

Poetry flourishes in Superior

By Irvin Mossberger

Bill Tecku has been around beating the bushes trying to get people to listen to him. He's been at it for two years, and apparently people are starting to get the message.

Tecku's message has been heard, and acknowledged recently by the Wisconsin Arts Board which thinks his idea for a series of taped poetry, prose and music programs merits some consideration. The Arts Board has even backed up that consideration with some money.

If you're one of the many people who, as Tecku says, gets turned off by the word "poetry," stick around for a little while longer. For it's Tecku's position that a poetry reading, instead of a wake, should be a happening. And he tries to make things happen.

"They should probably just get rid of the word altogether, and invent a new one, because so many people have the idea that poetry just *has* to be dry," said Tecku recently.

"In school, kids get turned off from poetry because they're forced to memorize it, and they're always taught the same old, traditional stuff. It shouldn't be like that."

What it should be like, he maintained, is on the order of a weekly radio program he and Bill Olson do on WDTN-FM each Sunday. The two Superior writers-performers, backed up by music (guitarist John Harris) have been doing the shows for about two years.

With the musical background, they read their own works, pieces by other local writers, and that of the big-timers like Fer-

linghetti, Ginsberg, Brautigan, Gary Snyder, Frost and Emily Dickinson.

Tecku also put together a series of three readings at UWS this summer, which he called Soup Town Trail, in which about 15 to 20 local writers took part.

"A lot of poetry readings are wakes," he said, "they're too dry. But with something like Soup Town Trail, it was more of an event, something was happening. It was an informal atmosphere, and I think the people who attended it really enjoyed themselves."

Helping the people in attendance to relax and enjoy themselves was the availability of refreshments. Wine was served at the readings, compliments of some local taverns.

"We didn't bill it as poetry or prose, and a lot of people probably went there without knowing what really was going to happen," acknowledged Tecku. "But once they were there, I think they enjoyed themselves, and they came back for the other shows."

Music by Harris, and more recently by Dave English on percussion, enhances the readings, said Olson. And Tecku goes even further.

"John has a tremendous intuitive feel for the internal feeling of the poem, which we're trying to express in our readings," said Tecku. "The music has helped us in carrying over that feeling, to the listeners."

Listeners at the Wisconsin Arts Board, which is endowed by the National Endowment for the Arts, heard Tecku's spiel one day in Madison and have decided to sponsor 10 to 12 half-hour tapes. The tapes may eventually go out over the Public Broadcasting System.

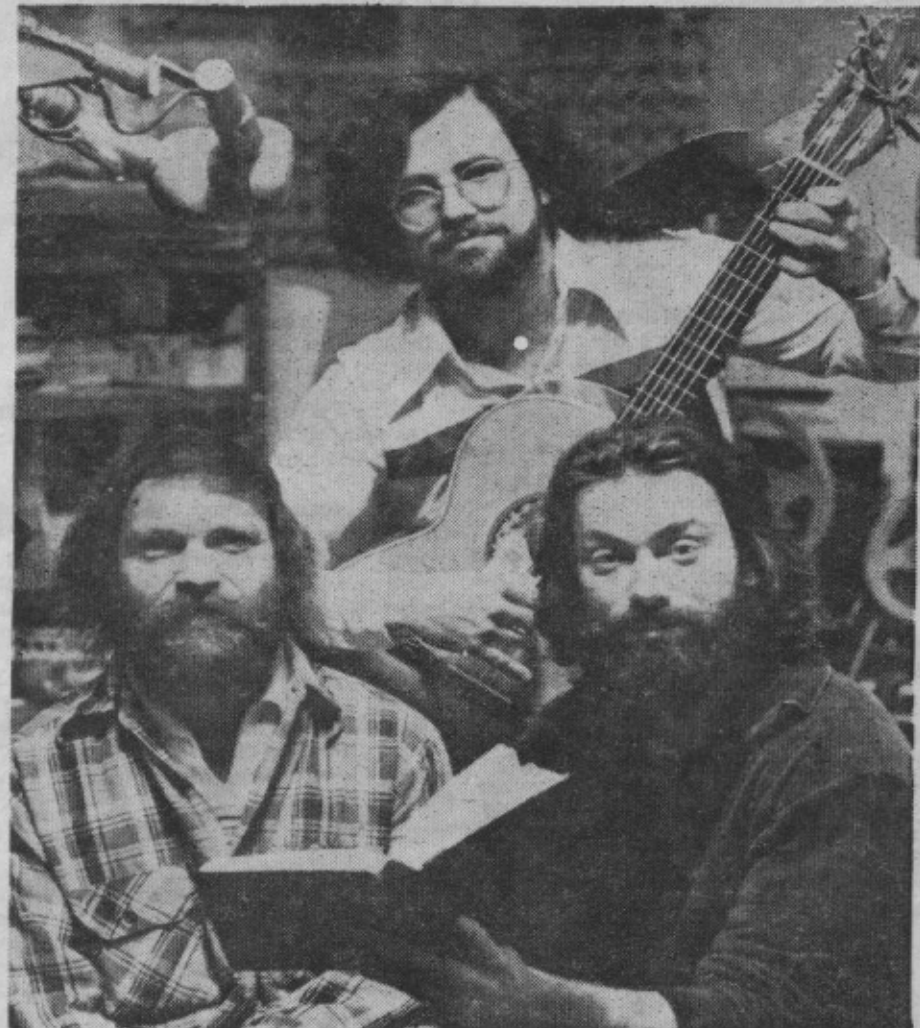


Photo by Joey McLeister

Bill Olson (left) and Bill Tecku share poetry reading chores as John Harris accompanies them on guitar.

"I'd gone to St. Louis (his hometown) and was passing through Madison and I thought, what the heck, I might as well give them a try," said Tecku of his application to the Arts Board for funding.

"And I talked to this really wonderful lady there, Lea Ward-James, and I told her what we wanted to do. She thought it was a great idea."

Ward-James, according to Tecku, asked him how much money he thought he'd need, and he came up with \$1,350.

He and Olson work as painters and he said, "I just added up what we'd get as

painters for the series, and figured it at \$1,350. We deducted for rehearsal time."

The tapes will feature one local writer for each program, and the two plan to begin their taping this month. They are still rounding up the artists but Tecku said he doesn't think he'll have any problems in that area.

"Some of the best young writers around are right here in Superior," Tecku said. "There are significant happenings artistically here. I think the climate is conducive to creativity and research, things like that. I think this is a very interesting area."