

Local author entertains crowd with stories

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From deep depression to laugh-out-loud encounters with crazy Southern characters, **award-winning writer and syndicated Asheville Citizen-Times columnist Susan Reinhardt** lives and tells her stories, using her writing to entertain as well as to heal.

Reinhardt entertained listeners with personal anecdotes about humor and hardships on Sept. 14 as the first guest speaker for Ramsey Library's regional author talks.

"Thanks for taking a risk having me here knowing I'm a PG-13-type of speaker, and not the type that can tell you what to grow in your yard and eat, though I wish I could," the author said as she gathered books and papers for her presentation.

What followed were stories about everything, from an alcoholic cat to her sister's opossum fur coat to the "mee maw" panties Reinhardt accidentally left behind at her Hollywood hosts' house.

Reinhardt may focus on the funnier aspects of life in her books and columns, but writing, she said, has always been a way for her to heal from life's challenges. She said her work sometimes takes on a darker tone.

"Even growing up, when I'd get upset, I'd go write," Reinhardt said. "I've always used writing as a means of making things right in my mind, and I've been writing humor for maybe 20 years or more."

In her second book, *Don't Sleep with a Bubba: Unless your Eggs are in Wheelchairs*, Reinhardt chronicles her journey through depression following her divorce from her first husband. After the hospital stay where she met her second husband, Reinhardt turned to writing humor again.

"Humor helped heal me," Reinhardt said. "I can find something funny in almost everything."

Erica Abrams Locklear, an assistant professor at UNC Asheville who teaches courses on Southern and Appalachian literature, has read Reinhardt's column for several years, and said Reinhardt often takes deeper, more disturbing subjects and writes about them in an entertaining way.

"The thing that Susan does is she'll take those darker topics and twist them a little bit so that you're slightly uncomfortable, but you're laughing, and



Sally Garner/staff photographer

Author and columnist Susan Reinhardt entertained listeners at the first regional author talk Sept. 14 in Ramsey Library. Reinhardt draws from personal experiences in her writings.

then you feel guilty about laughing at something that's really serious," Abrams Locklear said.

Reinhardt said there is no shortage of material in the South, and her stories frequently depict her family members' eccentricities as well as the crazy Southern characters she encounters.

"Half the people in the South are insane, but they're benignly insane, they're colorfully crazy, and you don't have a limitation of material, you just venture out and you find it in the South," she said. "I think that our colorful crazy characters do wonderful things for people, and they have very compassionate hearts, but they also have that 'touched in the head' effect, in a good way. When I find somebody

who's a little off-center, I'm all over them."

Abrams Locklear said some Southern writers, including Reinhardt, are good at pointing out specific qualities of the South and poking fun in a way that makes readers laugh rather than offending them. Though humanity as a whole is a little crazy, she said, the way craziness manifests in the South might be more peculiar or exciting to read and write about.

"Something else she really hones in on is gossip, that sort of communal nature in small town life, and that's not contained to the South, but Southern writers have written about that for

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Campus radio station set to relaunch

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After nearly two years of silence and countless hours of work from students, UNC Asheville's student radio station, the Blue Echo, is set to return to the air this fall.

Ian Hayes, a disk jockey and technician for the Blue Echo, has been a part of the station since he came to UNCA four years ago as a freshman.

He said the hard work and commitment of students made it possible to get the Blue Echo back up and running.

"It's been more organized in the past year than it has ever been, and we're not even on the air yet. So once we get started, I think everything will run smoothly. We've got a lot of people really committed to making this happen," said Hayes, a senior multimedia arts student.

According to those close to the Blue Echo, a lack of commitment led to the station's demise.

Rick Brophy, associate director of UNCA's Student Activities & Integrative Learning department, said students were always eager to sign up for a DJ slot, but the follow-through was a constant problem.

"Once the students figured out the amount of work required, they didn't want to do it," Brophy said. "They thought it was just getting in there, picking your favorite record and having fun, which it is, but there's a lot of work that goes into everything ahead of time."

Brophy also said once a large portion of the station's staff and DJs graduated or left school, nobody stepped up to fill those positions and the station slowly began to decline.

Since then, attempts to revive the Blue Echo have been mostly the volunteer efforts of a few students dedicated to bringing radio back to the Asheville community.

Caitlin Halloran, a junior mass communication student, has invested

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