



NORTHEAST STORYTELLING, INC.

# 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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# Letter from the President

## ChaChanna Simpson

President, Northeast Storytelling, Inc.

I began the fiscal year as your Vice President and eagerly stepped up into the President's role in January, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Looking back on the 2023-2024 year, I am proud of what we have learned, implemented, and accomplished.

Our top mission was to make sure NEST remains solid for generations to come without draining the resources of our members. So, your NEST Board began laying down the foundation to ensure the organization's future financial health with the creation of the Development Committee, where the focus

is on obtaining grants and sponsorships and developing fundraising initiatives. The Outreach Committee launched the annual Speak Peace Storytelling Concert Series to broaden our impact of using stories to transform and inspire communities in the Northeast and beyond.

This is just a taste of the fantastic work that transpired this year. Throughout the rest of this riveting report, you will be proud to read what our dedicated members have accomplished to fulfill our mission to provide education, advocacy, opportunities, and support to our storytellers, story listeners, and story lovers throughout the Northeast. Enjoy!





# About Northeast Storytelling



## Our History

For over forty years, Northeast Storytelling members have been dedicated to offering education, support, advocacy, and opportunities to our vibrant storytelling community. Initially formed in 1982 as part of Lesley College's New England Storytelling Center project for the "Sharing the Fire Storytelling Congress," the group's passion for storytelling, education, advocacy, healing, and positive change led to the establishment of Northeast Storytelling, Inc.

## Who We Are

We are the premier storytelling membership organization that provides professional development both in our programs and in peer-to-peer relationships.

NEST is a place where professionals come together to continue their professional journey and showcase what is happening in the industry. We are here to share and uplift the industry.

NEST, at its core, was created to support, educate, and promote storytellers and story lovers.

# Executive Director

## Katie Knutson

Executive Director,  
Northeast Storytelling, Inc.



## Membership

We ended our fiscal year with 193 active memberships. This is almost 30 less than we had at this time last year. It is also down over 100 members from June of 2021.

## Governance

ChaChanna Simpson took over as President of the Board in January. We welcomed new Board members Jezrie Marciano-Courtney, our current Secretary, and Erin Lovelien, who has since resigned. We are looking for a new Treasurer, as Cris Reidel, who has served us diligently for six years, has reached the end of her second term. We are seeking additional applications for new Board members.

## Communications

The NEST-L Listserv continues to be a great way for members to connect with one another. We have streamlined the process of being added to the listserv.

We continue to use social media (Facebook, Instagram, and X) as sporadic ways to communicate with members and reach out to the general public. Please make sure to like our pages and share posts to let others know what you love about NEST. If you are interested in helping with any of the social media accounts, please let me know.

## Programs

### *Sharing the Fire*

The reviews of Sharing the Fire 2024 (STF24) were overwhelmingly positive. People reported learning a great deal and enjoying reconnecting with others in person, among other things. We had 107 in-person registrations and 34 registrations for the Virtual Track. Our in-person registrations have not returned to pre-COVID levels (137 in 2018 and 179 who had originally registered in 2019). Many in-person events are experiencing lower numbers since the pandemic; we are not the only group trying to bounce back. The Sheraton Portsmouth was a very nice hotel, but also charged both NEST and attendees relatively high fees, which may have contributed to lower registration numbers.

## ***Sharing the Fire cont'd***

We have a signed contract with The Queensbury Hotel in Glens Falls, NY, for the next three years of conferences. “The Q,” as it is affectionately known by locals, is an independently-owned hotel with comparable accommodations, but lower fees, including free parking. We hope that the lower cost of attendance and the engaged local arts community will help to increase our numbers for 2025-2027.

Thanks to the generosity of our members during our Giving Tuesday Campaign and an appropriation from the Board, we were able to offer scholarship assistance to 14 people to attend STF24.

Due to lower registration numbers and high hotel fees, STF24 lost money again this year. We will need additional registrations in future years, or will need to downsize STF to keep it viable.

## ***NESTFest***

We did not produce a NESTFest 2023, but the Outreach Committee has expressed interest in creating a NESTFest 2024.

## ***Worldwide Virtual Storytelling Guild***

WVSG continues to be going strong, offering a free opportunity for people to share, hear, and give/receive feedback on stories. WVSG now meets once a month. All are welcome to come listen or tell. More info is on [our website](#).

## ***Storytelling Training Basics Program***

The Board launched this new initiative based on member feedback that you wanted more opportunities for storytelling training. In this pilot program, we plan to offer 8 training videos for beginning storytellers on important skills. The committee is working hard to get the videos ready to be released to the public in October 2024. If this program is successful, we hope to offer intermediate and advanced content in the coming years. Our hope is that learners will watch the videos, do the work, and then bring their stories to WVSG to get practice and feedback.

## ***Finances***

Substantial financial information is contained in other sections of this report. As an organization, we spent more money than we took in this year. See the attached budget for more specific details. Thankfully, NEST remains on solid financial footing and this loss was absorbed. Going forward, the Board and I are pursuing grants and sponsorships to help support the valuable work of NEST.

## ***Development Committee***

The Development Committee spent the first year focusing on defining NEST and our story to be able to make a case for funding/sponsorships. The committee is currently researching available grants and foundations. The Board has also dedicated additional staff time to put toward grant writing. If you are interested in being a part of this exciting new effort to lead NEST into a sustainable fiscal future, please get in touch.







# Financial Highlights

**Cris Reidel**

Treasurer,  
Northeast Storytelling, Inc.

NEST remains on solid financial footing.

Sharing the Fire was a hybrid event again this year, happening both at the Hotel in New Hampshire and having a track of online sessions.

While Sharing the Fire did not turn a profit this year, our account balances are sufficient to maintain our footing and allow us to proceed with new plans for the conference. Attendance was 145 total; 34 of those were for the virtual track.

NEST's overall membership stands at 193, down from 220 last year. Membership dues have not increased. The Outreach Committee is designing efforts to increase membership numbers.

Donations continue to form an important part of our funding. The Benevity Fund, a Google-employee match program initiated by one of our members, has continued to contribute. (We thank her for her support). Benevity donations this year were \$2,050 (as of February 2024); member donations totaled \$2,765 (as of February 2024).

## **The Finance Committee addressed the following issues this year:**

We clarified and streamlined the budget items on the Chart of Accounts.

We have begun working with the Merritt Bookkeeping company, and are currently seeking a new accountant.

We continue to search for a new treasurer, as Cris Riedel's tenure is concluding December 2024.

For financial statements, please see the documents at the end of this report.



# Financial Budget

		23-23	24-25 (budget)
<b>Revenue</b>			
	STF	\$ 33,910	\$ 38,925
	Donations / Grants	\$ 9,840	\$ 10,700
	Membership	\$ 16,375	\$ 12,000
	Outreach		\$2,900
	Storytelling Training	\$ 500	\$ 500
		<b>\$ 60,625</b>	<b>\$ 65,025</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
	Operations	\$ 5,652	\$ 5,669
	Professional Services	\$ 6,400	\$ 7,000
	Sharing the Fire	\$ 50,717	\$ 38,755
	Storytelling Training	\$1,600	\$2,000
	Outreach	\$0	\$ 2,325
	Employee-ED/Admin	\$20,514	\$ 28,991
	Other	\$9,380	\$ 4,600
		<b>\$94,263</b>	<b>\$ 89,340</b>
<b>Over / (Deficit)</b>		<b>\$ (33,638)</b>	<b>\$ (24,315)</b>





# Development Committee

## Mike Isko

Development Committee Chair,  
Director-At-Large  
Northeast Storytelling, Inc.



This year the Development Committee was formed and got off the ground with guidance from Development Consultant and Storyteller, Tere Kipp.

Tere provided an effective and helpful guideline packet. Our goal is to develop NEST's case for philanthropic support, fund development policies, and practices.

Our mission is to support our group of artisanal storytellers by providing continuing education, promoting our directory of members/tellers, and broadening our reach. We are working with our outreach committee to engage more tellers, to encourage acceptance and to learn of experiences different from our own.

### The first projects of our committee are:

- Develop an annual calendar that commences with Sharing the Fire.
- Complete an assessment of our funding sources.

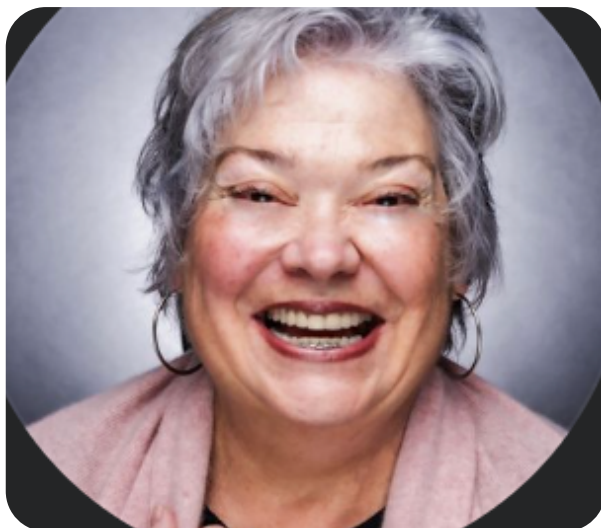
### Other important steps include:

- Engaging with our members to put together a "volunteer corps" to carry out tasks of short duration.
- Accumulate sponsorships and grants for our events and activities.
- Long-term: establish a planned giving program.

The committee is currently made up of our board members. We encourage and welcome broader member participation.

If you would like to join our meeting please contact, Michael Isko, [mjiperfomr81@gmail.com](mailto:mjiperfomr81@gmail.com).





# Outreach Committee

**Linda Schuyler Ford**

Outreach Committee Chair,  
Northeast Storytelling, Inc.

In fall of 2023, ChaChanna Simpson and I co-chaired an Outreach meeting with members to determine goals. There were a few suggestions for STF that would bring awareness to newcomers, and suggestions related to social media. I believe those have been addressed by ChaChanna, the Board, and STF organizers.

My own passion revolves around creating storytelling opportunities for members, promoting varied storytelling styles, promoting NEST, growing a more diverse membership, and supporting the strong sense of community that exists among members.

In January 2024, I proposed a series of Speak Peace Storytelling concerts on or around September, 21, 2024, International Day of Peace. Gratefully, the Board supported this. This September NEST members will perform during seven events at venues in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York.

Each event had unique funding needs, all of which have been met. This includes NEST investing \$700.00 from our Benevity Fund and an estimated \$2,500.00 has been raised. This year, we expect to show a small profit.

In November 2024, NEST will host a virtual New Member Showcase.

## **Current Status**

ChaChanna Simpson serves as Chair, and I am her committee. We would welcome volunteers to handle social media, assist with virtual events, and fundraising.

## **Future Plans**

We will continue to grow the Speak Peace series, prepare for the virtual New Member Showcase, and explore implementing quarterly online gatherings, if there is interest. I would also like to get feedback from members about their interest in House Concerts, other events.

I look forward to talking with Katie about creating events in and around Glens Falls, leading up to our annual Sharing The Fire Conference in 2025.

## **Dates/Deadlines**

All Speak Peace Storytelling Concerts will take place between September 16-September 22. One project will take place in October in order to align with Indigenous Peoples' Day, that by request of the host venue.

Please watch listserv and FB for ticketing details for these events. Support NEST, and your fellow storytellers.

# Social Justice Initiative

## Denise Keyes Page

Development Committee Chair,  
Director-At-Large  
Northeast Storytelling, Inc.



The Social Justice Committee met three times between October 2023 and March 2024. Milbre Burch and Cindy Rivka Marshall took comprehensive notes for us at our meetings.

We agreed that we should submit a proposal to the Sharing the Fire Committee to present workshops and stories on the social justice theme.

Joy Smith had a conversation with the committee chairs that resulted in an invitation to submit a proposal and the committee's decision to have social justice as its overarching theme. The Olio invited people to submit stories on social justice.

For our committee, things moved very quickly. Simon Brooks, Joy and I became the team to develop the social justice workshop. We submitted and ultimately presented the intensive "Elephant in the Room." It was well attended and well received. In fact, people stayed in the room to continue the conversation.

I like to assess projects, programs and workshops with an informal assessment I call "Went Wells and Do Differentlys."

To that end I submit the following observations:  
Went Wells:

- Enthusiasm for the cause of Social Justice was demonstrated in the meetings that were held
- A workshop was presented and well attended and received
- Committee members voluntarily shared responsibilities such as note taking
- Our message was carried throughout STF with the Olio putting forward the theme of Social Justice

Do Differently:

- Set a consistent meeting schedule
- Utilize more of the talent and experience on the committee and incorporate them in the final planning and presentations
- Create a vehicle for all members to have voice and place themselves where they feel most valued and most contributory

Next Steps:

- Schedule a meeting for the purpose of discussing who and how we want to be moving forward.



# Worldwide Virtual Storytelling Guild

WVSG approaches its sixth birthday this December. We have 172 members on the listserv, for which we deeply thank Jo Radner and American University. We average nine tellers per meeting; while this seems small, each meeting is attended by different tellers.

We recently shifted to one meeting per month, on the third Sunday, due to small numbers of attendees. The time change has made it difficult for tellers from India/Australia/Japan, so Jim Brulé is investigating the possibility of one more meeting time.

The Facebook group currently has 677 members. Recently, we added a request of members: Limit promotions to no more than one / week.

WVSG offered a meeting in its regular style for the virtual track of Sharing the Fire. Fourteen people attended, six of whom were new to WVSG.



## Cris Reidel

Worldwide Virtual Storytelling  
Guild Committee Chair,  
Treasurer  
Northeast Storytelling, Inc.

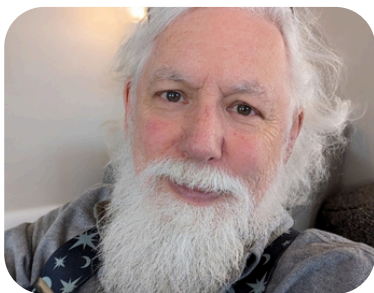


# Your Dedicated Board



**ChaChanna Simpson** *President*

A Connecticut native, ChaChanna Simpson is a writer, puzzle enthusiast, astrology fan, karaoke star, and talented storyteller. She's shared her stories across Connecticut and New York but can be lured elsewhere with frosted vanilla cupcakes and pizza.



**Jim Brulé** *Vice President*

A lifelong storyteller, Jim Brulé has also been a clinical psychologist, AI researcher, healthcare CIO, and federal regulations expert. Ordained as a Maggid, he now focuses on transformational storytelling, is a death doula, and coaches and mentors on storytelling and grief & loss.



**Cris Riedel** *Treasurer*

A twenty-year veteran of performing stories, Cris likes best to tell the old ones. Folktales of those who solve the problem—and save the day—with their wits. She has performed at the National Storytelling Conference, and the Stone Soup and Lehigh Valley Festivals.



**Jezrie Marciano-Courtney** *Secretary*

Jezrie's stories explore coming of age and AfroLatinx experiences, leading audiences through thoughtful adventures. Performing for Ubuntu Storytellers IDEAL, her true experiences inspire reflection on human interconnectedness.



**Denise Keyes Page**

*Director-At-Large & Social Justice Initiative Chair*

Denise Keyes Page, founder of Ubuntu Storytellers I.D.E.A.L., integrates her experiences as a multi-generational African American New Englander into her work, promoting social justice through storytelling. She leads workshops and serves on several boards, including the Connecticut Storytelling Center.



**Mike Isko**

*Director-At-Large & Development Committee Chair*

Michael, a retired attorney and current storyteller and ski instructor, tells stories with a group in the New Haven-Hartford area, produces shows at the Buttonwood Tree Art Center in Middletown, CT, and was named 2023 Big Brother of the Year by Connecticut Big Brothers/Big Sisters.



# Stellar Staff Team

These are the stellar staff that keeps things running behind the scenes. We are very thankful for their hardwork.



## Katie Knutson

*Executive Director*

Katie Knutson has 25 years of storytelling and 18 years of teaching experience, serving on boards and producing events for storytelling organizations. She's performed internationally and taught thousands. Knutson writes for Storytelling Magazine and has contributed to various books.



## Chris Donnal

*Tech Specialist*

Chris is our tech wizard who doesn't get enough shine. He is the person who updates our website, figures out how to make things happen with our software and does it all with a smile. We're so grateful for him and his expertise.





# Looking to the Horizon



I'm really excited for NEST's future as we continue to attract younger and diverse members on the Board, presenting at our workshops and attending our events. These members bring new energy, fresh ideas, and hope for a thriving future for our beloved organization.

As we move forward, NEST will continue to expand and grow as the premier community for support and education for the storytelling community. And YOU are a crucial part.

Thank you so much to our volunteers and committee chairs. We know how much work you put into leading initiatives and organizing events, and, at the same time, balancing your own storytelling careers. Your gift of time, talent, and ideas are greatly appreciated and help push NEST into the communities we serve.

I'd also like to thank our donors and sponsors who have helped fund our events; your donations are instrumental in helping us carry on the organization's work.

But our work is not done.

Please continue to spread the word NEST events so we can reach more people and introduce them to the world of storytelling. Consider volunteering your time and ideas in one or all of our committees that work really hard to bring you programming, opportunities and education.

Our membership is not only filled with the most amazingly skilled storytellers of our generation but also the kindest, giving and nurturing group of people I have ever known. Leading this enthusiastic, dedicated and hardworking team of stellar storytellers has been an honor and I am eager to see how we take NEST to the next level.

ChaChanna Simpson,  
President, Northeast Storytelling

# Contact Us

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