

AVC Professor is Finalist for the Waterston Desert Writing Award

Charles Hood, a Professor in the English Department, is one of three finalists for the 2021 Waterston Desert Writing Award. He was nominated for a project titled “Deserts After Dark,” which wants to help people appreciate bats, bugs, and night-blooming cactus—organisms whose main activities take place after sunset.

The Waterston Desert Writing Prize honors literary nonfiction that illustrates artistic excellence, sensitivity to place, and desert literacy with the desert as both subject and setting. Inspired by author and poet Ellen Waterston’s love of the High Desert, it was launched in 2014. The Prize recognizes emerging, mid-career, and established nonfiction writers, and it’s named in honor of actor Sam Waterston, who provided the seed money for the endowment that helps fund the award. He is best known for the series “Law and Order” and “Grace and Frankie.” The prize is administered by the High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon.

In addition, Hood will have two books coming out later this semester. One is a collection of essays titled “A Salad Only the Devil Would Eat: The Joys of Ugly Nature.” The main essay is about what he discovered walking the hills of East Palmdale during lockdown. That will be followed a month later by a field guide titled “Sidewinders to Sea Turtles: A Guide to the Most Fascinating Reptiles and Amphibians of the West.”

Hood has been teaching English and creative writing at Antelope Valley College since 1989, coming here from dual positions at U.C. Irvine and Cal State Long Beach. He says, “I always

knew I wanted to work in the desert. I have been blessed to find a warm and supportive community here.” He adds, “I always feel like these awards are never for me, but for my students and the campus as a whole. It’s a collaboration, and I always hope I learn from my students as much as they learn from me.”

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