CityLit Festival Makes Baltimore Debut

by Jim Milliot, PW Daily for Booksellers -- 4/22/2004

The CityLit Festival, held April 17 at Baltimore’s Enoch Pratt Free Library, attracted 750 people and was highlighted by a reading from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward P. Jones. The event, the first conducted by the recently formed nonprofit literary arts organization CityLit Project, included poetry readings, a panel featuring local authors and workshops. About 50 exhibitors displayed titles, including regional houses Black Classic Press, Tidewater Publishers and Mobtown Writers’ Collective.

CityLit Project, which also includes the not-for-profit publisher Pagoda Press, was founded by Gregg Wilhelm, former head of Woodholme House Publishers. Woodholme was backed by the Weese family, which also owned Bibelot Books and Music, the regional bookstore chain that closed amid a major financial scandal.

Wilhelm said he started CityLit because “independent publishers need to take a more comprehensive approach to publishing literary authors.” He added that he hopes the series of readings and other public programs that are scheduled for the year will help develop an audience for new authors.

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Pagoda Press probably won’t release its first titles until fall 2005, according to Wilhelm. The publisher will focus on regional Maryland books as well as fiction, including literary fiction.

The next CityLit event is set for May 22 at a Barnes & Noble store that was once a Bibelot outlet. The theme will be the business of publishing, and Wilhelm said he hopes to “indoctrinate new authors of the need to hustle to promote their book post publication.”