



KENNY HATCHETT - THE UNION RECORDER

Johnny Lee and his son Calvin Mapp listen as Milton Thomas of Perry reads a Flannery O'Connor story at Andalusia Tuesday.

# Fans of Flannery flock to Andalusia

By Merritt Melancon  
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The heat index Tuesday reached 103. It was perfect weather if you wanted to boil water slowly, melt crayons on a sidewalk or create the perfect atmosphere for reading short stories from Milledgeville's native daughter, Flannery O'Connor.

Fans of the author came from as far away as Denver, Col., and Steubenville, Ohio, to participate in a 24-hour marathon reading at her family farm, Andalusia. The event, "Remembering Flannery," commemorated the 40th anniversary of the writer's death and celebrated her life and work. Participants read from O'Connor's short story collection, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, from 12:15 a.m. Tuesday morning to 12:15 a.m. Wednesday morning.

By 12:15 p.m., only half-way into the reading, about 75 people had shown up to either read or listen, said Andalusia

Director Craig Amason.

For many of these people, the house, the grounds of Andalusia, the trip down U.S. 441 and even the inevitable mid-Georgia sweat made O'Connor's stories come to life.

Margaret Whitt of Denver teaches Southern literature at the University of Denver. She said seeing the environment in which O'Connor wrote gives her readers a chance to share more of the insight that O'Connor expressed in her stories.

"There's no question," Whitt said. "For those who read Flannery O'Connor and who have been reading her for years and years and years, there's something about her vision that changes your vision. Back in 1990, I brought a group of students down to Milledgeville, to Andalusia. We went to go see where 'Wise Blood' was filmed in Macon and went to Savannah to see her birth house. And I had one young man who had to make the choice of whether

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Attendants of the Mass held Tuesday evening at Andalusia receive communion and blessings from Father Michael McWhorter of Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

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to go to Rome (Italy) or Milledgeville. He said, 'No question, I'll go to Milledgeville.' So, there's this pool of people who have Flannery O'Connor get stuck in their heads. And you keep struggling with her, even when you don't mean to."

Being able to share that insight and struggle with other O'Connor fans is why she attended the marathon reading.

"It's that incredible community of people you might or might not know, but who sort of share an affection for O'Connor's powerful vision," Whitt said. "I see O'Connor as this singular voice in American literature, where at the same time she's being incredibly violent, she's being incredibly religious, she's being incredibly bizarre and she's being incredibly funny. And there are few people who are able to successfully show you how life can be hysterically funny and tragically sad - at the same time. That's a gift. To share that in a community is to say there are other people who appreciate what I appreciate. That's why I came here."

Ben Alexander, an English professor from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, said this was the fourth time he's come to Milledgeville because of O'Connor.

"I've read about three or four times now," Alexander said. "Here's what's great about O'Connor. At 5 o'clock this morning, that front porch was regaling in laughter. I've never seen that. You ask me what's the sustaining power of O'Connor. She's a writer who can make people wake up and laugh. This is the first time I've seen it, but at 5 in the morning we were reading 'A Circle in the Fire' and then we were listening to 'Good Country People' and people were just rolling on the floor. It was a really incredible moment. I don't know any other American writer who can do that. Can you imagine reading T.S. Eliot's 'Wasteland' at 5 in the morning? It would really put you to sleep."

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