

Books & Writers

Author profile

Clifford Brooks: An Emerging New Southern Voice

Jasper Poet's First Book Nominated for Pulitzer Prize

By David R. Altman
Books and Writers Editor

"Write what you know," says Clifford Brooks, a local writer whose first book of poetry, *The Draw of Broken Eyes and Whirling Metaphysics*, has drawn national acclaim and led to a Pulitzer Prize nomination.

And what the 38-year-old Brooks has known is the extraordinary heartache of lost relationships, the difficulties of drug and alcohol dependency, recurring feelings of isolation and the pain of witnessing the most evil of those in our society.

His compelling and at times unsettling new book conveys those experiences with both depth and courage.

Brooks, who was born in the Athens area but did much of his growing up in Pickens County, has just finished a book tour of the South, and will begin a national book tour early next year.

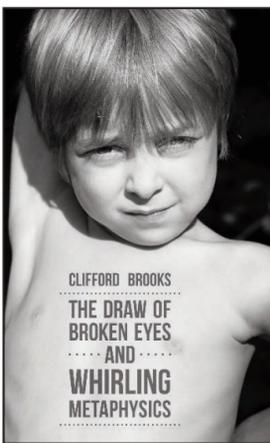
The book is actually two separate poetry collections published as one. The first is *The Draw of Broken Eyes* which he described as a "love letter I wrote with a broken heart". The poems—remarkable in their intensity and emotional honesty—range from verses about Brooks' divorce to others which delve into a series of relationships and experiences—including some that came with alcohol and chemical dependency—that left him physically and emotionally drained.

Brooks said the poetry collection in first section of the book, *The Draw of Broken Eyes*, follows his life over the past two-and-a-half years. While the author said that some of the poems start with a sort of "life of the party" tone, their conclusions (and Brooks' final stanzas are as disturbing as they are powerful) leave the reader realizing that those experiences end up "taking a piece of your soul."

Asked about the tumult of his past 10 years, he said "it's all in



Author Photograph & Book Cover
Photograph by Aisha Cleapor
Local poet Cliff Brooks embarking on national tour to promote *The Draw of Broken Eyes and Whirling Metaphysics*



my poetry." Brooks, who was also nominated for Georgia Author of the Year, added "I know my poetry is not all applicable to other people's lives."

"I pull my ideas and passions from different places," said Brooks, who is clearly on his way to becoming an important new voice in Southern literature. "My challenge is always how to incorporate those ideas into one place without it getting too confusing."

The second poetry collection in the book is called *Whirling Metaphysics*, and Brooks has described it as "that fuzzy-middle place born after I hadn't slept for three days". It is full of poems from both boyhood experiences and the pains of a young man living on the edge.

Brooks, who has a degree from Shorter College in political science and literature, spent much of the past 10 years working in Georgia's juvenile justice system in Pickens County. He served first as a juvenile probation officer and then spent four years with the Department of Family and Children's Services in Pickens County, splitting his time between Foster Care and Family Preservation—a time of witnessing both joy and "unspeakable tragedy."

"You know, 98 percent of the time there were great experiences in that job, where families were reunited and a great deal of joy and hope came from those cases" said Brooks. "But the ones that were bad, were bad."

They were bad enough to inspire Brooks to write a compelling and unforgettable epic at the end of his book called the *Gateman's Hymn of Ignoracium*.

"I was sitting in juvenile court one day and realizing that there are some folks that just don't deserve to draw the same breath that we do", said Brooks, more with regret than anger. Someone mentioned to him then that "hell is just too good for some people", so he created a poem that graphically depicts a layer of infamy below hell, which he called *Ignoracium*.

Inspired by Dante's *Inferno*, Brooks' epic poem is a complex, graphic and moving description of the "justice" that he envisioned would come to those whose crimes are so heinous that they are beyond human understanding. "It helped me purge the sadness."

Brooks, 38, said he didn't start out to write poetry, but his literary agent found it unique among new Southern writers and encouraged him to do more. "It just came about."

The author, who is living now in Jasper, is building a following well beyond Pickens County.

Candace Apple, owner of one of Atlanta's most renowned and unique book stores, Phoenix and Dragon, says Brooks is the real thing.

"His writing is powerful," said Apple. She notes that Brooks' appearances at her Open Mic night poetry readings the past year or so has helped to build their audience. "He's very encouraging of other writers and he has brought great energy to our group" Apple noted. "Plus, what some people don't know

about Cliff is that if he wasn't such a wonderful writer he could be a stand-up comic." Apple added with a smile, "For a man whose poetry is so serious, he can be really hilarious."

As Brooks works on a new collection of poetry called *Athena Departs*, much of his energy these days is coming from a new project that he is calling the Southern Collective Experience.

"It's my greatest joy," said Brooks about the project, which is bringing together writers, musicians, playwrights, poets and a diverse group hand-chosen creative artists into a small collective that has begun to meet on a regular basis. Brooks has already seen the group work unselfishly on creatively fusing their talents into a new stream of artistic expression.

"These folks are really brilliant," said Brooks. Since January, he has been inspired to find "kindred spirits" but with different voices—a sort of consortium of uniquely Southern artists whose extraordinary individual talents could lead to something greater. "We're all dreamers, but I don't just want dreamers, I want doers."

"Everyone is honest and genuinely talented in their craft and eager to work with other people and I'm excited to see what that cross-pollination can do," said Brooks. "It's amazing the amount of positive energy in this group."

Brooks said the raw emotion and sadness found in *The Draw of Broken Eyes and Whirling Metaphysics* has eased somewhat.

"For the first time in years, I'm optimistic about the future."

For information on our Books and Writers column contact Editor David Altman at daltman@pickensprogress.com

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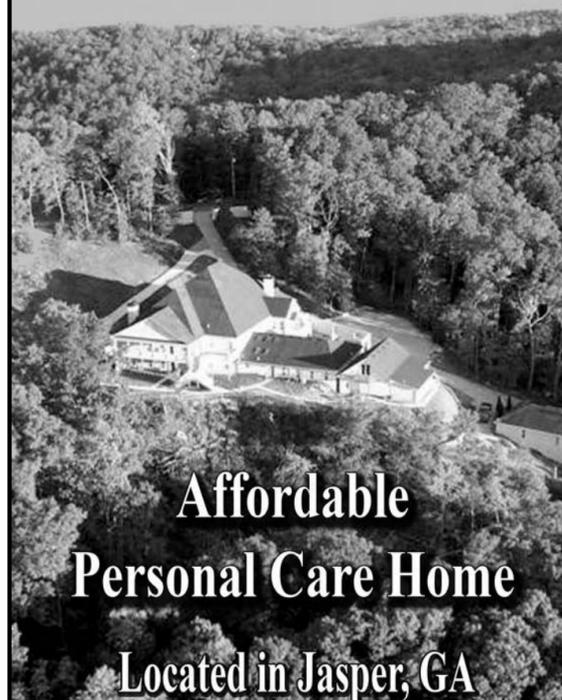
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Republicans to look at economy at September meeting

Submitted by Rich Andersen
Vice-chairman for Programs,
Pickens County Republicans

Is the state of the U.S. economy operating at a new norm-if so, what is causing it? The Pickens County Republican Party is pleased to have Dr. Don Sab-

barese discuss this topic at its next regular meeting scheduled for 7 p.m. at the Appalachian Campus of Chattahoochee Technical College on Sept. 10.

The U.S. economy's current expansion continues to underperform relative to past economic expansions. Some argue it's the result of the severity and financial nature of that recession. However, there are structural problems that predate the recession and require more than the unprecedented current monetary policy to fix it.

Dr. Sabbarese is Professor Emeritus of Economics at Kennesaw State University where he served as director of the Econometrics Center for many years. The Center focuses on data-intensive projects. Using advanced statistics and computing, it discovers patterns and relationships that otherwise would be difficult to identify. It publishes *The Purchasing Managers' Index* which is comprised of five variables; New Orders, Production, Employment, Supplier Delivery Time and Finished Inventory.

This Index offers purchasing managers an early warning of a change in the manufacturing sector and the broader economy; confirms whether or not a company's market conditions and commodity pricing are consistent with broader market conditions; and provides additional information for more informed procurement and production scheduling.

This program is open to all interested persons. Join us and learn more about the current state of the U.S. economy and possible options for enhancing its performance.

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Pickens County Government does hereby announce that the millage rate will be set at a meeting to be held at the Commissioner's Meeting Room located at 1266 East Church Street on Friday, September 6, 2013 at 10 a.m. and pursuant to the requirements of O.C.G.A.48-5-32, does hereby publish the following presentation of the current year's tax digest and levy, along with the history of the tax digest and levy for the past five years.

CURRENT 2013 TAX DIGEST AND 5 YEAR HISTORY OF LEVY						
COUNTY WIDE	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Real & Personal	1,447,920,106	1,457,632,271	1,451,291,008	1,445,760,240	1,407,243,759	1,384,233,571
Motor Vehicles	95,163,620	99,220,420	85,362,890	83,920,640	85,487,360	90,097,830
Mobile Homes	13,088,356	12,396,928	11,927,026	11,208,798	10,960,704	9,955,342
Timber - 100%	649,726	363,896	559,776	582,947	240,664	310,342
Heavy Duty Equipment	870,811	159,031	0	65,655	32,075	4,448
Gross Digest	1,557,692,619	1,569,772,546	1,549,140,700	1,541,538,280	1,503,964,562	1,484,601,533
Less M&O Exemptions	81,143,482	86,357,381	92,392,288	97,221,861	98,509,742	99,508,354
State of Georgia						
Forest Land Assistance Grant Value	0	1,473,903	2,278,518	2,312,768	2,475,266	2,711,196
Net M & O Digest	1,476,549,137	1,484,889,068	1,459,026,930	1,446,629,187	1,407,930,086	1,387,804,375
Gross M&O Millage	8.085	8.230	8.020	8.100	8.620	8.620
Less Rollbacks	2.190	1.970	1.760	1.840	1.970	1.970
Net M&O Millage	5.895	6.260	6.260	6.260	6.650	6.687
Total County Taxes Levied	\$8,704,257	\$9,295,406	\$9,133,509	\$9,055,899	\$9,362,735	\$9,280,248
Net Taxes \$ Increase		\$591,148	-\$161,897	-\$77,610	\$306,836	-\$82,487
Net Taxes % Increase		6.79%	-1.74%	-0.85%	3.39%	-0.88%