

**President Stan Liberty  
Cultural Convocation  
Introduction of Illinois Poet Laureate Kevin Stein  
May 2007**

**Good afternoon. Welcome to this term's "cultural convocation." Some of you may be asking why in the world we are hosting a poet as a convocation speaker at Kettering? Isn't that an unlikely match with what we are all about?**

**I don't think so. You see -- the common thread throughout the arts, the sciences and technological innovation is "creativity." And it is not really surprising that Albert Einstein was an accomplished violinist and that so many Kettering students and alumni have fine and performing arts talents. And no matter where we as individuals fall along the creativity spectrum, our effectiveness as builders and creators, as innovators, as designers and problem solvers, and our individual success, will depend on our ability to use words in powerful ways to express ideas and convey information.**

**Now, if you will allow me that premise, note that we are not just hosting any poet, but a poet laureate. I am sure you all know that a poet laureate is an ambassador who promotes awareness of poetry and works to heighten appreciation of the art form.**

**Why in the world are we being visited by the Poet Laureate of Illinois?**

**Well, for one reason there is no Poet Laureate of Michigan:**

- In the 1870s, poet Will Carleton was sometimes referred to as "The Poet of Michigan";**
- Michigan has really had only one official Poet Laureate – Edgar A. Guest, who held the title from 1952 until his death in 1959;**
- Mr. Guest was appointed as the Michigan Poet Laureate by the Michigan Legislature, who cited his poems as a means of moral support in times of stress and enjoyment through subtle humor and homespun philosophy;**
- Government officials have debated whether Michigan should have a Poet Laureate in recent years. Gov. John Engler vetoed a**

**proposal in 2001. In 2005, the Michigan Senate passed a bill to establish a Michigan Poet Laureate position, which was referred to a second reading in the House of Representative in 2006, but the issue has been silent for about one year.**

**Second, I know Dr. Kevin Stein personally, and that personal knowledge of this outstanding scholar's abilities led me to believe that the Flint community including Kettering would benefit from exposure to his creative work. And we have worked his tail off the past two days. He has met with two Flint middle school classes, two Kettering Liberal Studies classes and made a public presentation at the Longway Planetarium last night.**

**Kevin Stein was born and raised in a town somewhat like Flint, a GM town, – Anderson, Indiana. And I understand he has two cousins who were GMI graduates. Kevin and his wife of over a quarter of a century have two children and now live in Dunlap, Illinois - just north of Peoria.**

**I first met Kevin in early 1998 when I joined Bradley University as Provost. He was a professor of English there having come to Bradley in 1984 from Indiana University, where he earned a master's degree in Creative Writing and a Ph.D. in American literature. At Bradley, he teaches a range of graduate and undergraduate courses in American literature and he is the director of Bradley's Creative Writing Program.**

**It was immediately obvious to me that Kevin Stein was not only one of Bradley's most outstanding faculty members but that he was "world class" as a scholar. He had already won the most prestigious honors that Bradley could bestow on him at that time, and a couple of years after I arrived he was awarded one of the first three distinguished professorships at Bradley supported by an endowment established from a gift from Caterpillar, Inc. during Bradley's Centennial Campaign. He is one of only six faculty members holding this distinguished rank out of about 330 total.**

**In 2003, Governor Rod Blagojevich announced a competition to find Illinois' fourth poet laureate. As Bradley's Provost, I had the pleasure of signing the letter of nomination of Kevin, and in December of that year he was selected as Illinois' fourth Poet Laureate. The previous**

**Illinois Poet Laureates were noted writers: Howard Austin, Carl Sandburg and Gwendolyn Brooks.**

**I was tempted to tell you about all of his literary accomplishments, awards and recognitions, but I thought we should leave time for the program. I would invite you to visit the Illinois Poet Laureate website, where you can read all about him and his work.**

**Let me instead just quote from the University of Missouri Press that said this about his work called “Circus of Want”: “Kevin Stein’s poems celebrate desire ... moving sinuously among the particulars of daily life ... composing an absorbing record of human want ...”**

**Please give a warm welcome to and be entertained by Bradley University’s Caterpillar Professor of English and Illinois Poet Laureate Dr. Kevin Stein.**

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