The Same Page
A local publisher and editor create the first Baltimore writers’ anthology.

BY JESS BLUMBERG

Baltimore has never exactly been considered a hotbed of literary activity. But the creators of a new book hope to change that.

“I think we are often overlooked because we’re sandwiched between two big cities,” says Jen Michalski, editor of City Sages: Baltimore, launching at the CityLit Festival.

The book is an anthology of work from 36 writers—past and present, known and unknown—who have all resided in the city. The mission is to emphasize that Baltimore has always had a strong literary community.

“I’ve been amazed how many writers there are here,” says Michalski. “I’m someone who is relatively involved in the literary scene and, if I didn’t realize it at first, someone with a cursory passing interest wouldn’t know.”

Michalski began exploring the local scene in 2006 and quickly surmised there was no outlet for writers to meet. So she set up writers’ happy hours and co-created the 510 Reading Series in Hampden. That’s when she discovered the plethora of local talent.

She decided to create an anthology. She posted public calls at area colleges, bookstores, and coffee shops. Soon, submissions came pouring in.

The anthology features some writers no longer alive (Edgar Allan Poe, Gertrude Stein, Frederick Douglass), some thriving today (Anne Tyler, Stephen Dixon, Laura Lippman), and others just breaking through.

Surprisingly, this is the first anthology of its kind for Baltimore. There are encyclopedias of local writers, and some that compile modern pieces, but nothing of this scale.

“If you want something done in this town, you’ve got to roll up your sleeves and make it happen,” she says.

That’s why Michalski contacted Gregg Wilhelm, director of CityLit Project, a non-profit that runs festivals, youth programs, and now a publishing imprint, CityLit Press.

“This is the perfect way to launch the imprint because our goal is to create a local community of writers,” Wilhelm says.

City Sages: Baltimore is the first in what Michalski and Wilhelm hope will grow to other overlooked cities like Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Nashville.

“We want to challenge them to find a body of good writers in their cities,” she says. “And we don’t think they’ll fail because we got more than we bargained for.”