



THE Source

Society of Professional Journalists
Oklahoma Pro Chapter

July 2000



Quill good reading for journalists

By Ronna Austin
SPJ Secretary

Legislative session sees open record changes

By Diana Baldwin
SPJ board member

Mark Thomas, executive vice president of the Oklahoma Press Association, spent a great deal of time during the recent 2000 legislative session monitoring the session as well as lobbying for certain bills on behalf of all Oklahoma journalists.

Below is a listing of those bills and the changes affecting Oklahoma's openness law as passed at the close of the 2000 Legislative session.

•SB 1451 — An act relating to criminal procedure related to deferral of prosecutions, signed by the governor June 1, requires release of information to the public which relates to

deferred prosecution agreements, providing for open hearing upon termination of a deferred prosecution agreement, modifying application of certain provisions relating to release of certain information and clarifying application of criminal penalty for release of certain confidential information.

•HB 2028 — An act, signed by the governor on April 28, which allows the State Board of Vocational and Technical Education to hold meetings by teleconferencing, provided there is a quorum, providing an effective date and declaring an emergency. Teleconferencing still is not allowed for local Board of Vocational and Technical

Education meetings.

•HB 2552 — An act relating to sex offenders, signed by the governor on June 28, relating to the Department of Corrections and law enforcement records, removing restriction for making sex offender information available.

•SB 1164 — An act relating to state government, signed by the governor April 14, which relates to requests for information from the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, making records of certain laboratory services confidential.

•HB 2336 — An act relating to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, signed by

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NEXT Board Meeting, July 14

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 noon, July 14, at the OPA board meeting room located at 3601 N. Lincoln in Oklahoma City.

Bring a brown-bag lunch including a drink and join fellow journalists.

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

The June issue of Quill issued a wake-up call to all SPJ chapters in the story "McKerral has the cure for chapter illnesses."

Bravo!

The Oklahoma Pro chapter needs that call desperately.

If the number of newsletters sent out in the last two months is any indication, membership has sharply declined.

If the turnout for board meetings in the past several months is any indication, interest in SPJ has also sharply declined.

The bottom line is: without people and without interest, there is no real SPJ.

There is only a name backed by a few people doing as much as they can to keep a fire alive that is burning out fast.

Our chapter is ailing and needs immediate attention.

It needs a team of specialists — its members! Help!

Unruly journalists turn out creative copy

By Sue Hinton
OCCC

Washington Post feature writer Hank Stuever sat on the table in front of the room, swinging his legs. He launched into an irrelevant list of do's and don'ts for serious writers at a Sunday morning session of the National Writer's Workshop in Austin.

Before you leave an interview, Stuever said, always ask to use the bathroom — even if you don't have to go. It gives you a quiet moment to collect your thoughts and your source a chance to remember a new point of information.

For the benefit of his audience of about 100, Stuever supplemented his remarks with a two-page fluorescent-green hand-out.

A native Oklahoman and graduate of Bishop McGuinness High School, Stuever wrote a Pulitzer-Prize finalist story about returning to Oklahoma City shortly after the bombing of the federal building in 1995.

Among others, Stuever talked to his grandfather, who had heard, and felt, the blast from a few blocks away. Stuever's story was published in the Albuquerque Tribune, where he worked at the time.

"In the newspaper business, you should meet at least one person every day that you have a serious conversation with."

—Hank Stuever

As a footnote to Oklahoma journalism, Stuever was the first recipient of a journalism scholarship to McGuinness given in honor of Chris Rusche, a Daily Oklahoman editor who died in 1983.

Stuever's first admonition was all too familiar, yet writers tend to forget it while laboring away in their corporate routines: Choose your own path.

Doing that, Stuever admitted, requires some strategy and maybe a little subterfuge to get around news room traffic cops. A crowd of nodding heads indicated a knowing "amen."

So Stuever offered some tips on how writers can elbow their way into a little breathing room to work on their own story ideas.

A reporter for the Austin American-Statesman before joining the Post's Style section, Stuever explained his tactics in the hope that others would find their way.

First, he said, a writer must have his or her "secret work," stories being pursued without the editor's knowledge or permission.

"Good newspapers are driven by people who disobey," Stuever said. He also warned his listeners that the better story idea will almost always mean unplanned, unpaid overtime.

Always keep a list of 100 story ideas in your desk, at least 99 of which should be better than anything your editor might suggest. As more and more of the secret projects make it into print, the writer will

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gain more latitude in story choices.

Writers need to know themselves and know why they're writing a story in order to do their best. Stuever said he keeps a list of topics on his self-defined "beat," and updates the list about every six months. On his list are stories about sofas costing less than \$800.

On the opposite side, Stuever maintains a list of topics NOT on his beat, including couches that cost more than \$5,000. He said at least three reporters in his department had claim to that area.

On his beat: empty buildings of no historical value, people whose main television set was made before 1983, people who are lonely, unphotogenic living rooms, false cities such as airports and malls, low-brow art, parties that might end in a fight, spare freezers in people's garages.

Off his beat: stories that have potential as television movies, the deliberately wacky, the newest stuff, the government is messed up, sports, political campaigns, animal euthanasia.

Stuever recommended that writers identify topics that scare them, then pursue those topics — a kind of face-your-demons philosophy.

Every good writer, he



said, is haunted by self doubt.

He also admonished fellow journalists to get off the phone, away from their computers and out the door — into the world where their subjects live and work and play. When you get there (wherever it is), Stuever said, first find a woman over 60.

"She'll show you around and make everyone else talk to you. She also knows everybody's name."

Then listen to people.

"In the newspaper business, you should meet at least one person every day that you have a serious conversation with."

Listen and wait. Then wait 10 more minutes. Listen without limits.

A final thought: "Reporters who get the facts wrong usually don't get to write stories in new, exciting ways."

Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy. Has anyone mentioned that before?

**Get involved! Visit
[www.geocities.com/
oklahomaspj](http://www.geocities.com/oklahomaspj) to find
out how!**

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From the President



By *Jim Campbell*
SPJ president

Watchdog role crucial

It's up to the media to remind them in these circumstances. Mark Thomas, executive vice president of the Oklahoma Press Association, who watches bills affecting the newspaper industry and open government in general, briefed his members at their summer conference on the legislative session ending May 26.

A major victory was the SB 1451, requiring deferred prosecution deals cut after July to be open records.

Other bills affecting open records in the 2000 session included sexual assault, sex offenders, insurance, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation and tourism. In the next session, Thomas expects big issues to be legal notices on the Internet, teleconferencing, juvenile crime and privacy.

Legislation proposed in the last session would

have allowed some boards to meet electronically, rather than in person where a reporter might be present for an eyeball account of interaction between the members.

Sen. Ben Robinson, D-Muskogee, said he was only thinking of making it easier to get good people to serve by making travel and time away from their jobs less burdensome.

Meanwhile, Cherokee Nation legislators last month tabled a vote on a proposal to establish a free and independent press, even though the publication would remain funded by the tribe.

The Cherokees established the nation's first Indian newspaper in 1828. Its history since that time has been marked by conflict between press and politics. The first editor was slain.

Chief Chad Smith welcomed the proposal.

The perils of secrecy among government officials are demonstrated again and again, most recently in the ongoing scandal at the state Health Department.

These dangers fortify SPJ's commitment to opposing any rules or legislation that make it easier for government officials to avoid scrutiny.

Potentially dangers provisions pop up like dandelions during sessions of the Legislature. Sometimes the outcome is intended. But there also are times lawmakers don't realize the potential consequences of measures they propose.

Annual SPJ contest draws near

By *Kim Morava*
SPJ vice president

It's time to start dusting off the newsprint, mounting exceptional photographs and searching out other potential contest entries as the Oklahoma Pro chapter of SPJ gets its 1999-2000 Annual Awards contest under way later this month.

With several new categories in the radio, television, magazine and newspaper divisions, there are more opportunities to enter the contest.

A new website category will also be included as the contest expands to recognize all avenues of the journalism field.

We will soon begin the process of accumulating mailing labels from area organizations so we can mail contest brochures.

Brochures will be mailed out in a few weeks so if you know of a group that should be included, be sure to pass on the information so they can be contacted. All SPJ members will receive a brochure.

Those wishing to ensure their names or their organization members' mailing labels are acquired for the contest brochure can e-mail contest coordinators Kim Morava at kmorava@news-star.com or Ronna Austin at raustin@okc.cc.ok.us

Deadlines have been moved up this year to al-

low more time for judging during holiday months.

Deadline for entries with a \$10 entry fee will be Sept. 12. Late entries will be accepted until Oct. 1, if accompanied by an additional \$5 late fee per entry. All entries must have been produced or published between July 1, 1999 and June 30, 2000.

For the first time ever, information about the annual contest will be available on the Oklahoma SPJ website at: www.geocities.com/oklahomaspj

Look for that feature as well as a brochure that can be printed from the website soon.

Let's all work together to make this year's contest the best yet!

Journalists to benefit from changes

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the governor June 1, designating the bureau to be the official agency to maintain and sell fingerprint-based criminal histories and reduced the price from \$35 to \$19.

•HB 2428 — An act relating to officers, signed by the governor May 24, makes any information obtained at the local level on police officers that is confidential will remain confidential once the information is shared with the Council on Law Enforcement Education.

•SB 1524 — An Act relating to tourism and recreation, signed by the governor April 14, makes photographs, film recordings, video recordings, sound recordings, and digital records of the same

nature produced by or for the division available for public inspection during business hours and tourism officials cannot sell film recordings owned by an independent contractor and in the possession of the tourism department.

Curious about the status of a bill? Visit the legislative website:

www.lsb.state.ok.us/

Once there, use the menu on the left side of the page to choose “Bill Tracking.”

Another menu, to the left side of the page, gives several options such as: “bill tracking reports,” “selected step,” “conference,” and “help.”

Happy surfing!



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 has 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.

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!



Society of Professional Journalists

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NEXT SPJ MEETING: NOON, JULY 10, AT OPA, 3501 N. LINCOLN BLVD.