



# LAUGHING BEAR NEWSLETTER 94

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## The Surviving Small Press: Directory of Publisher Organizations

I've seen all kinds of directories related to small press, but I don't know of any directory widely available dedicated to organizations for small publishers. I'd like to do something about that. There are hundreds of groups in the US and around the world, but even the largest ones are hard to find unless they find you first.

Therefore, it seems a worthwhile project to compile a directory of such groups. The small press world is scattered. Whenever someone decides to self-publish or set up a small publishing company, they start from scratch.

Someone starting out may have been exposed to publishing through a magazine or newspaper in school, or a book on self-publishing, or they know someone who's published a zine or book. From there they have to gradually accumulate skills and information, learning as they go. But there's no better way to learn a craft than to have access to people who practice that craft, to be able to ask questions and learn from their experience.

A publishers' association gives the new member access to people who've been pub-

lishing for awhile. In turn, senior members benefit from new ideas and fresh enthusiasm brought to the group by new publishers.

No two groups offer the same services and resources. Some concentrate on marketing. Others on setting up events. Some are for literary publishers, while others are for nonfiction or magazines or academics. The variety of organizations and services is almost as vast as the variety of small publishers.

A comprehensive directory of groups could be useful in a number of ways for both new publishers and those who've been at it for years. First, to find a group nearby with similar interests, and then to find groups that meet specific needs.

Someone whose interest is in printing their own books by hand would find more in common with the National Amateur Press Association, whose membership includes letterpress printers and fine print presses, than with a group whose membership is more interested in reaching a mass market.

On the other hand, the directory would also help publishers widen their horizons. A member of the NAPA may benefit from having exposure to an organization that helps publishers apply

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## National Amateur Press Association

NAPA is an organization of publishers from letterpress publishers to zine-type newsletters.

Each month members receive a bundle of publications, mailed by my similarly named friend, Tom Parson, that bring news and poems from all over the country. It's like letters from home.

The latest bundle includes a letter from Tom's wife Patti updating members on their son Aaron; *The Eagle Is Down*, a reminiscence of a WWII flyer from The Boxwood Press; lots of little broadsides, hand printed, from across the country with news from small towns or memories of growing up.

Many of the pieces in the mailing are written and printed especially for the mailing, so it's like a big, free form newsletter, though NAPA has an official publication, too, *The National Amateur*. Because the pieces are written for the mailings, they are homey and conversational.

NAPA is a refreshing throwback to an era of small press not so long ago when we did this for fun and joined a group to share ideas.

Contact: Jack H. Visser, P.O. Box 262, Flushing, OH 43977; Dues: \$20 per year + \$7.50 for foreign; three month trial membership free.

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## **Directory** *(continued)*

for grants or a local group that sponsors book fairs.

What I would like to do is make it Laughing Bear's very-nearly-annual special project for 1997 to compile a directory of publisher organizations, send a copy to all subscribers, put it on the web site where it can be downloaded, and make it available to anyone else who requests it.

This is not going to be a big production – a simple chapbook at best. If it gets really big, there can be an electronic version, probably a generic database or ASCII file. I have even considered contacting a shareware database publisher and including that software so it's a self-contained disk that will work on any PC.

I have no intention of publishing an expensive book. The whole point is to make this information available to anyone who wants it.

To do this, I'll need your help. Please send the addresses (mail or e-mail) and/or phone and fax numbers of any organizations you belong to or know of – or ask them to contact me.

Don't hesitate to include small local groups. They are often the most difficult to find. And smaller organizations can provide more personalized attention to the day to day issues that come up for individual publisher, which can be important for someone just getting started.

Also consider groups that share common interests with publishers. In Denver, we had the Poets of the Front Range, a literary group, but they held some of the best book fairs I've participated in.

I can see the directory being useful in marketing and publicity for the organizations listed, as well as the publishers who use it. Bringing together a project like Small Press Week could be helped quite a bit with the support of as many community groups as possible, I would think.

**I need your help. Please send the names of groups, no matter how small.**

Smaller groups may use it to work out cooperative programs with others, making more benefits available to their members than they could provide on their own.

I'll work up a questionnaire asking about the organization's services, dues, who's eligible for membership, how long they've been around, how many members they have, and benefits of membership. If you have any suggestions for information you'd like to include in the directory that I may not come up with, please let me know.

There needs to be some criteria for what constitutes an organization. There are a number I know of that are nothing more than a person or press calling themselves an organization, but it's just a front for selling their services or even worse, they're just in it to make money off the

dues. There needs to be a way to weed those out.

An organization can be any size, but should offer something more than a newsletter and annual conference for the dues they collect. They should not accept advertising (to avoid conflict of interest). And for anything over the community level, they should have an elected board of directors or elected officers, or in some other way be accountable to their members.

There will be exceptions to these criteria, but I think they are helpful. Again, I would appreciate suggestions.

In addition, it would be useful to list organizations related to publishing, like the American Booksellers Association and its regional chapters. Regional booksellers' associations sponsor book fairs and other promotions in which publishers can participate. As an associate member you receive their newsletter and can take part in activities.

State and local arts councils aren't always membership organizations, but they sponsor literary and cultural programs and events and are usually supportive of small press. There can also be opportunities for grants.

Organizations of craftspeople (papermakers, letterpress printers, illustrators, bookbinders) could be useful resources for publishers. Literary and writers' groups could be included, too, since they sometimes sponsor book fairs and readings, and often have publisher members.

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## Directory (continued)

These kinds of related fields could be listed in their own sections in the directory. Or that may be stretching out the concept of the directory too far. Let me know what you want this directory to be. What will make it most useful to you?

Do you think it's a reasonable project at all? How can you see yourself using it?

I've been wrong before, but this has several things going for it. The organizations should be supportive since they get free publicity. The directory is essentially free and the information unique, so it should be easy to distribute through press releases. And it can be "printed" as needed to keep the cost down.

I don't see the directory being ready before August. I'll have to send out press releases to the organizations I know in the US and abroad asking for mailing lists of organizations they are in touch with, then do the same with those. And wait for responses.

I'll also be using the internet and newsgroups to search for publisher organizations.

The data will have to be collected, digested, and listings written, then put together and printed. But by the end of the summer I should have something to send you.

When it's done, we should have a useful tool to help bring the small press world a little closer together. If this is something you'd like to be an ongoing effort, we can put out updates. If not, at least we tried to do something to make things better for ourselves and the presses to come.

## Announcements

● **Astro Comics** (4195 Chino Hills Pkwy, Ste. 329, Chino Hills, CA 91709) publishes *Hilly Rose*, one of the best alternative comics I've seen, and one of the few that doesn't rely on sex, hate, or gore. \$2.95/issue.

● **MidAmerica Publishers Association** (Chris Roerden, president; PO Box 376, Ada MI, 49301; 888-308-MAPA) is sponsoring BookFest '97 April 25-26 in Milwaukee. This marks MAPA's 10th anniversary. The event will feature 2 days of intensive sessions on advanced book marketing methods.

● **Colorado Independent Publishers Association** (CIPA, PO Box 4008, Boulder, CO 80306; [www.cipabooks.com](http://www.cipabooks.com)) has decided that just giving members their own web page at the CIPA site is not enough. They are going to help members create their own web sites under the CIPA domain for a modest price. That lets members design and promote their sites independently while still benefiting from the organization's promotions.

● **Small Press Review** (Len Fulton, ed.; Dustbooks, PO Box 100, Paradise, CA 95967; \$25/12 issues), beginning its 29th year, remains the source for literary reviews, comment, and dialog in small press.

● **1997 PMA/ABA Publishing University** (Publishers Marketing Association, 627 Aviation Way, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266) is a 2 day event in Chicago, May 29-30, featuring seminars in editing, marketing, design, finance, law, sales, and publicity. The ABA in the name refers to its place and time coinciding with the ABA book fair.

● **Dream Network** (H. Roberta Ossana, ed.; PO Box 1026, Moab, UT 84532; <http://www.hmtp.com/new/dream/dream.html>; \$22/4 issues) is a quarterly journal exploring dreams and myth.

● **Esofea Report** (Rt 2, Westby, WI 54667-9802; free) is a personal zine covering politics, drugs, freedom, and gardening. Features essays, artwork, and comics.

● **The Yellowstone Meditations** by James Magorian (Poetry forum Press, 5713 Larchmont Dr., Erie, PA 16509; \$3) is a long poem of 4 line stanzas. A pleasure.

● **Squaw Valley Community of Writers** (Brett Hall Jones; 10626 Banner Lava Cap Rd., Nevada City, CA 95959) will hold its 1997 workshops on "Art of the Wild", poetry, fiction/nonfiction, and screen-writing July 11-August 9. Write for a copy of their publication, *Omnium Gatherum & Newsletter*, for details on the workshops (and just for the good articles on writing).

● **Poets' Roundtable** (Esther Alman, ed.; Poets' Study Club, 826 S. Center St., Terre Haute, IN 47807), a newsletter for poets, sponsors a no-fee competition.

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