

Professor writes poetry chatbook

BY KATHLEEN BARBOSA
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Sitting in his office with a picture of his father on the wall behind him and a wall of books in front of him that he uses to teach his classes, English professor Joe Benevento wrote his latest book, "Tough Guys Don't Write."

Benevento's scheduled poetry reading for Wednesday night featured his latest poetry collection, "Tough Guys Don't Write." This book, dedicated to his father, features works about family, his New York childhood and what it means to be a real tough guy.

Family is the book's uniting theme. Benevento said men like his brother and his 91-year-old father inspired the title, "Tough Guys Don't Write."

"A tough guy is someone like my dad who had to work common labor jobs and was always doing something for his kids, rather than showing off, like these fake tough guys," Benevento said.

Benevento said his childhood in a fairly poor Queens neighborhood of New York City played a large role in shaping several of the book's poems. He chose to include poetry about this time in his life because his family still has strong connections to those places. He often takes his children to visit his parents, who still live in his childhood home in New York. The cover of the book even features a picture of Benevento and his brother from their childhood and a photo of his father's sandlot baseball team that played in New York.

Benevento said he has been writing

poetry since he was in fourth grade. This is the eighth book he has had published and his fourth book of poetry. He said this book actually is a "chatbook," or a collection of 20 to 25 poems instead of an anthology, which generally consists of around 50 poems.

Despite his poems' incredibly personal subjects, they have resonated with others, including Mona Davis, assistant to the dean of the School of Health Sciences and Education.

Mona said she has been aware of Benevento's writing for years, but she first came into contact with his latest book this summer when she worked with the advanced placement training for English teachers.

Mona said that at first, she didn't expect to relate to a book about tough guys. Also, because she has such a different background than Benevento, she said she didn't think she would connect with his poems, but she was surprised by her reaction.

"I thought I would look at a couple of the poems just kind of out of respect and I did not put it down until I read the entire book," Mona said. "And then I immediately went back and reread some of those that were favorites."

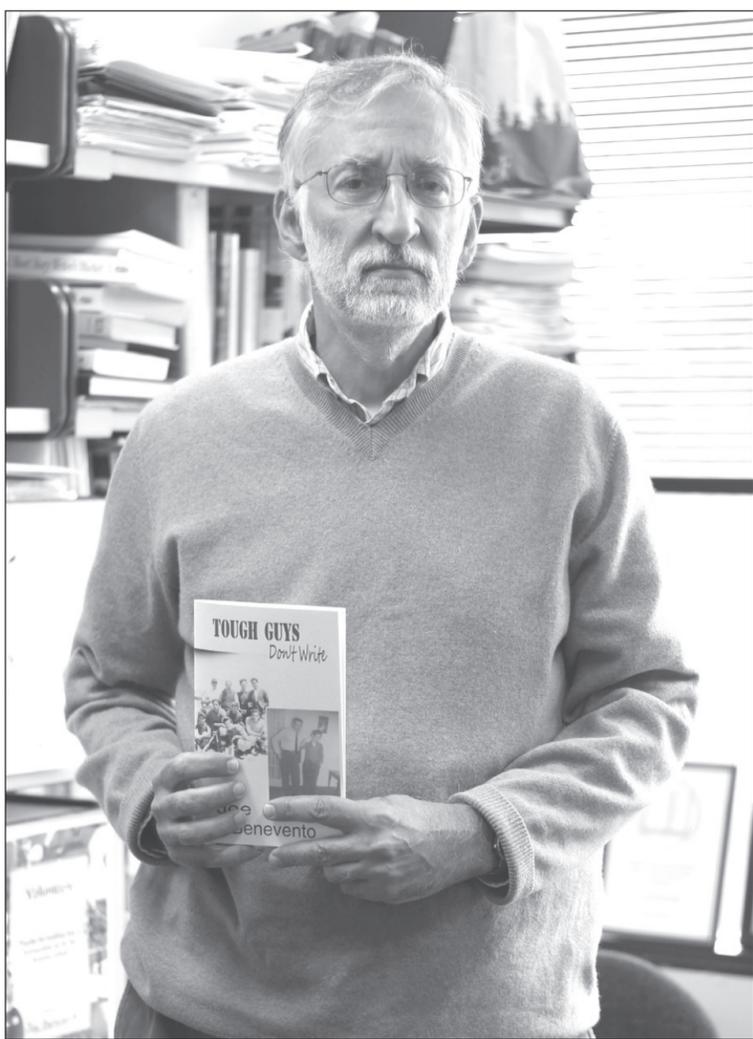
Mona managed to find common ground with his poetry. She said the poems about Benevento's father resonated with her because she recently lost her father.

The poems moved her so much she sent Benevento an email complimenting his work. Benevento said this was his first feedback from a general reader and he was flattered by her response to his poetry.

English professor Adam Davis said he makes an effort to read all his colleagues'

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Sonny Phan/Index

English professor Joe Benevento stands in his office with a copy of his new poetry book, "Tough Guys Don't Write." Many of the poems in his book are based on childhood memories and Benevento's father.

published works, but he critiqued many of the poems included in Benevento's latest work before they were published.

He said he characterizes Benevento's writing as "hard-edged sentiment" and "experienced idealism." Adam said Benevento manages to avoid being cliché although he dabbles in areas like love, loss and family.

Adam said readings like the one

Benevento did Sept. 21, in the SUB are a great opportunity for the Truman State community to appreciate the University's talented faculty.

"He is a poet of national standing and I don't know that we always appreciate locally the level of prestige that our artists and scholars enjoy in the wider community," Adam said.

Habitat finds house recipients

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Junior Clara Dahmer has worked to raise funds, increase awareness about poverty in Kirksville and has traveled on mission trips to rebuild houses devastated by hurricanes. During her three years as a member of Truman State's chapter of Habitat for Humanity, Dahmer never has had a chance to work on the project for which she joined — constructing a house in Kirksville. That is about to change.

Kirksville's Habitat for Humanity board informed Truman's chapter last Thursday that a family has been found who meets Habitat's qualifications. This will be the first local house Truman's chapter has built in four years.

Senior Allison Dooley, president of Truman's Habitat for Humanity chapter said the family's names and ages are being withheld from the public until the Kirksville Habitat board and the family decide to release the information.

The organization has been told some information about the family. Dooley said they are a recently engaged couple from Kirksville. The woman has been renting the same house for 15 years and her fiancé still lives at home. Dooley said the couple hopes the house will be completed by May so they can move in after they return

from their honeymoon.

Dooley said both have disabilities which will make the house layout different from most Habitat houses.

Jack James, member of Kirksville's Habitat for Humanity board and contractor for this house, said making the house handicap accessible for the couple while meeting Habitat and city regulations will require careful planning. James said he has been working on houses for 31 years with his construction company A&J Construction and in his experience, the adjustments won't create a significant impact on the construction timeline. If nothing goes wrong, the house should be completed in three months.

James said to make the house handicap accessible he will insert handrails around the house, a ramp instead of stairs to enter the house and special cabinets that allow easy wheelchair access. The bathroom, kitchen and bedroom areas also will be widened to allow a wheelchair to maneuver freely. James said these specifications won't prolong construction.

The family was given a choice from three plots of land Kirksville's Habitat board owns. They chose a plot located on Baird Street. James said Habitat acquired the lot when they bought it from the City at the cost of back taxes due on the property and an agreement to clean up the lot.

Dooley said the couple chose



Kathleen Barbosa/Index

Members of Truman State's Habitat for Humanity camp in a cardboard dwelling on the Quad in an effort to raise money.

this plot because it is close to Community Opportunities, where they both work, and because it has a large tree in the backyard.

James said his next step is to start drawing plans to submit to the City for approval.

In an attempt to keep the house affordable, James said Habitat tries to have skilled labor and items donated. He said the manpower put into building the house is what they need the most.

"We've been very fortunate with the houses I've helped build," James said. "We rely on the kids for a lot of the labor and thank

God we have them."

Dahmer said that after waiting for years to have a family, "excited" doesn't begin to describe how ready she is to start building a house.

The reason it took so long to begin building a house is because they had trouble finding families who met Habitat's qualifications, she said.

"Habitat is about giving a hand up, not a hand out, so they have to be able to pay an affordable mortgage," Dahmer said. "You also have to be able to put in 500 hours of sweat equity."

Dooley said other qualifications include a cap to ensure families make enough to contribute, but not enough to be out of need. They also are required to submit letters of recommendation. Dooley said the couple submitted their application in May and it took all summer to have it approved. Dooley said Habitat made a big push last year to publicize and persuade people to apply.

"We had tables at Salvation Army and Walmart," Dooley said. "We did a public service announcement and we were just really pushing to get a family."

During the past few years without a family, sophomore and fundraising chair Charley Becker said the organization has been raising funds and awareness and took mission trips to build houses in areas that have been victim to natural disasters.

Becker and he said they have collected donations and hosted car washes, bake sales, T-shirt sales. The organization also has learned construction and renovation skills such as roofing and putting up dry wall, on their mission trips, he said.

He said that after each trip they come back with more skills to contribute to building houses.

"It's a learn as you go thing," Dooley said. "You can come in not knowing how to hold a hammer and end up learning how to build a home."



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