

[after 1984] [Feb 27, 1987]

Confederacy of Aspiring Authors

By Jeff Raizner
News staff

When Thelma Toole—mother of the late Pulitzer Prize-winning New Orleans author John Kennedy Toole—died in 1984 she bequeathed a sum of money to Tulane “to be used exclusively for scholarships for brilliant and needy authors and playwrights” enrolled in the university.

Tulane has not received the donation because since her death the estate has been tied up in

The scholarship is to be awarded through the A&S and Newcomb English departments to students displaying exceptional talent in the field of creative writing. Due to the talent-based nature of the grant it will be awarded only to students of sophomore standing and above.

A maximum of two students will be selected to receive the scholarship each year. Each recipient's performance will be re-evaluated annually by creative writing professors and the A&S

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settlement for the past several years.

On Feb. 12, however, Civil District Judge Gerald Fedoroff ruled on the section of the will which had been contested, thus allowing other parts of the will to be enacted.

“The estate should be settled shortly and scholarship funds will be available for the next academic year,” Tulane Associate Director of Planned Gifts Julie Nice said. As of yet no students have been named.

The scholarship is to be funded

and Newcomb dean's offices, depending on the school the recipient is enrolled in.

“It will go through several selection criteria. That's the nice thing about being named a scholarship winner: you have been hand-selected,” Assistant Provost Nancy McDuff said.

Named The John Kennedy Toole Scholarship, the award is to be granted to students already receiving financial aid. The Toole fund will assume the recipient's financial burden for one year.

The Toole scholarship will be

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by Mrs. Toole's donation consisting of one-half of her estate and the future royalties from her son's novel, “A Confederacy of Dunces.”

In 1981 Toole's novel received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction eleven years after he committed suicide and one year after it was published. The book is set in New Orleans, including the Tulane campus as well as the French Quarter.

an endowed scholarship, according to McDuff. Endowed scholarships are donated to the university usually in the sum of \$100,000. The money is then invested and the resulting interest and dividends produced fund the scholarship.

“It is a scholarship the university holds in perpetuity,” McDuff said, “It will always be there, which is a great need as scholarship needs for this university

grow.

“As the cost of attending Tulane grows this scholarship will be able to keep up with it. It is in my estimation the ideal type of scholarship (for Tulane) to receive,” McDuff said.

John Kennedy Toole had received financial aid as a student at Tulane and graduated with a degree in English in the late 1950s. Toole wrote the novel during the 1960s, partially during a tour of duty in Vietnam.

After an unsuccessful struggle to get his work published, Toole committed suicide in 1969 at the age of 32. His mother relentlessly pressed professors and publishers through the 1970s until 1980, when with the assistance of Covington, La., author Walker Percy, it was published by the Louisiana State University Press.

In the will Mrs. Toole also requested her home on Elysian Fields Avenue be converted into a museum as a memorial to her son. She further specified a manuscript he had written before “Confederacy” entitled “The Neon Bible” never be published.

University of New Orleans Professor of English Kenneth Holditch was given the rights to the manuscripts with this understanding.

However the estate became entangled in litigation when Maple Street Bookstore owner Rhoda Faust filed suit claiming Mrs. Toole verbally promised

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her the rights to “The Neon Bible” in 1979.

The Feb. 12 ruling by Judge Fedoroff stated for the manuscript to be sold at public auction unless Holditch and four Toole cousins—the natural heirs—could agree on another way to settle the conflict, according to a Feb. 19 *Times-Picayune* article.

“This is such a good example for young people—especially would-be writers—not to give up, to keep going. It gets better,” Nice said.

“Toole's death was just such a waste, both for him and for us. ‘A Confederacy of Dunces’ won a Pulitzer Prize. It would have been just the beginning of a long and successful career and who knows what great novels he would have written had he lived,” Nice said.