NORTH CAROLINA—“There’s No Crying in a Tobacco Field,” a personal essay by a former Wayne County “tobacco kid,” won top honors in the 2011 Rose Post Creative Nonfiction Competition, sponsored by the North Carolina Writers’ Network.

Pepper Capps Hill, who now lives in Rocky Point, wrote the winning essay. Author Jay Varner, the judge of this year’s contest, praised Hill’s essay for its “details as crisp as one of those fresh tobacco leaves.”

“This essay took me into a world I barely knew—a North Carolina tobacco field—and taught me something,” Varner said. “The writer effortlessly weaves together a personal narrative about working as a ‘tobacco kid’ in the fields and the chilling research about the unseen health hazards thousands of children surely suffered. Here is a piece wrestling with the hard lessons learned plucking leaves from the field and long-term medical concerns these former tobacco kids could face.”

Both Hill and her husband grew up in tobacco-farming families. A graduate of the University of North Carolina Wilmington, Hill is a museum educator at the Cape Fear Museum of History and Science.

Davidson writer Cynthia Lewis won second and third place for her essays “That Dress, That Hat” and “Secret Sharing: Coming Out in Charleston.” Of the first, Varner said, “We hear all sorts of stories about identity theft today, but here’s a different sort of identity theft—literally taking over someone else’s life. This is emotionally raw, messy and, most importantly, doesn’t hold back. At the end, the narrator transcends this personal material and exposes something deeper and haunting about human nature.”

Varner described “Secret Sharing” as “a mix of good storytelling, old-fashioned gumption, and a mission to uncover something true. Nonfiction like this requires a writer to dive headfirst into a subject and peel back the layers.” Lewis teaches Shakespeare, Renaissance literature, and creative nonfiction at Davidson College.

Jay Varner is the author of *Nothing Left to Burn*, and the former managing editor of *Ecotone*.

He now lives with his wife near Charlottesville, Virginia, where he teaches adult and high school students.

Sponsored by the NCWN and administered by the creative writing department at UNC Wilmington, the Rose Post Creative Nonfiction Competition encourages the creation of lasting nonfiction work that is outside the realm of conventional journalism. The contest is open to any legal resident of North Carolina or member of the NC Writers' Network. First-, second-, and third-place winners receive $300, $200, and $100, respectively, and the winning entry is considered for publication in the magazine *Southern Cultures*.