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Local woman named poet laureate

By Kathleen Laufenberg, Democrat Staff Writer

The Tallahassee area now has its very own poet laureate.

Mary Jane Ryals, an author and research associate at FSU's business college, is the new — and first — poet laureate of the Big Bend. The 52-year-old also has a new book of poetry, "**The Moving Waters,**" coming out from **Kitsune Books** next year and is an editor at the long-standing local literary magazine *Apalachee Review*.

Still, the accomplished Ryals said she was surprised as well as honored to be selected.

"There are just so many great poets in this area," she said. "But I am really looking forward to it."

"Mary Jane Ryals will make a splendid poet laureate," said David Kirby, an FSU English professor, widely acclaimed poet and 2007 National Book Award finalist. "She has loads of personality. She will do a great, great job."



Rick Campbell, an English professor at FAMU, poet and member of the poet laureate selection committee, said Ryals, 52, is a perfect fit for this job — which comes with many expectations but no paycheck. The position will last for two years, after which another poet will be selected to represent the Big Bend.

"We wanted a poet who had a long, proven track record of service to the literary community," said Campbell, who is also the director of the Anhinga Press. "We want her to enhance poetry's presence in the community. She's going to work with the Tallahassee Writers Association, take writers into the schools and maybe do readings at public functions."

A committee was formed earlier this year to select the first Big Bend poet laureate.

"She was the logical one to lead this parade," said Mike Carducci, president of Big Bend Poets and a retired businessman. "She's so well-known and well-liked — just a lovely person — and she's very well-respected."