

Kentucky poet wins Transylvania's 10th annual Judy Gaines Young

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Transylvania University has named Kentucky poet Leatha Kendrick as winner of the 2025 Judy Gaines Young Book Award, which has been recognizing exceptional works of Appalachian writers for the past 10 years.

Kendrick, along with student winner Erika Williams '26, will be celebrated March 28 at 5 p.m. in Carrick Theater.

Both honorees will read from their works during the free, public event. Additionally, a resolution will be presented [in memory of lifetime Transylvania trustee Dr. Byron Young '61](#), who made the award possible in honor of his late wife, a 1962 graduate.

Both Judy Gaines Young and Kendrick dedicated themselves to writing in midlife and found community at the Kentucky Women Writers Conference.

Kendrick, who also made deep connections through the Appalachian Writers Workshop, has published five collections of poetry and received honors including fellowships from Kentucky Arts Council and Kentucky Foundation for Women.

"Leatha's poetry looks deeply at the world, from a curious mind that has read widely, and from a spirit willing to sit, as she says in her poem 'Your Fear' that opens her fifth book 'And Luckier,' with 'misery and joy – the living edge of mystery,'" professor Jeremy Paden said. "Her craft is seamless, and hard-won wisdom is passed on to her readers in well-wrought, musical phrases that shimmer."

Kendrick (pictured above, left) earned an MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts and master's and bachelor's degrees from the University of Kentucky.

This year's Judy Gaines Young student winner, Erika Williams (right), is an English major and creative writing minor from Tehachapi, California. She serves as a Writing Center staffer and Transylvanian literary magazine editor and founded the Writers' Circle.

As for the [field of candidates for this year's award](#), choosing a winner between them was particularly hard, Paden said. "The nominees are all gifted writers who have worked not just to perfect their craft but pass that on and nurture other writers through workshops and mentoring and similar activities."

Judy Gaines Young winners

Holly Goddard Jones (2015)

Amy Green (2016)

Crystal Wilkinson (2017)

Kathleen Driskell (2018)

Silas House (2019)

Frank X Walker (2020)

Robert Gipe (2021)

Jeff Worley (2022)

Richard Taylor (2023)

George Ella Lyon (2024)

Leatha Kendrick (2025)

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