



THE Source

Society of Professional Journalists
Oklahoma Pro Chapter

March 2001

Journalists recognized at SPJ awards banquet

By **Kim Morava**
SPJ Vice President

The Oklahoma Professional chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists recognized the state's top journalists at its annual awards banquet Saturday, Feb. 24.

Held at Embassy Suites Hotel in Oklahoma City, the banquet followed a contest period that drew nearly 700 entries. The entries were judged by three out-of-state SPJ chapters.

Awards in newspaper, television, radio, magazines, websites and public relations were presented. Award presenters were Susan Ellerbach, managing editor, *The Tulsa World*; Dr. Terry Clark, University of Central Okla-

homa; and Jack Lancaster, adviser for *The Daily O'Collegian*, Oklahoma State University.

A Lifetime Achievement Award and First Amendment award also were presented.

Ken Neal of the *Tulsa World* captured the chapter's Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by former co-worker and SPJ board member Scott Cooper.

Neal began his newspaper career in 1953, while still in high school, working as a copy boy at the *Tulsa World*. During his years with the *World*, Neal has held most of the reporting assignments there, as well as the positions of state editor, assistant city editor, political editor, and business and finance editor.

Neal is editorial pages editor, a post he assumed in April 1994, after 18 years as an editorial writer and associate editor of the newspaper. He presides over the editorial board which sets editorial policy for the *Tulsa World*.

Neal was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 1991. He has served as a visiting professor of Northwestern State University since 1990.

First Amendment honors went to four state journalism organizations for their collaborated efforts to expose open record access problems in Oklahoma.

The combined efforts of Freedom of Informa-

See "Awards," p. 4

NEXT Board Meeting, April 13

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, April 13 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!



Inside this issue

By **Ronna Austin**
SPJ Secretary

Like last year at this time, this month's newsletter is larger than usual.

That's because the last few months have been busy ones for SPJ.

The SPJ awards banquet, held Feb. 24, was the biggest yet! Congratulations to the winners and special award recipients.

You'll find several pages of this newsletter devoted to those people.

The SPJ job fair, held at the University of Oklahoma, was also a great success. Readers will find updates on that event too.

Two new board members have been added to the pro chapter. Look for a highlight on them.

Readers will also find the monthly president's column which always offers helpful advice and information.

Professionals offer students sound advice

By **Michele Schweitzer**
OKCCC Student

On March 2, a panel of recent journalism graduates and metro newspaper editors explained in detail the demands and rewards of working in journalism.

Anthony Thornton, Daily Oklahoman state editor; Wayne Greene, city editor for the Tulsa World; Seth Prince, OU grad and copy editor at The Oregonian; Andrea Eger, also a graduate of OU and public schools reporter for the Tulsa World; and Nate Billings, OSU senior and Daily Oklahoman staff photographer, made up the panel.

The panel discussion, sponsored by the Oklahoma Pro chapter of SPJ, was held in the Frontier Room in the student union at the University of Oklahoma.

An audience of about 50 asked the panel a series of questions in regard to how to land a job with a metro newspaper.

The panel responded by providing, in great detail, their experiences of the hard work and demands involved working in the journalism field.

Eger, Billings and Prince all agreed that working hard and doing more than is asked is key to making it with a metro newspaper.

"Work hard and make a name for yourself," Prince said.

Billings added, "You can never have enough clips."

When asked the question, "Did anyone help you get where you are today?" the panel all agreed that journalists create their own breaks.

The keys to success, they

agreed, are to be willing to put in long hours and to keep in mind, that nothing is beneath you.

Greene said he feels like professors often prepare journalists for the wrong job.

"Grads need to understand that when they are hired, they will more than likely get entry-level jobs — writing obituaries or the police beat.

"Grads are also lacking in math skills," he said.

Eger said students should take advantage of their elective classes.

"Political science courses are a great help in the legal aspects of journalism for such things like the courts and political offices," she said.

Panelists also answered inquiries about the difference between internships and actual jobs.

Eger said, in her mind, there is no difference.

Billings said there is more responsibility with a metro job.

"When you're working for the school paper, you don't mind turning in so-so work," he said.

"[With] a metro paper, you have thousands counting on you to give your best."

After an hour and a half of questions and many responses, the panel had some last words to pass on to future journalists.

There are a lot of dues to pay. Be willing to pay them if you want to get anywhere. Check your ego at the door and be willing to work hard.

UCO success story shared

By **Amity Tillman**
OKCCC Student

Spelling "definitely" correctly was definitely one of Kelly Crow's toughest barriers to overcome, she told a roomful of aspiring journalists who attended the recent SPJ job and internship fair.

"If you can stomach the long hours, then it is well worth it."

—Kelly Crow
N.Y. Times
Reporter

The Edmond native and University of Central Oklahoma grad was the keynote speaker. Crow now resides in New York where she is a writer for the New York Times. At 23, she has already achieved status as a reporter for The City, a weekly section that appears in the Sunday edition of the Times.

Crow gave an inspiring and helpful speech to those who seek to be successful journalists. Among the advice given was to write stories you think no one else is working on and to empathize with the people you interview. She said the best stories come from those who see you as a genuine person.

Though Crow is where she wants to be, she didn't just jump into the position overnight.

She said she started her career by writing for smaller newspapers such as The Edmond Sun and for Oklahoma Today magazine before her current stint at the Times. She landed the position while attending Columbia University graduate school in New York.

Crow has no plans to pursue any other career. She said she often thinks to herself that not many people go to work and have as much fun as she does.

"If you can stomach the long hours, then it is well worth it."

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From the President

Journalistic freedom bears protecting



By **Mark Hanebutt**
SPJ president

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

Unfortunately, the important word in that sentence isn't "vigilance." It's "eternal" — a fact we are reminded of daily.

Most of the time, the attacks on our freedoms are secret and subtle. Even journalists miss them. Case in point: H.R. 4392, the "Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001."

Never heard of it? You should have. Had it passed, journalists likely would have found the number of their confidential sources decreasing.

Fortunately, as one of his last executive actions, President Bill Clinton vetoed the bill because, as

he put it, "of one badly flawed provision in the proposed law that would have made a felony of unauthorized disclosures of classified information."

Section 303 of the bill incorporated the provision from the Senate version of the legislation. The provision — inserted into the Senate version by Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala. — made unauthorized disclosure of classified information punishable by fine or imprisonment for up to three years.

Clinton agreed that the problem of intelligence leaks is a serious one.

"Those who disclose classified information inappropriately thus commit a gross breach of the public trust and may recklessly put our national security at risk," he said.

"To the extent that existing sanctions have proven insufficient to address and deter unauthorized disclosures, they should be strengthened. What is in dispute is not the gravity of the problem, but the best way to respond to it."

He then quoted U.S.

Supreme Court Justice Stewart's reasoning from the Pentagon Papers case, *New York Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713 (1971), stating that "the only effective restraint upon executive policy in the areas of national defense and international affairs may lie in an enlightened citizenry -- in an informed and critical public opinion which alone can here protect the values of democratic government."

Added Clinton, "We must always tread carefully when considering measures that may limit public discussion — even when those measures are intended to achieve laudable, indeed necessary, goals."

We now have a new man sitting in the Oval Office. How would he respond to the same bill if it landed on his desk? Chances are good that we'll find out. No doubt a similar version of the provision will reappear in some other form or on some other bill.

Let's hope we see the next one earlier than we saw the last one.

SPJ welcomes latest board members

By **Ronna Austin**
SPJ Secretary

A recent amendment to the by-laws of the Oklahoma Pro chapter SPJ increased the number of board members from nine to 11.

Shana Hawk, reporter for the Shawnee News-Star, and Scott Cooper, reporter for the Daily Oklahoman, have filled

the added positions.

Hawk, a graduate of the University of Oklahoma, has been on the staff of the News-Star for three years.

"Though newly appointed to the SPJ board, I have become acquainted with fellow journalists and feel like I have the opportunity to make a difference in this profession through a great organization."

Cooper recently joined

the staff of the Oklahoman after seven years on the education beat at The Tulsa World. He graduated from OU with a bachelor's in journalism in 1992.

"Serving on the board has given me a chance to be more involved in a profession I dearly love and to become more of an advocate for journalism beyond just being employed in the profession."

Journalists take honors at annual SPJ banquet

"Awards," cont. from p. 1

tion Oklahoma, Inc., the Oklahoma Press Association, The Daily Oklahoman and Tulsa World resulted in a comprehensive analysis of open records in Oklahoma's 77 counties. The project included compliance surveys with tests administered by sending student interns, a member of the public, and letters to make open records requests.

Results of the efforts were released to state newspapers Aug. 31.

SPJ president Mark Hanebutt presented the First Amendment awards.

The following list includes winners in all categories. Judges did not award a first place in every category.

Division A newspapers are those with circulations of 18,000 or more.

Division B newspapers have a 7,000 to 17,999 circulation while Division C is for newspapers with less than 7,000 circulation.

Newspaper Division A

Investigative/individual: Ziva Branstetter, Tulsa World, first and third place; John Parker, The Oklahoman, second.

Investigative/team: Diana Baldwin, Randy Ellis, Penny Owen and Robby Trammell, The Oklahoman, first; Barbara Ho-berock and Ziva Branstetter, Tulsa World, second; Donna Hales and Angie Vega, Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat, third.

Enterprise/individual: Michael Overall, Tulsa World, first; Tom Lindley, The Oklahoman, second; Bobby Ross Jr., The Oklahoman, third; Lisa Tatum,

The Oklahoman, honorable mention.

Enterprise/team: Oklahoman staff writers, first; Mark Hutchison and Griff Palmer, The Oklahoman, second; Brandon Beard and Shelly Hickman, The Oklahoma Gazette, third; Tulsa World news staff, honorable mention.

Political/governmental: John Parker, The Oklahoman, first; John Greiner, The Oklahoman, second; Jim Myers and Shaun Schafer, Tulsa World, third; Donna Hales and Angie Vega, Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat, honorable mention.

Spot news: Oklahoman staff writers, first; Scott Cooper and Michael Smith, Tulsa World, second; Ken Raymond, The Oklahoman, third.

Feature writing: Brandon Beard, The Oklahoma Gazette, first; Shelly Hickman, The Gazette, second; Bobby Ross Jr., The Oklahoman, third; Jay Grelen, The Oklahoman, honorable mention.

Personal Column: Joe Patrick Bean, Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat, first; Jay Grelen, The Oklahoman, second; Julie DelCour, Tulsa World, third.

Editorial/Commentary: Joe Patrick Bean, Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat, first and second place; Patrick B. McGuigan, The Oklahoman, third.

General reporting: Tom Lindley, The Oklahoman, first; Michael Overall, Tulsa World, second; Scott Cooper and Rod Walton, Tulsa World, third; Bobby Ross Jr., The Oklahoman, honorable mention.

General team reporting: Oklahoman staff writers,

first and second place awards; Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat staff writers, third.

Special projects: Oklahoman staff writers, first; Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat staff writers, second and third place awards.

Police and crime: Bob Doucette, The Oklahoman, first and third place; Andrea Eger, Tulsa World, second place; Nicole Marshall, Tulsa World, honorable mention.

Education: Griff Palmer and Bobby Ross Jr., The Oklahoman, first; Christy

Watson, The Oklahoman, second; Susan Bosch and Donna Hales, Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat, third; Ashley Parrish, Tulsa World, honorable mention.

Business/general: Sonya Colberg, Tulsa World, first; Mike Strain, The Oklahoman, second; Russell Ray, Tulsa World.

Business/feature: Sonya Colberg, Tulsa World, first and honorable mention awards; Russell Ray, Tulsa World, second; Tamie Ross, The Oklahoman, third.

Entertainment/feature: Rick Rogers, The Oklahoman, first; Penny Owen, The Oklahoman, second; Elizabeth Lowry, The Oklahoma Gazette, third; Dennis King, Tulsa World, honorable mention; John Wooley, Tulsa World, honorable mention.

Entertainment review: James D. Watts Jr., Tulsa World, first; Gene Triplett, The Oklahoman, second; Dennis King, Tulsa World, third; and Rick Rogers, The Oklahoman, honorable mention.

Sports/general news: John Helsley, The Okla-

man, first; Phillip Baeza and Mike Koehler, Muskogee Phoenix and Times-Democrat, second; Dan O'Kane, Tulsa World, third.

Sports/feature: Jenni Carlson, The Oklahoman, first; Bill Haisten, Tulsa World, second; Mick Cornett, Oklahoma Gazette, third; Berry Tramel, The Oklahoman, honorable mention.

Sports column: Berry Tramel, The Oklahoman, first; Jimmie Tramel, Tulsa World, second; Jenni Carlson, The Oklahoman, third.

News page layout: John Walblay, Tulsa World, first; Leif M. Wright, Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat, second; Jennifer Chancellor, Tulsa World, third.

Feature Page layout: Phill Spiker, Tulsa World, first and second place awards; Jennifer Chancellor, Tulsa World, third place; Tim Parks, The Oklahoman, third place.

Headlines: Rusty Lang, Tulsa World, first; Sharon Baldwin, Tulsa World, second and honorable mention awards; Graham Underwood, The Oklahoman, third.

Feature photography: Steve Sisney, The Oklahoman, first; Paul Hellstern, The Oklahoman, second; Stephen Holman, Tulsa World, third; Kelly Kerr, Tulsa World, honorable mention.

Sports photography: Bryan Terry, The Oklahoman, first; Daryl Wilson, Tulsa World, second; Doug Hoke, The Oklahoman, third; Stephen Holman, Tulsa World, honorable mention.

General photography:

See "Winners," p. 5



Local journalism chapter names award recipients

"Winners," cont. from p. 4

Tom Gilbert, Tulsa World, first; Stephen Holman, Tulsa World, second; Nate Billings, The Oklahoman, third; David Crenshaw, Tulsa World, honorable mention.

Story/photo essay: Steve Sisney, The Oklahoman, first; David McDaniel, The Oklahoman, second; Paul B. Southerland, The Oklahoman, third; Roger Klock, The Oklahoman, honorable mention.

Spot news photography: Stephen Holman, Tulsa World, first and third place awards; Michael Wyke, Tulsa World, second.

Newspaper Division B

Investigative/individual: James Coburn, Edmond Sun, first; Justin Juozapavicius, The Daily O'Collegian, Oklahoma State University, second; Sarah Cavanah, The Oklahoma Daily, The University of Oklahoma, third.

Enterprise/individual: James Coburn, Edmond Sun, first.

Enterprise/team: Justin Juozapavicius and Cary Aspinwall, The Daily O'Collegian, second place.

Spot news: Justin Juozapavicius and Quanah Leonard, The Daily O'Collegian, first.

Feature writing: Karen Green, The Shawnee News-Star, first.

Personal column: James Coburn, Edmond Sun, first; Peggy Stevens, The Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise, second.

Editorial/Commentary: Brandon Dutcher, Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, first and third place; Mike McCormick, The Shawnee News-Star, second.

General reporting: Justin Juozapavicius, The Daily O'Collegian, first.

General team reporting: April Marciszewski, Cary Aspinwall, Justin Juozapavicius, Josh Bozarth, Brittanie Hoofard, Mark Taliaferro, Josh Hinkle, The Daily O'Collegian, first.

Special projects: The Oklahoma Daily news staff, first; Nancy Cook-Senn and The Shawnee News-Star staff, second.

Police/crime reporting: Kimberly D. Morava, The Shawnee News-Star, second.

Education: Justin Juozapavicius, The Daily O'Collegian, first; Brandy McDonnell, Edmond Sun, second; Josh Bozarth, The Daily O'Collegian, third.

Business/feature: April Wilkerson, The Shawnee News-Star, third.

Entertainment/feature: Deborah Benjamin, The Oklahoma Daily, first; April Wilkerson, The Shawnee News-Star, second; Cary Aspinwall, The Daily O'Collegian, third.

Entertainment/review: George Zablolski, The Oklahoma Daily, first; Deborah Benjamin, The Oklahoma Daily, second and third place; April Wilkerson, The Shawnee News-Star, honorable mention.

Sports/general news: Josh Crutchmer, The Daily O'Collegian, honorable mention.

Sports/feature writing: Brad Collins, The Daily O'Collegian, first; Mark Taliaferro, The Daily O'Collegian, second.

Sports column: Josh Crutchmer, The Daily O'Collegian, first.

News page layout: Seth Prince, The Oklahoma Daily, first; Matt Clayton,

The Daily O'Collegian, second and third place.

Feature photography: Ed Blochowiak, The Shawnee News-Star, first; Paul Rutherford, The Daily O'Collegian, second.

Sports photography: Ed Blochowiak, The Shawnee News-Star, first.

Story/photo essay: Paul Rutherford, The Daily O'Collegian, first.

Newspaper Division C

Investigative/individual: Ray Lokey, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, first; N. David Owens, The Vista, University of Central Oklahoma, second.

Enterprise/individual: Jeff Holladay, McCurtain Daily Gazette, first.

Political/governmental: Michaela Marx, Oklahoma City Community College Pioneer, first; Jeff Holladay, McCurtain Daily Gazette, second.

Spot news: Mel Claunch, Lucas Oswalt, Keri Bradford, William Wright, The University of Tulsa Collegian, first; John A. Small, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, second.

Feature writing: Mary Anderson, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, first; William Wright, University of Tulsa Collegian, second; Jeff Holladay, McCurtain Daily Gazette, third.

Personal column: N. David Owens, The Vista, first; John A. Small, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, second; Kristen Maxwell, University of Tulsa Collegian, third; Andrea Eubanks, University of Tulsa Collegian, honorable mention.

Editorial/Commentary: Matt Elliott, University of Tulsa Collegian, first; David McCrary, University of Tulsa Collegian, second;

N. David Owens, The Vista, third; Vu A. Vu, Oklahoma City Community College Pioneer, honorable mention.

General reporting: Jeff Holladay, McCurtain Daily Gazette, first and third place; John A. Small, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, second.

General team reporting: John A. Small and Ray Lokey, Johnston County Capital Democrat, first; Bruce Willingham, Jim Williams, Jeff Holladay and Bob West, McCurtain Daily Gazette, second.

Police/crime: John A. Small, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, honorable mention.

Education: Keri Bradford, University of Tulsa Collegian, first.

Business/General: Jeff Holladay, McCurtain Daily Gazette, first and third place; John A. Small, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, second.

Business/feature: John A. Small, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, first.

Entertainment/feature: John A. Small, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, honorable mention.

Entertainment/review: William Wright, Univ. of Tulsa Collegian, first.

Sports/general news: Gerry Ratliff, Johnston County Capital Democrat, first.

Sports column: Gerry Ratliff, Johnston County Capital Democrat, first.

News page layout: Ray Lokey, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, first.

Feature page layout: Kathi Etherton, Oklahoma City Community College Pioneer, first.

Feature photography:

See "Recipients," p. 6



Television, PR, radio and magazine awards given

"Recipients," cont. from p. 5

Mary Anderson, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, first.

Sports photography: Pam Mason, Johnston County Capital-Democrat, second; Ryan Johnson, Oklahoma City Community College Pioneer, third.

Story/photo essay: Ryan Johnson, Oklahoma City Community College Pioneer, first.

Television Small Market.

Spot News: Sandi Craig, KCSU-TV, University of Central Oklahoma, first and second place awards.

Feature: Sandi Craig, KCSU-TV, first and second place awards.

Enterprise reporting: Sandi Craig, KCSU-TV, first place.

Television Large Market

Investigative: Mike Browning and John McCracken, OETA - The Oklahoma Network, first; Diane White, Heather Farris and Eric Labbe, KOTV, second.

Political/governmental: Cathy Tatom and Tony Emig, OETA - The Oklahoma Network, first and second place awards.

Spot news: KWTW News staff, first.

Special program/series or documentary: OETA Documentary Department staff, OETA - The Oklahoma Network, first; Outdoor Oklahoman, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, second; Mike Browning, Royal Aills and John McCracken, OETA - The Oklahoma Network, third; Scott Thompson and Grant Gerondale, KOTV, honorable mention.

Feature: Kim Jackson and John McCracken,

OETA - The Oklahoma Network, first; Scott Thompson and Catherine Curtin, KOTV, second; Gary Horcher and Mark Dawson, KWTW, third; Scott Thompson and Michael Woods, KOTV, honorable mention.

Sports reporting: OETA Documentary Department staff, OETA - The Oklahoma Network, first; Mike Browning and Royal Aills, OETA - The Oklahoma Network, second; KWTW News staff, third.

Sports feature: Scott Thompson and Grant Gerondale, KOTV, first.

Enterprise reporting: Robin Marsh, KWTW, first; Diane White, Heather Farris, Jason Walker, Michael Woods, KOTV, second; Marlo Brawer, KWTW, third.

Public service reporting: Robert Cohen and Heather Farris, KOTV, second.

General reporting: Scott Thompson and Steve Higgins, KOTV, first; Oscar Pea, Charlie Ritter and Paul Serrell, KOTV, second; Tony Emig and Cathy Tatom, OETA - The Oklahoma Network, third place.

Videography - Series/documentary: Rich Fuller and Paul Moore, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, first place.

Videography - Feature/general news: Ken Kilbourn, KWTW, first place.

Videography - Sports: Mark Dawson, KWTW, first place.

Radio/Small Market

Series/documentary: Kelly Burley, KOSU-FM, first; Carrie Hulsey, KOSU-FM, second.

Sports feature: Kyle Enevoldsen, KOSU-FM,

second place.

Political/governmental: Chris Newbold, KOSU-FM, first and second place.

Radio/Large Market

Sports reporting: Mick Cornett, WWLS - Sports Animal, honorable mention.

Public Relations/ Non-Profit

Newsletter: Sherry Kast, Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, first; Cherie A. Cook and Stacy L. O'Daniel, Oklahoma Museums Association, second; M.J. Van Deventer, National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, third; Bobbi Legg and Susan Murray, Oklahoma Zoological Society, honorable mention.

Promotional Material: M.J. Van Deventer, National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, first; Charis Clinton and Becky Tallent, Epworth Villa, second; Ronnie Bloomfield, Chuck Coffey and Russell Stevens, The Noble Foundation, third; Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, honorable mention.

Annual Report: Child Abuse Response and Evaluation Center, first; Sherry Kast, Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, second; Sharon Burris and Noble Foundation Communications Department, third place.

Press release writing: Gerald Adams, Office of the Attorney General, first and second place; Terri Angier, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, third; Jo Kilgore, Seminole State College, honorable mention.

Public Relations/ Corporate

Newsletter: Seagate Technology, first.

Promotional Material: Pamela Gutel Vann and Dan Brooks, Logix Communications, first.

Press release writing: Laurie J. Foor, MainSite Gallery, first.

Magazines

Overall excellence: Tulsa World Entertainment Staff, first; Oklahoma Today, second place and honorable mention; Oklahoma Business Monthly, third place.

Feature writing: Oklahoma Today/Kelly Crow, first; Gretchen Mullen and Dayna Avery, Oklahoma Business Monthly, second; Missy Kruse, D.J. Morrow-Ingram, and Susan Everly-Douze, Tulsa-People magazine, third; Shay Rabineau, Sooner Yearbook, honorable mention.

Feature photography: Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, first; Oklahoma Today/Tom Luker, second; Terry Zinn, National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, third; Paul Dryden, Sooner Yearbook, honorable mention.

Website/graphics

Best website: Sherry Kast and Nancy English, Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, first; Scott McNeill, Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, second; Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, third; Laure Majors, Frankfort-Short-Bruza Associates, P.C., honorable mention.

The SPJ contest and awards banquet is a yearly event and fund-raiser for the local chapter.

Each year, contest entry forms are mailed in August and the awards banquet held in February.



Winning smiles...



Student SPJ members Ryan Johnson and Michaela Marx are all smiles at the annual SPJ awards banquet. Both were first-place award winners in the Division C Newspaper category.

**Check out the
Oklahoma SPJ chapter
online at:**

www.geocities.com/oklahomaspj

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- Link to other journalists•

VISIT TODAY!

When woman leaves fortune to strangers, local reporter has edge

By **Shana Hawk**
SPJ Board Member

Anne Katherine Abernathy didn't want her personal life splashed across the front page of the local newspaper.

"They know unfortunately I have notes. They will steal them legally from me, splash them and all other lies all over newspaper," she wrote in an Oct. 3, 1999, note.

But after rewriting her will to leave her \$1.6 million estate to the relatives of Elian Gonzalez and a Massachusetts family convicted of sex abuse, the story of the 57-year-old Shawnee woman who committed suicide in July made headlines, not only locally, but nationwide.

Probate squabbles don't often make news, but late last fall reporters from across the state and the country converged on Shawnee, Okla., to hear two days of testimony in the peculiar case.

When The Shawnee News-Star first broke the story, it wasn't that unusual. Abernathy, 57, died July 21, 2000, from a self-inflicted gunshot wound just hours after her mother, Katrine Abernathy, 91, died of natural causes in the home the two shared on a prestigious Shawnee street.

Then things got wild.

In a four-page handwritten revision to her will, Anne Abernathy seemed to delete 12 heirs from her will and divided her estate among the relatives of Elian Gonzalez "who treated him with such love," and Gerald Amirault and Cheryl Amirault LeFave of Massachu-

setts.

The Miami Herald called. The Associated Press called. Television crews rolled into town.

Abernathy's relatives protested the document, claiming she was incompetent at the time she wrote the relatives out of her will and included the two families that had made headlines on the other side of the country.

Relatives, neighbors and "expert" psychologists testified to Abernathy's belief that she was the object of a conspiracy on the part of her neighbors, the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Central Intelligence Agency, and was being persecuted by Nazis and Satanists.

As a local reporter, I had an edge over the other journalists covering the story. My office – only a block from the courthouse – was a lifesaver when getting the story to my editor by deadline (and sneaking in a few much needed caffeine breaks) while still sitting through two 14-hour days of testimony. Not to mention that I see Judge Glenn Dale Carter's secretary every day. She was able to give me heads up on any changes in the case, and the appeal that followed early this year and is still pending.

So why the stir?

High profile people.

Elian's Miami, Fla., relatives were thrust into the national spotlight during their battle to keep the Cuban boy in the United States after he was res-

See "**Abernathy**," p. 8

Strange behavior, conspiracy belief capture national attention

"Abernathy," cont. from p. 5

cued from a raft during an immigration attempt. The mother, daughter and son of the Amirault family were charged in 1984 with raping and assaulting children at a day care they ran.

Big bucks.

The Abernathy name is prominent in Shawnee. Anne Abernathy was the only child of a successful attorney and investor. Her estate is valued at more than \$1 million.

And, downright strange behavior.

Abernathy was said to have threatened neighbors, had severe outbursts with police and social workers and carried a

knife when she walked her dog. She so believed she was the victim of a conspiracy that she reportedly barricaded the house with plywood and ropes and would stand guard at night, shining spotlights into her neighbors' homes.

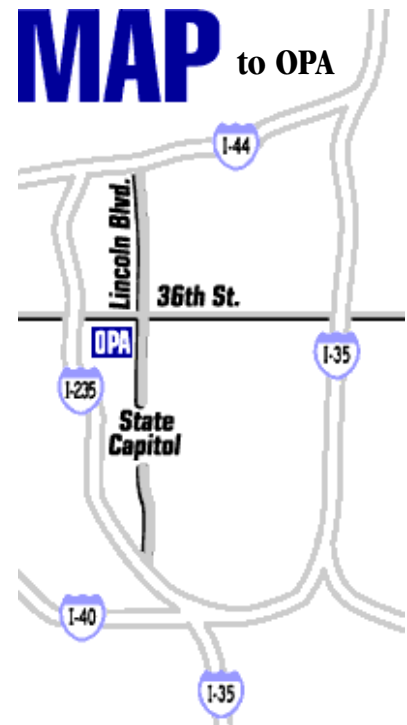
A safe deposit box opened during the first day of testimony contained "evidence" such as rocks, spiders, cigarette butts and water in plastic bags labeled with dates which Abernathy reportedly collected them in the belief that those items confirmed the existence of the conspiracy.

Unusual antics, big names and money, money, money all create an attention-grabbing story. And it ain't over yet.

This way to the next SPJ board meeting!

Follow these directions to the next SPJ meeting April 13 in the OPA board room.

Bring your lunch, your great ideas and invite your fellow journalists! See you there!



Society of Professional Journalists
Oklahoma Pro Chapter
860 Van Vleet Oval
Norman, OK 73019-2051

NEXT SPJ MEETING: NOON, APRIL 13, AT OPA, 3501 N. LINCOLN BLVD.