



THE Source

Society of Professional Journalists
Oklahoma Pro Chapter

June 2001



Annual contest nears

By Kim Morava
SPJ vice president

Getting away from the desk crucial to stories

Reporters do best work away from the office

By Scott Cooper
SPJ board member

Many of today's journalism projects and news features are becoming more derived from databases and Internet sources. But some of this year's major Oklahoma stories have come from traditional tactics of news gathering.

Finding out details and witnesses of Timothy McVeigh's execution and revelations of years of improper work by an Oklahoma City police forensic chemist were obtained through the foot-and-mouth disease of journalism.

There is no question that databases, spread sheets, e-mail and the

"...databases cannot suffice for an inside source, nor can the Internet provide secret documents which could reveal an agency's mismanagement or an employee's misconduct."

Internet have made news gathering a better, faster and quantifying profession.

Many stories could not be obtained without the new technological tools. This new medium has created the newest trend in newspapers — computer-assisted reporting positions.

These positions not only allow news organizations more opportunities for stories, features and projects, but also help beat writers find new angles, better insight and readily

available information on a topic or person.

But databases cannot suffice for an inside source, nor can the Internet provide secret documents which could reveal an agency's mismanagement or an employee's misconduct.

Those details can only come about by the reporters themselves hitting the streets, halls and offices, thumbing through countless files and talking with numerous sources. A da-

See "Reporting," p. 2

NEXT Board Meeting, July 28

Make plans to attend the monthly board meetings of the Oklahoma Pro chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists held the second Friday of each month.

The meetings are a great place to be heard and share ideas with other SPJ members or to become a member.

The next meeting is 4 p.m., July 28, at the home of SPJ board member Carter Bradley.

Call one of the members listed inside on page three for directions.

SPJ needs you and your ideas so make plans to attend. We look forward to seeing you there!

Early preparations are beginning for the Oklahoma Pro Chapter's annual open awards contest.

The process of gathering mailing labels for contest brochures will begin in coming weeks.

Last year's contest drew about 700 entries. More are expected this year.

Submissions eligible for entry are those produced between July 1, 2000, and June 30, 2001.

Contest brochures outlining the rules, divisions and categories in newspaper, radio, television, public relations and magazine divisions should be mailed sometime in early August.

Deadlines for the contest entries will fall in mid-September.

See "Contest," p. 3

SPJ members invited to summer meeting

By *Ronna Austin*
SPJ secretary

SPJ is cooking up some fun at 4 p.m. July 28 at the home of SPJ Board Member Carter Bradley.

This is an opportunity to mingle with fellow journal-

ists and consume some great food.

The outdoor meeting will replace the regular July meeting, normally held the second Friday of the month.

All those attending are asked to bring a food dish.

Soft drinks will be provided by the chapter.

SPJ members' families are also welcome.

If you'd like to attend, please call any one of the board members listed on page three of this newsletter to confirm and get the

address.

SPJ is making lots of plans for the upcoming months.

Take this opportunity to be active in your chapter and to help with those plans. We look forward to seeing you there!

Information age changing newsgathering tactics

"Reporting," cont. from p. 1

tabase can never replace the foot-and-mouth disease of journalism.

Stories about an FBI report claiming the forensic work of Joyce Gilchrist may have sent innocent people to prison, or that Gore Vidal was going to be a witness on McVeigh's behalf were sowed through cultivation, not Excel.

Reporters used their human sources within government agencies to get the information and confirm the validity and impact of the information. Many of the documents were hand-delivered to reporters, again the work of countless days and hours of getting to know sources. Leaked information usually comes through a voice or file folder, rarely through a download.

This is not to say that computer-assisted reporting cannot be a vital tool in these types of inside stories. E-mail has become an important means of communication between reporters and sources while the Internet provides a wide scope to find out if a problem happening locally has happened elsewhere, or to get

exact facts when memories slip or officials cannot be contacted. More reporters are using e-mail for interviews or to learn instant messages about upcoming events and information.

But e-mail interviews should be used prudently. The tone of an answer can get lost in an electronic response, aside from possibly the whole answer it-

"Editors are demanding more bylines and get nervous when reporters want to spend time away from their desks to talk with sources which will not produce a meal for the daily beast."

self. Plus, sending questions via e-mail is nothing less than sending a list of questions to a source before an interview.

The face-to-face contact not only ensures better communication and understanding, but also trust.

Sources and officials are usually more at ease when speaking to someone rather than waiting for their computer to chime, even if the interview is contentious.

This was a major reason why U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft called The Daily Oklahoman after his announcement to delay McVeigh's execution a

week before schedule. He could have easily sent out a press release or statement explaining his decision. But Ashcroft said he felt he owed it to the people of Oklahoma City to personally explain his motives.

Stories like Joyce Gilchrist and the Oklahoma State University plane crash also show the

importance of digging for information from various places.

Documents on Gilchrist and her cases came about after spending hours in the boxes and cabinets of the state attorney general, district attorney and police department offices.

The plane crash sent reporters to the state commerce department, airport hangers and the FAA center examining everything from planes to microfiche. Databases revealed the plane's bio, but not its history, ownership and maintenance records.

While these tactics are nothing new and might even seem condescending

for some journalists reading this article, the practice of wooing sources and finding documents is getting harder. Not because reporters don't have the know-how, or are relying too much on technology.

The demands of an ever-changing newsroom and news philosophy are starting to constrain reliable means. Reporters are finding it harder to find the time to cultivate sources and learn where to go when needing certain information.

Editors are demanding more bylines and get nervous when reporters want to spend time away from their desks to talk with sources which will not produce a meal for the daily beast.

The constant fear of news breaking and an editor not having a reporter in their first line of sight consumes newsrooms, even though a reporter is only a pager or cell phone away. Or even worse, not having a reporter who might help pad an editor's story list for the 4 p.m. news meeting.

But stories like Joyce Gilchrist didn't break. They grew from the hard work reporters spent away from their desks and computers.



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From the President



By **Mark Hanebutt**
SPJ president

They're going to put ugly people on television and there's nothing we can do about it.

It may be just another sign of a decaying civilization and, since people tell me they don't watch television anymore anyway, maybe it won't matter.

But I suspect it's going to build a lot of insecurity in the profession and make a lot of clothiers, psychologists, remedial English teachers and anti-acid distributors rich.

The problem here is something call Convergent Journalism, a procedure in which we graft a television reporter with a print reporter and come up with a hybrid two-headed, two-faced, hard-nosed news gatherer/Dale Carnegie graduate news reader who doesn't know whether to give us just the facts or act sincere.

Those in favor of the development say it will make journalists more marketable since they will now be trained in both print and broadcast journalism.

Those opposed to it, say it's all a move by publishers and broadcast station owners to make deals to squeeze a few more bucks out of the business by sharing their reporters and thus, cutting their expenses.

New breed of journalists part writer, part looker

Convergent Journalism changing rules of game

I'm skeptical.

But since journalists and the public they serve don't own newspapers and television stations, and those who do are pushing this, it's apparently the wave of the future.

In any case, it means that some of us who should never look into a camera will, and others



who should never do anything but smile, will have to learn to write without using clichés.

I'm still investigating this development, but those who know about all this say it will work something like this: Reporter A from the newspaper will research a story, come back to the newspaper and write it for the next edition, then write another version of the same story for broadcast and turn to a television camera in the same newsroom and deliver it.

In reality, it may not work like this everywhere.

In Oklahoma for example, Channel 9 and the Daily Oklahoman are collaborating with news cov-

erage but the reporters from the Oklahoman have yet to write and deliver their own stories on air. Now, the television news anchors just refer to stories in the Oklahoman.

I understand some reporters from the Oklahoman would like to be on the air, while others would rather die first.

Whichever way it goes, ultimately it means a change in the way we do our business and, of course, it will mean that, like it or not, we will need to pay attention now to more than just the business of news-gathering.

All of us will need to learn about makeup, delivery, camera angles and, ultimately, facelifts.

Contest deadline outlined

"Contest," cont. from p. 1

Those persons who receive The Source each month will be included in the mailing lists, as well as members of area journalism organizations.

Brochures also will be sent to newspapers, radio and television stations.

Anyone wishing to ensure they receive a contest brochure should e-mail kmorava@news-star.com or call 214-3962.



tidbits...

Get involved!

•The Source needs you! SPJ members are encouraged to contribute to the monthly newsletter.

Add your name to the list of those whose work have graced these pages by sending along an article, picture or tidbit for publication.

SPJ is about all of its members working together. This is a great and simple way to be actively involved even with a busy schedule.

Surf our website

•The Oklahoma Professional chapter SPJ website can be found at: www.geocities.com/oklahomaspj

Soon, the domain name, or website address, will be www.OklahomaSPJ.org

It's a great place to keep up with the local chapter and find helpful links to the national chapter.

College chapters should send links to raustin@okc.cc.ok.us so they can be added to the site.

Summer fun!

•The Oklahoma Professional chapter SPJ will be holding its annual summer meeting at 4 p.m., July 28 at the home of Carter Bradley.

Bradley is a long-time SPJ board member.

If you're interested in attending, please call one of the SPJ officers or board members listed inside on page three for directions.

This is your chance to attend a meeting, have fun and eat great food all in one place!

Time to update?

•Do you need to update any or all of your SPJ membership information?

National headquarters has made it simple!

On the Internet, go to: www.spj.org/membership/membupdate.htm and fill out the form.

While you're there, look around at all of the helpful information SPJ has to offer today's journalists.

Let SPJ work for you by getting involved!



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NEXT SPJ MEETING: 4 P.M., JULY 28, AT CARTER BRADLEY'S. SEE INSIDE.