Samuel Green
coming to town
State poet laureate
spreads the word

By MARY ANN ARLIGHT
Columbia staff writer

Samuel Green wrote his first poem in sixth grade, a love declaration to a girl. The effort failed, but, Undaunted, Green continued to hone his craft. In 1970 while in college, Green published his first poems, which were widely loved by a woman named Sally. These poems proved more successful, as Sally is now his wife. Nearly 40 years and 10 published poetry collections later, Green is still writing about love and what he describes as other emotional undercurrents. Now he’s in a unique position to share his words, as well as those of other Washington poets.

Last year, Washington became the 41st state to establish a poet laureate position, a role stated Washingtonian, holds the honor of being the Evergreen State’s first poet laureate. This week he comes to Vancouver to read from his latest title, “The Grace of Necessity.”

In addition to writing poetry, Green co-edits with Sally Brooking, of Portland, Oregon, and the poet laureate of Oregon, the work of Washington poets. Poetry education is another of Green’s passions. He’s taught in elementary, middle and high school classrooms for more than 30 years, as well as at Southern Utah University and Western Washington University.

On the Web:
More information about Samuel Green is available online at washingtonpoetlaureate.org.

GREEN POEM COMMEMORATES VANCOUVER LAND BRIDGE

Washington state poet laureate Samuel Green wrote “What We Carry on the Trail” for the Aug. 23 dedication of the Vancouver Land Bridge.

Arching over state Highway 14, the bridge is a 40-foot-wide, earth-covered, pedestrian walkway lined with indigenous plants and American Indian basket-weaving panels. It connects historic Fort Vancouver with the Columbia River waterfront.

‘What We Carry on the Trail’
By Samuel Green

We know that Lewis saw the horsey eater. He left a sketch and a sample pressed & dried like something in a card sent back from holy lands by some devoted uncle.

We know how wild he kept his whatch. No doubt he kept the baird of winter over sand, of fur sliding through an ocean of grass, & been the different kinds of wapiti he had on his attention & sorted the catch of the day, the size & shape of a grizzly’s teeth, the rauous calls of geese & ducks. He ground in the mist of the fields, as if by a mist of the fields.

He might have picked a stalk to count its leaves or fall its light beak. The way a man at rest might finger out stones after rain, or pick & elven a stem of grass. He might have seen curious hidden in the leaves. A few weeks more.

The Columbia

Tammie Cook, left, and Jennifer Hausinger walk across the land bridge that crosses over Highway 14 and links Fort Vancouver with the Columbia River on Feb. 15.

of color on the spread quilt of the day, something to remind him of his sister’s bouquet, his mother’s apron, or laundry drying on a neighbor’s line.

He would have been riding the breeze, dependent on this single plant.

He could not have known how rare that lupine would become, how trained dogs would come to hunt it by scent, how every year it blooms more rare the bright white flower of absence. If wild bees hummed their prayers, they might contain the names of flowers.

In trouble. Air doesn’t reflect the shape of a fish’s head. Water can’t remember the weight of a swimming frog.

Like Lewis, like Clark, we have set our feet on a bridge into the future, intending to arrive with everything we’ve come to know—including the bison pelican, the screech owl, Fender’s blue butterflies. We teach our children every step is a home that matters.

We have traveled a long, long way and are traveling still. We carry the cost of hillsides, the lengthening song, of what is gone already, of all that might be kept, knowing what we have to do, believing that we will.

Elda Field designed an ornament depicting Washougal in 2008.
Green:

From Page DI

wrote her a poem. It didn't work, but it was the first time I had encountered an emotional emergency that I couldn't deal with in any other way. I had discovered that I could go to other poets and they could speak for me, help me understand my feelings, but this was the first time I had thought about using language to work the emotional urgency out myself. It didn't matter that the poem didn't have the effect I wanted it to have on the audience, what mattered was the writing, working it out for myself. Essentially nothing has changed since I was in sixth grade. I'm just more skilled at it. My poems are more sophisticated, I'm still working out emotional urgencies.

As a child I grew up with The Northwest and how does the Northwest impact your work? We have a rich literary tradition of our own. One thing I think is important to find is that writers aren't from another place, they can be from your own backyard. The fact that someone who lives in the same neighborhood you do, the Pacific Northwest, can write poems makes it somehow easier to believe that you can write poems yourself. I love poets who write from all over the world, but it's important to me to know that we've had people like Richard Hugo, Theodore Roethke, David Wagner, Caro-

Art historian Susan Platt, right, passes a mural on the Vancouver Land Bridge depicting life in the area in 1845. Washington state poet laureate Samuel Green wrote a poem for the dedication of the land bridge. In an individual and a community, the nature of work, the whole notion of a spiritual quest, cultural events. His latest book deals with the aftermath of 91/11.

Do you employ specific themes or motifs when writing poetry, or do you write free verse? I don't believe in the usefulness of the term "free verse." I write organic form most of the time, so whatever the poem is asking me to do.

In 60 years as a serious poet, is there one poem you're particularly proud of and feel best represents who you are as a writer and as a person? Not really. Poems are those things you have to get through. I try to bring my best to every poem I write, but I always finish a poem with this feeling that I wish I could have done it better. I'm more interested in the next poem I'm going to write than what I've already done.

What does it mean to you to be the state's first poet laureate? It means that I have a chance to be an advocate for other poets in the state. It's also a responsibility to carry out the mandate of the Legislature. The Legislature having said that poets have a contribution to make to the literacy of the state. And if you think about it, what good is a library without a love of the heart? As you near the halfway mark of your two-year appointment as poet laureate, what have you accomplished? I've traveled around the state giving readings and workshops. I read my own poems as well as those of other Washington poets. I've given close to 20 public readings. I opened the Legislature in January. I read to the House and the Senate, and to a couple government-sponsored meetings. I read in the Capitol building on Arts Day. I've written poems on request. I wrote a poem for the dedication ceremony of the Vancouver Land Bridge. I last called "What We Carry On The Trail." I wrote poems for the inauguration of the new Spokane Art School and for the opening of a park in Anchorage.

Old teeth point to richer diet

By THOMAS MAUGH II
Los Angeles Times

Early Parthians appear to have had a richer diet than previously believed, according to starch grains embedded in plaque on their teeth.

The findings, reported Tuesday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, round back the date that humans in the New World were eating beans and a local fruit known as peccy by more than 2,000 years, indicating that they were committed farmers rather than foragers. The farmers also were eating grains and domesticated squash.

The teeth used in the study were discovered more than 20 years ago in distinctive round houses in the 1,500-foot-high Nacholoc Valley on the lower western slopes of the Andes.

Radiocarbon dates for objects found with the teeth show that they are 6,000 to 8,500 years old, archaeologist Thomas Shobay of Vanderbilt University reported. Researchers found that the early people were consuming several kinds of beans, phascolus beans, lima beans, peanuts, and peas.