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Bowling Green author chronicles literary clubs

By JULIANNA LOWE intern@bgdailynews.com

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After more than 25 years in the making, Western Kentucky University emeritus associate professor Jean E. Nehm is finally seeing the release of her biggest project, “Respectfully Submitted: The Remarkable Literary Clubs of Bowling Green Kentucky.”

To honor the release of her book, Nehm will host a signing from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday at the Eloise B. Houchens Center on Adams Street.

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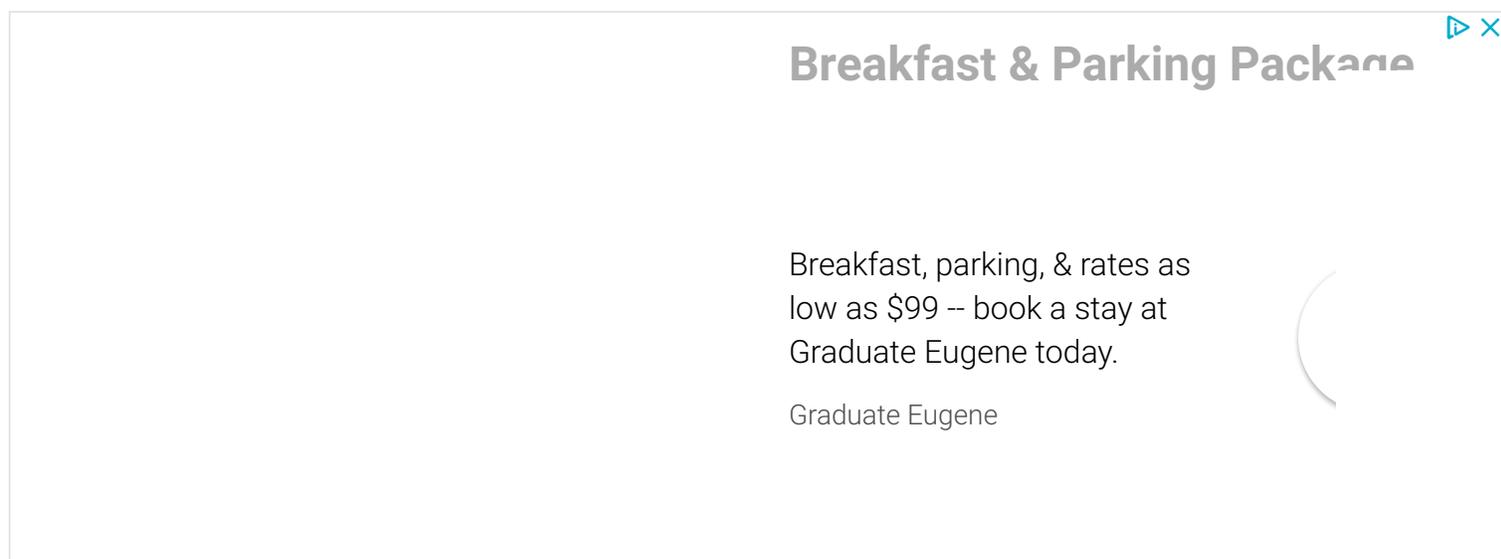
Judicial Watch

The book, which was published by the Landmark Association, explores more than 140 years of recorded literary clubs in Bowling Green. Literary clubs, which are different from book clubs, are social clubs centered around the education of their members.

“Literary clubs are more formal than book clubs,” Nehm said.

Literary clubs have presidents, vice presidents, secretaries and treasurers, all of whom attend monthly board meetings in conjunction with bi-monthly club meetings, Nehm said.

Nehm was invited to join the Browning Club in 1994 and she is still a member, she said. At her first meeting, one of the members gave a presentation on American composer Leonard Bernstein, which was followed by a club discussion, Nehm said.



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In 1995, the Browning Club celebrated its 100th anniversary, Nehm said. She observed the process of the literary club, in which members signed up for a presentation date, researched their topic, gave a presentation and stimulated discussion on the topic, she said.

“I thought, ‘someone should write a history of this,’ ” Nehm said. At the time, Bowling Green had 13 active women’s literary clubs and six active men’s literary clubs, Nehm said.

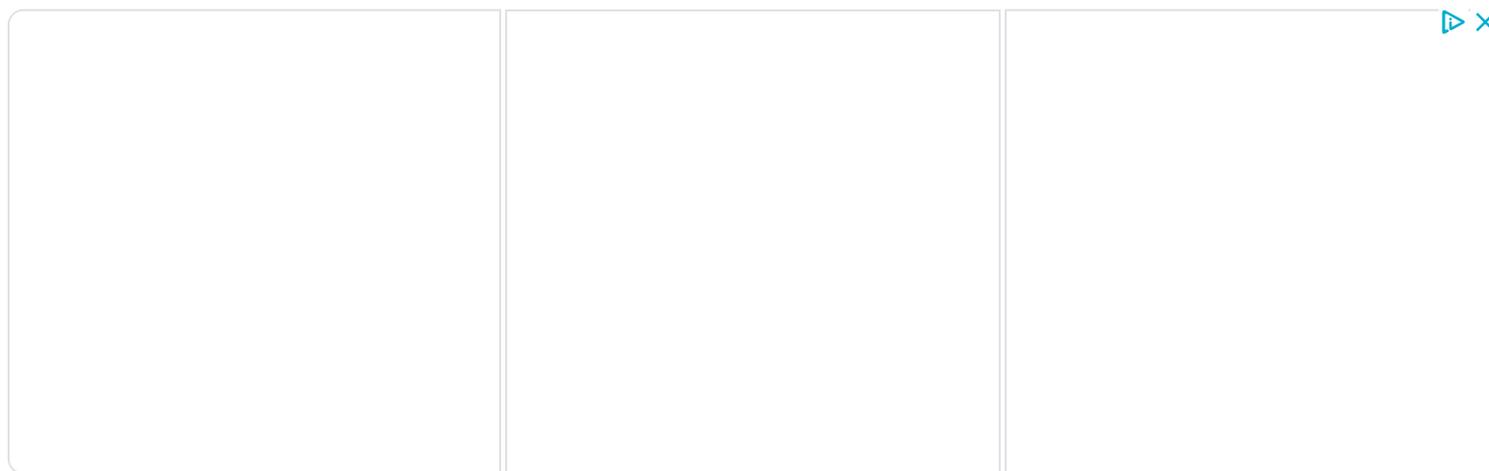
Literary clubs have been donating their minutes to the Kentucky Museum at WKU, meaning their correspondence, photos, newspaper clippings and other files were kept safe in acid-free boxes in the library at the Kentucky Museum, Nehm said. For years, Nehm sifted through these files, reading about each club's activities.

"I started reading every single page of every single club," Nehm said. "I wanted to bring the clubs to life, so I started focusing on the people. I got really fond with every club."

For years, Nehm sat in the museum and read every club's minutes, she said. After her retirement in 2016, Nehm started researching the men's clubs, followed by interviews with members of Bowling Green's current literary clubs, she said.

"They were so enthusiastic about their club that they were so easy to talk to," Nehm said.

The oldest club, XV, was founded in 1879, Nehm said. The first ladies' literary club that was formed after XV is still active, Nehm said.



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Other clubs include the Mother's Club, which ran from 1925 to 1998 and was focused on making club members the best mothers they could be, Nehm said.

"I started getting worried that all the clubs would be the same, but they all had different personalities," Nehm said.

The book allows for readers to stroll through the history of Bowling Green as it was recorded by the town's literary clubs. From 1879, the entire history of Bowling Green can be read through the words of literary club members.

"I think anybody in Bowling Green would enjoy reading about their history this way," Nehm said.

The title of the book, "Respectfully Submitted," is derived from the literary clubs themselves. All of the secretaries of every club signed their minutes with "respectfully submitted," Nehm said.

At Sunday's signing, readers can drive up to the Houchens Center parking lot, order a book and Nehm will autograph the book from the front porch of the building.