LOVING THE PRINTED WORD

Loyola's unique student-staffed book publishing operation and the CityLit Project are both ways to get Baltimoreans, especially the young, excited about the literary arts.

BY LAUREN SHULL (STAFF REPORTER)

Greg Wilhelm stands in front of a large metal cabinet in a classroom full of computers, proudly displaying the books that his students have published. It’s an eclectic mix ranging from poetry to wine guides to a translation of the diary of a second-century Christian martyr.

Wilhelm makes his living off the printed word. In addition to teaching at Loyola College’s student-staffed educational publishing house, Apprentice House, he is the founder and CEO of the CityLit Project. At Apprentice House, students learn to develop projects and design and market books. CityLit, meanwhile, aims to “nurture the natural love of literature” in Baltimore through programs and workshops, including an annual festival at the downtown library.

The Loyola graduate had just finished grading class assignments and took a break from his busy life — which he says he manages with the help of a very supportive wife and lots of coffee — to talk to The Sun about what he does for the written word.

Tell me about your classroom — what goes on in here?

Apprentice House has been around for 50 years. It was a stockroom producing pre-press projects as part of one course in the communications department at Loyola College. Then the science technology, economy, and business program added a book publishing class to its curriculum. And so, in the fall, Kevin teaches the design course for projects that have already been accepted and have been published. This printing just finished the marketing class in which the students create marketing plans.

What happens over the summer when the staff is gone on vacation?

That’s a trick, because this is the first fall that Kevin and I have been doing this. We need to meet and talk about that. What do you do when your staff runs out over 14 weeks of school, but your projects are still running — and you’re trying to get them out on time? I’ve talked to a few young people about finishing these over the summer. Kevin and I are on the same page in that we want to get these projects done even in the absence of students.

Tell me about your other life, with CityLit Project.

The idea was that I wanted to do more to not just produce the books that I was publishing but to more comprehensively nurture the culture of literature, which is our flagship at CityLit. So I started the foundation, the beginnings of CityLit Project in 2005.

In the fall of 2005, Hurricane Isabel blew through Baltimore and quite literally wiped out the Baltimore Book Festival. So after that, the literary arts community rallied and said it would be a shame if there was no celebration of the literary arts in Baltimore that year. So we rescheduled a scaled-down version of the festival for the spring of 2006.

What surprises me,” says Greg Wilhelm, “is how much I’m enjoying the teaching.”

And that’s the outcome of the success of CityLit.

I CARRIED OUT A CAREER IN BOOKS IN BALTIMORE AT ALL TIMES. I NEVER HAD THE DESIRE TO WORK ON NEW YORK, AND I THINK MY OPPORTUNITY LAY WHERE I’VE BEEN ABLE TO DO THE BEST, EVEN THE BEST. I’VE DONE IT IN BALTIMORE.”

GREGG WILHELM