

MEMORANDUM

TO: Claire Powell, City Manager

FROM: Denise Helbing, Arts Center Manager

DATE: February 16, 2026

SUBJECT: Appointment of James Mardis as Poet Laureate for City of Lewisville 2026-2028

HISTORY

Since 2014, the City of Lewisville has proudly maintained a Poet Laureate program as part of its commitment to the arts, complementing the City's performance and visual arts initiatives. Through this program, several original poems are commissioned each year—typically to commemorate significant events such as the City's 'birthday', dedication of public art or buildings, or other special occasions. Additional poems may also be created at the suggestion of the Poet Laureate.

In addition to writing poetry, the Poet Laureate supports staff in organizing educational and cultural programming such as live poetry readings and public engagement efforts.

Lewisville's Poet Laureate program has been held by three individuals since its inception:

- J. Paul Holcomb (2014–2020)
- Yoonsoo Nam (2021–2023)
- James Mardis (2026–2028)

2026 APPOINTMENT

James Mardis has been appointed as the City's next Poet Laureate for the 2026–2028 term. A multidisciplinary artist, writer, and storyteller based in Lewisville, Mardis is widely recognized for his integration of fabric art, leather pyrography, and narrative expression.

Originally from Arkansas, Mardis has been a prominent figure in the Dallas/Fort Worth literary and arts scene for decades. Early in his career, former *Dallas Morning News* Arts Writer Shermakaye Bass referred to him as “a cultural poet-hero” for his innovative combination of quilting and poetic storytelling.

His accolades include:

- Induction into the Texas Literary Hall of Fame (2014)
- Featured among the top 150 Writers in Texas at the inaugural Texas Book Festival (1996)
- Recipient of a Pushcart Prize for Poetry (2000)
- Multiple GRIOT Awards from the National Association of Black Journalists – Dallas
- Recognition from the Dallas Press Club KATIE Awards for his social commentary on KERA 90.1 FM

Subject: Relocation and Other Actions for Public Art Works
January 26, 2026
Page 2

James Mardis will debut his first commissioned work as Poet Laureate — "**The Lewisville Lights**"— during the February 16 City Council meeting. He is also scheduled to lead a Poetry Slam as part of the City's 2026 Juneteenth Celebration. Additional poetry commissions and community programs will be developed throughout his term.