



A portrait of Norton, by the resident artist at the Maitland Art Center, will go to a trust fund Norton is establishing to help young writers.

Grand master writes quietly, prolifically

By Ines Davis Parrish

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Just as a book shouldn't be judged by its cover, writer Andre Norton can't be categorized by her looks, her name or just about any other aspect of her life.

Norton lives in an unassuming house on a quiet little street. She hates high-tech but is one of the nation's most prolific and widely known science fiction authors. And she started writing when women weren't accepted in science fiction circles.

A distinguished looking silver-haired woman, Norton explains the incongruities simply: "None of us look like who we are."

Soft-spoken and meticulously groomed, Norton's demeanor belies the imaginative creativity that has sustained her through 20 years and 120 books.

"She was, and still is, considered one of the premier authors in the field," said Frank Dowler, owner of Enterprise 1701, a science fiction book and collectors store in Orlando.

She legally changed her name from Alice Mary to Andre in 1934 to get around the gender issue. She also sometimes wrote under the pen name of Andrew Norton.

Her first science fiction work, *Star Man's Son*, was published in 1952 and has sold more than a million copies. Her works have been translated into 13 languages, and Norton said the countries with the most voracious appetites for science fiction are Germany and Japan because of their advanced technologies.

In 1984, the Science Fiction Writers Association named her a grand master, one of the highest honors in the field. Her book *The Beast Master* was made into a movie, though Norton had her name removed from the screen credits because the movie plot did not remain true to her story.

Dowler said her works still are popular sellers, particularly the "Witch World" fantasy series.

Norton laughs now about being able to live off her works. "One year I made 39 cents writing. I've been self-supporting since the 1950s though."

The 78-year-old former librarian is not slowing down, either. She is researching material to co-author a book of historical fantasy based on an ancient Chinese dynasty

and just published *The Jekyell Legacy*.

"I write every morning, except for one day," Norton said.

Just as her looks contradict her profession, her aversion to technology presents another contrast — she writes science fiction that presumably is filled with high tech.

But Norton's books are more about a loner in a future world who comes to grips with his or her morals and convictions.

Her books also deal with a recurring theme — the abuse of power.

"When I was working during the Depression years, I experienced a situation where authority was abused. It was terrible. I hate people who abuse power," she said.

Her books are more fantasy than science fiction and involve very little technology, she said.

Only recently has she given into computerization and bought a computer herself.

"I was driven to using a computer [for health reasons]. I didn't like it because I'm allergic to machinery, you know. But I'm adjusting."

There isn't a television in her Winter Park home — she hasn't watched a TV show in four years — but there are lots of books.

So many books, in fact, that Norton had an architect design her inconspicuous house to accommodate all those books. She estimates there are 10,000 books, and they are in every room of the house but the kitchen.

Where there aren't books, there is science fiction artwork and little items Norton collects such as cat figurines.

Her house, a boxy, plain structure overlooking a little pond, is another incongruity in her life where appearances belie reality.

Norton is working to establish a trust fund that will enable young writers to spend time at her home working.

A portrait of her recently was shown at the Maitland Art Center and will be donated to the trust fund. The portrait depicting Norton's otherworldly serenity was done by the center's resident artist, Barbara Tiffany-Eginton.

Dowler said Norton continues to do tremendous work in opening up the science fiction field and giving it credibility throughout the world. Her trust fund will add to that effort, he said.