

Manitoba Writers' Guild downsizing office space after funding cut

By: Carol Sanders

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Marc Gallant/Winnipeg Free Press Files

2004 file photo of Writers Guild's Robyn Maharaj and Jamis Paulson in teaching classroom in the Artspace building. Due to a funding cut, the Manitoba Writers' Guild is closing their second-floor classroom and office in the Exchange District this month.

After its funding took a hit, the Manitoba Writers' Guild is packing up its second-floor classroom and office in the Exchange District this month, putting things in storage and figuring out what's next.

"We're just trying to downsize to conserve our funds," said Susan Rocan, president of the organization, after the guild posted the news on Facebook.

"In light of decisions by granting councils to cut operating support for the Manitoba Writers' Guild, the board of the guild has voted to reduce costs by shrinking the organization's physical presence," the group, founded in 1981, said in an online post.

"This step is necessary for the organization's survival, but will result in the closure of the (guild's) current office and classroom on the second floor of the Artspace building. The board is working to establish a small studio office or, should that not be possible, a virtual office."

The non-profit group that provides programs and services to more than 100 Manitoba writers will maintain a small office space on the fifth floor of Artspace at 100 Arthur St., said board member Bob Armstrong, who edits the group's newsletter and Facebook page.

The guild will continue to run the Manitoba Book Awards and the Sheldon Oberman Mentorship Program, but writing workshops and other public programming will be held in more affordable venues, such as the Millennium Library.

The space cost the group around \$680 per month, Armstrong said. For now, they're planning to keep a small, fifth-floor space that costs closer to \$100 per month.

The volunteer-run Manitoba Writers' Guild lost its Manitoba Arts Council operating funds last spring. It also lost its Winnipeg Arts Council funding.

For now, the guild is asking current members to pay their dues and new members to join.

"We really do need to attract young writers," Armstrong said.

The guild is trying to recruit them at horror and science fiction conferences. There are graphic novelists and spoken-word writers and those in other genres who would also benefit from joining the guild's community of writers, Armstrong said.

The guild offers critiquing circles, "blue pen sessions" and is open to developing new workshops to meet the needs of new members.

"We need to get their views of what they want us to do," he said.

"We've been around for nearly 40 years. We're seen as a unifying force that a lot of people tell us is important. We've got such a strong writing community in Manitoba."

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