The University of Kansas recently awarded 138 of its most prestigious scholarships, the Watkins-Berger scholarships, to students from 75 Kansas high schools in 31 counties.

Among the students recognized are Maria Jackson, a graduate of Lansing High School, who received the Watkins-Berger scholarship, and Tyler Gurss, a graduate of Tonganoxie High School, who received the Summerfield scholarship.

To be eligible for the award, a student must maintain a 3.5 grade-point average and score 31 or higher on the ACT.
Potential authors get novel opportunity

Like a lot of people, Ted Boone had always wanted to write a novel but didn't think he had the time.

"I think people can sit down and watch a television show and think, 'I could have written that,' or 'I would have written it better,'" Boone says. "And I think we do that with books, too. There's a temptation to compete with the creative forces that are out there."

With one recent study showing more than 80 percent of Americans would like to write a book, it's obviously a common goal for many.

So if you're one of those who wants your own novel, get your laptop fired up — November is National Novel Writing Month.

The annual event, which goes by the shorthand NaNoWriMo, is pretty straightforward: Write a 50,000-word novel during the month of November, then upload it to www.nanowrimo.org. A computer will count your words, and if you hit the 50,000-word mark, you'll get a certificate.

"There's no magic here," says Chris Baty, a Prairie Village native who founded the event. "All we're doing is giving people a little bit of inspiration and a little structure."

Baty, who now lives in San Francisco, started the writing event in 1999 with a group of friends. They picked 50,000 words as an arbitrary number that seemed attainable but would still qualify as a short novel.

It's grown to include a non-profit organization and more than 101,000 participants in 80 countries last year.

"We all have dozens of books in us," Baty says. "Sometimes people get caught up that they don't have THE idea, the book no one's ever written before, and it has to appear before they start writing. That idea I don't think ever comes. You just have to start writing."

That's the way it was for Lawrence resident Sara Lundberg. She attempted to hit the 50,000-word mark twice before finally attaining it last year with a fantasy story.

"It's probably going to be crap," she says of most of the NaNoWriMo novels. "Thirty thousand of the 50,000 I wrote last year are not great words. There are gems in there, though, that are amazing, that I didn't know I could write."

That may be the case, but NaNoWriMo novelists have had some luck in the past. Baty says 27 manuscripts have been sold to publishers, and the event can now tout a New York Times best-seller: "Water for Elephants," by Sara Gruen.

The key, participants say, is not to worry about quality — just get words on paper.

Writing 50,000 words might sound like a difficult task.

But Boone, a lecturer in Kansas University's School of Business who serves as the Lawrence organizer for NaNoWriMo, says it's definitely attainable. He's done it three years, all with science fiction stories.

There are different strategies to getting through.

For me what works is writing scene by scene," he says. "Some days, I'll write a chapter that's 3,000 words, which is a lot of output for a single day. The next day, I might write a single scene that's much shorter."

Others, he says, just try to get through 1,667 words a day, which puts them on pace to finish the novel by the end of the month.

And there are resources available. The organization's Web site, www.nanowrimo.org, has tips and also lists local write-ins that will happen in Lawrence in November.

At those writing events, NaNoWriMo participants can get inspiration from one another and bounce ideas off of other writers.

"It's a really interesting crowd in Lawrence," Boone says. "You get people in full goth gear and makeup, and people who are professors. It really grabs the spirit of NaNoWriMo. People who wouldn't usually rub elbows..."

"One another see they have commonality."

If you want to participate and don't have an idea, don't fear. Boone says he often doesn't choose his topic until a day or two before Nov. 1. And even then, he doesn't have the whole thing mapped out.

"I usually find I've got a good starting point, a couple of way points in the middle I'd like to strike, and I know where I want to finish," he says. "In the process, they'll get to the point where they feel like they're not telling the story. Literally the story will take on a life of its own."

Lundberg, an administrative associate at KU, plans to write a story about vampires to fill her November writing fix. She's starting feeling excited about writing every year around this time.

And even if she never gets anything published, it's worth her time.

"If I could make writing my life, that would be amazing," she says. "But most of my writing I do for myself. The thought of sharing it with the world is scary. But maybe someday I'll write something that's significant enough and..."
Writers get chance at writing novels

BY TERRY ROMBECK
Lawrence Journal-World

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Like a lot of people, Ted Boone had always wanted to write a novel but didn’t think he had the time.

“I think people can sit down and watch a television show and think, ‘I could have written that,’ or ‘I would have written it better,’” Boone says. “And I think we do that with books, too. There’s a temptation to compete with the creative forces that are out there.”

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