



Professor Laura Kearns' choreography "Swinging on a Bench" was selected for the North Carolina Dance Festival and is touring the state for the remainder of the year. Seniors Kara Griffin and Bill Commander perform the dance. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY RANDY PILAND

Professor, students travel the state with NC Dance Festival selection

Rachel Southmayd
Senior Reporter

The stage is blank except for a single item: a plain bench. Simple and unassuming, the bench stands center stage and is joined from stage left by a woman and a man, also simple and unassuming. Then contact is made. And a dance begins.

This is the start of Laura Kearns's piece, "Swinging on a Bench."

Kearns, who serves as the head of the Dance Department at Elon University, had this work selected to perform as part of the North Carolina Dance Festival. The Festival is touring the state over the course of the year. Seniors Kara Griffin and Bill Commander were selected to perform the roles of a woman and a man meeting and connecting, the movement centered around that simple bench.

"I needed two dancers that had similar movement qualities that were highly expressive, highly emotive and were

obviously capable of doing the really athletic movements," Kearns said.

Throughout the dance, Commander and Griffin perform complicated movements, sometimes bordering acrobatics, often incorporating both the bench and each other's bodies to create shapes and express the meaning of the dance.

"Obviously, the bench became a metaphor for the evolution of a relationship," Kearns said.

Griffin and Commander learned the piece by watching videos of the choreography during the summer. They came back to Elon earlier than most students to rehearse and prepare for their first show in the beginning of September.

The festival kicked off at Elon and since then, "Swinging on a Bench" had been performed in Charlotte, Greensboro and Boone, as well as at the Elon fall dance performance, "Dancing in the Black Box."

Kearns and Griffin said one of the greatest challenges about doing a piece

like this for a year is keeping it fresh for the dancers. Griffin said she tries to have a different internal dialogue and creates a different story each time she performs.

"Because I feel like (Commander) and I are so comfortable with the choreography now, we can play around a little bit with the performance," she said.

Kearns created the piece for the American Dance Festival in 2007. Dances for the North Carolina Dance Festival are selected by judges from outside of the state, based on a submitted press kit and a video of the piece itself. This is the second time Kearns has had a piece on the tour.

The festival is celebrating its 20th year. Artistic director Jan van Dyke said the festival began as a single show at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

After two years, a second show was added, and after six years, they took it on the road. She said the mission of the festival is to help North Carolina dance artists raise their profile and share their

work with the community.

"By traveling around with each other, we get to know each other," van Dyke said.

In addition to performing for audiences, members of the tour often do community outreach by teaching workshop classes in schools and other venues.

"It's really quite an honor," Kearns said. "I really believe in the mission of the festival."

Kearns said the tour is good for Griffin and Commander as well as for her work because of the exposure they're getting to an actual tour environment, and the professional experience they're having.

"It's really great because it's nice to get outside of Elon because I've been performing here and only here for so long now," Griffin said. "And it's nice to experience different audiences, different stages and its different every place."

"Swinging on a Bench" and the rest of the festival line-up will be performed again Jan. 28 and 29 in Raleigh.

Collecting canned food through a common love Literature brings people together at Will Read for Food

Marlena Chertock
Design Editor

What's a place to enjoy a love of food and books? The fourth annual Will Read for Food event at 7:30 p.m. combined the two on Nov. 17 in the Isabella Cannon Room in the Centre for the Arts.

English professor Tita Ramirez said the Arts and Letters Learning Community started the event in 2006 to promote literature.

"There's a lot of readings on campus where people read their own work," Ramirez said. "There are faculty readings, student readings and visiting writers who read their work."

She said she realized there wasn't a reading where students and faculty could read other writers. A place where people who might not be writers can share writing they enjoy with others, she said.

"Where people just share their love of literature," she said.

Will Read for Food always occurs during National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. Students and faculty read excerpts from writing they enjoy or that relates to the themes of hunger, being underappreciated, giving,



Students could bring donated food during this year's Will Read for Food Event and read from their favorite author or writer. This year, the group raised 180 cans for the homeless. MOLLY CAREY | Staff Photographer

family and homelessness. The admission fee is a can or more of food, which are then donated.

"We dedicate these excerpts, and the food cans we'll donate abate the craving for a moment," said English professor Prudence Layne. "But they'll do little to fend off insult and hunger

and homelessness."

It's all about raising awareness, she said.

"It's a great opportunity to do the most important work," Ramirez said.

The writers read varied greatly, from nonfiction to poetry and fiction to excerpts of books.

Layne said this event

and the readings offer an opportunity to learn more about ourselves, isolation and the view of imprisonment.

"Might I suggest that we expand homelessness to include imprisoned people," Layne said.

She explained that currently the government does not consider those held in prison to be homeless.

English professor Kathy Lyday-Lee discussed the new government word that describes hunger: food insecurity.

"The number of people suffering from severe food insecurity doubled from 2007 to 2009," she said.

Traditionally, students and staff of all different majors and departments read and attend, Ramirez said. The Arts and Letters Learning Community is composed of a mixture of majors, which contributes to the diversity.

This year, Arts and Letters partnered with the Service Learning Community, who collected the cans of food at the end of the event and distributed them to the Alamance County Food Bank. There were at least 180 cans collected and donated from the event, according to sophomore Will Brummett, a member of the Service Learning Community.

SELECTIONS FROM WILL READ FOR FOOD

Sophomore Elliot Luke
"Boa Constrictor," "One Inch Tall,"
"The Garden," "Treehouse" and
"Spaghetti" by Shel Silverstein

Professor Prudence Layne
An excerpt from Nelson Mandela's recent book, "Conversations About Myself" and the prologue of Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings."

Sophomore Chris Sonzogni
"Onions" by William Matthews
and "Oranges" by Gary Soto.

Senior Tosh Scheps
"Keep One's Treasure Protected"
by Stephen Dobyns.

Professor Kathy Lyday-Lee
"The God of Hunger" by Sonia Huber.

Junior James Shaver
"Luciano," by A.A. Gill.

Senior Natalie Lampert
Excerpts from a blog by Tuscan chef Faye Hess

Professor Paula Patch
"Every Little Hurricane" from Sherman Alexie's "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven."

Senior Jon Bolding
"Test" by G.A. Ingersoll.