



THE Source

Society of Professional Journalists
Oklahoma Pro Chapter

November 2000



Editorial writers to answer public's questions in forum

By Mick Hinton
SPJ treasurer

Leading editorial writers for the state's two largest newspapers, The Daily Oklahoman, and the Tulsa World, will talk about how they decide what to write on the editorial pages concerning elections.

The Oklahoman's Patrick McGuigan and The World's David Averill will reflect on their coverage leading up to the Nov. 7 general election. Moderator will be Mark Thomas, executive director of the Oklahoma Press Association.

How do the newspapers pick letters to the editor supporting candidates? How do they decide which candidates to support?

Patrick McGuigan & David Averill
Editorial forum and Q&A

7:30 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 16,
The Oklahoman auditorium,
9000 N. Broadway, Oklahoma City

These and other questions will be addressed at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 16, in the auditorium of The Oklahoman, 9000 N. Broadway, Oklahoma City.

McGuigan, 46, has been with The Daily Oklahoman since 1990. He was chief editorial writer for five years and is now editor of the editorial page.

Averill, 55, has been with the World for 31 years and an editorial writer/opinion page columnist for 15 years. As a Sunday columnist,

he concentrates on education, politics, conservation and children's issues, including poverty, health and nutrition and housing.

A native of Kansas City, Averill graduated from Will Rogers High School in Tulsa and holds a bachelor of science degree in journalism from the University of Tulsa.

McGuigan graduated from Oklahoma State University with a bachelor's and master's

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NEXT Board Meeting, Nov. 10

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, Nov. 10, 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!

Contest entries en route

By Ronna Austin
SPJ Secretary

All SPJ contest entries are now in the hands of three out-of-state chapters for judging.

The record 668 entries were packed in three large boxes Oct. 27 and shipped to Utah, Pittsburg and Memphis SPJ chapters.

Kim Morava said the judged entries will be returned by Dec. 1.

Morava is SPJ vice president and contest coordinator.

"The chapters that are judging for us this year have reputations for doing great jobs," Morava said.

"Joel Campbell, who is well-known for his involvement in FOI, is one of the judges of the Utah chapter.

"The others are equally impressive," Morava said.

All contest entrants will be notified by mail in early January.

Found wallet leads to investigative search

By **Stan Ketterer**
Oklahoma State University
Assistant Professor
of Journalism & Broadcasting

John Catsis knows news when he hears it.

Catsis, an associate professor at OSU's School of Journalism and Broadcasting, was conducting an interview with Senior Project Manager Stephen McDonald about the renovation of Gallagher-Iba Arena when McDonald mentioned a worker had found a wallet.

McDonald, who works for prime contractor Manhattan Construction Co., said the wallet was found lying on some pipes about five feet above eye level in the arena's basement in April 1999. He said it apparently was lost 58 years earlier, about three years after the original arena opened in 1938.

Catsis immediately recognized the news value of the find and contemplated writing a feature story about it. The wallet was displayed on the wall of the construction trailer, and Catsis, a member of the broadcasting sequence who teaches a photography class at the school, took pictures of its contents.

This summer, Catsis' story about the wallet appeared in OSU Magazine. What it did not tell was how he, with help from some colleagues at the school, used "shoe leather" and computer-assisted reporting in his spare time to track down the owner. Here is the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say:

The wallet contained a

driver's license, auto registration and a draft card. The driver's license indicated the wallet's owner, Everett Shreck Sharp, was 23 years old at the time and lived at 520 Knoblock in Stillwater.

From the birth date on the driver's license, Catsis determined that Sharp was 82. Consequently, he first wanted to establish that Sharp was still alive.

Catsis consulted Assistant Professor Joey Senat, a former investigative reporter for the Tulsa World and Memphis Commercial Appeal who teaches media law and advanced reporting classes.

At Senat's suggestion, Catsis checked with state officials about a possible death certificate. Officials wanted a date of death in order to search for a possible certificate, but Catsis was in a Catch-22 position because he did not know if Sharp was dead.

In addition, Catsis talked to Assistant Professor Stan Ketterer, a former assistant city editor at the San Diego Union-Tribune who teaches computer-assisted reporting. Ketterer suggested that he check for an obituary in the Stillwater News-Press' online morgue and possibly its paper morgue. Catsis checked the morgue, along with area funeral homes, but did not find any mention of Sharp.

Undeterred, at Senat's suggestion, Catsis contacted Social Security officials to talk to them about death records. A Social Security official said he could only give out

information about Sharp if he were dead and noted he did not have any information about him. Catsis now knew that Sharp was likely alive, and he moved to the next phase of his quest.

Going back to the documents in the wallet, he checked state motor vehicle records but turned up nothing. In addition, he found a membership card for the Acacia Fraternity,

which once had a chapter at the time at Oklahoma A&M University, the precursor to OSU. This information

meant Sharp likely attended the university. Checking with the registrar's office, Catsis discovered Sharp received a bachelor of science degree from the School of Commerce in 1938. He also checked with the OSU Foundation to find out if Sharp had given money to the university, which he had not.

University records indicated Sharp was from Medford, Okla. Catsis and Ketterer searched a phone directory on the World Wide Web via the Oklahoma Web Resources site (www.cas.okstate.edu/jb/faculty/ketterer/index.htm) and found a listing for a different Sharp in Medford. Subsequently, Catsis called the number but the person who answered did not know Everett Sharp, and his number was not listed elsewhere in the state.

After the phone call, Ketterer suggested a search of Dow Jones In-

teractive, an online database available to OSU students and faculty. Some newsrooms also have access to the database. The search turned up a Kansas City Star obituary of Sharp's wife, Betty, who died in Richmond, Va., in 1993. She was born in Kansas City and had lived in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, and later nearby Prairie Village, Kansas, until she moved to Richmond. Sharp was listed as a survivor "of the home." His sons, Richard of Richmond and Philip of Woodbridge, Va., also were listed.

An online phone directory search of Richmond and also Virginia was unsuccessful. Consequently, Ketterer suggested that Catsis call the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Catsis called the paper and asked a reporter to check the local phone book. Bingo, a match.

Subsequently, Catsis called the number and found out Sharp was living at a nursing home. He talked to the superintendent of the nursing home and then Sharp's son Richard, 52, the chairman and chief executive officer of Circuit City stores. Richard confirmed that his father was the person who had lost the wallet.

Moreover, Richard filled in the details of Sharp's life since losing the wallet in Stillwater. Days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Navy and Betty, his new bride, drove him to San Francisco to begin his duty. He served in the ac-

See "Wallet," p. 3



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From the President



By **Mark Hanebutt**
SPJ president

Newspapers must earn trust

plagued leaders.

People turned to the newspapers for direction and answers. Immigrants needed newspapers to help them learn the new language and culture. Newspapers became an American Guidebook.

Today, the answers are more difficult and varied. Two world wars and an increase in education have created a more sophisticated, skeptical and cynical audience.

Polls tell us that citizens now often believe politicians more than the media — the watchdog role reversed.

All have filled more leisure time with more activities. Few people spend their evenings quietly listening to the radio or reading the newspaper.

Television has made the news more intrusive and invasive. TV crews that show up close and personal shots of victims crying on camera are considered insensitive and uncaring.

Television anchors who can't seem to report the news without adding a comment make us look like we're taking sides or unable to report things accurately and objectively.

Lastly, and perhaps most important, newspapers are often no longer the friends we once invited into our homes.

They sometimes appear more as unwelcome trespassers who stick their feet in the door and force their way inside, bringing with them all the world's problems and none of its solutions. For all its worth and promise, the newspaper has ceased to be indispensable to the citizen.

For the welfare of our profession, and our country, it's critical that we work to reverse this trend. With the Information Age upon us, the media, particularly newspapers, must again make themselves friends of the people and establish themselves as the central, authoritative, believable, and objective sifters of news that enable citizens to govern themselves effectively.

To that end, we must be sensitive, caring, objective, accurate in fact and context, and fearless against government and special interests.

We must again get to the place where fathers tell their daughters: "Ask The Sun. If you see it in The Sun, it's so."

In 1897, when little Virginia O'Hanlon wanted to know if there was a Santa Claus, she was told to write to The New York Sun.

"Ask The Sun," her father advised. "If you see it in The Sun, it's so."

That her father ducked such an important yet impossible question probably isn't all that surprising. That he left it to some unknown editorial writer is. At least, so it would seem to most readers today. Given the increase in libel suits and the general mistrust of the media, it's unlikely that any father would put such faith in a newspaper now.

Why?

Historically, when editorial writer Francis P. Church wrote his famous 'Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus' answer, the country was faced with inept and scandal-

Computer-aided search finds wallet's owner

"*Wallet*," cont. from p. 2

tive military until 1946 and attained the rank of lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve.

After leaving active service, he began a career with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and became the head of the federal crop insurance program in

1971. Sharp and his wife later retired to Shawnee Mission.

Sharp's other son, Phillip, who is retired after a career at Lockheed-Martin, lives in Woodbridge, Va.

Richard says his father is still a "pretty darn good ping-pong player" and following his trail sparked

the emotional ups and downs of a close ping-pong match. In the end, persistence paid off.

As for the wallet, it contained no money. But it has become part of the university's lore and will be displayed in Heritage Hall when the Athletic Center opens in December.

Editorial content of state's top newspapers to be discussed

"Editorial," cont. from p. 1

degree in history.

His articles have appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Washington Times, USA Today, Christian Science Monitor, Wall Street Journal, Manchester (NH) Union Leader and The Rothenberg Political Report.

He is the author of two books, "Ninth Justice: the Fight for Bork" (1990), with Dawn M. Weyrich, and "The Politics of Direct Democracy" (1985).

Averill's columns have won newswriting awards from the Society of Professional Journalists and Associated Press Managing Editors.

Before joining the editorial opinion pages, Averill was an education reporter,

Capitol bureau correspondent and political writer, entertainment editor, special projects writer and Sunday magazine editor.

A member of the American Political Science Association, McGuigan has participated frequently as a panelist or analyst at sessions of the Direct Democracy Research Group. He is also a member of the National Press Club, the Knights of Columbus, Phi Kappa Phi and the Tulsa Press Club.

He serves on the Board of Directors of The Education and Employment Ministry (TEEM), an inter-faith ministry assisting the unemployed and the under-employed in Oklahoma City.

In March 1998, he was inducted into TEEM's Hall

of Honor.

McGuigan in 1974 was co-founder of Birthright of Stillwater. He remains an active supporter of Birthchoice of Oklahoma City.

A product of Oklahoma City's Roman Catholic schools, McGuigan graduated from Bishop John Carroll grade school and Bishop McGuinness High School. He also attended Harding and Hawthorne public schools.

Averill supervised construction of a Habitat for Humanity house sponsored by the World and now serves on the board of Tulsa Habitat for Humanity. As a Habitat volunteer, Averill runs a weekly session at the group's Tulsa woodshop, where prospective Habitat

homeowners learn basic carpentry skills and complete practical projects.

Averill is currently president of the Tulsa Press Club and is a board member and past chairman of its Education and Charitable trust. He has been an author and performer of the Press Club's annual Gridiron Show for 25 years.

McGuigan has played leading roles in the Oklahoma City Gridiron including the character of Gov. Frank Keating.

McGuigan and his wife have four children. Averill's family includes his wife and two children.

**Check out the Oklahoma
SPJ chapter online at:
[www.geocities.com/
oklahomaspj](http://www.geocities.com/oklahomaspj)**



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