

GREAT MOMENTS IN RESEARCH

Writing their own success stories

Famed Canadian novelist W.P. Kinsella may have hit it out of the ballpark with his 1982 novel *Shoeless Joe*—which would later become the Oscar-nominated Kevin Costner film, *Field of Dreams*—but the bullpen he warmed up in was none other than UVic's Department of Writing.

The home-schooled Kinsella had been penning stories since he was a child, but lacked any formal writing background before coming to UVic as a 30-something undergraduate student in the early '70s. His talent quickly became apparent once he started working on what would become his debut collection of short stories under the watchful eye of novelist and then-department chair, Bill Valgardson.

Kinsella is only one of many literary stars who have honed their craft in UVic classrooms. From best-selling fantasy author Steven Erikson to the recent international success of Esi Edugyan—whose novel, *Half-Blood Blue*, was nominated for four of the world's most prestigious fiction writing awards—UVic's writing program has crafted volumes of success stories, large and small.

Info: finea.uvic.ca/journal/

GARDENING IN THE CITY

Mike Edel and Jory MacKay. PHOTO: NIK WEST

A new urban agriculture magazine sprouts out of a UVic writing class

On Vancouver Island, not all farmers live in the country. Increasingly, city-dwellers are becoming involved in urban agriculture—tending vegetable gardens, harvesting fruit from urban orchards, keeping bees or setting up chicken coops, growing mushrooms, raising fish—and benefiting from organic and sustainable sources of food right in their own back yards.

This movement—which is growing in popularity not only on Vancouver Island, but around the world—is the inspiration for a new magazine, soon to be published by University of Victoria writing students.

“Every year, I challenge my professional writing and editing class to think of new ideas for magazines,” says Prof. David Leach, a longtime magazine writer and editor, and director of the professional writing program at UVic. “Last year, one of the student groups came up with the idea of a magazine built around the sustainable urban agriculture movement.”

The students who developed the concept, Jory MacKay and Mike Edel, explain: “It’s something we’re both passionate about,” says MacKay, “and we know there are lots of people like us who are interested in sustainability,

fascinated by growing their own food, and happy to get their hands dirty.”

After successfully pitching their idea to the class, the students started thinking about their target audience, the format of the magazine and how they could finance its publication. “Their idea was the strongest I’d seen in a long time,” says Leach, “but there’s a lot more to publishing a magazine than having a great idea.”

The students decided to target the magazine at an audience of 20- to 30-somethings, and to focus on sustainable urban farming and gardening, and other forms of alternative agriculture on the West Coast. By the end of the semester, they had developed a prototype issue, a bank of story ideas, and a solid business plan.

“They did really well,” says Leach, “They had an original idea, strong writing skills and a striking design. I thought they could take the next step and turn their idea into reality.” MacKay and Edel began a directed study (which means they receive course credit) for developing and publishing the magazine as an ongoing venture, with both a print and digital download edition.

“We took everything we’d learned in class and transferred those skills directly to the real

world,” says MacKay. “The biggest challenge for us was the entrepreneurial aspects of it. We’re writers, and had no experience talking to potential investors, selling ads or negotiating with suppliers. It was a very steep learning curve.”

With the first issue of the magazine, called *Concrete Garden*, due to be printed this fall, the student publishers are nailing down final content and design, choosing a printer, and looking at ways to raise money to offset production costs.

“The exciting thing about this project is that it will live on after Jory and Mike have left,” says Leach, “Our goal is to produce an issue of the magazine once or twice a year as part of our professional writing and publishing program. Students in different courses will write articles and feature stories, update the website and design the layout.

“It will continue to get students excited about the magazine business—and produce something that is of real value to the community.”

To find out more about the Concrete Garden visit:



Meet David Leach at
h.p://bit.ly/uvic-leach