

There once was a place called Niagara ...

17 Oct 2009 Corey Larocque

Attention, all you wannabe poets. It's audition time for the job of Niagara Falls' unofficial poet laureate. Send us your best limerick about Niagara Falls.

You remember limericks from Grade 4? Five-line poems. AABB-A format. First two lines rhyme. Second two lines rhyme. Fifth line rhymes with the first.

"There once was a man from Nantucket ..." That sort of thing.

The reason it's important now is because Niagara Falls needs its own poet laureate.

Last week, a story from the Sudbury Star told about finding a poet laureate for the northern Ontario city.

Good enough for Nickel City, good enough for Niagara Falls.

You'd wonder what's left to say after Stompin' Tom Connors summed it up in Sudbury Saturday Night, coupling Inco with "getting stinko."

But Sudbury's public library announced last week the search was on.

"Photographs may fade with time, but a moment captured in verse will survive forever," said Sudbury Mayor John Rodriguez, apparently a potential greeting card writer, based on that imagery.

A poet laureate is one of those of positions governments create to prove how sophisticated and in touch with the arts they are.

In Canada, Pierre Des Ruisseaux, editor of a dictionary of Quebec expressions, is this year's Parliamentary poet laureate and the fourth to hold that post, defined by an act of Parliament. His job is to "write poetry, especially for use in Parliament on important occasions" and sponsor poetry readings.

There are at least 13 official poet laureates in communities across Canada, from Victoria to St. John's. Brantford and Owen Sound have official poets, for crying out loud!

Sudbury's poet will have a two-year term. That's not bad job security. But the pay is \$1,000 over that term. So, yeah, you'd

be doing it pretty much for the glory. Oh, and the poetry.

How the heck would Sudbury's poet laureate find something every week to write about? How often can you muse about the Big Nickel?

And how many times can you include "pickle" in your poems before it seems forced?

Not too many things rhyme with Niagara. Except Viagra.

But lots of words rhyme with "Falls."

"If you want to go over the falls / you've gotta have a lot of..." Courage. That's what's needed for Niagara's poet laureate to tell it like it is, in a lyrical format.

Niagara Falls has a town crier, Derek Tidd, and an official historian, Sherman Zavitz.

Why not a poet who could wax lyrically about the Horseshoe Falls, the Whirlpool, wax museums and strip clubs.

One of the leading candidates would be David Smith, a bylaw officer who can often be seen writing odes to the things he sees while on the parking-ticket beat.

In a tough budget year, appointing a Niagara Falls poet laureate is just what the city needs to lift the spirits of the masses without breaking the bank. City council could say it's adding a new service with almost no cost to the taxpayer.

Talk about a smooth election-year move.

Niagara Falls already has some experience with poet laureates.

Toronto's official poet, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, stormed onto the agenda of a 2007 council meeting – one of those "make-or-break" sessions about down-town revitalization they used to have every three months. The gallery was packed with boosters of Historic Niagara Development and its critics. By the time Di Cicco was done, he had united the two hostile factions – both sides agreed they didn't understand him.

A poet laureate could become a beatnik celebrity of the Queen Street art scene. Maybe there could be poetry readings in trendy coffee houses like Balzac's (think Mike Myers in *So I Married An Axe Murderer* – "Harriet, Harriet. Hard-hearted harbinger of haggis ...")

So, it's high time for Niagara Falls to get caught up to Sudbury, that bastion of arts and culture, and name its own official poet laureate.

In the meantime, The Review is looking to crown one of its readers "the unofficial poet laureate." The newspaper has no official standing, but we can reprint some original limericks. Maybe it will get the ball rolling and spur city hall into action to get us the poet laureate we deserve.

So, email a limerick about Niagara Falls.

We promise to read them, carefully critique them in the newsroom and publish some of the best ones we can find.

Hey, you could even impress your friends and co-workers at the upcoming Christmas party by telling them you're a published poet.