



# The American Editor<sup>®</sup>

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS

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## Navigating the future



Editors talk about leading newsrooms  
through uncertain times

# In China, news of a dolphin eating a whale

By RICK RODRIGUEZ

It was a scene I always shall remember.

Our 26-person ASNE International Committee delegation to China had just concluded an hour-long meeting with the country's vice foreign minister, Yang Jiechi.

Fellow McClatchy editor and incoming ASNE president David Zeeck and I, cell phones in hand, went to the back of the bus and dialed into a conference call originating from Sacramento.

We listened intently, on the bus and as we walked across Tiananmen Square, to McClatchy President and CEO Gary Pruitt outline to the company's publishers and editors what would be announced a few hours later: the details of the purchase of Knight Ridder.

We were sworn to secrecy until the deal was announced publicly in New York, a pledge we fastidiously kept even as our curious colleagues peppered us with questions.

But news these days indeed travels fast, and at a meeting the following morning, Zhu Ling, editor-in-chief of China Daily, the state-sponsored English-language paper, greeted me, as a McClatchy editor, with congratulatory remarks. "The dolphin ate the whale," he said.

Those scenes were part of a memorable 12-day trip that really drove home to me how small the world has become in the Internet and cell phone age.

Time and time again, we were amazed at how much people knew about us — our industry and our country — leaving me convinced that American journalists and our readers need to know much more about other countries and cultures in this complex global economy.

When I was interviewed, for example, by a young reporter, Hujun Li of the Beijing bureau of the Southern Weekly, she knew as much about The Sacramento Bee and me as any reporter with whom

I've spoken.

Tell me about the transition from working in a tortilla factory to your first job in newspapers, she said. What happened with your columnist who fabricated stories and why has the U.S. media had so many problems with plagiarism and ethics violations, she asked? It was impressive — even though the Chinese media model remains far from our ideal of a free press, she knew how to serve up softballs as well as fastballs aimed at the heart.

It was a terrific final trip before the convention that marks the end of my year as ASNE president.

It's been a tumultuous year for our industry in so many ways:

■ How the Knight Ridder chain was put into play by unsatisfied shareholders.

■ How the demands of Wall Street continue to grow, increasing profit pressure on newspapers.

■ How overall circulation continues to decline while online readership grows but no one has yet to figure out a long-term financial model.

■ How our credibility continues to be shaken by ethical lapses.

Still, I'm amazed and proud of the journalism that's being done across the country and that continues to make a

difference. Each time I judged a contest, I left more and more confident that despite our industry's much-lamented problems we are continuing to fulfill our watchdog roles.

That is especially rewarding since watchdog journalism was my theme this year. To that end, we helped promote it with our groundbreaking meeting with editors and publishers at The Poynter Institute; our collaboration with Investigative Reporters and Editors through the Craft Development Committee to hold training workshops for midlevel editors around the country; and with our Ethics and Values Committee's summit on anonymous sources in cooperation with the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

We also set an early goal to collaborate with other journalism organizations, and we did. Our Diversity Committee, for example, launched a pilot program underwritten by the Knight Foundation in which reporters from mainstream newspapers collaborated with reporters from the ethnic media through the New American Media organization.

And our committees did much more, too much to list. I'm proud of the work they did. I'd like to thank all of the committee chairs and members for their contributions to ASNE and the industry. And, of course, I'd like to thank ASNE's wonderful staff for all that they do.

I leave office with mixed feelings — glad the year is over and the pace will finally slow down but at the same time wishing the year hadn't gone so fast, wishing that I could have done more.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your president. It's a year I always shall remember. ♦

It's been a tumultuous year for our industry in so many ways. ... Still, I'm amazed and proud of the journalism that's being done across the country and that continues to make a difference.



Rodriguez, ASNE president, is executive editor of The Sacramento (Calif.) Bee.

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# Navigating the future of newspapers

BY BUTCH WARD

Ask Rich Oppel how the job of newspaper editor has changed over the 29 years since he took the top job, his first, at the Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat.

"In many ways, the job is not radically different," he began. "You still need to put interesting, important stories in the paper. You edit one day at a time. You hire excellent people, and keep them feeling good about themselves."

Then Oppel, speaking from the editor's office at the Austin (Texas) American-Statesman, described how the job has changed.

The job has changed a lot.

Now let's be clear: The editor's job always has been difficult, demanding that rare combination of excellent journalist, creative manager and effective leader. Many an editor struggled — even failed — during other times of transition: from typewriters to computers; from evening distribution to morning; from hot type to paste-up to pagination.

But talk with editors today about their work. (And pass the Tums.)

■ Figure out the Internet.

■ Serve an increasingly diverse audience.



■ Create a readership strategy to stop the circulation slide — or at least slow it.

■ Get young people to read.

■ Integrate the newspaper and online staffs.

■ Collaborate more effectively with the company's other executives.

■ Manage — and protect — the newsroom's resources.

■ Find new revenue streams, and ways to save money.

■ Build a more interactive, transparent relationship with the community.

■ Improve the newspaper's credibility.

■ And don't forget to figure out the Internet.

An imposing list? Now consider the context in which most editors face these issues. (Make it Extra-Strength Tums.)

■ Declining paid circulation.

■ Dwindling classified revenue.

■ Fewer and fewer newsroom jobs

■ Ever-tightening budgets.

■ A technology revolution that threatens the business model on which print newsrooms are built.

■ Changing definitions of news.

■ Widespread distrust of media.

■ Increasingly impatient shareholders; company executives anxious to pacify them.

"I have a clear, powerful vision for what the L.A. Times can be," said Dean Baquet, who became editor of the Los Angeles Times in August. "I know what we can do that no one else can do."

"But there's a sense of desperation in

some newspaper companies," he said, "and that's causing us to run the risk of making decisions that will cause lasting damage. Take the drastic cuts in news hole — how can you argue that will be good for readers?"



Ward is a Distinguished Fellow on the faculty of The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Welcome to the world of the newspaper editor in 2006. It's a world in which men and women who believe in the

power of serious, community-serving journalism — and in their newsrooms' ability to provide it — face tougher and tougher questions every day about how to preserve its future.

Are they discouraged? Absolutely not. Editors use words such as love to describe how they feel about their work, its challenges and the satisfaction they get from publishing journalism that matters to their communities.

They are tired and frustrated by the doomsday scenarios, and they speak with confidence of guiding their newsrooms into a more secure future. They point to examples of excellent journalism that newspapers produce each day, and note that publishing in print and online allows them to reach more people than ever.

And they also speak frankly about the enormity of the challenge. For, as one editor said, "the hurdles keep getting bigger every year."

Oppel, who said his Austin newsroom has reduced its resources between 8 percent and 10 percent since 2000, is sober about the changes he's seen over the course of his career.

"Those of us who entered the business in the late 1960s and early 1970s," Oppel said, "have seen a great arc of journalism — from Watergate until, well, around 9/11. We were used to growth."

"But every business has a cycle. And we're, at best, in a flat period — and probably in decline. But that's the newspaper business," he stressed, "not the pursuit of journalism in a democracy. If the journalism happens to move into other technologies, so be it — we just have to keep our values intact."

Oppel's distinction — between the financial future of the newspaper business and the public's continued need for high-quality newsgathering — surfaces frequently in conversations with editors.

Like Oppel, many believe news on paper will be around — perhaps in a reduced form — for a long time. And, increasingly, they speak of the Internet as a means of enhancing their journalism; of reaching a wider and more diverse audience with coverage that, in the words of Atlanta Journal-



**"Twenty years ago, I would have responded to some of these ideas by saying, 'I have to draw the line here. This can't give.' Well, you can't be that way anymore. You have to be open and flexible and keep in mind what our enduring values really are. We need to look for solutions, not victories."**

— Rich Oppel  
editor  
Austin (Texas) American-Statesman

Constitution Editor Julia Wallace, "has so many more layers — it's liberating."

"It's hard to imagine newspapers existing in 20 years as they do today," Wallace said, "but it's really hard to say what will happen in the next five years. And the challenge is how to navigate during that period."

If that's the challenge, what kind of editor will it take to navigate through that period?

"Editors today need to be more resourceful — the demands are far greater. An editor today must be more like the publisher of a newsroom." Tim Kelly, publisher of the Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader, has sat in two editor's chairs — first at the Los Angeles Daily News and later, in Lexington. Now he gets to hire them.

"I want an editor who, most importantly, is my primary journalist," Kelly



**"While I'm not always close to the hour-to-hour progress on coverage each day, I spend a lot of time talking with staff members about content — from the 'how's it going' chat with reporters and front-line folks to conversations about the direction of coverage on big issues. It's a central part of my job."**

— Melanie Sill  
executive editor  
The News & Observer,  
Raleigh, N.C.

said. "And I also want an editor who has a good sense of business — someone who doesn't recoil at the thought that we have to make money."

Mark Ziemann, editor of The Kansas City (Mo.) Star, believes so strongly in his need to participate in business decisions that he's pursuing an MBA.

"I have to have a seat at the table," said Ziemann, who grew up reading the Star and became its editor in 1997. "If I'm not there, the newsroom gets marginalized."

"I'm interested in any tool that will help me defend my budget, which I think you have to look at in journalism terms — in terms of news stories we can do, trips we can take and news hole we can use."

Oppel said he's actively involved in the search for new revenue streams and "makes no apologies for it."

"I'm considering ideas that would have made me upchuck 20 years ago," he said, ideas like section-front ads, ads in section ears, even clearly labeled ads that float in the middle of a sports page. And remember, back in the 1970s, the sports agate page sponsored by Camel cigarettes?

"I'd tell my sports editor it would help us keep our news hole," Oppel said.

"Twenty years ago, I would have responded to some of these ideas by saying, 'I have to draw the line here. This can't give.' Well, you can't be that way anymore. You have to be open and flexible and keep in mind what our enduring values really are."

"We need to look for solutions, not victories."

Baquet accepts the need to change, but with care.

"Changing every 30 seconds leaves people wondering what we stand for," he said. "We need to be deliberate before we putz around with something that's not just a business; something that's worked for generations, attracts millions of readers and made billions of dollars."

"Newspapers are great institutions. Maybe it's time to put up a good fight for them."

■■■

Melanie Sill, executive editor of The News & Observer in Raleigh, N.C., frequently calls to mind advice she received when she became editor in 2002 from Sandy Rowe, editor of The Oregonian in Portland.

"Sandy told me, 'You always have to have your feet firmly planted in the newsroom,'" Sill said. "It's in every editor's interest to have a good understanding of what's going on (on the business side) — and helpful for the other senior vice presidents to understand what we do. But I have my feet planted firmly in the newsroom."

"While I'm not always close to the hour-to-hour progress on coverage each day, I spend a lot of time talking with staff members about content — from the 'how's it going' chat with reporters and

front-line folks to conversations about the direction of coverage on big issues. It's a central part of my job."

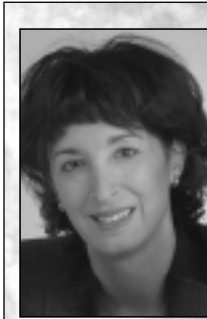
Within three months of becoming editor in Los Angeles, Baquet had to cut 85 newsroom jobs — and came to a sobering realization.

"It's really easy to get caught up in meetings with the company and with corporate," Baquet said, "but I really need to make sure that I'm in the newsroom — that I'm seen by the newsroom as a journalist."

"That's the complaint I hear most often from reporters — their editors just aren't visible."

But being recognized as a serious journalist is just one key to leading a newsroom staff in 2006, editors say. Staffs want more involvement in decisions. More detailed explanations about strategies. More candor about whether there will be sufficient resources to carry them out.

"There was a time when the editor was godlike," Sill said, "The editor had the answers. Reporters were afraid of him. Most knew him only by reputa-



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— Julia Wallace  
editor  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution





**“What I’d like to think I would do, if I had a 300-person newsroom, is take 100 of them for a year and say we’re going to create the best newspaper Web site in the world. We’ve got to do something special and make it work for us.”**

— Jerry Ceppos  
former vice president for news  
Knight Ridder

tion. You didn’t see him and wouldn’t think to challenge him. Now editors are seen less as gods and more as humans.”

Wallace said her staff used to care most of all about their own work.

“Now they’re worried about the business,” she said, “and they are anxious to be part of the solution.”

She welcomes the interest.

“If an editor said, ‘Here’s what I want, everyone go do that,’ the result will be predictable and somewhat limiting,” she said. “Instead, the editor can say, ‘Here’s the goal, here’s the mission, here’s information, what do you think?’”

“Sometimes the way to go is very clear — you reach a moment of consensus. Other times the editor reaches that moment when you have to say ‘this seems like the best approach.’ But you still have to be able to answer, why? That’s very important.”

Zieman agrees. “I take responsibility for the editorial vision of the paper,” he said, “but I’m not its creator. The paper reflects the community, and I’m just one part of it.

“I believe in having a diverse staff, seeking opinions and using that to create a vision. That’s better than what Mark Zieman thinks.”

Beyond involvement, Oppel said the staff looks to him for answers.

“They want to know, ‘Will I have a pension?’” he said. “‘Will the company be sold out from under me? Will I be able to continue doing important public-service journalism?’”

How does Oppel respond?

“I tell them the truth. I reassure them that they work for a good, diversified company. And I’m not afraid to tell them when the answer is, ‘I don’t know.’”

And their questions about resources? About why the newsroom is being asked to do more with less?

“They do have to do new things,” Sill said. “And we need to equip them and train them to do it.”



Zieman doesn’t hide his enthusiasm for new media.

“We’re changing in our newsroom,” he said. “We’re transitioning from a focus on tomorrow’s paper to a 24/7 operation.”

Zieman doesn’t have a vision for the perfect combination of paper and Internet publishing — and he’s not worried about it: “We focus on continuous improvement.” He has hired a former TV investigative reporter and, with the help of AP video and the paper’s TV partner, is aiming for 10 to 20 video news stories every day.

“We’re going back to a newsroom that looks like we have multiple editions — one is paper and the others are Internet,” he said. “We have a p.m. paper again.”

Atlanta’s Wallace said the Internet “is a huge change and the next round of technology will change everything even more.” She points to Web successes like those of editorial cartoonist Mike Luckovich, who each day posts his cartoon and gives readers a chance to vote on it. On the day after the American death toll in Iraq reached 2,000, Luckovich blogged about that day’s car-

toon, explaining his thinking, and received over 1,200 responses.

“Some found the cartoon brilliant, some thought it was disrespectful,” Wallace said. “It was a great example of interaction.”

In January, many newspapers — having reported that 12 West Virginia miners had been found alive — waited the 24 hours until their next publication to explain the mistake. Raleigh readers heard from Melanie Sill within hours. She simply explained the error in her blog.

Buddy Martin, editor of the Charlotte (Fla.) Sun, sees the Internet enhancing the best that his newspaper can offer.

“First they said radio would kill newspapers, then TV and now the Internet,” Martin said. “Those of us who deal primarily in grass-roots news and cover our communities intensely know that as long as we do it better than anyone, we’ll never lose ground.”

Such convictions notwithstanding,



**“But there’s a sense of desperation in some newspaper companies, and that’s causing us to run the risk of making decisions that will cause lasting damage. Take the drastic cuts in news hole — how can you argue that will be good for readers?”**

— Dean Baquet  
editor  
Los Angeles Times



Jerry Ceppos, former Vice President for News at Knight Ridder, said many editors are struggling with how to integrate the Internet into their newsrooms.

“People are still scared of it,” he said. “I’ll bet in most newsrooms, there are two or three people dedicated to worrying about posting stories on the Web.”

“What I’d like to think I would do, if I had a 300-person newsroom, is take 100 of them for a year and say we’re going to create the best newspaper Web site in the world. We’ve got to do something special and make it work for us.”

And what about newsroom staffs who see the Web as additional work?

Zieman said an old movie, of all things, makes his point that reporting for multiple platforms is nothing new.

Back in the 1930s, he said, the Star owned both the newspaper and a radio station. A movie trailer (believed to be the first “talkie” filmed in Kansas

City) was commissioned to illustrate how the Star covered a big story — a bank robbery with a gunman still on the loose. The film featured actual Star journalists. “The acting was horrible,” he said.

The film depicts reporters rushing around the newsroom, preparing the story for publication. Suddenly an editor bursts out: “We ought to warn the public. Why not broadcast a description of this man?” He calls over a staffer: “Put this on the air!”

Convergence, 1930s style.



In the face of all of these challenges — a technology revolution, shrinking financial support, a public that is more critical and yet, by other indicators, increasingly disinterested — what fuels these editors’ confidence?

“Twenty-five years ago,” Oppel said, “I carefully crafted 25 letters a week in response to readers. Now, thanks to blogs and radio talk shows, I get 25 complaints in 3 minutes.”

Actually, Oppel said, he answers 150 letters and e-mails from readers each week — no surprise given that, according to one market study, the combined paper-online efforts of the American-Statesman reach nearly 83 percent of the adults in the Austin market.

“The waves of this stuff from readers say something about the robustness of our trade,” he said. “There are still people strongly reacting to journalism.” (That day readers were upset with the paper’s story about University of Texas Quarterback Vince Young’s father, who is serving time for burglary. “Why did you have to do such a thing to Vince?” readers asked.)

Editors also believe their newsrooms can survive — and prosper — because their traditional strengths still matter.

“I think newspapers will go back to more hard-edged local coverage,” Baquet said, “and more aggressive coverage of government. These are the things we can do that no one else can do.”

“We need to break more local news,” Zieman said. “We have more resources and better sources. If we’re not breaking stories, either in print or online, we’ve ceased doing our jobs.”

“The flow of information on the Internet is rich, deep and instantaneous,” Oppel said, “but it is also hard to sort, largely irrelevant and often wrong. We have the experience, skills, knowledge and commitment to excellence to verify news of importance, and to make sense of it in a geographic community.”

What then, drives one editor in 2006 to stay the course, and another to walk away?

“I ask myself,” said Sill, “can I help carry journalism forward in this new time? Can I help move this along? I have a great staff and a great community. I’m happy doing what I believe in — and I also understand the people who need to walk away.”

“The hardest thing is the uncertainty.” ♦

# Editors need not be eliminators

By ALY COLÓN

Some writers think the word “editor” serves as a euphemism for “eradicator.” This person eradicates the writer’s pristine prose and turns it into bland copy. This “eradicator” makes lively copy boring.

Some editors believe the word “editor” means “eliminator.” This individual eliminates superfluous, repetitious, and obtuse words that confuse and confound readers.

But an editor need not be an “eradicator,” or an “eliminator.” In fact, one of the roots to the word editor comes from the Latin word “educare.” It means to educate.

Editors educate.

They educate readers by providing news that helps them understand the world they live in. They educate writers by enabling them to write stories that capture human drama, clarify information, and make readers pick up a newspaper.

Crisp, concise and compelling writing improves the craft of journalism. That’s why legendary editor Eugene Patterson made it his priority to focus on writing as ASNE president in 1977-78. His efforts led to the annual ASNE newspaper writing awards. The award winners appear in the annual Best Newspaper Writing book published by the Poynter Institute and CQ Press.

Roy Peter Clark, now Poynter’s vice president and senior scholar, became the Best Newspaper Writing book’s first editor 28 years ago. He came up with four goals, which the book continues to meet:

- Make the best journalism writing available to journalists, teachers and students.
- Make it a renewable resource.
- Hear directly from the writers and

editors about how they produced the stories.

■ And demystify the process of award-winning entries.

Clark established a theme as well:

“This book should help dispel persistent myths about newspaper writing in America: that there is no room in newspapers for good writing; that reporting and writing are mutually exclusive skills; that deadlines make good writing impossible; that governmental or international news is, by definition, unreadable; that good writing can only be found in power papers with enormous resources.”

The award winners’ work offers examples of excellent journalism that others can emulate. For editors, the Best Newspaper Writing book serves as an additional educational tool. It provides mini profiles, interviews, and writers’ workshops for professionals to study.

In mid-February, about 25 editors spent a few days at Poynter reviewing more than 600 entries that fell into several writing categories, as well as community photojournalism. On the final day, they filed into Poynter’s amphitheater. They talked about the qualities of excellence they found in each category. Sometimes they agreed about the merits of work. Sometimes, they challenged each other about who deserved to win. A second vote occasionally became necessary

By noon, a new group of award-winning writers emerged. And the process of publishing the 28th edition of the Best Newspaper Writing book began.

## TEAM DEADLINE CATEGORY

In the Team Deadline category, The Los Angeles Times came out on top. Judges described their Times’ deadline work on a train derailment as compelling storytelling. “The coverage was compact, exciting and had great writing.” The first story, noted one judge, was beautifully written. And the series as a whole showed reporting that was extremely broad and extremely well sourced, the judges said.

The finalists were the Biloxi Sun Herald and The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel. The judges cited the Sun Herald for clear, strong writing about the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. And they noted that the Journal-Sentinel took readers to the scene a tragedy, enabling them to see what happened when a churchgoer opened fire on during a religious service, killing seven people.

## INDIVIDUAL DEADLINE CATEGORY

In the Individual Deadline category, John Simerman, of The Contra Costa Times, became the award winner. His coverage of an execution was described as a “jewel of a story.” This was “skillful underwriting,” said one judge. “This one rose above the usual execution story.”

The finalists were Anne Saker, of The Oregonian, and Natalie Pompilio, of The Philadelphia Inquirer. Judges said Saker, who covers the state courts, “had taken beat reporting to a different level,” using narrative to bring people to life. Pompilio, the judges noted, took her readers to the streets New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and reminded readers that journalism was all about people.



Colón is Reporting, Writing and Editing Group Leader at The Poynter Institute, St. Petersburg, Fla.

## WATCHDOG REPORTING CATEGORY

In the Watchdog Reporting

Category, The Plain Dealer won. The newspaper’s coverage, which raised questions about the lack of evidence involved in one man’s conviction and pending execution, was described as a “heck of tale.” The paper did “an extraordinary job of deconstructing what happened,” said one judge. “It was wonderful story to read,” said a judge. “When it came to the quality of writing, Cleveland was way ahead.”

The finalists were The Los Angeles Times and The Oregonian. Judges found the Times coverage of conservators appointed by judges to manage the lives and assets of elderly people as spotlighting truly outrageous acts. The Oregonian focused on firefighters on disability, who then go on to collect disability checks while working full time elsewhere. This was the kind of watchdog reporting that’s fun and heightens public outrage, and was the kind of work other newspaper could do, the judges noted.

## EDITORIAL WRITING CATEGORY

In Editorial writing area, award winner Mike Trimble, at the Denton-Record, drew praise for embodying the best type of hometown editorial journalism. “He makes the mundane meaningful,” said one judge.

He also tackles big issues, added another judge, quoting from one of Trimble’s editorial in which Trimble wrote “We do not want our governor to be a bigot. We fervently hope he just said something stupid again. We can live with stupid.” One judge enjoyed Trimble’s editorials so much he planned to bookmark the Denton-Record editorial page when he got home.

“Of all the places I’ve lived,” said another editor who had worked for a number of newspapers, “Denton would be the only place I would start my day reading the editorial page.”

Finalists in this category included Terri Trocale, of The Times-Picayune, and Susan Trausch, of The Boston Globe. Judges described Troncale’s work, which focused on what needed

to be done in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, as passionate yet rationale. Trausch, whose pieces focused on the offbeat and amusing things people experience, drew praise for her unorthodox approach and lyrical and literary style.

## NON-DEADLINE CATEGORY

In the Non-Deadline category, Jim Sheeler of the Rocky Mountain News, took the top award. His entry on a the process involved when a dead Marine comes home, prompted judges to laud his pacing, cadence, and scene shifting. “He used flash backs and a wealth of details,” noted one judge.

Judges also highlighted the work of finalists Lane DeGregory, of The St. Petersburg Times, and Mark Lebovich, of The Washington Post. DeGregory series on a St. Petersburg’s high school student striking out for Broadway stood out for providing details woven imperceptibly into her stories. Lebovich’s political profiles made his people come alive, and made them multidimensional. One judge said everyone in this category could have been an award winner. “This was an incredibly strong category,” the judge noted.

## COMMENTARY CATEGORY

In the Commentary area, Nicholas Kristof, of The New York Times, took top honors. Judges praised his leads and endings. They believe his columns make a difference. He brings clarity to complicated topics, noted one judge.

“He’s so precise, so strong,” said a judge. “But it doesn’t feel like a rant.”

The Commentary finalists were Chris Rose, of The Times-Picayune, and Helen Ubinas, of The Hartford Courant. Judges noted that Rose used conversations as a way to explain what happened to New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina. Ubinas demonstrated how stories of people in her community could be told with strong opinions. Judges noted that for all three columnists, the strongest columns were

the ones that were reported.

“The more reporting that went into the column the more controlled the writing became,” said one judge.

## DIVERSITY CATEGORY

In the Diversity category, the judges tapped Phuong Ly, of The Washington Post, as the winner. Her stories were “beautifully written and surprising,” they judges noted. “It was not the normal coverage of diversity,” said a judge. “You feel the experience. You learn something. The stories offer a window into new worlds.”

Both finalists Don Aucoin, of The Boston Globe, and Steve Young, of the Argus Leader, also were cited for their strong writing. Aucoin did a series on “How We Live Here,” which focused on minorities. Young told stories through the eyes of children, not yet tainted by adults.

## COMMUNITY PHOTOJOURNALISM CATEGORY

In the Community Photojournalism, arena, the judges’ first encounter with the Final Salute entry by Todd Heisler of the Rocky Mountain News made it clear to them that here was an extraordinary work.

The cumulative impact of the photographic narrative is compelling and lasting, each building nicely upon the next, as chapters leading to an arresting climax. The photograph captured on the runway is a critical moment that too often goes undocumented and rarely presented to the families and communities of the soldiers who die in the line of duty.

Every facial expression in the windows spoke eloquently to the complexity of master story narrative. This was a local story with national and international relevance.

The finalists included Bruce Ely of The Oregonian, Mike Siegel of The Seattle Times, and Brian Vander Brug of The Los Angeles Times. ♦



# Curious, observant, accurate and fair

*At Melrose Elementary, students are learning the joys of breaking a big story, taking the perfect picture and snagging a Page 1 byline*

By DONNA WINCHESTER

It could have been any newsroom as the clock ticked toward deadline.

In one corner, two reporters sat hunched over a computer polishing a lead. In another, an editor double-checked a story for accuracy. A news artist sitting near the window looked over a proof while an editorial writer made last-minute revisions to an opinion piece.

Meanwhile, the folks in charge pored over a "to do" list and wondered how they would pull all the pieces together before press time.

Such scenes play out over and over in the newsroom at Melrose Elementary, a magnet school for communication and mass media in St. Petersburg, Florida. The tiny school, tucked into one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, has been turning out a quality student newspaper — the only one of its kind in the nation — since 2002.

What makes the program unique is that all 520 children from kindergarten through fifth grade participate, regardless of skill level. The young reporters and editors, photographers and copy editors produce three issues of the Manatee Messenger each year in a hands-on laboratory equipped with laptop computers, digital cameras and walkie-talkies.

Their beat is their school, and in a larger sense, their community, where they are dispatched to report and write

stories of surprising depth and range. Recent editions have included articles about a child who died in a car accident, another who had a seizure in the cafeteria, and a student whose house was destroyed by a hurricane.

But perhaps the program's most distinguishing feature is that it's run by professional journalists who share their real-world experience with the children. The point is not only to grow future journalists but also to develop critical thinking skills and spark in young students interest in the world around them, said Gelareh Asayesh, a former education reporter at the Miami Herald and the Baltimore Sun who pioneered the program's creation more than four years ago.

"There is something powerful in putting a pen and a pad and a camera in the hands of a kid and saying, 'The world is your oyster,'" Asayesh said. "That's one of the things that's been exciting to us, to feel that what otherwise might have been a pretty passive response to the world has been turned into something more active."

Asayesh and her husband, St. Petersburg Times executive editor Neil Brown, chose Melrose for their daughter Mina in 1999. The school had been awarded a federal magnet grant the previous year but was struggling to find a

focus. Asayesh thought a journalism program would be a good way to bring "something touchable" to further the magnet's goal of attracting a diverse student population to the predominantly poor, African-American neighborhood.

At the same time, she hoped to boost literacy at a school where nearly half the students were reading below grade level and three out of four qualified for government-subsidized lunch programs.

Asayesh persuaded Andy Barnes, then chief executive officer of the Times, to contribute \$35,000 for equipment. She then convinced the Pinellas County School District to hire a journalist to run the program.

She soon realized that trying to build a program based on real-world journalism in the public school system would be an uphill battle. District administrators fretted about how the program would mesh with existing curriculum. Some teachers were resentful about hiring a journalist, rather than a certified educator, to be the teacher. Asayesh wondered if she could find an accomplished journalist willing to work for the salary that teachers generally make.

Enter Cynda Mort, a professional journalist with nearly 30 years' experience and a journalism degree from Ball State University. Mort, 53, had worked for newspapers in Indiana before coming to the Times where she worked as a local news editor and an assistant features editor.

"I was still passionate about journalism, but I was at a point where I wanted to touch lives on a more day-to-day basis," Mort said. "It seemed like an amazing fit, something that combined kids and journalism, the two things I cared most about."

The school district agreed to fund a "journalist-in-residence" position for Mort. She started in November 2001, and by January, the fledgling program included one class from each grade level. Soon every student in the school was getting some journalism instruction and by mid-May, the



Winchester is an education writer for the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times.



children had put out their first 12-page newspaper.

From the start, the program's watchwords were "curious," "observant," "accurate" and "fair." Every child, even those who were just learning to read, were given assignments. Special education students were given responsibilities along with general education students. Before the first year was over, older students were taking on leadership roles as reporter-editors.

But this program was about more than growing journalists. It was about developing newspaper literacy. So the Times began offering free 52-week home-delivered subscriptions to families of Melrose students. The idea, said newspaper in education manager Gretchen Letterman, was to get children and their parents reading the paper together.

"What we found was that for a lot of households, it was improving adult literacy," Letterman said. "We've had some heartfelt reaction from parents who say, 'It's helping me as well as my student.'"

Letterman also organized a pool of Times volunteers who began mentoring the children and helping on newspaper production days.

Paul Tash, chairman, chief executive officer and editor of the Times, said the program appealed to the paper on a number of levels.

"We thought it would advance the involvement of young people in journalism and it would enhance diversity," Tash said. "And I think it was Gelareh's noble vision that a journalism program in the midst of a community with some real issues could help people see journalism as a vehicle for social change."

The potential benefit to the industry goes beyond the possibility that the program is preparing children for journalism careers, Tash said.

"As much as I hope we're developing future journalists, I hope we're developing a lot of good newspaper readers," he said.

It now has been four years and Mort has another journalist-turned-teacher working beside her, Kathleen Tobin, 44, — also a Times alum.

Kindergarteners through second-



graders meet once a week for 30 minutes, go on assignments and get training in keyboarding stories. Third graders meet for 40 minutes. Fourth and fifth graders meet weekly for an hour. They brainstorm story ideas, check assigned beats, and write increasingly more complex stories. Fourth-graders begin learning about journalism's watchdog role by visiting city hall. Fifth-graders attend a news meeting at the Times.

Many of the older children, after trying their hand at reporting, find their niche in photography. Darion Johnson, 11, a neighborhood kid who has attended Melrose since first grade, said he has learned he has to take a lot of pictures before he gets the perfect shot. Eleven-year-old Leon Tomlinson, said his job with the paper is important "because you can't tell a story without the pictures."

No matter what their assignment, even the youngest children know the consequences of goofing off. Mort fired an entire class once because the students failed to take their jobs seriously. They suffered what Mort calls the worst punishment imaginable: not having a byline in that particular issue.

The program also teaches the kids about censorship and "pushing the envelope." A teachable moment occurred when older students from another school threw chunks of concrete through the chain-link fence on to the PE field, striking one of the Melrose coaches.

Knowing they had discovered news, the children worked hard to report and write the story, only to learn the school district's area superintendent intended to squash it. Mort and the principal went to bat for the kids, and the story appeared in the next issue.

"We come from the journalism world," said Tobin, who worked at the Times for 17 years as a reporter and copy editor. "We don't want there to be censorship. There is bad news and there is good news. You write about both."

Not all children, of course, have the same ability to produce stories, Tobin said. Some write great leads and know how to ask good questions while others

need to have the stories coaxed out of them. But they all do their own reporting.

"If they don't come back with good quotes, they have to go back out and try again," she said.

Regardless of their skill level or the size of their contribution, they all take pride in the finished product, said principal Cara Walsh.

"Before the paper comes out, they'll come up to me and say, 'I'm going to have a byline,' or 'I have a front page story,'" Walsh said.

Walsh says the program is responsible in part for an upswing in students' standardized test scores at Melrose. Reading scores on Florida-mandated tests are up several percentage points. Writing scores have improved more dramatically, with 90 percent of the students performing at grade level last year, up from 82 percent in 2002.

The program has attracted national attention. Time/Time for Kids magazine named it the best elementary school newspaper in the country in 2004. And in 2004 and 2005, it was recognized at the annual conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

At a time when up to 40 percent of the nation's high schools either have no scholastic media or are in danger of losing them, the success of an elementary program is truly extraordinary, said Diana Mitsu Klos, senior project director for the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

From ASNE's perspective, nothing can link civics, public affairs, social studies, English and critical thinking skills like scholastic journalism programs, Klos said. That's why for six years, with funding from the Knight Foundation, the organization has supported the efforts of daily newspapers to reach out to scholastic journalism programs. Melrose benefited from such funding in 2004, becoming the first elementary school to receive a grant from ASNE.

The director of another project funded by the Knight Foundation has his eye on the journalism program at Melrose as well. Warren Watson, who

works with a program that supports scholastic journalism, first amendment awareness and media literacy, said it's encouraging to see a successful elementary enterprise at a time when high school journalism programs are shrinking.

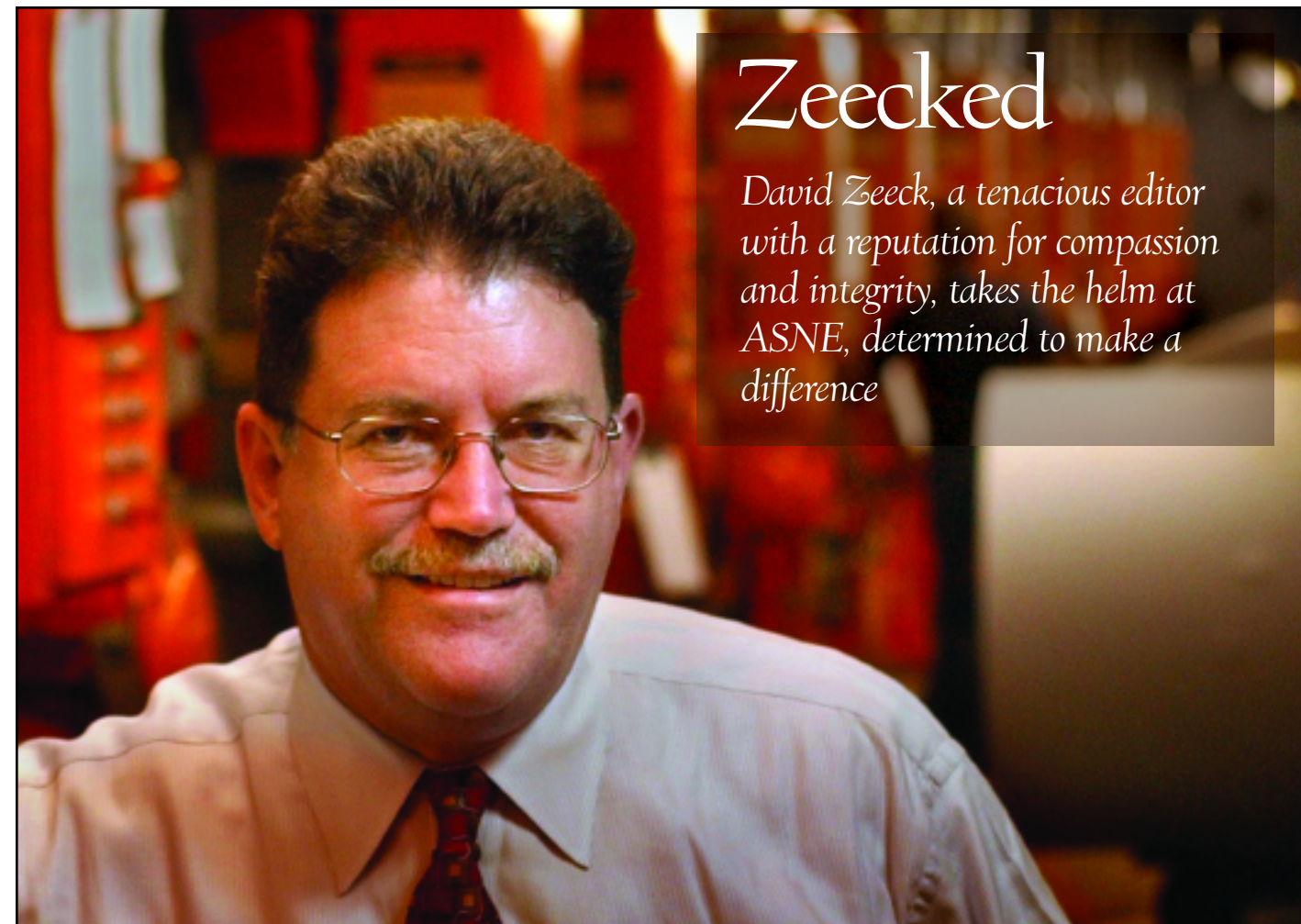
"I think that somewhere along the line, we may have lost this generation of high school students," Watson said. "We need to be working not only to create reform and make sure journalism is a consistently high priority in high schools. We also need to focus more at the elementary, middle and junior high levels. If we want to go after our future journalists and citizens, we want to get them as early as possible."

Buoyed by the success at the elementary level, Asayesh and Mort took on expanding the program to the middle school level. The Times once again agreed to a \$35,000 donation, and the school district agreed to hire journalists to operate the new program at John Hopkins Middle School.

Expansion meant that a more formal structure was needed to guide the program. Asayesh helped set up a Midtown Journalism Advisory Committee, a body composed of school administrators and Times staff as well as representatives from various "partnership organizations" including the University of South Florida St. Petersburg and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies.

Plans are now under way to expand the program to the public high school level. The hope, Asayesh said, is to continue to "build a pipeline" that will reach from kindergarten to college for students who want to pursue journalism as a career.

Asayesh hopes others will follow the Melrose model. The key, she said, is to follow a recipe that combines the leadership of the local newspaper with a clearly delineated commitment from the school district for salaries and technology. She sees the strength of the St. Petersburg effort in a game plan that spells out the program's primary goal to get kids published. That, she says, "is where the rubber meets the road." ♦



## Zeecked

*David Zeeck, a tenacious editor with a reputation for compassion and integrity, takes the helm at ASNE, determined to make a difference*

BY PAM JOHNSON

For David Zeeck, two stories stand out in his career because they are at the core of why he became a journalist and why he will focus ASNE in the next year on the future of journalism.

One story involved the Hyatt skywalks collapse in 1981 that killed more than 100 people in Kansas City. Within four days of the disaster, a Kansas City Star investigation revealed what caused the collapse.

The second story was The News Tribune's coverage of the Tacoma police chief who murdered his wife and committed suicide. It took an extended legal battle to finally win the release of investigative records.

"Both efforts held government to account, honored the innocent dead, enabled healing in the community, and were accomplished despite tremendous

pressure from powerful political and business interests," Zeeck said. "Both stories made a difference. That's what it's about for me."

As ASNE president this year, Zeeck will aim to make a difference in three ways:

■ A rallying cry for strong editors to step forward "to lead, to innovate, to blaze a new trail in print and online .... All great advances at individual newspapers — all great stories for that matter — generally start with one strong journalist who's not afraid to pursue what he or she thinks is right."

■ Look out for the personal and civic interests of the people through what Len Downie and Bob Kaiser call

accountability reporting that holds government or business or other powerful institutions to account — "That's the constitutional role of a free press."

■ Encourage every editor to write to

readers at least weekly and online as well as in print — explaining the paper's mission, telling the story behind its triumphs and honestly explaining its failures.

"If we aren't transparent and forthright with readers we'll lose the bond of trust between us. If we lose that trust, there will be no future of news for us," Zeeck said.

These goals for ASNE align with perspectives and experiences that colleagues and family readily share about Zeeck, his dedication to journalism, his openness and his values.



Johnson is executive director of the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism.



As a junior at the University of Texas in the early '70s, Zeeck was searching for the right career through which to make a difference. Then a class project helped tip him toward journalism. He and other classmates were sent to Corpus Christi, assigned to investigate the death of a Chicano activist in police custody.

"It was probably that experience, and my growing distaste for the war in Vietnam, that caused me to think about what I could do make the world better," Zeeck says. "I devoured news — in the newspaper, in magazines and on television — and loved to read and write, so journalism just became the obvious choice."

"I don't think I would have considered journalism but for my mother's influence and that of her brother. They were both veteran wire-service reporters drawn to foreign reporting — my mother to Latin America (Panama), my uncle to Greece, Italy and London. Because of them I already believed in journalism as a noble calling."

His mother, Bea, recalls advising her son that if he was going to be a journalist, he should be prepared to give it his all. And beginning at the Missouri School of Journalism where mother and uncle preceded him, Zeeck has done just that throughout his career.

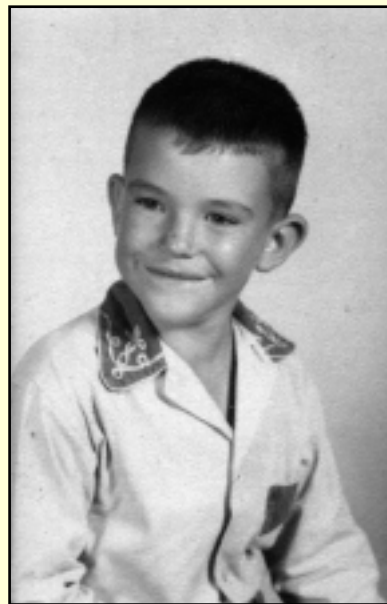
Significantly, he and Valarie, young marrieds, started this trek together. He toward journalism, and she, eventually toward the law. Today she is an attorney. Sons Phillip and Michael are in college.

Few friends have as long a view of Zeeck and Val than Osler McCarthy, who knew them in Plainview, Texas. He lived across the street from Val's family until the Zeecks purchased his house. McCarthy also became a journalist and earned his law degree.

"Zeeck inherits from his mother some of the crusty veneer of, in her case, a newswoman who was a pioneer in her field — covering news, not bake sales, when newsrooms probably had nothing other than urinals," McCarthy says. "His mind, as hers, was inquisitive and engaging and fascinated with the good story well told. His father, Jarvis,

*Right, David Zeeck grew up in the Texas panhandle in the '50s. "I have no defense for the shirt," he said. "Every little boy needed a cowboy shirt with an embroidered collar and pocket."*

*Below, Zeeck (managing editor) and Mike Waller (editor) at The Kansas City Star, mid-1980s. "A great editor, mentor and friend, and great fun to work with."*



*Top: Zeeck as a young reporter at a Kansas City elementary school, mid 1970s. "Being a reporter — mixing with people from all walks of life, going behind the scenes — is the best job at a paper."*

*Above: On ASNE's 1998 trip to Cuba, Zeeck and Castro established they had both been educated by Jesuits. "He asked me how I defined hell. 'A Jesuit education,' I said. He laughed and agreed with me."*

on another hand, was a gentle bear, a pilot and adventurer."

Zeeck graduated in December 1973 and wasted no time getting to his first job as a reporter for The Kansas City (Mo.) Star.

"We moved from Columbia and to K.C. and into our house on a Saturday night, Jan. 5, with a truckload of furniture," he recalls. "I started work Monday at 7:30 a.m., Jan. 7."

Mike Fancher, executive editor of The Seattle Times, was city editor at the Star.

"Zeeck stood out because his relentless curiosity didn't stop with the stories he covered. He wanted to learn everything about every aspect of putting out the newspaper," Fancher recalls. "It was clear he was destined to be a great editor."

And Zeeck did make significant strides at the Star as an editor. In 1981 he had been city editor for a few years when the Hyatt skywalks collapsed. Mike Waller, managing editor, turned to him to direct the coverage.

Waller says Zeeck earned his stripes on that story.

"Within a few hours on Friday night, he and his assistants had doped out an extensive plan of coverage and had assigned more than 100 people to various stories. The end result was the most thorough and extensive coverage of any one topic in the history of the Sunday Star."

He also asked Zeeck to try to find an engineer to hire to read construction and design drawings. "Zeeck and his editors got several rejections from engineers who said the assignment was too sensitive," Waller says. "Finally, late Sunday, Zeeck got a yes from an engineer in Leawood, Kan."

The next day — Monday — the engineer and reporters were allowed one hour inside the Hyatt. The engineer discovered the fatal design flaw within 30 minutes, Waller said, and a year later, the U.S. Bureau of Standards released its findings and cited the Star's story as exactly correct in explaining how the skywalks collapsed. A few months later the Star and Times won a Pulitzer for the coverage.



In Tacoma, Zeeck led coverage of the police chief who killed his wife and then committed suicide. Sean Robinson, one of the reporters, expresses the importance of the motivation Zeeck provided:

"There was a day when the police chief story was still rolling forward, when we had a full-fledged citywide scandal staring us in the face, when it was clear we had weeks and months of coverage ahead. Dave gave a short little speech to the newsroom, urging us to push, to own the story and outrun the competition. 'I don't want us to get beat on this story,' he said. 'Not for one \*\*\*\*\* day.'"

"He usually didn't talk like this in group settings. It gave the room a charge — we knew he wanted us to run and gun, to not give up. He backed it up with a series of blistering columns, aimed at the city's leaders. Every journalist deserves the fortune of working with that kind of support and inspiration. Whether it's a public-records issue, a case of government malfeasance, we know Dave will fight for us."

Robinson and others also know Zeeck is a focused gatekeeper in the editing process, particularly on projects. "Reporters have a phrase to describe the most harrowing stage of a big project — the moment when Dave finally gives it a read. The story doesn't move until it's been Zeecked," he said.

Suki Dardarian, deputy managing editor, The Seattle Times, worked with Zeeck at The News Tribune before moving to The Seattle Times and offers her own experience of being Zeecked:

"I recall a fairly complex story we were editing for a weekend edition. I'd hand a draft to him, he'd mark it up and hand it back — each time with fewer markings. The process went on, and as the deadline drew near, I gave him what I thought was the final draft. I was still struggling with one minor issue on verb tenses in a transitional paragraph, but it was mostly good to go. Zeeck took the printout, read through it, circled that one sentence and handed it back to me. Fix that, he said, and I was done."



Zeeck shakes hands with President Clinton at an ASNE convention in Washington. "I met him several times on the campaign trail and in formal settings. He has laser focus and never forgets a name."



The Zeeck family — Phillip, Valarie, Michael and David — at the abbey at Monte Casino in Italy in 2000. The monastery is the source of the Benedictine Order and site of famous World War II battles. "For us, every vacation is a history tour."

Jen Graves, former art critic, now art critic for The Stranger, a Seattle alternative paper, liked Zeeck's no-nonsense but risk-taking style.

"He's a character, in that old-newsroom type of way, and, overall, he's very old-school, new-school, I guess, if that makes sense," she says. "I like that he takes chances on younger reporters he believes in. He sent me on assignment to southern Afghanistan for 2 weeks in 2003 because he wanted to give readers a fresh perspective on the military's affairs. He wants creativity and conscientiousness."

She also saw him as a real human being.

"He gave me time off to care for a fellow employee who had lost her beautiful baby son to a sudden illness, demonstrating to me at least that he sees the newsroom not only as a professional environment, but as a network of social responsibility, like any community. I appreciate that."

Other colleagues have seen that side of Zeeck. Catharine Hamm was his assistant managing editor for several years in Kansas City.

At a particularly tough period at The Star, when the two newspapers merged and a new paper had just been introduced, her father became very ill.

"When I called Zeeck and told him what had happened, there was no question about whether I should go. 'You have only one chance to get it right,' he told me. I was on the plane the next morning and at my father's bedside when he died a few days later.

"In the years since, I've had many occasions to say this same thing to reporters, editors and colleagues wondering what to do when facing the same situation. He helped me, and by extension, many others get it right."

Zeeck and Val began their journey together 34 years ago this August. Osler McCarthy has an interesting take on their longevity:

"She tempered the impetuous teenager — it's a wonder, considering the chances against young marrieds, they're together still — and now mature, he tempers the impetuous middle-aged Val."

# His other family, related by ink

By STAN TINER

I never worked for Dave, and he never worked for me. That has probably made for a perfect relationship, though I would have considered myself lucky to have worked for him or with him.

He is a newspaper guy through and through, but first he is a fine human being — a good husband, father and friend. As I observe him he does all of these well.

He is a leader who does so from ground level, working to inspire those who work for him as a cheerleader and an advocate.

I suspect that everyone who ever worked as a reporter or editor in his newsroom somehow felt safe — sheltered from the slings and arrows of those who hurled them by the big guy.

Maybe in the beginning that is what we had in common — scale, dimension, height, weight; the gravamen that comes from being large. We essentially talk alike, the Texas in his speech entirely understandable to the sound of North Louisiana in my head. But in the end it was respect.

I came quickly to learn that Dave Zeeck is a man of his word, and for a news person there is no close second to integrity. I have found over the years that his journalism is unflinching, just like his constancy

to family and friends.

You can never call him too late to ask for advice on the tough calls that editors face from time to time, and you know that if you are an editor you are a part of his "other family," the one related by ink almost as closely as those who are bonded by blood.

When Katrina devastated the Mississippi Coast I knew that Dave was there in Tacoma pulling for the newspapers of the Gulf Coast to pull through and applauding our efforts to deliver the news to our neighbors in the rubble.

The first time I spoke to him after the storm he vowed he would come and be a part of The Sun Herald's newsroom, and sure enough he did, pulling duty with our one-person Hancock County bureau, Ryan LaFontaine, witnessing the circumstance of a newsroom covering the great disaster firsthand.

He went back to Tacoma and told our story to the home folks in the editor's voice, an authoritative column that lets his readers know he is in charge and interested in them, and in keeping them advised about "their" newspaper.

He left Mississippi with a newsroom full of new admirers and friends. We hope he comes again one day, and if I had to guess he will. ♦



Tiner is executive editor of The Sun Herald, Biloxi, Miss., and co-reipient of the 2006 ASNE Award for Editorial Leadership.



Gregory Favre, retired editor now affiliated with The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, knows Zeeck, Val and their sons. He hired Zeeck into McClatchy.

"If you really want to know about Dave and Valarie, all you have to do is meet their sons, Phillip and Michael. I have enjoyed many memorable moments with those young men. They are extremely bright, thoughtful, polite, and they are true reflections of the values and virtues and generous spirit that have marked the lives and service of Dave and Valarie."

Phillip says one of his favorite things about his dad is the eagerness to teach people things.

"Whenever we go to a new place, or do something new as a family, or when he's read something that captures his interest, he instantly wants to share what he's learned with us. He's the world's best tour guide, and can tell you a little bit about everything, as I'm sure you know."

"The best part about it to me is, he does it out of a bottomless, genuine curiosity. When he shows you something new, it's not to show off his knowledge or drop names, it's because he's found something that excites him, and he wants you to share that excitement. As his boys, he showed us how much fun learning is, and Michael and I have benefited greatly both from his knowledge and his attitude."

Michael attends George Washington University and Phillip is a Presidential Administrative Fellow at GWU.

What stands out most to Michael about his dad is his integrity:

"I remember a day when I was trying to make a decision about something semi-important, but not life-altering — I think it was whether or not to play soccer one year — and my dad's advice was to make a decision and not look back. He wasn't trying to advise against retrospective evaluation; quite to the contrary, he was emphasizing it. His was a cautionary statement that the course I chose was the one I was going to have to live with. It was about making the most honest choice you can make, and what I think is so remarkable about my dad is the consistency with which he

## The right words can nudge the world a little



*Editor's note: Here is how David Zeeck explained his passion for journalism at the 2003 ASNE Convention.*

British playwright Tom Stoppard used one of his characters to say what I think about journalism: "Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you use the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little."

That's what I love about journalism.

The young woman in this photograph is Ann Marie Harris. That's the way she looked six years ago. She was a high school senior on her way to Purdue. She looked that way the night she was killed. One of four angry young men in a car fired a shot at the one in which Ann Marie Harris was riding. He fired because the driver of Harris' car had tapped his brakes to keep the gangster's car from tailgating.

The bullet went through the empty trunk of the car, struck Ann Marie in the back and severed her aorta. She died within minutes.

Three witnesses eventually told police that a passenger in the gangster's car, a fellow named Campbell Alefaio had fired the fatal shot. Prosecutors developed a strong case and took it to trial. The witnesses were ready to testify, got up on the stand, and every one of them changed their story. They pointed at another man as the shooter.

Campbell Alefaio was found not guilty, but because prosecutors didn't believe the altered testimony, they never charged the man named.

We at The News Tribune never forgot that story. We kept it alive in the editorial page and in our news columns for five years. Last year, as the statute of limitations on perjury charges neared an end, the newspaper pushed a reluctant prosecutor to put Alefaio and his friends on trial for perjury. One witness broke down under police questioning almost immediately and admitted a conspiracy, naming Campbell Alefaio's brother as the coach who encouraged all the witnesses to change their story and keep Campbell Alefaio from serving a prison sentence.

One week ago today, Alefaio and three confederates were sentenced to extraordinary terms for perjury. Campbell Alefaio is going to serve 15 years in a state prison in Washington. Two other conspirators will serve 10 years each, and one will serve five years.

The day of the sentencings last week, if you paid real close attention, you could feel the world nudged just a little toward justice for Ann Marie Harris. That's why I have a passion for journalism. Thank you. ♦

does just that. Walking through life with that sort of integrity commands respect, even in the rare instances of disagreement."

Could there be a better running start for an ASNE president, with this kind of support to help him make a difference in the future of journalism. ♦

## What does David Zeeck want to contribute to journalism or ASNE this year?

There are three things I want to concentrate on.

■ The first is to sound the call that journalism needs great editors now more than ever. In a time of crisis, when we're trying to divine the future of news, it's imperative that strong editors step forward to lead, to innovate, to blaze a new trail in print and online. I think this would be a natural time to retreat, to hold back in the face of an uncertain future. That's precisely the wrong response. All great advances at individual newspapers — all great stories for that matter — generally start with one strong journalist who's not afraid to pursue what he or she thinks is right.

■ The second is to support what Len Downie and Bob Kaiser call accountability reporting, reporting that holds government or business or other powerful institutions to account — to look out for the personal and civic interests of the people. That's the constitutional role of a free press, and I think there is no higher journalistic calling than fighting for open government and unlocking and publishing the secrets that the powerful want to keep.

■ Finally, I think it's critical that editors communicate more with readers. Every editor in America ought to be writing to readers at least weekly and online as well as in print — explaining the paper's mission, telling the story behind its triumphs and honestly explaining its failures. If we aren't transparent and forthright with readers, we'll lose the bond of trust between us. If we lose that trust, there will be no future of news for us. ♦



"His care for people and dedication to journalism, his willingness to innovate and fear of nothing (except maybe making his wife mad) will serve ASNE incredibly well. He'll do what he always does: give it his all, and he will produce results."

— PETER BHATIA  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR  
THE OREGONIAN, PORTLAND

"Zeeck's intellect is like a perpetual motion machine, and working beside him was exhilarating. His zeal for getting a story and getting it right was energizing. His willingness to see a question from every angle possible was enlightening. His drive for self-improvement was motivating. His goodness as a person was inspiring. Some 30 years later, Zeeck is still the same. The unifying quality of his career has been leadership, and it is fitting that he will lead ASNE this year."

— MIKE FANCHER  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR  
THE SEATTLE TIMES



(On meeting Zeeck for the first time when a group went to a soul food restaurant.) "When I saw the grease dripping down his chin, I knew right then this was one cool dude. And we've been tight ever since."

— GREG MOORE  
EDITOR  
THE DENVER POST

"Zeeck walked up to my desk when I was working on a big project at the Star and noticed that I had a bag of gummy bears and was yanking off their heads. He asked about it, and I told him it was a great way during the most tense moments of a project to work out my frustration over editors. After that, whenever the editing stage began on any of my projects, I'd find a bag of gummy bears on my desk, look up and see Zeeck smiling at me from his office. It did the trick."

— DIANA DAWSON  
FORMER REPORTER  
THE KANSAS CITY (MO.) STAR



# Goodbye to boring opinion pages

*A bobblehead doll opens the floodgates of creativity at a newspaper in New York, leading to a vibrant page that is connecting with readers like never before*

BY KEN TINGLEY

I was judging one of those newspaper of the year contests that we have all done at one time or another and somewhere around the fourth or fifth circulation group it struck me that every single newspaper in the region had exactly the same Opinion page format.

Exactly. There were no exceptions.

It shouldn't have come as a surprise. My newspaper's layout was identical as well: a four column horizontal cartoon, an editorial in the lead left rail position and two national syndicated columnists. Each paper varied a little. Some substituted letters for one of the columnists. Others had a second editorial, but essentially they were cut from the same vanilla cookie cutter.

Our words may have been elegant and dynamic but our presentations were anemic and depressing.

At most small newspapers one of the senior editors writes the editorials in between planning enterprise, editing copy and picking the kids up at school. Presentation is an afterthought. The pages are designed with lack of imagination in mind.

Who can blame us?

If we're lucky, our small staff has managed to pull together a pretty compelling A1 centerpiece that addresses one or more of the Readership Institute's points to grow circulation. If we're really having a good day, our local section sings with stories that will affect our readers daily lives and our sports

section will cover the high schools like the New York City papers cover the Yankees.

This is a good day's work.

So what if our editorial page could make a six-week old puppy yawn?

At my newspaper in Glens Falls, N.Y. we are proud of our commitment to our Opinion page. Our Editorial Page Editor Mark Mahoney is as good as it gets when it comes to editorial writers. He manages to write four local editorials a week while also wading through the copy editing on dozens of local stories each week. But we wanted more.

We wanted our editorial page to be what people are talking about at the local diner. We wanted it to be as compelling as our front page.

We decided to start devoting time to the design of our Opinion page. No more standard format. We would reinvent the wheel every day. We wanted to centerpiece our local editorials.

Early in the process we had one of those great snooze inducing editorials on inter-municipal cooperation. Everybody talks about it, but nobody wants to do it. Mahoney spoke eloquently to the local politicians, demanding that they put their heads together to help find a way to make a cash strapped local civic center solvent again.

Bingo!

Our copy editor Mary Lutz, got a photo taken of a bobblehead doll that happened to be in the newsroom and superimposed the mug shot of a half dozen or so supervisors over the bobblehead body. No one had ever seen an Opinion page quite like that before. We were off.

The floodgates opened to Opinion page creativity like we had never seen before. The old boring Opinion page is now the place where we regularly surprise the reader.

We have gone from using 15 syndicated national columns a week to just four or five. In the past when we canceled a syndicated columnist, we heard from our readers in mass. Under our new format, no one seems to miss the national columnists at all.

Now we're looking for two or three national columnists to round out the page with a short, entertaining read. In past years, our complaint to the syndicates was that their stars wrote too long. We asked if they could get the star columnists to write shorter. We told them we just don't have the room for a 25-inch column anymore. A lot of small newspapers are in the same sinking ship.

They laughed at us.

So I have begun writing the letters notifying the syndicates that we don't need their national columnists. We have found a better way.

Our Opinion page is vibrant and visually appealing.

Our letters to the editor were up by over 10 percent last year. We have more interaction on the Opinion page than ever before after adding

another feature called "Debateables" where readers can e-mail their opinions on breaking news issues without signing their names. We also just recently did our first editorial video for our Web site.

People seem to be talking about our editorials again.

We feel like we are framing the debate in our communities better.

We think it is one of our best success stories. ♦



Tingley is managing editor of The Post-Star in Glens Falls, N.Y.

# Annual inventory of the 'what ifs'

*A newsroom in Louisiana spends time each year thinking about likely disaster scenarios and how the staff will deal with them*

BY KATHY SPURLOCK

Once a year, our news editor groans. Well, it's actually more than once a year. He is the news editor, after all.

But the biggest groan comes when I announce in our weekly editors' planning sessions that it's time for the annual reality check on our disaster plans.

He's the guy who updates the plans.

We pause once a year from our routines to ask ourselves "what would happen if?" That helps us prepare for major news stories in our community.

Learning about disaster coverage sometimes takes place the hard way like we dealt with in 2005's disastrous hurricanes Katrina and Rita, or the crash of the Space Shuttle Columbia, where pieces of the shuttle literally fell in our backyards.

These are stories we never expected to happen, much less have a local impact. Certainly, some big stories are too outlandish for anyone's imagination.

Our newspaper coverage area was relatively unscathed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Yet, we didn't have a plan for handling a scenario where our community's population suddenly exploded by thousands of evacuees. Nor did we have experience dealing with the various federal and national organizations that arrive when a major disaster occurs.

Through our experience during the hurricanes with some public records and access fights, we learned we need to

have some written "how to" thoughts and story ideas about the kind of story that has an impact on our community beyond breaking news.

But big stories occur in every community. You've got your own "disaster scenarios." If you take inventory of the "what ifs," you're probably a lot like us.

Our planned responses are restricted to big news stories we know occur every few years, with a few "what ifs" thrown in. Our reality at our newspaper is our staff and beat assignments probably change more frequently than our communication about how to cover a big story. We don't want to lose precious time bringing new editors and new reporters up to speed on the basics, nor do we want to dispatch staffers to potentially dangerous situations without thinking about personal safety.

Our community is prone to flash flooding from brief storms and river flooding from extended rainfall. We experience tornadoes, hail storms and ice storms. We've had major industrial accidents, hazardous train derailments, fires and chemical spills. We've got a plan for a declaration of war. We've thought about terrorism attacks. We've even developed thoughts about how to handle a plane crash at our airport, because one of the major flight paths

is only a few hundred feet above our regional shopping mall.

We refined our written plans and expanded our thinking about disaster scenarios after seeing a plan prepared by former executive editor Juli Metzger at The Daily Advertiser in Lafayette, La.

Our disaster plans are simple, held to four pages. But they're user friendly and comprehensive, just in case the editor is on that long-awaited Caribbean vacation when disaster strikes.

Key components of our plans:

■ A description of what might happen, and what our immediate response would be for print and online.

■ A description of our prior responses to this type of story.

■ A clear line of command — who's directing the story.

■ Who should respond, and how.

■ A list of what equipment and supplies staffers need to have on hand at home and at work.

■ A telephone tree to call people to work.

■ An online update team.

■ Preliminary story, photo and graphics assignments to cover the basics.

■ A checklist of the administrative chores to immediately handle — space requests, who outside the newsroom needs to be notified.

■ What will happen if we cannot work or publish at our newspaper.

■ Safety tips.

Another component of our disaster planning is beat books. Our beat books include all of the information and contacts a reporter coming in cold might need to cover a story.

We developed beat books because our staffers often pinch hit for vacationing and sick employees. And when someone leaves for greener pastures, the replacement isn't always immediate and key information can be lost in the transition.

In a smaller newspaper operation, this idea of disaster and beat planning seems like an overwhelming amount of

*Continued on Page 31.*



Spurlock is executive editor of The News-Star in Monroe, La.



# Getting it right in shorthand class

*Narrative writer Tom French was inspired by Capote's In Cold Blood, but also realized that the truth starts at the 'subatomic' level of a story*

By WARREN WATSON

Tom French, a narrative writer at the St. Petersburg Times, knew the importance of accuracy and credibility long before he became a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for newspaper feature-writing.

In 1975-76, French was a senior at Pike High School in Indianapolis. He became the first male student to complete a class in Gregg shorthand, a course popular with female business and secretarial specialists.

"The shorthand increases your confidence that you will get it right. I knew that I was going to be a reporter, and I knew it would help," said French.

Thirty years, a Pulitzer Prize, two books, and dozens of creative non-fiction projects later, French still uses shorthand — a strange written language of abbreviated symbols and swirls — for interviews, research, and other note-taking. It gave him the ability to capture quotes more completely, he said, and make better observations. The technique is part of his obsession with detail and accuracy, hallmarks of his nearly three decades in St. Petersburg. It is evident in his two books, *Unanswered Cries* (1991) and *South of Heaven* (1994), which both began as serial narratives in the Times, and *Angels and Demons*, a 1997 narrative and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing.

At a time when narrative is used in countless newsrooms and is being hailed as a tool to retain present readers

and draw new ones in daily newspapers, this year marks the 20th anniversary of French's first narrative venture, *Unanswered Cries*, originally published in the Times in 1986 under the title *A Cry in the Night*. The book is reminiscent of Truman's Capote's *In Cold Blood* in that both narratives draw inspiration, energy and substance from true crime.

Unlike Capote, however, French has not been accused of developing composite characters or fabricating scenes to improve his story. French admitted he learned from Capote's work years earlier.

"I read *In Cold Blood* in the eighth grade and it knocked me over. It was an amazing piece of work, a fairly new form of writing. The spirit and beauty is hard to find in literature. I was inspired by it."

He added, "But we think about it differently today. We have to be more accurate with characters and scenes. We learned from *In Cold Blood* that truth starts at the subatomic level. You have to get it right."

*Unanswered Cries* focuses on the May 1984 rape and murder of Karen Gregory in Gulfport, Florida. The murder went unsolved for more than two years and bedeviled detectives, who ultimately arrested George Lewis,

Gregory's next-door neighbor. Ironically, Lewis initially had aided police in the inquiry and even had a neighborhood watch crime sign in his front yard. Lewis also was a close friend of Larry Tosi, the lead detective. Tosi, a justice of the peace, officiated at the marriage of Lewis, after the murder but before Lewis's arrest in 1986.

The book begins with the murder, investigation, and the arrest. French concludes with the jury trial of Lewis, who was convicted of first-degree murder. Lewis is serving a life sentence in a Florida prison.

"This is a work of non-fiction. All of the people, events, and details are real. There are no composite characters, fake names, imagined quotes, or imagined conversations," French said in the author's notes for the book.

Indeed, French painstakingly gathered interviews with more than seventy-five people over five years. He reviewed 6,000 pages of court and police records. Techniques used to maintain credibility included immersion reporting, multiple fact-checks, and having sources verify story drafts for accuracy.

Andy Barnes, once editor-president of the St. Petersburg Times, said that French broke new ground for the newspaper from 1984-88, when the story was first developed and written as a pair of in-paper, serial narratives:

"French did a remarkably sympathetic, thorough and detailed reporting job," Barnes said at the time. "He talked to virtually everybody who would talk to us, and persuaded several people it was worth their effort to make sure the stories came out right. Nowhere did we ask you to believe we were perched on the shoulder of one of the participants as they muttered darkly. The series could pass the old newspaper standard and assert, 'None of this was made up.'"

Letting that simple story unfold is at the success of *Unanswered Cries*.



Watson is director of the J-Ideas high school initiative at Ball State University. He is co-chair of The American Editor Committee.

Said French, "There is a very powerful engine in virtually every story we write, and that is: what happens next. It is an extraordinary question and it is what all narrative runs on. I really believe one of our basic needs is to find out what happens next."

To heighten his story's narrative impact, French focused on the ends of paragraphs and sentences. He would place important and dramatic information there, sometimes adding irony. At the end of one chapter, Tosi, the police detective conducting the investigation that has focused on next-door neighbor Lewis, learns that a forensic examiner has made a conclusion about a bloody footprint left at the crime scene. Tosi discovers that the footprint was nine-and-one-half inches long.

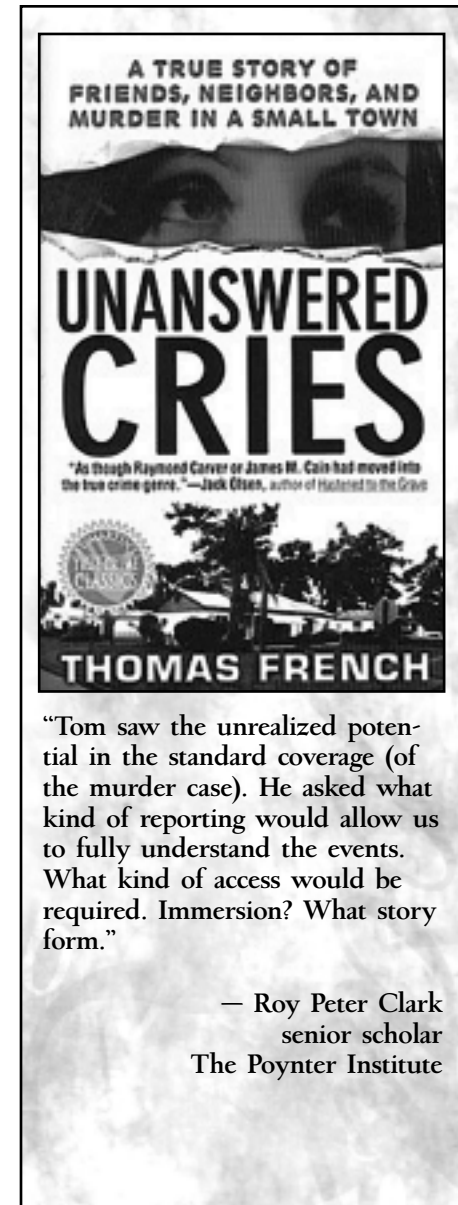
In his story, French followed Tosi's discovery with the observation: "About the same length as Lewis's feet."

French, in the interview, mentioned the bloody footprint, and said: "If you want to improve the energy of writing, look at the ends of paragraphs. End them with power and imagery."

French was able to organize story lines this way because he was in command of the material, using immersion reporting and painstaking investigation, leading to journalistic credibility. Author Mark Masse, who teaches narrative writing at Ball State University, said this kind of research and attention to reporting and interviewing detail is the key to literary journalistic credibility.

Part of French's technique for maintaining accuracy in *Unanswered Cries* was to work intensely with sources, reviewing excerpts point by point. And to gather material for internal monologue, he would ask them what they were thinking. "Try not to telegraph stuff you hope they were thinking. You don't want them to be making stuff up," French advised.

French had long sit-down interviews with Gregory's family members and friends. Because he was not there the night of the murder, he said he was forced to rely on re-creation: "I went through a great crisis of confidence a while ago — years ago — where I was really aware of the fact that people's



"Tom saw the unrealized potential in the standard coverage (of the murder case). He asked what kind of reporting would allow us to fully understand the events. What kind of access would be required. Immersion? What story form."

— Roy Peter Clark  
senior scholar  
The Poynter Institute

memories are faulty. But what choice do we have? After all, history, even our courts, rely on memory."

To counteract this in *Unanswered Cries*, French used corroborative interviews to validate material.

When that corroborative interviewing could not resolve a point of dispute in the Gregory case, such as when family members disagreed about the kind of footwear the murder victim had worn at her college graduation, he opted for full disclosure, despite the fact it appeared to be a small point: "Years later, when this moment was recalled, there would be some disagreement about whether they were combat boots or hiking boots."

In *Unanswered Cries*, French took his self-editing to another level, beginning what is now his common practice — used in selected instances — of reading back quotes and passages to sources.

French said that the technique contributes to credibility. Ninety-percent of the time, sources will be satisfied. At times, sources will volunteer additional details. Very few sources, he said, will ask to change the story.

Roy Peter Clark, senior scholar at The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, has watched French's career since the early 1980s, pointing out that *Unanswered Cries* was a major step for the writer in development of narrative technique. The immersive reporting gave the story a booster shot:

"Tom saw the unrealized potential in the standard coverage (of the murder case). He asked what kind of reporting would allow us to fully understand the events. What kind of access would be required. Immersion? What story form."

It has been 40 years since Capote wrote what many have called a flawed masterpiece. It has been 20 years since French took his first voyage into narrative journalism. It is easy to compare and contrast their approaches.

While French dwelled on the rights of victims, Capote, the first major writer to explore true crime in creative non-fiction, focused on the criminals themselves.

In an interview in the wake of the release of the film *Capote*, which has created new interest in the late author's work, French talked about how Capote broke new ground in *In Cold Blood*; he also discussed Capote's problems in the area of journalistic credibility — an issue French had in mind in his own work:

That "sub-atomic level" means fact-checking, detailed notes (taken in shorthand), verifying quotes, and being fussy with the details.

Capote often boasted that he never had to take notes in *In Cold Blood* because he had a photographic memory that was 94 percent accurate.

How does French feel about Capote's recall?

"I don't buy that for a second," French said. ♦



# Newsrooms stepping outside for perspective

*From judging contests, to soliciting feedback on cutlines and copy editing, more newspapers are turning to outside experts for a kick in the pants or a pat on the back*

By STEVE BUTTRY

For identifying problem areas or measuring excellence, sometimes an outside view is exactly what you need.

The outside view might just confirm what you already think, but still it carries extra weight. "We can get kind of a kick in the pants and really start working on our cutlines or copy editing," said Skip Foster, editor of the Shelby (N.C.) Star.

The Star is one of 33 papers graded annually in an evaluation program operated by Freedom Community Newspapers. While that program provides praise and criticism, some newspapers and newspaper groups seek the outside view only to select their very best work.

Cox Newspapers brings in a panel of 18 journalism experts to choose winners of awards for the best performance of the year in several categories. The Oregonian also draws on notable journalists to choose the annual winners of its Fred A. Stickel Awards for Journalistic Excellence.

Michael Schwartz, manager of editorial training for COXnet and Cox Newspapers, and George Rede, director of recruiting and training for The Oregonian, said the use of outside judges adds prestige and credibility to the awards.

Cox used to judge its contests internally but decided to spend to bring in judges who are leading journalists. This year's judges include Pulitzer Prize-win-

ning columnist Connie Schultz of the Plain Dealer in Cleveland as well as Susan Biddle of the Washington Post, Andres Cavelier of El Nuevo Herald, Chin Wang of the Boston Globe and Robin Gaby Fisher of the Newark Star-Ledger.

"I feel, and I've been told, that has raised the quality of the contest in the eyes of the people who are competing," Schwartz said. "Since these are some of the best journalists in our business, people take it very seriously."

Cox brings the judges to Atlanta for two days. Cox pays expenses but judges donate their time. They work in teams to pick award winners in four classes: metro newspapers, community dailies, non-dailies and (a new class this year)

Spanish-language papers. Winners in each of 32 categories win \$1,000 awards.

Schwartz presents the awards in a ceremony in Atlanta. "It's a little bit like the Oscars after I do the presentations," he said. Winners race outside the room to call colleagues on their cell phones to spread the news.

The Oregonian used to ask its judges to pull double duty. After choosing the winners, they would come to Portland to present the awards at a luncheon. Then in the afternoon, the judges would lead workshops in the newsroom,

working some training in with the awards program.

Budget cutbacks prompted the paper to drop the workshops, but it still brings in one judge to address the luncheon. "It's all about having someone prominent in journalism judge our work and deliver some inspirational remarks," Rede said.

Like Cox, The Oregonian asks the judges to donate their time. The paper gives the judges a gift and pays expenses for those who come to Portland. Dropping names of previous judges helps in recruiting volunteers to judge.

Judges have included Lou Boccardi, former president of the Associated Press; William Woo, former editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; Merrill Perlman, copy desk chief of the New York Times; Cynthia Tucker, editorial page editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution; and Kenny Irby and Gregory Favre of the Poynter Institute.

The awards honor day-to-day excellence in four categories: reporting and writing; commentary; copy editing and headline writing; and visual journalism. Winners in each category receive \$1,500 awards. Runners-up in the larger categories receive \$1,000.

The stress on daily excellence lets reporters in suburban bureaus compete with The Oregonian's stars who have won Pulitzer Prizes. "It may seem daunting for a reporter to go up against Tom Hallman or Rich Read, but there

are years when those guys don't win," Rede said. When a suburban reporter wins, he said, "that really goes over well."

Sometimes an award will recognize a journalist who's been working hard for 15 to 20 years. Other awards recognize a breakthrough by a young journalist.

Freedom makes a substantial investment in outside opinions in its annual evaluations and a quarterly e-mail critique of its papers. Both programs are operated by the American Press Institute's Tailored Programs.



Buttry is director of tailored programs at the American Press Institute and a nationally recognized writing coach.



For the annual evaluations, veteran editors hired by API read several editions of each paper and rate them against standards set by Freedom, depending on the paper's size. The papers are evaluated in 13 categories, including relevance of content to readers, enterprise reporting, cutlines, editorial pages, design and reader participation. In each category, the judge gives a paper a score of 5 or 6 if it meets the Freedom standards. Higher scores, up to 10, may be rewarded for excellence, and poor performance can result in a score as low as 1.

In addition to the scores, judges send the paper a written evaluation, commenting on high points or low points in each area. Unlike contests, where judges read a newspaper's best work, the API judges evaluate editions of the same date for each paper, plus a wild card edition or two that may show off some prime work.

Foster and Tom Porter, vice president of Freedom Community Newspapers, said the newspapers take the evaluations seriously.

"Everybody on the staff gets the whole thing and we spend some time

**"It's all about having someone prominent in journalism judge our work and deliver some inspirational remarks."**

— GEORGE REDE  
DIRECTOR OF RECRUITING  
AND TRAINING  
THE OREGONIAN,  
PORTLAND

talking about it," Foster said.

Sometimes the dates selected for evaluation might not have been good days for a newspaper. And sometimes editors will disagree with the evaluation and tell the staff so, Foster said. More likely, editors know they are weak in an

area and the evaluation spurs them to finally address it.

A low score for cutlines one year prompted some training on writing cutlines. Last year's only low score for Shelby was for the editorial page, an area the Star was already planning to address as part of a redesign.

Porter said Freedom invests in the evaluations to help the newspapers improve from year to year. Every newspaper evaluated in 2001, the first year of the program, had a higher score in 2005. Twenty-two papers improved their scores last year, while only seven papers had declining scores.

Freedom supplements the annual evaluations with quarterly fine-tuning newsletter called the eTuner. This doesn't provide as much detail on any single paper, but cites highlights of the past quarter from several papers, as well as general suggestions for improvement.

"People are hungry for that when it comes out," Porter said. The outside views have credibility, he said, because "they don't know the personalities involved. They're just looking at the work." ♦



# Journalist muckraker, meet citizen muckraker

*The Internet might be journalism's future, but it suffers from a familiar problem: Public mistrust.*

BY ROBERTA BASKIN

It's no longer a secret — or for that matter a topic of much rumination — that the future of journalism lies somewhere along the medium of the Internet.

The number of people getting news online has risen steadily for years now, as has the audience for community-driven websites and online classified advertising. This transformation has sparked profound anxiety at print publications, whose leaders see readers and jobs lost as fragmented audiences scatter to portals, blogs and “grass-roots” journalism sites to get their news.

Their concern is understandable, but it tells only half the story. While the Internet has led to sweeping, occasionally noxious changes for the news industry, it has also facilitated tremendous advances in the field of journalism.

Less than a decade ago, journalists were limited to reporting on issues in their own research field. Today, reporters can utilize technology to expand the scope and reach of their work. Whereas in the past, journalism was conducted through monologues — with the paper providing the story and the subscriber the audience — in the age of the Internet, journalism is an ever-expanding dialogue among reporter and readers.

At the Center for Public Integrity the Internet has facilitated a transformation of reader into resource. Investigations we author on political misconduct lead to e-mails from our readers with docu-

ments detailing analogous, unreported stories. The process ends up being cyclical; as more information is unearthed, more journalists, to our delight, are thrown into the breach.

The Internet, both at the Center and throughout the news industry, has permitted an unprecedented connection between journalist muckraker and citizen muckraker.

So why, one may ask, does the news industry appear to be in such disarray? Well, it's true that since the Internet became widely available, newspaper circulations have dropped dramatically (from 62 million in 1990 to 55 million in 2003). And since the introduction of cable news (CNN was founded in 1980) the viewership of the nightly network news has been cut almost in half (from 52 million in 1980 to 28.8 million in 2004).

But these numbers don't necessarily represent a news industry in free-fall. The public remains eager for more journalistic substance and less superficiality. At the same time that newspapers are losing readers, audience levels for National Public Radio are reaching record highs. In the fall of 2004, more than 23 million people were tuning into NPR on a weekly basis, a 41 percent increase over the previous four years.

Last year it was not only significant, but historic, to see the New York Times tear

down the wall and officially merge print and online journalism. Or as Executive Editor Bill Keller explained it: “...to reorganize our structures and our minds to make Web journalism.”

People are clearly eager for more substantive, detailed information, and the Internet, as the New York Times figured out, is increasingly becoming their medium of choice.

The problem, critics are quick to argue, is that Website content is often a minefield of opinion, misinformation, and disinformation.

Unfortunately, there have been numerous incidents when the Internet has been misleading. These instances have made the public skeptical of treating every Internet source as a truism. According to a study by Magid Associates, only 10 percent of 18-34 year-olds say the Internet is trustworthy. Newspapers, sadly, evoked even less confidence, registering a paltry 9 percent trustworthy rate. And yet, 41 percent of this age groups' respondents say the Internet is a “useful way to learn” as compared to the 8 percent who see newspapers as such.

More and more people are going online for information and members of the media would be wise to start embracing, not shunning, the Internet as the medium of both the present and future.

In the past, technological breakthroughs have been an asset to the field of journalism. Advancements in printing helped newspapers expand their size and audience. Radio permitted Edward R. Murrow to report from the frontlines of WWII. And television allowed journalists to add visual potency to stories where it is desperately needed; from a Tsunami in Southeast

Asia to a hurricane here at home.

The Internet, journalists must realize, is simply the next in a series of technological breakthroughs that will modernize, and ultimately facilitate their work. ♦

Sam Stein, press secretary at the Center for Public Integrity, contributed to this article.

Baskin is the Executive Director at the Center for Public Integrity, a non-profit organization dedicated to public interest, investigative journalism.

# Spotting the trends behind graduation

*The graduates walking across high school stages this June will be more diverse than ever and that can point editors toward a number of great education stories*

BY BOBBI BOWMAN

Let's talk about graduations. This June, the happy days of hugs, congratulations and pride are the placid prelude to the country's rainbow future.

The number of students is growing more diverse each year. The leading edge of the large middle of Generation Y will walk across high school stages this June — our children, our nieces, our nephews. The kids who brought us Barney, the Spice Girls and bare midriffs in the winter will now bring us a future in brown and black.

This wave started gathering last year with the 2.75 million high school graduates in the Class of 2005. It will continue to grow larger and larger to an estimated 2.78 million this June, 2.83 million next year, and 2.99 million by 2009, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

College admission officers are already talking about the implications of the declining percentage of the white non-Hispanic student population. They are increasingly wondering how to attract more children of Mexican immigrants. Students who traditionally are poorer, have high drop out rates, and, when



they attend college, many do so part-time.

Then there are the implications of replacing a white work force where one-third have a college degree with:

A black workforce in which only 173 percent have college degrees.

A Latino work force where only 57 percent are high school graduates and 11.4 percent have finished college.

Consider that according to the U.S. Census:

In 1980, a scant 23 years ago, 82.7 percent of the high school graduates were white.

In 2003 that number was down to 68.4 percent and falling.

Meanwhile Blacks and Latinos made

up 15.4 percent of the 1980 graduates. By 2003 they stood at 24 percent.

White non-Hispanics make up only 58.8 percent of the 73.7 million kids 17 and under in the U.S. That number is falling yearly which means that Asian, black, Latino and Native Americans already make up 41.2 percent.

That's really all you need to know to understand the future of the U.S. and your community.

Want to see the future. Visit an elementary school in your community. The little faces sitting in those seats are your future. You may be surprised how many are brown and black.

Between 2000 and 2013, the number of public high school graduates is expected to increase in 25 states — mainly in the South and the West — and decline in 26 states, primarily in the Northeast and Midwest, according to NCES projections.

The West should see an 18 percent increase, the highest in the country followed by a 12 percent rise in the South:

Nevada 72.2 percent, Florida 30.3 percent, Arizona 29.6 percent, California, 23.1, Georgia 22.7.

Meanwhile the Northeast will see only an 8 percent increase and the Midwest, a 4 percent increase:

Maryland, 8.6 percent, Pennsylvania 4.9, New York, 2.0

States expected to have a declining percent of graduates include: Missouri — 2.8, Ohio — 3.3, Arkansas — 4.9, South Dakota, — 20.6.

“As the College Board's annual meeting got started Saturday in New York City, enrollment managers and admissions officers in one meeting room heard projections about how their existing sources of students may be drying up and how they will need to go after new groups of students — especially Latino students to fill their classrooms,” Inside Higher Ed reported on Oct. 31, 2005.

“But for a number of reasons, the college officials were told, Latino students might be reluctant to enroll and might not have the money to pay their bills if they wanted to attend,” the

*Continued on Page 31.*



Bowman is ASNE's diversity director.



Calendar

- April 10-11 — Readership Training Seminar, Memphis, Tenn.  
April 18-19 — Readership Training Seminar, St. Louis

**April 25-28 — ASNE Convention, Westin Hotel, Seattle**

May 31-June 1 — Readership Training Seminar, Anchorage  
May 11-12 — Readership Training Seminar, Phoenix  
June 4-9 — Institute for Journalism Excellence orientation,
- American Press Institute, Reston, Va.  
June 13-14 — Readership Training Seminar, Harrisburg, Pa.  
Sept. 26-27 — Readership Training Seminar, Hartford, Conn.  
Oct. 4-5 — Readership Training Seminar, Grand Forks, N.D.  
Oct. 9-13 — International Journalism Exchange orientation, Washington  
Oct. 24-25 — Readership Training Seminar, Hackensack, N.J.  
Nov. 8-10 — International Journalism Exchange debriefing, New York



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What ifs

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detail and work. That’s why our news editor groans, but he’s only acting these days.

We actually found that once the basic information is in the computer system, it’s easy to duplicate details from scenario to scenario. And once the disaster and beat scenarios are there, the annual updates are mostly an act of expanding what we would do online, changing the players and updating the telephone lists.

After we update, we schedule an “all hands on deck” staff meeting and discuss our plans, handing out printed versions

and letting everyone know where the electronic versions are stored in our system.

Does it work? We’ve used earlier versions of our war, ice storm and flooding plans. We’ve had to execute the off-site publishing plan twice in recent years because of power failure and mechanical issues.

The staff knows we’re serious about “all hands on deck.” They come prepared for the work, and people show up or call in to see if they’re needed often before the telephone tree reaches them.

We hit the ground running as a team. When disaster strikes, those moments of clarity and organization make a difference for our readers. ♦

Copies of The News-Star’s disaster coverage plans are available via e-mail, kspurlock@thenewsstar.com

Graduation

Continued from Page 29.

Inside High Ed story went on.

“ . . . the prospect of having more minority students appeals to just about everyone at the conference,” the story said. “The problems people are worrying about are . . . Latino students are less likely than white students to enroll in college, to enroll in four-year institutions and to be able to afford more expensive institutions. If you are, say, an admissions director at a private college in the Northeast, this presents all kinds of problems.”

Andre Bell, the vice president for enrollment services at the College Board, said that 2009 would probably be the last year in a string of 20 years of growth in the number of high school graduates, according to the story.

Certainly high school graduation rates have fluctuated along with the country’s birth rates for the past 30 years. But something fundamental is about to change — the number of minority students — especially Latino students — graduating will increase. But white non-Hispanic students — the core of college enrollments — will decrease, the story continued.

This will affect states from diverse Arizona to very white Vermont. Inside High Ed reported in Arizona, “ the number of new high school graduates is projected to increase by 30 percent and the proportion of Latino students is expected to reach 41 percent, up from 29 percent today.” The white share will fall from 57 percent to 45 percent.

In Vermont, the story goes on, while the number of high school graduates will actually decrease by 17 percent over the next decade — the percentage of Latino high school graduates will grow from 1 percent today to 9 percent — and that’s Vermont!

Nationally, if you look at people 25 and older, 56.4 percent of whites, 44.7 percent of blacks, 67.4 percent of Asians and 29.6 percent of Latinos have some college education, according to the U.S. Census 2004 report on education.

Let’s look at younger folks — 25-29 years olds, with college degrees: 34.2 percent of whites, 17.2 percent of blacks, 61.6 percent of Asians but only 10 percent of Latinos.

The Latino number actually drops because of the surge of immigration in this age group.

We all know that a college education means you make more money. According to figures from the U.S. Census, the average annual income with:

- a high school diploma: \$27,915.
- a college degree \$51,206
- an advanced degree \$74,602.

The more you make, the more the state government will happily take from you to pay for services. So who pays for good schools if your community has fewer college graduates? Who pays for government services?

College graduates, even folks with a little college, can get a white-collar office job that comes with health benefits. But increasingly, employers at every level are eliminating health care benefits. So who pays the increased health costs of sicker people going to the hospital for emergency treatment because they couldn’t afford to go to the doctor to prevent getting sick?

Who pays for the higher income college graduates — you and your children.

As you cover the joyous occasions of high school graduations you might want to tell your readers about the challenges these children, and all of us, face. ♦

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## 2006 ASNE Annual Convention 'Knowledge to Take Home'

**April 25-28  
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**P**lan on coming to Seattle April 25-28 and let us help you identify ways you can lead change. We're bringing together leaders and innovative thinkers from inside and outside of our industry who will frame actionable ideas for you to take home.

Innovation and Watchdog Journalism will be front and center. And we'll make sure you feel the heritage and vitality of the Pacific Northwest. We'll have fun, too, with an opening night reception at the Experience Music Project and another at Teatro ZinZanni.

Highlights include Microsoft's Bill Gates, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, editor John S. Carroll, McClatchy's Gary Pruitt and Dean Singleton of Medianews. ♦