



A Proud Chapter of  
Romance Writers of America®

**December 31, 2016**

**Volume XXIX, Issue 11**

## **WELCOME TO CENTRAL OHIO FICTION WRITERS**

**Apologies for the lateness of this issue! A family member's surgery and the pressures of the holiday season worked against the timeliness of this newsletter, which covers the November meeting and the December releases.**

**At COFW's November meeting, the group welcomed author Tracy Brogan, who is published by Amazon.com's romance imprint, Montlake. She talked to us about using small moments to build a big, satisfying story.**

**For more great articles and news about your fellow COFWers, see inside.**

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Central Ohio Fiction Writers (COFW) <http://cofwevents.org> is a non-profit professional association for romance writers and a local chapter of the Romance Writers of America (RWA) organization that offers monthly meetings. Since 1987, COFW has promoted excellence in fiction writing, encouraging writers to grow and gain knowledge in their craft. Members provide a networking system to share knowledge and support the goal of becoming published.

# MINUTES OF THE COFW BUSINESS MEETING 11-19-2016

by Julia Blaine



Central Ohio Fiction Writers met at the Norwich Township Safety and Services Building, 5181 Northwest Parkway, Hilliard, Ohio.

President Jane Conner, called the meeting to order at 12:30pm. She reminded members to turn down their cell phones, make a name tag, and sign Works in Progress.

Present were: Kris Branch, Robin Gianna, Linda Rice, Saralee Etter, Ireanne Chambers, Jenessa McRoy, Amalie Berlin, Lisa Coffey, Jane Pierangel, Tracy Brogan, Sheri Adkins, Becky Barker, Shari Heinrich, Sandy Kachurek, Jeanne Estridge, Jane Conner, Stacy McKitrick, Janet Ciccone, and Julia Blaine.

There were no corrections to last month's minutes and no questions regarding the Treasurer's Report. Sheri Adkins volunteered to write the Recap for the Newsletter.

Incentives:

**Jane Conner** joined NaNoWriMo and has written 30K words thus far.

**Jeanne Estridge** won a contest.

**Alicia Anthony** had a full request.

**Saralee Etter** has 3 Regencies now available on Amazon.

**Julia Blaine** entered the Rita.

**Becky Barker** entered the Rita.

**Nancy White** has had one request and 2 items published.

**Robin Gianakopoulos** has entered the Rita.

**Sheri Adkins** has suffered rejections.

Linda Rice gave an update about COFW's all-day workshop on October 21, 2017, featuring Larry Brooks, author of **Story Fix**, **Story Physics**, and **Story Engineering**. It will be at the Courtyard Marriott, 2350 Westbest Drive, Columbus. Costs will be \$55 for COFW members and \$75 for non-members.

Member of the Year voting online began November 19 and lasted one week. Nominees are Robin, Nancy and Jane.

We passed around a sheet indicating what we will bring to the Holiday Party in December.

# COFW MEETING MINUTES (CONT'D)

Leadership Positions for 2017 include:

Pan Liaison – **Susan Heino**

Inventory Coordinator – **Robin Gianakopoulos**

Ignite the Flame – **Nancy White** and **Jane Conner**

Incentives – **Julia Blaine**

Social Media Coordinator – **Andrea McConnell**

Meeting Hostesses – **Linda Rice** and **Sheri Adkins**

We passed the slate of officers for 2017:

President – **Jenessa McRoy**

Treasurer – **Stacy McKitrick**

Secretary – **Jeanne Estridge**

These are the members of the COFW Board.

Also announced were the 2017 Chair of Programs - **Sheri Adkins**, who will have the help of a committee, and the 2017 Newsletter Editor – **Sandy Kachurek**.

The meeting was adjourned for speaker Tracy Brogan.

Congratulations to  
COFW's 2016 Member of the Year  
Jane Conner

# RECAP: TRACY BROGAN

## CREATING BIG STORIES FROM A SERIES OF SMALL MOMENTS

*by Sheri Adkins*

On Saturday, November 19, 2016, COFW was honored to have author and three-time Rita finalist, Tracy Brogan, as their featured speaker. Tracy writes contemporary romance and historical romance for Montlake Publishing. As an Amazon and Wall Street Journal best-selling author, she is best known for her “fun, funny stories about ordinary people finding extraordinary love.”

Have you ever felt the pressure of crafting that all-powerful high concept story? We've all heard the buzz and wished above anything that we could master the mystery of high concept. Well, Tracy Brogan would tell you to stop stressing! Yes, high concepts are great, but not all great stories are high concept. More than anything, a great story is about great moments—and experiencing those moments through great characters. In fact, even huge moments won't impact readers if you don't break down the moment into how it impacts your characters. And yet, conversely, small moments that might appear to be insignificant can pack a real punch if you anchor them to something meaningful in your character's life.

Tracy was kind enough to read an example from her work where her heroine, an executive, is in her office on her birthday. She doesn't believe in wishes or dreams coming true because of events in her past. She thinks it silly to make a wish as she blows out the candles on the birthday cake her colleagues have presented to her. Still, for their sake, she closes her eyes and pretends to make a wish.

In that moment, Tracy masterfully established that this heroine has a deep-set belief that nothing magical will ever happen to her, but she is kind enough to fake it for her well-meaning friends. We instantly relate to this character and immediately know the obstacle she will need to overcome to find happiness. Nothing blew up.

No one was running for their lives. Nor was the future of the planet in any danger. Just a small moment that could seem unremarkable, but it established the heroine's flaw, her backstory, and world view in a very touching and relevant way.

Simple scenes are relatable. As much as we may all enjoy the ride of high concept thrillers where you have to catch your breath after nearly every page, not many of us can relate to saving the world. Sometimes, the simplest scenes can be the most touching and poignant. What matters is how you, as the author, shows the reader



## TRACY BROGAN(CONT'D)

how something relates to the character. Use these quiet moments to add layers of inner conflict or establish your themes. What matters is using the moment, whether big or small, to reveal something about your characters, their relationships, and their back story. It is also highly effective to use a small moment's significance in a call-back later in the story—it really hits the point home. (Tip: keep track of the moments you've layered into your story in order to call one back just at the right time.)

Small moments can also help readers relax into the story and get to know the characters more intimately. Think of these scenes as seasoning for your story, like salt and pepper. It makes your character come alive. It's a great way to show regular people doing regular things. Choose those "things" wisely, make them subtle, so readers will feel they are genuine character traits, not contrived for convenience. Remember, it isn't so much about what actually happens in these scenes, as it is about how the character feels about what happened.

Tracy revealed when small moments can matter the most:

- 1) When your character has an epiphany. For example, in *Gone With the Wind* when Melanie dies and Scarlett finally sees that Ashley really did love his wife all along. In that moment she knows that she has loved Rhett, too, but she was too foolish to see it.
- 2) When an event is entirely internal. The significance of the moment is completely lost on everyone except your Hero or Heroine.
- 3) When an event is nostalgic, such as a father walking his daughter down the aisle.
- 4) When an event is so huge that it's too hard to describe it all. As the author, slow down and focus on one part of the scene to bring it to life for the reader. (For example, in *Schindler's List* when the events of the Holocaust are too horrific to conceive, we become numb to the atrocities. However, as we focus on the little girl in the reddish coat, we feel her pain and see the horror.)



Tracy reminded us that even big stories can benefit from small moments. In *Indiana Jones* when Marion kisses his elbow because everything else on him hurts, it is more powerful and memorable than if they had fallen into each other's arms in a passionate kiss. Don't be afraid of small moments. Don't even be afraid of a whole story based on small moments. Tracy Brogan has made a career of it!

On behalf of COFW, I'd like to thank Tracy for driving down from Michigan to enlighten us on her special brand of brilliance! If you would like more information on Tracy's books or how to get in touch with her, visit her website at <http://www.tracy-brogan.com>.



## NEW RELEASES BY COFW MEMBERS!

### THE KILL SIGN (JAMIE SINCLAIR #4)

*by Nichole Christoff*

**Available December 6 from Random House Alibi.**

Security specialist and PI Jamie Sinclair finds herself in deadly waters off the steamy Gulf Coast in this combustible thriller from the award-winning author of *The Kill Box*.

Never in her life has Jamie Sinclair anticipated a weekend getaway more. After four months apart, she's flying to Mississippi to see her would-be boyfriend, military police officer Adam Barrett. Barrett's currently stationed in the same Gulf Coast town where Jamie got her start as a private investigator, and she's equally excited to reconnect with her old mentor, Ray Walther, and his pregnant wife, Corinne, who's Jamie's best friend.

But all hopes for a relaxing and romantic weekend are shattered when a dirty bomb explodes on a riverboat packed with military, killing dozens of soldiers. In the chaotic aftermath, Jamie believes that she spots the bomber—and recognizes him from her past.

As Barrett and Jamie race to catch the terrorist before he strikes again, Ray and Corinne become targets themselves. And this time around, Jamie won't let a little thing like the law keep her from protecting the people she loves most—no matter the cost.



## NEW RELEASES BY COFW MEMBERS!

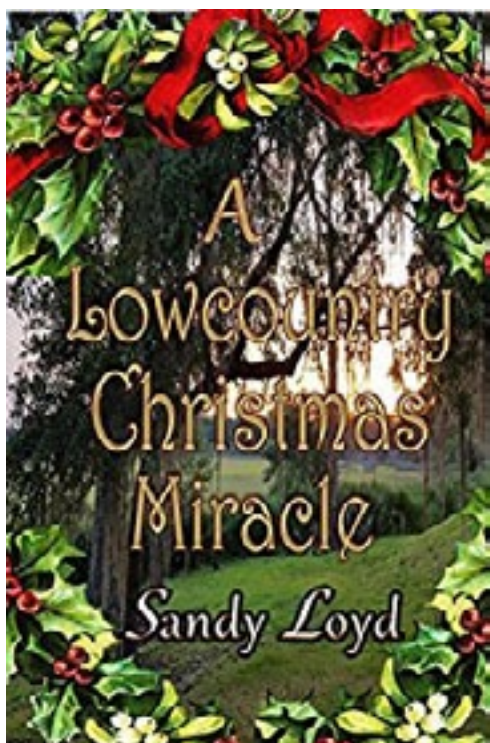
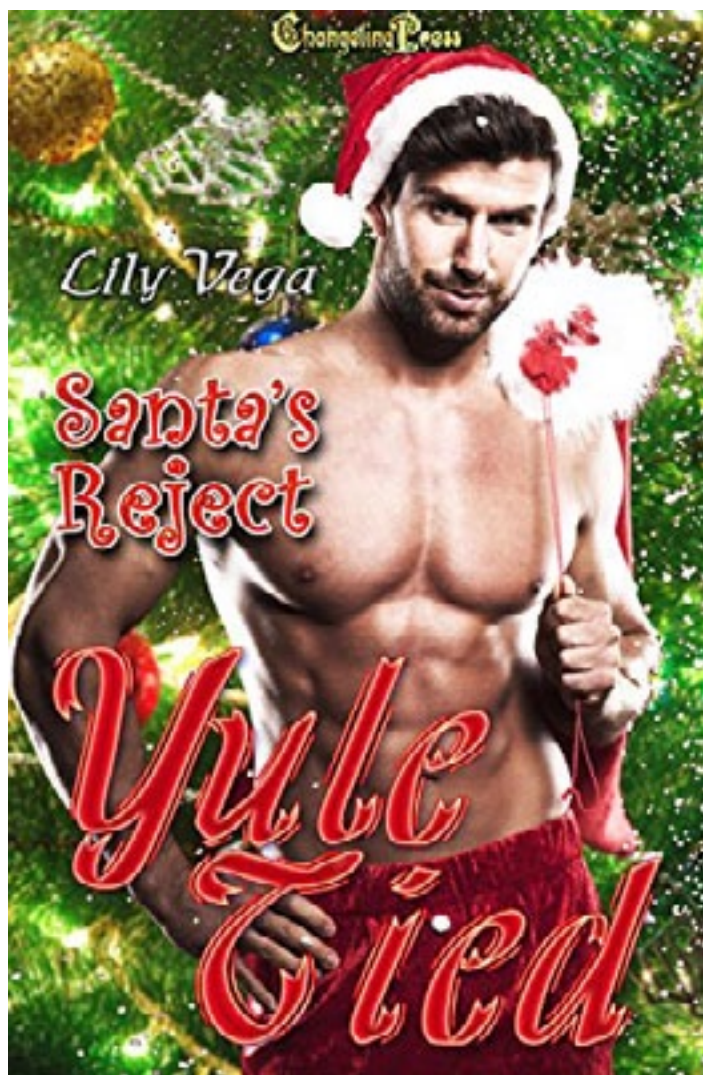
### SANTA'S REJECT (YULE TIED)

by Lily Vega

Banished from the North Pole for bad behavior, Beryl is shipped off to Fairyville. A scratch from Cupid's arrow infuses her with Christmas spirit and saddles her with a mad crush on her new boss, Killian -- a.k.a. the Tooth Fairy.

Killian despises love and the entire notion of Yuletide celebrations. The last thing he needs is a beautiful Elf spreading holiday cheer and trying to drag him into the sack.

After all, Beryl's love could sour like rotten eggnog once she discovers his secret.



### A LOWCOUNTRY CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

by Sandy Loyd

Considering the bad blood between father and son, it will take a miracle to get Cade Duval to return to the Lowcountry for Christmas. Lacey Barnes has loved Cade since...forever...and feels up to the task of making sure it happens. Unfortunately, Cade's in a relationship and Lacey would never poach. Success means her heart will be broken all over again.

Yet, miracles have a way of happening at Christmastime. Like the miracle of family coming together and the miracle of forgiveness. But the most wonderful miracle of all is the miracle of finding true love.



# TOP TIPS FROM AGENTS AND EDITORS:

## USE THE RIGHT VERBS

by Donna Maloy

*The following article first appeared in the November 2016 issue of In Print!, the monthly newsletter of Houston Bay Area RWA.*

Today's advice comes from Jodie Renner, a freelance fiction editor and the award-winning author of three craft-of-writing guides in the series **An Editor's Guide to Writing Compelling Fiction: Captivate Your Readers, Fire up Your Fiction, and Writing a Killer Thriller**, as well as two clickable e-resources, **Quick Clicks: Spelling List** and **Quick Clicks: Word Usage**.

Find her at [www.JodieRenner.com](http://www.JodieRenner.com), and [www.JodieRennerEditing.com](http://www.JodieRennerEditing.com).

Follow her on Facebook, Twitter, and her blog, <http://jodierennerediting.blogspot.com/>

Jodie is also a frequent blogger at Kill Zone (<https://killzoneblog.com/>) – a blog I've frequently mentioned as a favorite. In last month's article, Jodie talked about the importance of verbs in capturing the mood of a scene.

### Power-Packed Verbs

Mood is more than just soft lighting, or the scent of roses, or the sound of thunder. Yes, using the five senses—with judicious placement of a few adjectives—can help create a feeling that enhances the reader's immersion in the scene. But action verbs can have a similar effect and they have the added advantage of “showing” us such intangible things as character emotion.

Paying attention to action words can have a major payoff, especially in those all-important first pages, when you need to set up a scene and a character quickly, with a minimum number of power-packed words. Consider:

*Jane Roble's footsteps echoed loudly as she raced from the scene of the bombing. Blood ran from the cut on her face into her eye. She wiped it away. At Seventh Street, she dropped her purse to gain speed, but the fear followed her.*

Versus

*Jane Roble's worn Skechers hammered the sidewalk, faster and faster, as she fled the screams of the bombing victims. Blood oozed from the cut on her face into her left eye. She swiped it once. At Seventh Street, she abandoned her purse to gain speed, but the horror pursued her.*

The first version tells the story of a frightened getaway. But the more emotion-laden word choices in the second version—including the verbs—paint a picture of urgent panic. Specifically, consider how much emotion is added by choosing the words abandoned instead of dropped and pursued instead of followed.



# TOP TIPS ARTICLE (CONT'D)

## Don't Just Walk, Strut Your Stuff

Let's take one word—walk—and see how using alternative words could enhance the reader's experience of a person or a situation.

“Do you have a heavy, tired, or angry character simply walking when he could be trudging or clomping or stomping or plodding? “

--Jodie Renner

*Exercise:* Carefully choose verbs that will show how the following people “walk” into a room:

A 91-year-old man with a walker

His 17-year-old gymnast granddaughter

Her exhausted mother

The proud trainer who coached the girl to the Olympics

The girl's beauty-queen sister

Her arrogant football-hero boyfriend

The stoned kid who isn't sure what he's doing here.

The worried caretaker of the old man.

Remember, words like wobble, strut, stagger, dart, shuffle—all carry meaning beyond the simple action they describe. Their use can imply a whole world of extra context, including character traits, physical or mental wounds, the age of the character, even his or her motivation.

To get more ideas for using verbs to enhance your writing, check out chapter 21, “Choose Words That Nail It,” in Jodie Renner's **Fire Up Your Fiction**.

*Donna Maloy is a published author of fiction and plays for adults, teens, tweens and young adults. Her first book for middle grade, **Celia and the Wolf**, won the Lyra Award for best juvenile fiction in 2014. She has been teaching writing at the college and community level for more than ten years.*

*Visit her at [www.donnamaloy.com](http://www.donnamaloy.com) and [www.tangledwords.com](http://www.tangledwords.com), a blog for new writers.*

# WRITING TECHNIQUE: SETUPS AND PAYOFFS

By Saralee Etter

Remember this scene?

**Indiana:** There's a big snake in the plane, Jock!

**Jock:** Oh, that's just my pet snake Reggie.

**Indiana:** I hate snakes, Jock! I hate 'em!

**Jock:** Come on! Show a little backbone, will ya?

Of course you do. It's from **Raiders of the Lost Ark**. At first glance, it just seems to be a humorous "button" on the extended opening sequence. Indiana Jones has just coolly battled his way past deadly traps, creepy spiders, murderous Hovitos, a treacherous rival archaeologist, and a giant rolling boulder. The last thing we expect is for him to be afraid of a pet snake.



It's also a classic "setup," the first half of the setup/payoff combination, which is an essential storytelling technique. Other names for this include Setup/Reveal, Plant/Reveal, and sometimes Foreshadowing. The idea is that early in your story, you give your reader a detail that may seem irrelevant, but later on will become interesting or meaningful in some surprising way (the payoff).

The payoff in **Raiders** is the moment when Indy and Sallah look down into the Well of Souls and see thousands of poisonous snakes – and we already KNOW that it's Indy's worst nightmare. Even though that earlier moment might have slipped our minds, when we see that slithering mass we remember. And we completely get it.

Done well, setups and payoffs create a sense of connection between the writer and the reader. Writers trust their readers to look for and pay attention to details. Readers who notice these things get a little burst of pleasure from recognizing the meaning behind the detail.

No matter what the genre, setups and payoffs can show character growth, illuminate backstory, and provide the clues that help solve a mystery. Furthermore, as you move your story forward with a careful blend of setups and payoffs, you will give your reader a sense that something important is just about to happen. This keeps readers involved in your story, giving it that "un-put-down-able" quality called narrative drive. Narrative drive happens when new information is introduced, or previously-introduced things are explained.



## SETUPS AND PAYOFFS (CONT'D)

Many writing teachers point to J.K. Rowling's brilliant use of setups and payoffs, which make her books so readable. One example of a setup that pays off in numerous ways throughout the series is Harry Potter's ability to talk to snakes.

This detail is set up in the early scene when Harry talks to a boa constrictor at the zoo. At that early point in the story, a reader might think that talking to snakes is just part of the general "magical" wizarding world. But then in the second book, ***Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets***, Harry's ability to talk to snakes is shown to be a very unusual trait, even among wizards, and is the key to solving the mystery of the monster.

Later, in ***Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire***, it is revealed that Voldemort is also a Parseltongue (i.e., can talk to snakes) and Harry's connection to the Dark Lord is the reason he has that ability. The ability to speak Parseltongue resurfaces even later on, when Harry uses the ability to destroy one of the evil Horcruxes.

The setups work so well because they are subtle – there is enough distance between the setup and the payoff to allow the reader to "forget" about it temporarily, or at least to not expect the way in which the setup is paid off.

An obvious or unsubtle setup would be when Q shows James Bond a whole bunch of fancy new weapons – and you know that Bond will be using them before long. Such obvious plants are not uncommon in stories, but the most satisfying ones are less obvious.



Usually, the setups happen in the first part of the story and the payoffs come about in the second half. But it's best to keep setting things up and paying them off all along the way, like breadcrumbs leading toward the climax.

The biggest setup should have the most satisfying payoff, at the climax of the story. In ***Star Wars: A New Hope***, the Force is brought up numerous times – Obi-Wan explains it, then Han scoffs at it, and finally in the climactic moment, Luke turns off his targeting device to use it. In the key payoff scene of the movie, using the Force enables Luke to destroy the Death Star.

So how do you accomplish the setup and payoff? One easy way is by working backward.



## FIVE TIPS (CONT'D)

Start with the payoff – what do you want to prove, what aspect of character do you want to reveal, or plot point do you want to reach? If you know where your story is going, then that revelation will be your payoff. You can then go back to the beginning and insert your setup.

It is important to establish your setup early, so your audience doesn't balk later on. There's nothing worse than coincidences popping up unexpectedly to save the day at the climax of the story.

But it shouldn't be too obvious either. The setup should set a pattern or cause the reader's mind to go in a specific direction. Then there should be a twist, or surprise – the payoff should happen in a way that is different from the specific direction you've set up.

Master Editor Sol Stein, in ***Stein on Writing***, explains it like this: "Look at each important incident in your plot and see what you would normally expect to happen next. Then have the exact opposite happen. At least half the time an idea will suggest itself that will surprise your characters as well as yourself."

Famed writing teacher and author of ***Story*** Robert McKee says setups "must be planted in such a way that when the audience first sees them, they have one meaning, but with a rush of insight, they take on a second, more important meaning."

If the payoff is really good, we realize, in the end, that there was no surprise at all. What had seemed to be a turn of fate proves to be inevitable and, as we realize it, we receive the gift of insight. We should have seen it coming!

Once you've made your choice, you can write all the action, dialogue, and subtext to increase the feeling of surprise and also to reveal character in the process.

All kinds of stories have this setup and payoff sequence. The cause-and-effect nature of reality itself tells us that for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction.

As Anton Chekov said...

"If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there."

Happy writing!



*After years of writing newspaper articles, public relations releases and legal briefs, Saralee Etter published three sweet Regency romances with the Cotillion line. As Rose Maybud she published the sexy contemporary, "[Something in the Coffee](#)"*

*Now she is working on a Victorian murder mystery series featuring Lucy Turner, who eventually marries William S. Gilbert of Gilbert & Sullivan fame. The first book, "A Short Sharp Shock," will be coming soon. You can find Saralee at [www.saraleeetter.com](http://www.saraleeetter.com) and at her blog, **A Fine Mystery Indeed**, [www.saraleeetter.com/blog1](http://www.saraleeetter.com/blog1)*



# WORKS IN PROGRESS

**Sheri Adkins:** Need to start a new WIP

**Becky Barker:** Getting used to a new computer operating system and Dragon Naturally Speaking

**Amalie Berlin:** Finishing 10th Harlequin Medical

**Julia Blaine:** Entered the Rita

**Kris Branch:** WDCU is my Work in Progress. I have joined NaNaWriMo and am about 20K in so far

**Tracy Brogan:** "My Kind of You," release date 4-18-16

**Ireanne Chambers:** "Alien of Extraordinary Ability"

**Lisa Coffey:** Working on "Leah's Story"

**Jane Conner:** Participating in NaNaWrimo

**Jeanne Estridge:** "Girl's Best Friend". Finished first draft

**Saralee Etter:** Regencies available now. Mystery WIP

**Robin Gianna:** Working on Medical Contemporary

**Shari Heinrich:** **Querying** "River Daughter"

**Samdy Kachurek:** 25,000 words of NaNaWrimo

**Jenessa McRoy:** Editing Historicals

**Stacy McKittrick:** Revising "Ghostly Interlude." (24 pages left!)

**Jane Pierangel:** I'm Tracy's tag-along friend and Beta reader

**Linda Rice:** Worked on Workshop



## COFW 2016 TREASURER REPORT

### REVENUE

	Nov	YTD	Budget
Membership Dues	75.00	1195.00	1500.00
Event Revenue			
Contest	0.00	2050.00	750.00
Convention	0.00	0.00	0.00
Retreat	0.00	0.00	0.00
Workshop	0.00	0.00	0.00
Interest Income	0.03	1.69	2.00
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>75.03</b>	<b>3246.69</b>	<b>2252.00</b>

### EXPENSES

Bank Fees	0.00	0.00	25.00
Donations	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dues (RWA Membership)	0.00	59.00	60.00
Event			
Contest	0.00	469.75	200.00
Convention	0.00	0.00	0.00
Retreat	0.00	0.00	0.00
Workshop	0.00	0.00	0.00
Financial Services (Quickbooks)	11.14	121.76	155.40
General Expenses (non event)			
Postal Box Rental	0.00	86.00	75.00
Supplies and Printing	21.21	154.61	100.00
Holiday Party	0.00	0.00	50.00
Incentives			
Basket	0.00	7.64	50.00
Member Recognition	51.60	127.93	80.00
Insurance - Westfield (RHK)	0.00	500.00	500.00
Newsletter Articles	60.00	285.00	300.00
PayPal Fees	2.55	107.42	48.00
Programs			
Meeting Fees	0.00	250.00	0.00
Speaker Fees	0.00	1249.00	5000.00
Speaker Reimbursements	262.29	815.50	0.00
Supplies	42.71	219.56	0.00
Promotion	0.00	79.98	75.00
RWA National Registration (President)	0.00	743.15	750.00
Website Maintenance	40.00	521.99	550.00
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>491.50</b>	<b>5798.29</b>	<b>8018.40</b>
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>75.03</b>	<b>3246.69</b>	<b>2252.00</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>491.50</b>	<b>5798.29</b>	<b>8018.40</b>
<b>Net</b>	<b>(416.47)</b>	<b>(2551.60)</b>	<b>(5766.40)</b>

### ASSETS

Checking	10997.52
PayPal	1067.49
Savings	0.02
Financial Assistance Savings Account	1564.38
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>13629.41</b>
Cash (not including Fin Asst Acct)	12065.03

# COFW 2016 LEADERSHIP

## Executive Board

President	Jane Conner	djconner@earthlink.net
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