



Baton Rouge Area Foundation

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OLYMPIA VERNON WINS FIRST ANNUAL ERNEST GAINES AWARD

Baton Rouge, Louisiana—The winner of the first annual Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence is Ms. Olympia Vernon for her novel, *A Killing In This Town*, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, sponsor of the award, announced today. Ms. Vernon will receive a \$10,000 award and commemorative sculpture created by artist Robert Moreland at the award ceremony on January 24, 2008 at 7 p.m., at the Manship Theatre in Baton Rouge.

Ms. Vernon's novel was selected from 29 entries from across the country by a panel of nationally known judges, including Tina McElroy Ansa, Rudolph P. Byrd, John F. Callahan, Elizabeth Nunez, and Patricia Towers. (Bios of the panelists can be found on the award website www.ernestjgainesaward.org.) Because of the excellence of the submission, the judges also selected two runners-up, or shortlisted submissions: Kim McLarin's *Jump at the Sun* and Asali Solomon's *Get Down, Stories*.

Submissions for next year's award will be accepted from February through April 2008. For more information, visit www.ernestjgainesaward.org.

Seating for the award ceremony is limited. To reserve your tickets, contact Helen Fisher at hfisher@braf.org or (225) 387-6126 after January 1, 2008.

About Olympia Vernon: Olympia Vernon has published three novels: *Eden* (2002), *Logic* (2004) and *A Killing In This Town* (2006). *Eden* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won the 2004 Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award from The American Academy of Arts and Letters. Ms. Vernon received a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1999 and earned a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in 2002. She is currently the Hallie Ford Chair in Writing at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon.

About the award: The Award was launched by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and underwritten by donors of the Foundation to honor Ernest Gaines and inspire a new generation of African-American writers to aspire to the literary recognition heights which Mr. Gaines has earned, as not only an African-American writer, but an American writer of international importance. The award recognizes an African-American author who has published a full length work of fiction during the previous calendar year.

Twenty-nine works of fiction from across the country published in 2006 were accepted for judging in the spring of 2007.

About Ernest Gaines: Mr. Gaines is among the nation's greatest writers and educators. He has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for his novels and has won numerous awards, including the 1993 National Book Critics Circle Award for "*A Lesson Before Dying*." His novel, "*The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*," was made into a popular TV film starring Cicely Tyson. Other notable works include "*A Gathering of Old Men*" and "*Of Love and Dust*."

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