

PEOPLE

Local poets put "Peace



Nathan Hall

News-Journal Staff

Mendy Knott's voice comes full and clear from the speakers.

"When war was declared on Iraq in March 2003, I made a personal commitment to write at least one peace poem every

month as long as the war should last."

She continues "I'm still writing."

There is no music, no effect. Just voice.

Foregoing tradition, a group of local poets came up with an alternative to the age-old art of pamphleteering.

They decided a CD would provide a more accessible and lasting way to make themselves heard.

They visited Fred Rumpfelt's recording studio in Marion, and began distributing copies soon after.

The disc is called "Peace-

work: Poems in Wartime".

"It was our way of doing something, instead of feeling helpless," said Beki Buchanan, one of the five voices featured on the disk.

"Sometimes, people are more likely to listen than they are to read."

The disk was co-produced by poet G. Leigh Wilkerson, Knott and the Herwords writing group of Asheville, N.C.

Featured alongside the Burnsville-based Knott are guest appearances by Johnson City, TN essayist Janice Barnett as well as other Herwords members Beki Buchanan and Kamala Parker from Asheville, and G. Leigh Wilkerson of Burnsville.

Both Knott and Parker are veterans, and half the profits from the CD are to benefit Veterans for Peace and other peace-based organizations.

"These poems have been my way of overcoming despair over the past three years and putting my convictions into action," said Knott.

"I hope they inspire others to act on behalf of peace and democracy."

Knott is a popular regional poet known for her clear and powerful poems. Her previous work includes the CDs "Voice Like a Hammer: poets respond to 9/11" and "Climbing Mount Pisgah," as well as multiple chapbooks of poetry.

She was named Asheville's most popular poet by Mountain Xpress' yearly Best-Of poll.

Here's how the poets describe the CD:



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Mendy Knott (above) is one of five poets featured on "Peacework: Poems in Wartime", a spoken word CD. "These poems have been my way of overcoming despair over the last three years, and putting my convictions into action," she said.

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Peacework" on disk



MINI PHOTO / NATHAN HALL

Bakersville's Beki Buchanan (above) is one of the local poets featured on *Peacework: Poems in Wartime*, a spoken word CD. Contributors Mendy Knott and Kamala Parker are veterans, and half the profits from the CD are to benefit Veterans for Peace and other peace-based organizations. The CD is available at Blue Moon Books in Spruce Pine. Visit www.herwords.org for a list of upcoming performances in the region.

'On *Peacework*, the poems range from heartbreaking to heartening and cover the ground in between.

In "Subtraction" Knott prepares a mother's living math lesson in human lives for the current administration, who she says can "count only in millions and billions" and knows only how to deal in "multiple gains, not losses."

In other poems like "Seeds," "Peace is Personal," and "Peace in small Packages," the acts of planting a garden or growing

a friendship become the small acts of antidote to the war fever.

Beki Buchanan renders a haunting version of "God Bless America" and Parker contemplates the "what ifs" of peace. Wilkerson examines the dark side of unquestioning patriotism while Barnett speaks sincerely of sending her beloved nephew off to war.

The work is plainspoken and authentic, written as Knott says, "for the people, by the people."

The writers are seeking more venues to share these poems.

"Feel free to burn copies if you want, send it to friends," said Buchanan.

"We want to make it as accessible as possible, and get it out there."

Churches and groups who would like to host a reading are invited to contact the group. Call 828-675-4126 or email peace@herwords.org.