

Together Place telling 'Stories of Maine'

Bangor exhibit brings state's literary history to life

By Allen Adams

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BANGOR – A local recovery center is using Maine's literary tradition to help spread the word about their services to the community.

Together Place, a peer-run recovery center, is located on the corner of Second Street and Union. You're probably familiar with the building if you've driven by – its two street-facing walls are dominated by huge murals dedicated to some of the most prominent figures in Maine's cultural history.

At least a few of those figures gracing the outside are now gracing the inside, part of Together Place's new exhibit, titled "Stories of Maine." The exhibit's official opening takes place on Nov. 29 at 5 p.m.; best-selling author and Bangor High graduate Christina Baker Kline will be a special guest.

The exhibit itself is meant to help shine a light

on Maine's literary history, according to Sean Faircloth, executive director of Together Place.

"Maine has one of the richest per capita literary histories in the country," Faircloth said. "No small population state – say three million or less – has as many connected works of impact as Maine does."

It's a point that becomes clear as one walks the perimeter of the exhibit, a series of framed covers from books with Maine connections. Whether they're written by a native or simply about the state, you can see that there are a LOT of heavy hitters on the list. Stephen King leads the way, obviously. His works make multiple appearances throughout the exhibit. But he's far from alone – the collection of talent is quite impressive.

The joy of "Stories of Maine" is the ability to learn more – more about the author or the story and their connection to the Pine Tree State – thanks to the text provided for each individual work, totaling close to 70 in all.

The type and tone of this information varies, ranging from literary seriousness to issues-related impact to pop culture relevance (and sometimes combinations therein). Each framed piece – cover and text – was put together by graphic designer Bill Dwyer.

While the exhibit draws inspiration from all over the state, there are a great deal of entries that have a direct connection to the Bangor area specifically. Again, there's Stephen King, but there's also Christina Baker Kline. There's a book on satellite archaeology from Sarah Parcak and a book about Bangor's racy history from Ardeana Hamlin. There are numerous works courtesy of University of Maine professors. And on and on and on – when you see it all in one place, it really is impressive.

"Our state really punches above its weight as far as literary impact," said Faircloth.

The intent of the exhibit is to help illustrate how valuable literature – and by extension the arts in general – can be to the recovery process. "Stories of Maine" is meant to keep that value in the forefront, working hand-in-hand with some of Together Place's writing- and art-based recovery groups. The center also has its long-standing Periscope Writing contest, entering its

14th year in March; it's open to adult mental health consumers or those in substance abuse recovery who live in Maine.

It's also meant to help introduce the space to the general public, both in terms of the many important services Together Place offers and the potential for outside use presented by the newly-improved space housing "Stories of Maine."

"This would be a great place to have a meeting or a reception," Faircloth said. "We'd love to have more organizations use the place to gather."

And really, that's what Faircloth and company hope to achieve with "Stories of Maine." The cultural reach of our city is vast; the goal is for this exhibit to help provide that spark a collaborative conversation between organizations and create new relationships.

Words matter. Exhibits like this are intended to illustrate just how much.

(The grand opening of "Stories of Maine" – with special guest Christina Baker Kline – takes place on Nov. 29 starting at 5 p.m. For more information about Together Place and Maine Mental Health Connections, visit their website at www.mmhc.us.)

The MMHC executive director, with the authorization of the Together Place board, selected the people to be honored on the murals and drafted the text and selected the images for the "Stories of Maine" exhibit.

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