

# INSIDE

**American Red Cross.....2**  
Marking 'National Heart Month' with learning opportunities

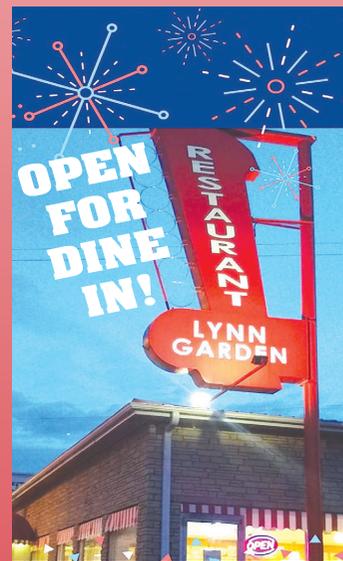
**Kingsport Public Library.....2**  
Unveiling a host of virtual activities during the month of February

**The Paramount Chamber Players .....3**  
Presenting 'A Night in Paris' just in time for Valentine's Day

**What Love Looks Like.....4**  
Celebrating love all month long

*Editor's Note: Sunday Stories may be a little thinner than usual right now, but we still welcome your photos and stories. Email them to us anytime at [sundayscrapbook@timesnews.net](mailto:sundayscrapbook@timesnews.net).*

*If you would like to discontinue receiving Sunday Stories, please call our customer service department at (423) 722-1330*



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**NEW HOURS**  
MON-FRI 9-8  
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SUN 9-4



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# Sunday Stories

February 7, 2021

A Special Edition of the Johnson City Press and Kingsport Times News

## Big Stone Gap's 'Origin Project' named one of state's ArtStars

By Carmen Musick

A transformative educational experience with roots in Big Stone Gap is drawing statewide attention in Virginia for helping students express their inner voices.

The Origin Project was one of five 2021 Dominion Energy ArtStars honored during the Jan. 26 Virginia Commission for the Arts' Art Works virtual conference. Each of the organizations received a \$10,000 grant to support its winning arts or cultural education program.

Founded in 2012 by Big Stone Gap native and best-selling author Adriana Trigiani and educational advocate Nancy Bolmeier Fisher, TOP develops and encourages writing and other artistic self-expression to support the students in Southwest Virginia (and beyond) in their academic and professional endeavors. It was launched in Big Stone Gap with a group of 40 ninth-graders. As word spread, teachers and administrators across Virginia lobbied to participate. Over the years, the program has expanded to serve up to 2,000 children in suburban Prince William County, urban Richmond, and the coastal Hampton Roads region – all while continuing to grow TOP's roots to serve even more students in Southwest Virginia.

"Receiving the ArtStars award from Dominion Energy is a great honor. We are particularly grateful for their continued support since we were fortunate to have received the ArtStars award two years ago," Fisher said. "The generous financial gift that accompanies the award is vital to help us sustain and grow our programs."

TOP works with teachers to help students across the commonwealth express their inner voices through the art of writing about their origins. Participants vary in race, gender, academic ability, disability, and family composition: the stories of their young lives are unique.



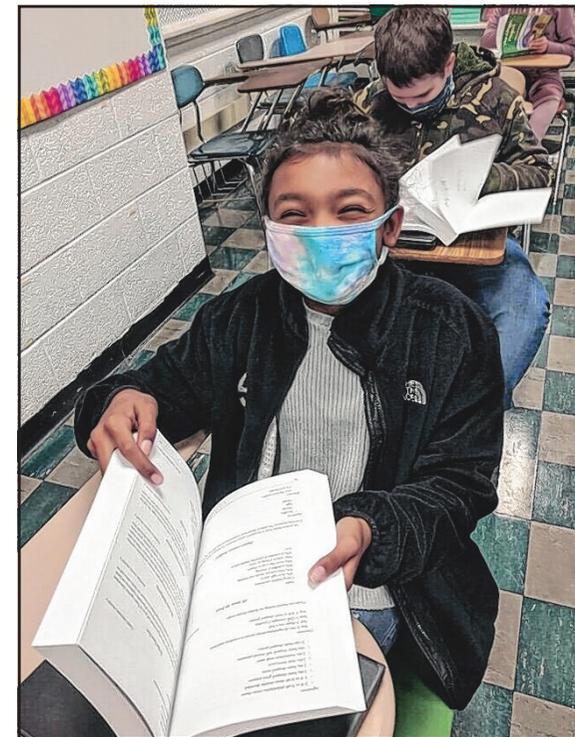
Executive director Nancy Bolmeier Fisher (left), who along with best-selling author Adriana Trigiani founded The Origin Project in 2012, visits with a student reader at a pre-pandemic gathering at Norton Elementary & Middle School. More recently, a Jonesville Middle School student (right) thumbs through The Origin Project's annual book, an anthology featuring the work of participating students.

TOP galvanizes the students' curiosity about, and respect for, each other through in-school programming, author visits, and cultural excursions, culminating with the annual publication of an anthology of the students' work.

This year, programming transitioned to virtual experiences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ArtStars grant will support TOP's efforts to continue to provide the programming in today's virtual world. This year's anthology of student works, set to be published in May, will focus on student reflections of the time they've spent sheltering with their families, and stories that embrace the "silver linings" they have all enjoyed as the weeks and months unfolded.

"The recognition is welcome especially this year to help remind our communities that The Origin Project students were busy writing and chronicling the events of this unprecedented year," Fisher said, adding that "The Origin Project Book Seven" is headed to the publisher soon, "and will be full of poignant remembrances of a year our teachers, students and their families will never forget."

Anthologies from the last few years can be found online at [www.theoriginproject.org](http://www.theoriginproject.org). The



COURTESY OF THE ORIGIN PROJECT

website also features photos of author visits, class presentations, field trips, and more.

This year's other ArtStars winners included:

- Arts for Learning (Norfolk) – for its Take 10 digital series, which provided live and recorded arts programming for students learning from home. Take 10 featured 12 different art forms from a great diversity of cultures and traditions.
- Art for the Journey (Richmond) – for "The Creative Corner," which provides a wide variety of arts education through public television and media. The innovative thinking allows Art for the Journey to reach students that do not have access to high speed internet.
- Fairfax Symphony Orchestra (Fairfax) – for its Link Up program and partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools. They expanded to offer the program virtually, and provide high-quality music instruction to the community.
- Halestone Foundation (Lexington) – for providing inclusive, student-focused dance education for all ages. The innovative virtual and outdoor classes continued to reach their community this year.