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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CITY OF URBANA ANNOUNCES THE 2023 URBANA POET LAUREATE - JA NELLE DAVENPORT-PLEASURE

The City of Urbana and the Urbana Arts & Culture Program are proud to announce the third Poet Laureate in City of Urbana history, Ja Nelle Davenport-Pleasure.

Davenport-Pleasure was born in Springfield, Illinois, and came from a military family. She joined the Urbana-Champaign community 24 years ago where she raised her three amazing kids, Aria, Ian, and Joshua. She currently works for the University of Illinois as an IT specialist for the College of ACES. She has written two books of poetry, a chapbook titled *Eyes Open* and her second *Splitting 650*. Her third book *Breathe* will be out next summer. She is a member of the Galaxy of Poets group that works to bring awareness and support to mental health through the art of words. She performs at Soul on Sunday, a group that enriches the poetry and music scene in Urbana. She joined forces with the previous Poet Laureate, Ashanti Files to host workshops for the Writers of Oya, and performed alongside Will Reger, the first Poet Laureate, in this year's Central Illinois Rivers in Art and Poetry event. Davenport-Pleasure was selected as the 2020 Artist Ace Awards winner and also founded Cinderella/Cinderfella, a ballroom dance troupe for children. She has performed her poetry at SPEAK Café, Pygmalion, Iron Post, and many other events throughout the community.

Davenport-Pleasure has immersed herself in the arts for more than three decades. In addition to being an author and spoken word poet, She is an avid dancer, and jewelry and recycled clothing designer. She has engaged audiences throughout the United States and internationally. She strives to help people of all ages to express themselves creatively through writing, spoken word, music, dance, and other art forms. She looks to share her gifts and passions with all in her community in hopes of building a brighter tomorrow.

Davenport-Pleasure was selected through a competitive application and interview process by a panel of literary experts. The poet laureate receives a \$2,000 honorarium for the one-year term, funded by the City of Urbana's Arts and Culture Program. The jury was drawn to her proposal due to her strong spoken word and poetry performance skills and her substantial experience creating arts-based programming with a wide and diverse range of local

populations spanning socio-economic, ethnic/cultural, and age differences. Davenport-Pleasure's multidisciplinary talent is evident in the local community and she looks forward to developing multi-age, diverse programming for all to enjoy.

The Urbana Arts and Culture Program congratulates Davenport-Pleasure on her position as the next Urbana Poet Laureate and looks forward to providing dynamic poetry and arts programming for our community. For more information, contact the Arts and Culture Commission by email at sbuckman-bc@urbanaininois.edu

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