Gregg Wilhelm's first job in publishing after he graduated from Loyola College was at Maryland Farmer, an agricultural newspaper. Years later, he can still talk about types of alfalfa and breeds of cattle.

A self-described city boy and a Hampden native who now lives in Highlandtown, Wilhelm at that job learned more than he ever needed to know about agriculture. But it helped launch a career in publishing that continues to this day.

Wilhelm got his first book publishing position in the early 1990s at Johns Hopkins University Press. Working under experienced editors, he learned about the market for regionally focused books by local writers. At the time, he was also getting a master's degree in divinity at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore.

In 2002, while on a trip to Minneapolis, Wilhelm came upon a successful literary center and performance space called Open Book. Around that time, he was coming to the idea that more needed to be done to build a literary community in Baltimore. Or else, he said, the audience for books might wither away.

In early 2004, he launched CityLit Project, a nonprofit group designed to promote the literary life in and around Baltimore.

The group holds writers' workshops and conferences and produces literary festivals and author events. This year's upcoming CityLit stage at the Baltimore Book Festival in late September will feature discussions about journalists-turned-authors, wine writing, author H.L. Mencken, sports writing and tips from agents.

Wilhelm's full-time job is director of communications at the Babe Ruth Museum, which runs the legendary slugger's birthplace and the Sports Legends at Camden Yards museums. He also works as director of Apprentice House Publishers, the student publishing company of Loyola College.

While other art forms get lots of attention, Wilhelm said, literature can get lost in the shuffle, even in a city like Baltimore with a rich literary history.

"I think the history is taken for granted," he said. "And a lot of the current scene gets ignored."

Wilhelm credits CityLit Project's growth to "surrounding myself with smarter people than me." But his fellow board members say he has provided the enthusiasm to make the project work.

"He's basically a bundle of energy," said Dan Fesperman, a Baltimore Sun writer, novelist and board member.

"He has such a clear vision of what he wants to accomplish, and it's so worthwhile," said E. Scott Johnson, a lawyer with Baltimore law firm Ober Kaler and chairman of the group's board. "The things he wants to do are not really being done comprehensively by any other organization in Baltimore."

The group also has its own publishing imprint, Pagoda Press, which has books in the works on beer brewing in Baltimore and a fiction project by local author Rafael Alvarez. Eventually, Wilhelm would like CityLit to have a physical location.