to a request for support written by University of Southern Indiana professors Tom Wilhelmus and Matthew Graham, Ropewalk's organizers.

"Mrs. Lilly's gift will mean the promise of fulfilling our dreams for this conference," said Wilhelmus, professor of English and assistant dean of the School of Liberal Arts. Among the dreams he and Graham have are to establish the conference as one of excellence in the Midwest, to create scholarships for superior writing students, to expand the number of visiting faculty including a poet-in-residence, to lengthen the conference from one to two weeks, and to create a magazine which would showcase the work of Ropewalk students.

Wilhelmus also said the most immediate need which can be met with Mrs. Lilly's gift is to establish scholarships for which Ropewalk students can compete. "This will allow us to defray the costs of travel and lodging for the most talented students, regardless of their financial circumstances," said Wilhelmus.

The writer's retreat is held annually in New Harmony, Indiana, where USI manages and develops programs consistent with the community's history and potential as a place of continuing intellectual and artistic endeavor. Ropewalk takes its name from the rope walk which once stretched 1,100 feet from New Harmony's North Street to Steammill Street. Graham said the name is a metaphor for "a place where thoughts and feelings are twisted into new poetry. We thought it was the right name for such an ambitious literary endeavor."

Graham and Wilhelmus began the conference four years ago. "We wanted a conference which would be regional and national in scope, one which would be serious in its approach to writing. To date, the retreat has attracted students from throughout Indiana, the Midwest, and from both coasts. In an effort to sustain the conference financially, the University has been assisted by a variety of groups, individuals, and grants. Mrs. Lilly's interest in poetry, which also leads her to award the \$25,000 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize each year, encourages poetry and poetic achievement throughout the United States. Philip Levine, one of the recipients of the Lilly Prize, was an instructor at the first Ropewalk Conference. According to Wilhelmus, "Mrs. Lilly's gift not only makes Ropewalk solvent, but also allows us to improve and expand on our foundation."

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