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National Association of Science Writers, Inc.

Winter 2010-11

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RECAP OF NASW
WORKSHOPS

NASW AND CASW CELEBRATE MILESTONE
ANNIVERSARIES

ScienceWriters™
EST. 1952

Winter 2010-11 ■ Vol. 60, No. 1

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Deadlines
Next Issue: Spring..... March 1, 2011
Summer ..... June 1, 2011
Fall ..... September 1, 2011
Winter..... December 1, 2011

On The Cover
Dragonfly by Michael C. Purdy; Computer Button © Ingram Publishing/SuperStock

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EST. 1934

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The Council for the Advancement of Science Writing provides financial support to NASW for the production of *ScienceWriters*.

ScienceWriters is printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper.

From The Editor

Sage advice from a mentor early in my career: Most people don't join professional associations early enough in their careers.

To that, let me add: You need to do more than just pay your dues and read the newsletter. Get involved!

On page 28 of this issue you'll find the names of more than 200 members who last year did exactly that by volunteering their time and talent to advance the goals of NASW by mentoring, financial oversight, award judging, grievance resolution, liaison with other writing groups, contributing to the magazine, professional workshop planning, website redesign, and governance.

Volunteers are stepping into established committees and roles or else taking the initiative to create new projects that benefit science writers. For example, Siri Carpenter and Jeanne Erdmann's website "The Open Notebook" (see story page 10).

And, take an extra moment to appreciate the stunning image gracing the cover of this issue. It was contributed by member Michael C. Purdy.

Well done, everyone!

Lynne Friedmann

In This Issue

NEWS

COLUMNS

FEATURES

FRIEDMANN COURTESY OF KEN JACQUES; YALE'S ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL COURTESY OF MICHAEL MARSLAND AND YALE UNIVERSITY; PAST PRESIDENTS PHOTO © 2010 MICHAEL J. TRAYNOR

ScienceWriters2010 Recap

Benefits in Connecting and Collaborating

ScienceWriters2010 (Nov. 6 to 10) took place at the Omni New Haven Hotel and Yale University, in New Haven. Below is a sampling of workshop session coverage as provided through a group blog set up for the meeting. Contributors are NASW graduate travel fellows and NASW freelance travel fellows. Read all the ScienceWriter2010 blogs at ***http://sciencewriters2010.blogspot.com/****.*

Maybe New Media Needs a New Metaphor

BY DAVID BERREBY

A couple of workshops about new media ("Experiments in New Media: Beautiful Failures and Startling Successes" and "Rebooting Science Journalism: Adapting to the New Media Landscape" convinced me that neither revolution nor evolution are the right metaphors for the impact of digital media.

A better model for what's happening in our profession is a forced migration. Old niches (like science beat reporter or science writer for magazines) are drying up, so we're stampeding into new media. Not because they're better than our old watering holes in print and radio and TV, but because we have no choice. More and more of us now find that only digital media give us access to the public. "Rebooting Science Journalism" panelists Emily Bell, Columbia Journalism School; and Bora Zivkovic, new director of *Scientific American*'s blogs, explained the situation with rather unnerving detachment: It's no longer the case in 2010 that people can expect to make a decent living as science journalists.

A shout out to past NASW presidents attending SW2010. Leadership dating from 1973 to the present.

Both also said that science journalism itself would keep thriving. How can this be? Essentially, it's because digital tools empower people to create good science journalism without getting paid. They can, like the award winning blogger Ed Yong, produce great blog posts about science in their off-hours, when not at their day jobs. Or, they can use social media to get once-passive readers to supply content for free.

For people used to traditional journalism, it's important not to be the kind of emigrant who refuses to learn the new language or otherwise adapt to a new country. We shouldn't, for example, nostalgically think of old media as a lost paradise. As one audience member noted, there are plenty of over-hasty stories, misunderstood concepts, and recycling of press releases in print and broadcast science journalism.

But another common migrant's error is to tell ourselves that everything about the new place is bright and beautiful and great, while the old country was awful. Yes, Zivkovic said, blogs read well because they're not constrained by the conventions of old journalistic forms. Yes, this stuff is fun, and there's nothing wrong with enjoying ourselves. "There's a huge value in doing things because they're fun," said Mark Coatney, a panelist in the Experiments in New Media session who is now the media evangelist for **tumblr.com**. Your own enjoyment is a good predictor of your audience's, he said.

Trouble is, no one knows how our new media environment will support good journalism about science. Standards of quality for online journalism don't exist (part of Emily Bell's new job at the Tow Center at Columbia Journalism School is to create these). There are things that old-media approaches could do—supply a travel budget to research a story, support a month's worth of real research before producing a word—that we don't see in "new media" tools of science journalism.

It's easy to caricature such reservations as what's-in-it-for-me self-interest, but I don't think that's fair. Our problem as our profession migrates *from* the old familiar niches is that we don't really know where we're going *to*. We're taking part in an ongoing media experiment. And the essence of an experiment, of course, is that the experimenter doesn't know how it ends.

FREELANCE DAVID BERREBY'S WORK HAS APPEARED IN *THE NEW YORKER*, *NATURE*, *SLATE*, *NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE*, *SMITHSONIAN*, AND THE HUFFINGTON POST.

Video for the Web

BY NIDHI SUBBARAMAN

Trigger happy? You're in luck. Christie Nicholson, video producer and contributor to *Scientific American*, says now is the best time to get involved with online video. People's TV and online video streaming are soon going to be one and the same, and web video is growing at a phenomenal pace.

Nicholson and Eric Olson, video and audio editor for Nature Publishing Group, ran a hands-on workshop on the basics of good video production. After a quick introduction to the basic equipment that a science writer-turned-producer would need, and tips on shooting and interviewing, volunteers from the audience played

Encore of the Science Cabaret

The New Haven Science Cabaret featured three terrific musical acts: 1) Singer-songwriter (and NASW member) Leo Kretzner, a molecular biologist who studies prostate cancer, is a guitarist and mountain dulcimer player extraordinaire; 2) a capella group The Chromatics, described as "NASA's most endearing merrymakers" (*The Washington Post*); and 3) guitarist/cancer researcher John Olson and his wife, classically trained soprano/recovering mathematician Gioia De Cari. Bravo!

(I Can't Get No) Climate Action

(to tune of "Satisfaction")
Lyrics by Leo Kretzner © 2010

I can't get no climate action,
I can't get no sane reaction
Cause I try, and I try, and I try, and I try
I can't get no…! I can't get no…!
When I'm driving in my car
    and that Rush comes on the radio,
Telling people more and more
    is manufactured misinformation
And trying to smear peoples' reputations
I can't get no! No, no, no
Hey, hey, hey! That's what I say!

I can't get no climate action,
It's all tied to that same addiction
Cause I try, and I try, and I try, and I try
I can't get no…! I can't get no…!
When I'm watching my TV
And a man comes on and tells me
    how deep those wells can be
He's billed as an expert
    of course he's employed
    by the oil and gas industry
I can't get no!! No, no, no!
Hey, hey, hey! That's what I say!

I can't get no climate action,
I can't reach certain politicians
Cause I try, and I try, and I try, and I try
I can't get no…! I can't get no…!
When I'm running around my place
And I'm turnin' off this
And I'm turnin' down that
And I'm dreaming 'bout cap and trade
(and I'm writin' to McConnell and Boehner)
But they tell me, "baby, baby come back,
Maybe next year,
can't you see we've got a deficit here??"
I can't get no!! No, no, no
Hey, hey, hey! That's what I say!

I can't get no…! No climate action…

(above) The Chromatics: "an astronomy class set to music" (*Sky & Telescope*). (right) The Olson/De Cari Duo.

Leo Kretzner studies DNA methylation and plays a mean dulcimer and guitar.

Coli in the Night

(to tune of "Strangers in the Night")
Lyrics by Karen Nazaretian © 2010

Coli in the night,
    their plasmids mating
Pili jammed up tight,
    they're conjugating
What a happy sight
    to see two bugs in love!
Take two Streptococci
    or some Shigellae,
Turn the lights down low,
    they'll link flagellae
And before you know,
    he'll be inside her genes!

On a Petri plate,
    two cultured lovers with their
    chromosomes embraced
Two bouncing bodies
    on a lonely agar sea,
    and it's clear to me
Love's more fun than staying at home
    and fondling your ribosome

Ever since that night
    they've been together
Never had a fight,
    they'll clone forever
Things turned out so right
    for coli in the night.

Doo-be doo-be do,
be doo-be doo-be…

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interviewer and producer. Here are some tips.

Action is key to telling an interesting visual story. Running, jumping, eating, biting. Nicholson's tip for judging good visuals: Is the image/video still interesting if you turn the sound off? Take this *New York Times* video of cuttlefish **http://bit.ly/192mY4**. See where the cuttlefish bites the scientist? That's good action. (It would have been neater still, Nicholson said, if they got the creature to bite Zimmer, too. More biting, it seems, is key.)

Take time to find characters who speak with emotion. If they talk with their hands, and with their face, that's a valuable bonus.

Pay attention to sound quality. You only get one shot at recording all your source matter, so keep your headphones on. Stay away from trucks and sirens. Keep out of the wind, and don't be afraid to stop your interview and start again until your sound quality is just super.

The New featured workshops, presentations, and

When shooting, make sure the person talking is well lit. Take your time. Avoid windows.

While interviewing, take a few questions to get the interviewee comfortable on camera (Olson says people usually get comfy after three questions). Ask them to repeat the questions in their answers. This makes stitching together the final video easier. And, don't forget to sound check!

When shooting additional footage (B-roll in production parlance) zoom slowly, pan slowly, almost twice as slowly as you're tempted to.

Finally, when editing, keep it short. Online videos these days typically run for about two minutes. Scripts for video and audio pieces are snappy too. Nicholson, who produces the "60-Second Mind" weekly podcast for *Scientific American*, said these one-minute pieces don't typically run longer than 200 words on a page.

Science writer Nidhi Subbaraman is a graduate student at MIT. She has a bachelor's degree in Biochemistry.

KRETZNER PHOTO © 2010 MICHAEL J. TRAYNOR; THE CHROMATICS © 1998-2011; OLSON DE CARI DUO COURTESY OF OLSONDECARIDUO.COM

Looking for a Story? Try a Spreadsheet.

BY VIRGINIA HUGHES

Last year, 14 stem cell biologists from outside the U.S. complained to journal editors that their papers were being sabotaged in the peer review process, resulting in delays or rejections. A provocative claim, but was it true?

Peter Aldhous, San Francisco Bureau Chief of *New Scientist*, got to the bottom of the story: Yes, in top journals, stem cell papers submitted by American researchers are published faster than are papers submitted by non-U.S. researchers. What's more, one researcher

Haven weekend receptions, award lots and lots of laughs.

—Shinya Yamanaka—gets cited far more often than anybody else. Aldhous discovered all this thanks to data visualization.

If I learned one thing at the data visualization session, it's this: Working with data can not only help journalists tell great stories, but *find* great stories.

Aldhous and fellow panelists—Eric Hand, a reporter at *Nature*, and David Harris, editor of *symmetry*—showed dozens of examples of the ways in which they have incorporated data sets (large and small) into their stories. Eric once used census data to map all of the outhouses in Arkansas. David helped his wife, a criminologist, tracked life events of prisoners.

Luckily, spotting interesting patterns in data is easier than you might think. The panelists mentioned several free and easy-to-use online tools for making infographics. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Tableau Public: Allows you to publish interactive data to the web—for free—and no programming skills required!
- Google Docs Motion Chart: Simple bubble-chart maker that allows you to look at date over time.
- Geocommons: Create and share interactive geographic data and maps.

Of course, putting together a clear and

The ScienceWriters2010 welcome reception was held at the Peabody Natural History Museum.

Who knew Nancy Shute wore a gas mask bra? Robert Lee Hotz is grateful.

Diane McGurgan and her timekeeper wine glass "gong."

(L to R) Dan Haney, Ron Winslow, Marilyn Marchione, Cris Russell, and Ben Patrusky at Vic Cohn Award presentation.

SIS Award Winners Christine Cosgrove and Susan Cohen with NASW president Nancy Shute

(L to R) Rob Irion, Amber Dance, and Lynne Friedmann following the Evert Clark/Seth Payne Award.

MUSEUM AND AWARD PHOTOS © 2010 MICHAEL J. TRAYNOR; MCGURGAN AND SHUTE/HOTZ PHOTOS COURTESY OF MERRY BRUNS

ScienceWriters2010 Travel Support

NASW and CASW were pleased to provide the following writers with travel support to the annual meeting. Congratulations to those selected, and thank you to everyone who applied.

NASW Freelance Travel Fellows
David Berreby
Marla Broadfoot
John Cannon
Jim Downing
Karen Frenkel
Virginia Hughes
Sara LaJeunesse
Alaina Levine
Roberta Kwok
Christine Mlot
Stephen Ornes
Janet Rae-Dupree
Kara Rogers
Beth Skwarecki
Dawn Stover
Renee Twombly
Cori Vanchieri
Emily Voigt
Marie Zhuikov

NASW Changing Times Travel Fellows
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Sandi Doughton
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Rebecca Kessler
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NASW Graduate Travel Fellows
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Anne Johnson
Allison MacLachlan
Madeline McCurry-Schmidt
Catherine Meyers
Sandeep Ravindran
Nidhi Subbaraman
Kirsten Traynor
Danielle Venton
Susan Young

CASW Traveling Fellows
Sally James
Nancy Atkinson

ScienceWriters2010 provides ample opportunity for practical jokes, punch lines, libations, reminiscing, networking, and camaraderie.

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compelling infographic takes skill. Eric's tips:

- Sometimes the best chart is no chart. If you can say it in words, say it.
- Keep it simple and in the service of the story. That is, avoid infoporn.
- Be fair. You can manipulate people with data just as easily as you can manipulate them with words.

Freelance Virginia Hughes writes for *Discover*, *Nature*; blogs for NOVA's Secret Life of Scientists and Engineers.

Discover and Engage Your Digital Audience

By Susan Young

The panel "Your Next Book Will be a Pixel: Navigating e-books and e-rights" emphasized the importance of engaging with your readers both before and after the publication process.

The real change in the digital revolution of book publishing, said Guy Gonzales, director of programming and business development, Digital Book World, is the ability to interact with your audience.

It's an incredible time for an author to get your work out there and build an audience, he said.

People have been talking about e-book revolution for so long that people can be pessimistic about its potential, said Brandon Badger, product manager for Google Books. "This is the moment." Prices are dropping on e-readers, people are adopting smart phones in droves, and e-book revenues are nearly doubling every year.

Nonfiction enhanced e-books, those with integrated audio or video, or extras (such as interviews), are a vibrant area, and nontraditional publishers are looking for that kind of content, said Gonzales. The potential for interactive visualization of data, especially with books on science, is the real opportunity of the growth of digital books, said Badger.

Digital books and their related content can ease the way authors interact with their audience. Take the example of Stephen Elliott's book *The Adderall Diaries*. Elliot developed an application for smart phones that features a chat room where readers can interact with the author and each other, said Gonzales.

It's becoming more important for authors to manage their own communities, said Jason Allen Ashlock, founder and principal of Moveable Type Literacy Group. "Find out who your audience is and find out how they will discover you," said Jason. Content may be king, but discoverability may be even more important, he said. He also pointed out that if authors can find out who their audience is early on, then they can speak more clearly to them.

One audience member attempting to make the transition into new, more interactive technologies asked if she needed to learn programming. Ashloft says no, writers just need the right partners. He advises looking for the agents and publishers educated enough to know what's possible for your digital publication.

But education doesn't hurt—as a writer, the more educated you are about interactive technologies, the better you will be at finding partners who can help you. Debbie Stier, formerly senior vice president, associate publisher, and director of Digital Publishing, HarperCollins, said that getting a device is worth the investment. "Be as informed as possible about trends that are happening," she said. "We all need to be thinking about [smart] phones as sensory devices."

Susan Young is a student in the UC Santa Cruz science writing program.

GRABMEIER/DEVITT PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNIFER CUTRARO; OTHER RECEPTION PHOTOS COURTESY OF MERRY BRUNS, CUTRARO/MCGURGAN PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF GRABMEIER

Online—It Pays to be Involved

by John Cannon

As science journalism moves increasingly to the web, writing and posting an article is just the beginning. Reader commentary that follows a post needs focused and immediate attention, especially early in a site's development. That was the consensus from discussion at this session on "Social Web and Online Commenting."

Tools such as site registration can halt detractors from the conversation before they ever get started and help weed out the spammers and trolls—commenters who fill their posts with insults and other types of harassment. But, says Teresa Hayden, community manager for BoingBoing, "Great conversations require real human beings." Hayden's pedigree in social media stretches back to the 1980s.

Near-real-time comments from insightful readers add a dimension to science blogs and online articles that isn't possible in print media. To develop that value in your website, Hayden says, find ways to motivate the best commenters.

Mathilde Piard points to a badge system used by The Huffington Post. Thoughtful contributors who frequently post about, say, foreign policy might be rewarded with a "Foreign Policy" badge that indicates their elevated standing in the community. Piard is the social media manager at Cox Media Group Digital.

By the same token, sussing out the system's abusers is also critical. Just as comments that drive the conversation add to a site's perceived value, spammers and trolls can degrade a site's image in a hurry, discouraging value-adding contributors from posting. Amos Zeeberg, managing editor for Discover Online, says that catching a nefarious comment early on can halt an ugly turn in the discussion.

Panelists agreed that as a site develops a following the community will begin to police itself, as contributors become stakeholders in generating thought-provoking discussions.

John Cannon is a journalist and science writer. His work has appeared in magazines and online news portals, and on public radio.

Can Scientists Paired With Rock Stars Improve Science Literacy?

by Karen A. Frenkel

Panelists tackling solutions to the collapse of science literacy and the collapse of science journalism differed radically on how to get the public interested in science and reading about it.

Co-moderator and new NASW President Nancy Shute kicked off the discussion by citing "depressing numbers" reflecting peoples' knowledge of science, like what an experiment is, or what a placebo is. Though excited that DNA no longer has to be described to many, they did not seem to know much else, she said. Given the level of knowledge, and that news online is linked to hits, she asked whether science could "sneak into the matrix," and answered her own question by saying "No."

Carolyn L. Funk, associate professor and director of the Commonwealth Poll, Virginia Commonwealth University, who consults for

SW2010 RECAP continued on page 33

Diane McGurgan Service Award winner Jennifer Cutraro shown with the award's namesake in New Haven.

Diane McGurgan Service Award Announced

Jennifer Cutraro has been awarded the 2010 Diane McGurgan Service Award in recognition of her extraordinary volunteer efforts on behalf of NASW. Since 2007, Cutraro, a Boston-based freelance writer, has managed NASW's intern fair, which connects student science writers with dozens of top-quality employers during the AAAS annual meeting. She recruits employers and handles countless inquiries from students, all with deft diplomacy and a winning smile. The intern fair is one of the most sought-after benefits of student membership, and Cutraro makes it all happen.

The announcement was made during the NASW membership business meeting on Nov. 6, in New Haven. According to Cutraro, receiving the honor from Nancy Shute was doubly gratifying. "Nancy was my mentor at a meeting way back when I was making my escape from the lab and just getting started in science writing," she said.

Award Background

In 2001, member Louis Lerner, who passed away in 2006, expressed a desire to show appreciation for then Executive Director Diane McGurgan and other members whose efforts on behalf of NASW go above and beyond the call of duty. He sent NASW an unsolicited check for $2,500 and left it up to the organization to decide how best to distribute the money to deserving members. McGurgan suggested the money be used to fund an annual service award of $500. The board agreed, accorded the first honor to McGurgan, and named the award after her. After initial funding was distributed, the NASW board voted to continue funding the annual award at the same $500 level. ■

NASW's 75th Anniversary

Celebrating the Past; Forging the Future

BY NANCY SHUTE

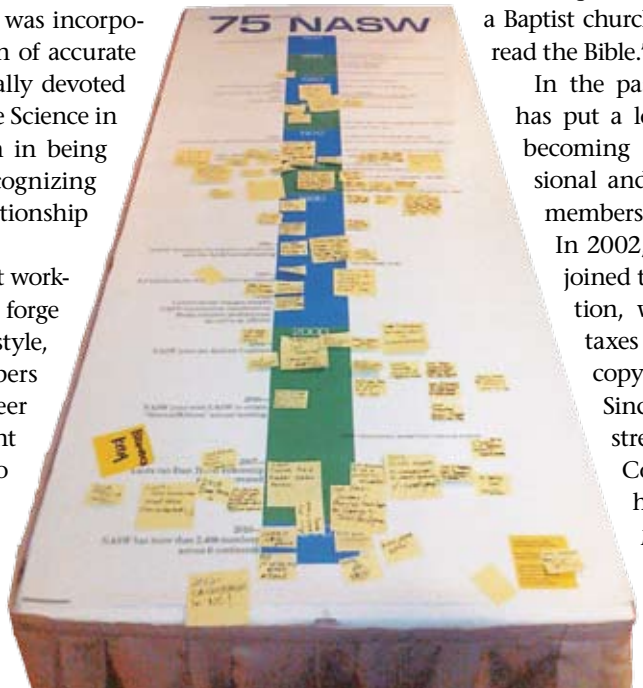
When 12 reporters decided back in 1934 that they'd gain more credibility with their sources if they had a professional association, I'm quite sure they weren't envisioning a future when members of the National Association of Science Writers would be editing websites, posting blogs, sharing news on Twitter and Facebook, adapting iPad text, and Skyping with sources. But I've got to think they'd be pleased.

Those guys were innovators, for their day. They had realized science writing is a specialty beat with its own problems and challenges, and that there was much benefit in connecting and collaborating. That's been true every year since.

Back then, NASW members were almost all staff writers for newspapers and magazines, and almost all guys. They would meet up at press conferences or at scientific society meetings, and somewhere between the drinks and the poker games, I'm sure they would talk about how they struggled to describe complex processes clearly and engagingly, and how they dealt with stonewalling government officials or obfuscating scientists.

My, how times have changed. NASW now has more freelance members than staff writers, nobody goes to press conferences any more, and it's really hard to find a good poker game at AAAS. But some things remain the same. Science writers still strive to draw clarity from complexity, and to improve their craft. Above all, we still fight for the free flow of science news.

(Above) The anniversary celebration revealed everything you always wanted to know about NASW. (Below) A 75-year timeline banner compiled by Sarah Webb, designed by Suzanne Dell'Orto, and embellished by attendees.



Bit by bit, NASW outgrew its informal beginnings. It was incorporated in 1955 with a charter to "foster the dissemination of accurate information regarding science through all media normally devoted to informing the public." In 1972, NASW inaugurated the Science in Society Awards. They are unique in science journalism in being awarded by science writers for science writers, and in recognizing science reporting that examines the often fraught relationship between science and the public.

In 1994, NASW launched its professional development workshop, aimed at helping members develop skills and forge connections to advance their careers. In typical NASW style, the workshop has always been a DIY project. Members propose sessions they'd like to organize, and a volunteer committee shapes and prunes the offerings into a tight program that ranges from hands-on skill-building to debates over the public's understanding of science. In 2005, the NASW board decided to pair with our sister organization, the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing, and produce a science writers' meeting that pairs professional development and briefings by leading researchers. November's ScienceWriters2010 drew more than 600 attendees to Yale, the largest meeting ever. In New Haven, we celebrated NASW's 75th, as well as CASW's 50th anniversary. We'll keep working at making ScienceWriters even more useful and inspiring, and to expand remote access for the many NASW members who can't attend in person.

How does one become a science writer? You could look it up. As issues in science, journalism, public affairs, and ethics became more complex, NASW members saw a need for a guide for teaching and learning effective science writing. So in 1997, NASW published *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, edited by Deborah Blum, Mary Knudson, and Robin Marantz Henig. The second edition, published in 2006, is almost entirely new, and is used around the world as a teaching text and deskside reference. One Amazon reviewer writes: "Doing science writing without reading this is like preaching in a Baptist church without having read the Bible."

In the past decade, NASW has put a lot of energy into becoming a more professional and financially solid membership organization. In 2002, the organization joined the Authors Coalition, which divvies up taxes levied on photocopying in Europe. Since then, a steady stream of Authors Coalition funding has helped NASW

NASW 75TH continued on page 33

NASW president Nancy Shute is a freelance writer.

NASW 75TH PHOTO © 2010 MICHAEL J. TRAYNOR; TABLE TIMELINE PHOTO COURTESY OF LYNNE FRIEDMANN; CASW 50TH PHOTO © 2010 MILES O'BRIEN

CASW Celebrates Golden Anniversary as Matchmaker to Journalists and Scientists

by Cristine Russell

Remember Belka and Strelka? Didn't think so. On August 19, 1960, these Russian dogs made news when they, along with 40 mice and two rats aboard Sputnik 5, became the first animals to go into orbit and return safely to Earth a day later. The Soviet-American space race was in full force then, and the next year astronauts would follow dogs into space. In 1960, the U.S. launched the first weather satellite, TIROS-1, and American astronomers began to search for signs of extraterrestrial intelligence. Use of the first laser provided a tool with vast applications. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's 1960 approval of the birth control pill ushered in a medical and cultural revolution. And genetics was a hot new field, as scientists probed the alphabet soup of chemicals involved in human inheritance.

With the spigot of science spilling out a steady flow of new information about inner and outer space, the tough task of making sense of all this was thrust upon a small, but growing, cadre of journalists charged with communicating science and technology to the public. But first they had to understand it themselves.

Panel at the CASW 50th anniversary dinner discuss the need for scientists to improve communication with the media, public, and policy makers. (L to R) Moderator Phil Boffey, New York Times; Nobelist Carol Greider; NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco; USGS Director Marsha McNutt; and Nobelist Harold Vermus.

The Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW) was born 50 years ago for just that purpose: to serve as an independent non-profit educational organization to demystify science by bringing scientists together with reporters, editors and writers; to facilitate access to and understanding of the most important new science and technology developments; and to promote best practices in communicating those findings and their significance to a wide audience.

CASW was the brainchild of a handful of pioneering print and television journalists who were members of the National Association of Science Writers, then just 25 years old itself. I tend to think of NASW and CASW as sister organizations, but in fact, it really started as a parent-child thing (or father-son, since they were largely guys). These early science writers were generally a self-taught bunch that learned their science on the job. But suddenly the world of science was speeding up and lots of new journalists were coming on board to cover everything from the space race to biomedical "breakthroughs" (a word science journalists tend to avoid).

Among CASW's inaugural efforts was the creation of its New Horizons in Science program, bringing in top experts in a host of disciplines to explain cutting-edge science to journalists. The first meeting was held in 1963 at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge.

Fast-forward to 2010. CASW, now 50, and NASW, now 75, are alive and thriving. In fact, we're needed more than ever at a time when our profession is struggling to meet the challenges of a 24/7 news cycle, a deluge of information, and falling economic fortunes that mean fewer staff jobs for specialty writers. For the last six years, both organizations have worked together on an annual meeting that brings together NASW's professional development workshops with CASW's New Horizons in Science briefings. Record attendance at ScienceWriters2010 at Yale University demonstrated the appeal of one-stop information shopping and networking at a meeting designed by science writers for science writers. The tools of yore have given way to Wi-Fi equipped computers and smart phones that allow instant communication via social media, and the crowd is happily getting younger (or at least younger-thinking).

But CASW's goals are still the same as those set back in 1960: good science writing is needed more than ever. At a time when the nation's growing anti-science mood has made science a political football, informed media coverage of controversies over climate change, evolution, stem cells, genetically modified foods, and childhood vaccines can influence the public outcome.

So how can we help new generations of journalists and communicators translate science, and its economic, legal, and social implications, to a public audience that has splintered? The challenge ahead is reaching out to a wider base—not just those who call themselves science writers but those who find themselves writing about science as they cover statehouse politics, business, consumer issues, local medical care, education and even weather and sports.

As we move forward, CASW's plan is to reach out to this broader group with new programs and online tools that will encourage and advance opportunities for better science writing. Our initiatives already include travel fellowships for journalists; stipends for graduate science journalism education; a prestigious annual medical science reporting prize in honor of one of our founders, the late Victor Cohn; and programs on science journalism for the scientific community.

It is here, I think, that we have seen the most change. At a recent CASW anniversary celebration, a panel of scientists, including

CASW continued on page 33

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Science Journalism: Too Close for Comfort

by Boyce Rensberger

Science journalism has undergone profound changes since its origin more than a century ago, some more radical than most journalists of today are aware. Although there are legitimate complaints that some current reporters are too close to their sources, or otherwise unable to deliver a disinterested analysis of the field, it is salutary to reflect on how far the profession has come since its beginning.

In the 1890s, there seem to have been no fulltime science journalists in either the United States or Britain, although there was one notable part-timer—H.G. Wells. When he wasn't writing science fiction, he penned newspaper articles on genuine scientific findings, arguing that there was a need for writers to translate scientists' jargon and use writing techniques to engage non-specialists. In an 1894 edition of *Nature*, Wells wrote of the need to employ what today is called narrative nonfiction: "The fundamental principles of construction that underlie such stories as Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue,' or Conan Doyle's 'Sherlock Holmes' series, are precisely those that should guide a scientific writer."

In 1904, Adolph Ochs, founder of the modern *New York Times*, hired the legendary Carr Van Anda as his managing editor. Van Anda may have been the most scientifically astute news executive of the twentieth century. He had studied astronomy and physics at university, wrote science stories, and encouraged his reporters to cover science. He stressed the need for accuracy: In an often-quoted anecdote, Van Anda corrected a mathematical error in a lecture of Albert Einstein's that the *New York Times* was about to print—after, of course, checking with Einstein.

> ***…science journalists at U.S. newspapers in the 1930s and 1940s believed that it was their job to persuade the public to accept science as the salvation of society.***

Unlike now, the work of most science reporters in those days consisted largely of translating jargon and explaining the statements of scientists and medical leaders. More than that, according to Bruce Lewenstein, a historian of science journalism at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., the handful of science journalists at U.S. newspapers in the 1930s and 1940s believed that it was their job to persuade the public to accept science as the salvation of society. This was a vestige of the Progressive Era in American history that spanned from the 1890s to the 1920s, in which intellectuals of all stripes believed that society was perfectible and that the wonders of science and technology would lead civilization towards this ideal.

To do this job, U.S. science reporters decided that they needed scientists to take them more seriously and thus created the National Association of Science Writers in 1934. They explicitly called themselves "writers" rather than "journalists" or "reporters" because they felt it sounded more professional. NASW members, all 12 of them, told scientists that they could feel safe talking to members because they belonged to an elite society. Scientists were advised not to talk to non-members, because those reporters were not "true science writers." Thus began what I call the "Gee-Whiz Age" of science reporting, in which the emphasis was on the wonders of science and respect for scientists, rather than on any analysis of the work being done or any anticipation of its effects on society.

In 1937, George W. Gray, who covered science for *TIME* magazine, wrote that science journalism should serve to make "the scientific method an integral part of popular education and through it a universal element of civilized thinking." When Gray won an award in 1949 from the American Association for the Advancement of Science, he gushed: "What counts most is the recognition from scientists themselves."

Throughout much of this period science reporters encouraged the mythos, as Lewenstein puts it, "that the proper relationship between scientist and science writers was one of trust and respect." One of the best examples of such trust and respect can be seen in science reporter William Laurence's coverage of the Manhattan project to develop the first atomic bomb.

Laurence wrote for the *New York Times* and was well known for his desire that the public appreciate science—so much so that the Pentagon invited him to be the only reporter privy to the project and the atomic bombing of Japan. He was, in effect, one of the first science journalists to be embedded within the military. As it happens, Laurence was also on the U.S. government's payroll, writing press releases about the bomb for President Harry S. Truman and the war department. Incredibly, Laurence's government job was not kept secret, nor did it seem to strike anyone as the massive conflict of interest that journalists today would see.

FRIENDLY FIRE

After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as rumors developed that people outside the blast area were becoming ill and dying, the war department held a press conference at the military base at Alamogordo in New Mexico. Laurence opened his resulting story this way: "This historic ground in New Mexico, scene of the first atomic explosion on earth and cradle of a new era in civilization, gave the most effective answer today to Japanese propaganda that radiations (sic) were responsible for deaths even after the day of the explosion." He wrote that the tour of Alamogordo would "give the lie to these claims." The journalism community felt that Laurence epitomized the best in science journalism: in 1946 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

In the 1950s, science journalists wrote often of their belief that the fact of scientific

Boyce Rensberger was director of the Knight Science Journalism Fellowship program at MIT from 1998 to 2008, and a science reporter for 32 years, chiefly at the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*.

FLATOW PHOTO COURTESY OF CARL FLATOW

discovery—the joy of science for its own sake—should be emphasized over the practical and social implications. NASW members would talk of how to make science journalism "more effective," by which they meant making it result in wider public appreciation of science, rather than making it a better watchdog of the field. It was this attitude, I believe, that led many news executives in those days to begin to distrust their own science and medical writers. After all, in every other part of the newsroom, reporters are valued for their disinterested, even aggressive stance towards the people they cover.

Cracks soon began to appear in science journalism's "Gee-Whiz" zeitgeist. In 1962, Rachel Carson published her book *Silent Spring*, highlighting the role of the pesticide DDT in weakening birds' eggshells and killing wildlife. But because pesticides had previously been reported as technological marvels, something the public should admire and accept, science journalists were conflicted. Some lambasted Carson's book as emotional and biased. Lawrence Lessing, who wrote for *TIME* and *Fortune* magazines, attacked her and said that the best science writing was a result of cooperation with the American Chemical Society and with "enlightened industries encouraging a better discourse between working scientists and science writers, to the benefit of the public." Yet Carson's work—and her view that industry claims should not be taken uncritically—helped to launch not just the environmentalist movement, but also the field of environmental reporting. These reporters were more willing to be critical of the work of scientists, especially those funded by industry.

Science journalism today: taking back its independence and exercising a new responsibility to the public.

The 1970s offered increasing evidence of technology's potentially adverse effects, in part owing to controversies and crises such as the reactor meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pa. By this time there was no way science journalists could ignore the societal and political implications of their topic. And so the next great age of science journalism began—the "Watchdog Age"—as science reporters became much more like their colleagues in other part of the newsroom.

PAPER TRAIL

The quantity of science journalism boomed too, starting with the birth of a science section in the *New York Times* in 1978. By the boom's peak in 1987, according to one count, some 147 newspapers had at least a weekly science page, and our new popular-science magazines had joined the venerable *Scientific American* and *Science News*. Sadly, this upturn was short-lived. By the late 1980s, the magazine upsurge was over—all new titles, none of which was ever profitable, died except for *Discover*, which still exists alongside the older titles. The number of newspaper science sections started to fall, eliminating all but the handful that survives today.

We are obviously now in the "Digital Age," and the very definition of journalism is changing in uncertain directions. Science journalism has moved from working for the glory of the scientific establishment to taking back its independence and exercising a new responsibility to the public. Now, traditional news outlets are withering, leaving many journalists to self-publish online with total independence and a direct connection to the public. But scientists too can use the web, bypassing journalists altogether and taking their science—and their agendas—directly to the public. It is becoming increasingly difficult for readers to tell which sources are disinterested and which have an axe to grind.

If science journalists are to regain relevance to society, not only must they master the new media, they must learn enough science to analyze and interpret the findings—including the motives of the funders. And, as if that were not enough, they must also anticipate the social impacts of potential new technologies while there is still time to make a difference. ■

"Science journalism: Too close for comfort," Nature *459, 1055-1056 (25 June 2009).*

NASW member Ira Flatow honored for outstanding contributions to science in the public interest.

Ira Flatow Lauded

Science journalist Ira Flatow, host of NPR's *Science Friday*, has been awarded the 2010 Nierenberg Prize for Science in the Public Interest.

Flatow currently hosts and produces National Public Radio's award-winning weekly talk program about science *Science Friday*, now in its 18th year. His numerous TV credits include six years as host and writer for the Emmy Award-winning *Newton's Apple* on PBS and as science reporter for CBS's *This Morning*.

Flatow received the award on Nov. 8 at a ceremony at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO). Underwritten by the Nierenberg family, the Nierenberg Prize , a bronze medal and a $25,000 check, was created to honor the memory of William A. Nierenberg, director of UC San Diego's SIO for 21 years.

This is the 10th awarding of the Nierenberg Prize. Previous recipients were: Harvard naturalist E.O. Wilson, newsman Walter Cronkite, marine ecologist Jane Lubchenco, primatologist Dame Jane Goodall, nature filmmaker Sir David Attenborough, technology innovator Gordon Moore, genomics pioneer J. Craig Venter, climate researcher James Hansen, and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.

And Flatow has interviewed nearly all of them on *Science Friday*. ■

(Source: news release)

A Peek Inside The Open Notebook

BY JEANNE ERDMANN

A few years ago, Siri Carpenter and I found ourselves in the same spot in our careers, wanting to switch our focus to magazine features. I had finished a stint as a grant writer and Siri had just completed a psychology textbook. Eager to do more feature writing, we decided to work together as writing partners. Since we live in different states, we chatted on the phone each week or so, talking over pitches and story ideas. We often found ourselves admiring other science journalists' work—and wondering how a writer thought of a particular story, came up with a particular angle, got access to certain sources, thought of asking certain questions, figured out how to structure a certain story, and so on. We really wanted to speak with the best science journalists to discover how they create such outstanding work. Last summer, we decided to formalize the process. So that others could benefit from what we learned, we decided to create a blog.

The end result is The Open Notebook (**www.theopennotebook.com**), a craft-focused website for science journalists, which Siri and I launched in October. The underlying idea behind the site: Despite the shifting marketplace for science journalism, expert craftsmanship still matters. The ability to recognize and sell important stories, ask incisive questions about complex subjects, and tell accurate, compelling stories—on shorter deadlines and with fewer reporting and editorial resources than ever before—is more vital than ever to success.

Currently, no other website allows science journalists to glimpse the "story behind the story"—to see how the best science stories got done, from inception to completion. Nor does any site exist whose main purpose is to foster discussion about the craft of science journalism.

In planning The Open Notebook, we first made a short list of stories and journalists we admired, and then we contacted the writers to invite them to participate. Even though the site had yet to launch, the first reporters we approached were universally enthusiastic and extremely generous with their time and insights.

The Open Notebook's main content is a series of question-and-answer features, each concerning a single piece of outstanding science journalism. Each feature dissects how the writer executed the story, from initial idea to published article. Each feature also includes materials that illustrate how the story evolved over time, such as the successful pitch, outlines or other notes, and early draft excerpts.

Thus far, The Open Notebook is a hit. The site had more than 1,000 unique visitors in its first month, and in the social media realm, we are enjoying the company of hundreds of Twitter followers and Facebook friends.

We have posted more than half a dozen interviews so far. In the near future, look for posts featuring some of the NASW Science in Society and Kavli Science Journalism Award winners, as well as many other outstanding science journalists. We're also developing plans to expand the site's scope. Stay tuned. ■

Science journalists Siri Carpenter and Jeanne Erdmann founded The Open Notebook to promote outstanding craftsmanship in the field of science journalism. The site brings readers the story behind the best science stories.

SCREEN CAPTURES COURTESY OF WWW.THEOPENNOTEBOOK.COM AND NASW.ORG

JEANNE ERDMANN IS A FREELANCE SCIENCE WRITER IN WENTZVILLE, MO.

SOME INITIAL FEATURES POSTED IN THE OPEN NOTEBOOK

Brendan Borrell—*Smithsonian* story on a hunt for hot peppers in Bolivia

Dan Ferber—Story in Indianapolis's *Nuvo Newsweekly* on a couple driven from their farm by the toxic gases emitting from the confined-animal farm operation next door

Roberta Kwok—*Nature* story chronicling the fall of an asteroid to Earth

David Dobbs—*Atlantic* article on genetic variants that put some children at greater risk of failure, but also greater "risk" of spectacular success, depending on environment

David Grimm—*Science* story on how fallout from atomic testing is being used in all manner of scientific realms

Christie Aschwanden—*Miller-McCune* article on the perils of trying to convince people to accept medical guidelines that run counter to their beliefs

Tina Saey—*Science News* feature on the dangers of sleep deprivation

Carl Zimmer—*New York Times* story on the microbial life teeming within us

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In negotiating an assignment, perhaps the most important thing a writer needs to know is what a potential market will pay, as opposed to what it claims it pays. These can differ, often by significant amounts, and having the facts can give a writer leverage that may result in a larger check. Fortunately, what NASWers have actually been paid, plus other important information about hundreds of markets—including what they are like to work for, how quickly they pay, what rights they buy, and much more—is waiting for you on Words' Worth, our exclusive markets database. You can find it in the members' section of the **www.nasw.org** and it covers publications from *Astrobiology* to *Zoogoer* and many other kinds of clients besides.

Words' Worth has this information because hundreds of NASWers have taken a few minutes to file anonymous and confidential reports on their experiences. It's quick and easy to do and some people make it a habit to write a report every time they work for a new client. So please help your fellow members by going to Words' Worth and letting us know your experiences with your clients. You can divulge exactly as much information about the assignment as you like and no one will know that you wrote it. A report takes only minutes to write and can be invaluable to a fellow writer. Thanks in advance for helping keeping Words' Worth strong and up-to-date! ■

■ ■ ■

www.nasw.org/words-worth

New Break on Deduction for Health Insurance

BY JULIAN BLOCK

Medical expenses can add up and they're hard to deduct. While these outlays may loom large in your eyes, they may not provide any relief when tax time rolls around. When you claim itemized expenses on Schedule A of Form 1040, you'll find that medical expenditures are allowable only to the extent that they exceed 7.5 percent of AGI, short for adjusted gross income, the figure on the last line of page one of the 1040 form. An example: An AGI of $100,000 means no deduction for the first $7,500 of medical expenses.

Writers and other self-employed individuals get a special break. People who are their own bosses are allowed to deduct 100 percent of their payments for medical insurance (including qualifying long-term care coverage) for themselves, their spouses, and dependents. They lower their income taxes by deducting the insurance payments on line 29 of the 1040 form. The usual 7.5 percent nondeductible floor for medical expenses is waived for them. And they don't even have to itemize to deduct insurance.

SCHEDULE SE DEDUCTION FOR 2010 ONLY

Legislation enacted in September of 2010 (known officially as The Small Business Jobs Act) significantly liberalizes the rules for deducting payments for medical insurance. This break for writers is available just for 2010.

After writers take an income-tax deduction on line 29 for the insurance payments, they again deduct these payments when they calculate their liability for self-employment taxes (Social Security taxes for the self-employed). They deduct the payments on Schedule SE (Self-Employment Tax).

The Schedule SE instructions tell taxpayers to add their self-employment income from lines one and two of Schedule SE, subtract the amount of their insurance deduction on line 29 of the 1040 form and enter the remaining amount on line 3 of Schedule SE.

Note that the IRS didn't create a separate line on Schedule SE for the insurance deduction. Consequently, many writers will fail to subtract the brand-new deduction and pay more self-employment taxes than legally required.

Authorizing a deduction for medical insurance on Schedule SE significantly reduces self-employment taxes for 2010. For instance, a deduction of $10,000 on Schedule SE decreases self-employment taxes by around $1,400. But the net savings is less than $1,400. The complication is that a reduced deduction on the front of the 1040 form for one-half of self-employment taxes results in an increase in income taxes that somewhat offsets the decrease in self-employment taxes.

The revised rules for 2010 provide a much better break than the rules for 2009 and earlier years. Previously, writers couldn't deduct their medical coverage on Schedule SE. They had to deduct medical premiums as an "above-the-line adjustment," that is, as one of the off-the-top subtractions applied in the section where they calculate AGI. That's also the section in which they claim write-offs for, among other things, money stashed in traditional IRAs or other retirement plans, job-related moving expenses, alimony payments, and one-half of payments for self-employment taxes.

WHAT HAPPENS IN 2011 AND BEYOND?

Will our lawmakers decide that a "temporary" deduction on Schedule SE ought to stay on the books beyond 2010? Look for that to happen. Congress almost always

TAX DEDUCTION continued on page 32

JULIAN BLOCK IS AN ATTORNEY AND AUTHOR BASED IN LARCHMONT, N.Y. HE HAS BEEN CITED AS "A LEADING TAX PROFESSIONAL" (*NEW YORK TIMES*), "AN ACCOMPLISHED WRITER ON TAXES" (*WALL STREET JOURNAL*), AND "AN AUTHORITY ON TAX PLANNING" (*FINANCIAL PLANNING MAGAZINE*). FOR INFORMATION ABOUT HIS BOOKS, VISIT JULIANBLOCKTAXEXPERT.COM.

Featured Column

Scholarly Pursuits

Academic research relevant to the workaday world of science writing

by Rick Borchelt

Back to Some Basics

This issue's picks focus on some meat and potatoes issues for PIOs and health writers and reporters.

People who don't spend much time reading the communications literature (and even some who do) usually think of the so-called "gray literature" as dense, plodding, abstract analysis of theoretical concepts they have a hard time applying to real-world work. In truth, translating academese into useful tips is what *Scholarly Pursuits* is all about. This time, the authors have done most of the heavy lifting for me.

■ ■ ■

Izumi, Betty T. et al. 2010. The One-Pager: A practical policy advocacy tool for translating community-based participatory research into action. *Prog Community Health Partnership* 4(2): 141–147.

If you've spent any time at all in the PIO arena, chances are at some point you've been asked for "a one-pager" describing some particularly interesting research or science policy proposal. These vary widely; some institutions have very formal templates for this kind of information, some want just a set of bullets, and still others are happy with a narrative extract of a feature story you've written.

Izumi and her co-authors, working with a community based participatory research program of the Detroit-based Healthy Environments Partnership (HEP), decided to start from scratch and actually formalize a process of crafting, reviewing, and delivering a series of one-pagers describing the policy implications of health-promoting and health equity issues. Together, they write, "researchers and community members can develop persuasive advocacy arguments that are based on scientific evidence, local conditions, and the experiences and insights of constituents." Seldom, however, do the partners "emphasize the development and use of practical tools to communicate research findings to policy makers."

Established in 2000, HEP is an on-going community–academic partnership that develops, implements, and evaluates multi-level interventions in southwest, eastside, and northwest Detroit, Mich., to reduce racial/ethnic and socioeconomic inequities in cardiovascular disease. What the team needed were one-pagers to help them frame HEP's decade or more of research findings for policymakers, and a consistent way of presenting the one-pagers to policymakers. The steering committee for the project, after extensive discussion and consultation among themselves and with community partners, chose two issues for one-pager treatment: reducing exposure to harmful air pollutants and improving access to nutritious foods. Working with a subcommittee of the steering committee, a scholar-writer worked to develop and gain approval for a development and clearance process for the one-pagers, reviewed relevant HEP and related research, consulted all the subcommittee members personally or through email, and (using previous one-pagers as a rough guide) developed a rough draft for consideration. "Multiple drafts of the one-pagers were reviewed by the subcommittee and edits were made until there was agreement on their content, format, and perspective among all members of the subcommittee," the article notes, an unsurprising necessity to those of us who do policy papers routinely.

…changes are at some point you've been asked for "a one-pager" describing some particularly interesting research of science policy proposal.

After full consensus on the one-pagers,

"Scholarly Pursuits" features articles from journals produced in the United States and abroad. If you read an article you think would make a good candidate for this column, send it along to rickb@nasw.org.

Rick Borchelt is special assistant for public affairs in the Office of the Director at the National Cancer Institute.

the project tackled how to present them to federal officials. Project participants agreed to guidelines drawn from previous dissemination strategies, namely that, to the extent feasible, there would always be at least one community and one academic partner co-presenting information on behalf of HEP. The project participants also developed a standard "packet" of materials to accompany one-pagers when they are left behind.

Now, readers might legitimately questions what the big deal is here. Veteran science communicators might find nothing particularly striking in how I've described the process Izumi and her colleagues developed. But I can tell you that, as a one-pager expert of some 25 years' standing, I learned a thing or two about what makes for an effective and efficient writing and clearance process (even one that took months to complete, as these did) and even picked up some ideas from the template.

■ ■ ■

Alpert, Carol Lynn. 2010. *Small Steps; Big Impact: A guide for science museum leaders developing education outreach partnerships with university-based research centers.* Accessed online 4 December 2010 at http://risepartnerguide.org/

As part of the NSF-funded Portal to the Public (PoP) project of engaging researchers in public dialogue about science and technology, Alpert—who works at Boston's Museum of Science—has spent a lot of time trying to figure out how universities and science museums can work together. On the face of it, the partnership seems made in the shade: Universities want to get their science out to the public (usually); museums have a ready-made audience and need a regular content stream. And NSF in particular is committed to "broader impacts" work as part of the research that it funds.

But life is seldom so simple. Researchers have limited time to commit to public outreach, and don't necessarily come prepared with the skills needed to successfully engage public audiences. Museums and science centers, for their part, often have a pretty high threshold for what constitutes research that is interesting to the public.

Alpert found that dedicated university research centers, as opposed to individually funded PIs, offered the best hook for university-museum collaboration. "The larger pool of funding available to research centers and their longer operational timeline allow for a better-organized education outreach effort and a more efficient use of collective resources," she writes. "It may allow for a more specialized investment in education and outreach, including support for university-based education and outreach coordinators. It may also allow for a subaward to support a long-term education and outreach partnership with a local school, a science museum, or other science education organization." She recommends developing an explicit five- to 10-year education outreach between the research center and the museum; by doing so, she explains, "relationships deepen, the work improves, and the partners reach broader audiences. They have time to take stock, evaluate, and improve their practices. They can cultivate new alliances and links to schools and community organizations. They also have time to share their experience and successful practices with others in the field." She also recommended the university partner establish an education and outreach coordinator to manage the partnership.

Alpert found that dedicated university research centers… offered the best hook for university-museum collaboration.

Alpert next tackles the question of how to get researchers to participate, articulating a range of motivations from prestige of doing public presentations in a well-known museum or as part of a public series, to altruistic appeals to "giving back," to the opportunity for younger researchers especially to developing public speaking and explanation skills that could serve them well in the future. Lastly, she spends some very helpful time explaining NSF broader impacts criteria and how to work university-museum partnerships into the funding mix for university research, likely the most useful discussion in the paper.

■ ■ ■

Nucci, Mary L. et al. 2009. When good food goes bad: Television network news and the spinach recall of 2006. *Science Communication* 31(2): 238-265.

In September 2006, an unprecedented outbreak of E. coli on spinach created a media firestorm, with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and television network coverage both aggressively reaching out to the American public. Seventy percent of Americans who were aware of the recall of spinach first heard about it on television. Nucci and her colleagues at the New Jersey-based Food Policy Institute reviewed how the event played out in FDA news releases and network news coverage, and uncovered some missteps and pitfalls that—if reporters and PIOs learn from the lessons the authors identify—could improve communication to the public during public health crises.

…very quickly, the news as framed by FDA and the news as reported diverged markedly.

Over the course of the month after the initial food recall, FDA issued some 18 news releases and held almost daily news conferences to update the public on the recall and guidance for consumers. The authors studied 86 morning and evening network news stories from the same time period to see how well they tracked the public health priorities identified by FDA.

"In the first blush of the crisis, it would appear that the television networks were quick to faithfully pick up the FDA announcements of the recall, which is in keeping with research that points to a reliance on government sources in crisis situations," the authors write. Sources used by networks, however, tended to be nongovernmental—academic and farm/food advocates in particular. And very quickly, the news as framed by FDA and the news as reported diverged markedly.

SCHOLARLY PURSUITS continued on page 33

The Science Beat: *Riding a Wave, Going Somewhere*

By Charles Petit

As things change rapidly in mass media, the science beat keeps on providing the purest news. At least that's how I see things. It never has been the most prestigious or glamorous beat in a newsroom, but no one can accuse us of merely plugging new names and places into familiar tales of crime, corruption, political maneuvers, celebrity canoodling, and moments of catastrophe.

When done well, our reporting is about things new to human experience: discoveries about the nature of the universe and of game-changing technologies, the unknown past, and potential treatments for disease. And while there is the occasional scandal or disaster to investigate and report, what the science beat reporter unearths tends to be a tonic to the bad tidings that dominate daily news. Besides, we get to talk to smart people who do their jobs well. Most of our stories are about achievement. They may include peril but not so often failure or crime.

Other than that almost nothing is as it was just a few years ago. Nor were things quite as exciting as they are on this beat today. Never have I observed colleagues who are as collectively innovative, vital, multitalented—performing on multiple platforms—and aggressive as now. But the reason is not jolly.

Desperation motivates action, and the newspaper science writer, once a mainstay of our tribe, is an endangered species. Pay rates at magazines have stagnated. A typical science journalist's reporting day is fractured by demands to exercise multiple skills—audio, video, photography, and text while tweeting and blogging away. There is a dizzying array of opportunities to publish online, but few pay a handsome rate. A few independent science writers are doing fabulously. But as a group, we're running and scrapping along as fast as we can with little idea of a destination.

Stephen Leahy is an enterprising and crusading Canadian environmental reporter, whose website rises to the top of a Google search. Climate change policy and science energizes much of his writing. He has a regular gig with Inter Press Service and has had pieces in *New Scientist*, *Wired News*, *Audubon*, *Maclean's*, and other sterling outlets. But contracts are becoming harder to get.

So Leahy is turning to crowdfunding techniques to augment his erratic income through a one-man community-supported journalism shop, which was launched when he asked followers of his website for donations to help him cover the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009. He got enough for airfare and a few nights of lodging. At a subsequent conference he found himself in the company of a platoon of freelancers, not a single one of whom had been able to get his or her usual outlets to foot the bill. "No one had any money," he recalled. "And I need to feed my family. My hope is that community-supported journalism will fill this gap."

Now, a large share of his articles— the ones not written under standard freelance arrangement—go online at his site. He also sends them directly to registered readers by e-mail. In return, he asks but does not demand of them: Please send money. His site has no ads, just that plea. He suggests a $50 or $100 contribution.

I asked him this fall how the arrangement is working. "Too soon to tell, less than a year in," he replied. Contributions come from all over but mainly North America and Europe. "At first it was people who sort of know me—met at some meeting—but more now come from out of the blue." He also gets verbal support, ideas for news stories, and offers of assistance, which he appreciates, such as an offer of "a bed if I am in their city," he told me. But at times he feels like he's panhandling and he has had less than $5,000 donated this year, which is only about a third of what he needs to make such direct-access journalism worth his while.

Good luck, Mr. Leahy.

I've been through my own career crisis. About four and a half years ago I became a different kind of science writer. My beat went from writing about science to writing about other science writers. Monday through Friday I'm up before dawn, blogging by about 7 a.m., and at around noon I send off from my home in California a compilation of impressions of what I've found in breaking news and occasionally in feature writing. In the afternoons I do some freelance writing or chase grandchildren.

I am fortunate. It comes with a paycheck and benefits. Former *Washington Post* reporter Boyce Rensberger made me an offer. We ran into each other in early 2005 at a AAAS meeting. He was then director of the Knight Science Journalism Fellowships at MIT. I was long ago a fellow in the program. He knew I'd been bought out at the end of 2004 by *US News & World Report*. Rensberger wanted somebody to work part time, surveying the day's science news online and blogging with links and commentary. "Sort of a Romenesko for science writing," he said, alluding to the Poynter Institute's must-read daily journalism blog.

At first, I didn't want to do it. I felt as though I would be chained to a desk at home. But the lure of benefits was high since the anxiety of a freelancer's life did not suit me. In April 2006, the Knight Science Journalism Tracker—known as KSJ Tracker—went online. I assembled a huge list of RSS feeds, heavily focused on traditional outlets, including wires, a few online sites, and nearly 200 North American and overseas English-language newspapers and

Charles Petit is the lead writer for the MIT Knight Science Journalism Tracker. He also does freelance reporting and was a science writer for 26 years for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and spent six years at *US News & World Report*. He is a past NASW president and serves on the board of CASW.

broadcasters. I would churn through as many as possible and chase specific, popular news via search engines. I found I could get in 10 or so posts a day, encompassing dozens of stories, many of them covering the same news.

Since then, I have filed more than 6,000 posts. In the past year or so the site has added other contract, per-piece part-time trackers to follow medical science, as well as news media that publish in Spanish and German, nearly all of which, like the U.S. press, give their content away for free on the web.

Several times during the early years I posted about the departure of old standbys in the business as conventional media lost ad revenue. Such attrition helped to force a change in the way I covered my beat. Within two years the systematic searches yielded less and less. I stopped going through the original RSS food line every day, and I took to writing fewer, longer, more analytical items, which often meant rounding up the dozen or (many) more outlets that had jumped to cover the same basic news. Plus, more readers—many and probably most of whom are science journalists—suggested a growing stream of articles to check, sometimes their own.

Now here's the catch, the one I can't really explain. While I can't figure out who is paying a lot of these science reporters, the quantity of what they produce does not seem to have fallen off nearly as much as the cratering of traditional U.S. news media would predict. In fact, what I've been witnessing is an explosive increase in the number of websites providing science news worldwide, and that includes those originating in the United States.

The diversity of this news reporting is illuminated by a post I did on Sept. 29, when a team of astronomers said they had discovered another planet circling the small, reddish star Gliese 581. The star is 20 light-years away—close by astronomical standards—and has several offspring, but press releases dubbed this latest one a "Goldilocks planet." Not too close or too far from its star, it is just right for liquid water. No one could know what its surface is like, but the orbital dimensions alone struck a chord with reporters and editors. (Two weeks after this story broke, reports began to surface that perhaps this planet doesn't exist. Maybe it's a figment of data analysis—certainly news for another day.)

My initial KSJ Tracker post had a discussion of the artist who did an impression of the planet—catnip to art editors—and links to 28 versions of the news, most of them bylined stories. I could have listed many more. I had found stories by searching the old standbys—outfits that would have covered similar news 20 years ago, including the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, Reuters, *The Associated Press*, Voice of America, *TIME* magazine, BBC, NPR, *Maclean's*, *Washington Post*, plus a few regional newspapers in the United States, and *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Register*, *Mirror*, and *The Independent and Mail* in the United Kingdom, as well as outlets in Australia.

Then there were the links to what I call the new old media—found online for the most part but affiliated with established news organizations. These digital destinations are now fixtures among science reporters, regarded as places that still practice journalism. There were blogs posted by staff reporters on websites such as the *Washington Post*'s and on the **SeattlePI.com**. CNN had a story online, as did the tech outlet CNET. I found more at *Discover* magazine in the form of the so-named Bad Astronomy site operated by prolix astronomer-bloggista Phil Plait and at *Discovery News*. *Nature* and *Science* also covered the Goldilocks planet.

In addition, the story was covered by outlets such as *Slate*, *PC Magazine*, *Wired News*, *National Geographic*, *Scientific American*, *Science News* (which had its story also published on the *US News & World Report* site), and *Popular Science*.

I found one story from a sort of mash-up called "The Takeaway," which describes itself as a national morning news program produced in partnership with the *New York Times*, BBC World Service, WNYC, Public Radio International, and WGBH Boston. What it is exactly, I am still not sure.

Then there is a new category of online news outlets that I can't begin to classify; it's an inchoate sea of outlets that I seldom track simply because there are too many of them. Presumably these writers are receiving some sort of pay, and some of them might well be ethical journalism outlets, but I didn't include them in my post that day. Some of these sites merely aggregate others' work, but some have distinctive pieces that carry bylines.

Another kind of science writer, if not science journalist, writes the press releases that tumble out of government-funded labs or universities. The Goldilocks planet story was born out of at least five press releases sent by UC Santa Cruz, University of Hawaii Institute for Astronomy, Carnegie Institution for Science, NASA, and NSF. And no longer are press releases targeted exclusively at the press; each of these was written in journalistic style, if not with a journalistic edge, and was piped to the public via in-house websites and through the many "news" outlets that lightly rewrite and on occasion relabel releases as news stories.

When I first started at the KSJ Tracker, I regarded my inclusion of press releases as brilliantly subversive. Have them there for readers and they'd reveal how much spoon feeding goes into the generation of a lot of news and make transparent which writers tend to lift quotes rather than making their own calls. That was when I still thought of them as inside information. Now the work of press agent is simply a routine part of the flow of information directly to the public, with the journalist as intermediary regarded as a bit of a quaint notion.

Something exciting is simmering in the stew of old media, online, smartphone, and tablet-borne news streams. And science journalists are stirring the pot.

Journalism professors tell me that programs to train science journalists are still seeing their graduates get jobs. Though I live in the territory where the work of the science beat writers resides, I couldn't tell you where these jobs are. Nor do I know when or whether a business model will come along to provide the competent ones with a reasonable wage. Nor do I know when or whether any more than a small fraction of the reading public will—or still does—include science journalism in its daily diet.

This much I do know when I go to my computer each morning: Something exciting is simmering in the stew of old media, online, smartphone, and tablet-borne news streams. And science journalists are stirring the pot. ■

"The Science Beat: Riding a Wave, Going Somewhere," Neiman Reports, *Winter 2010.*

BOOKS
BY AND FOR MEMBERS

Ruth Winter
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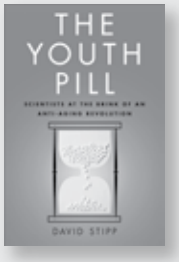
Send material about new books

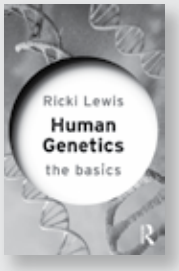
Microsoft Word files only. Include the name of the publicist and appropriate contact information, as well as how you prefer members get in touch with you.

The Youth Pill: Scientists at the Brink of an Anti-Aging Revolution
by David Stipp (NASW), published by Penguin Group



Research on aging used to be a stagnant backwater surrounded by charlatans. According to author David Stipp, the discovery circa 1990 of gene mutations that can slow aging in animals revealed that the rate of aging is astoundingly plastic and, just as surprising, is controlled by genes that are almost as old as life itself. The discovery of such "gerontogenes" began the field's transformation into a hot topic and helped convince its leading scientists that anti-aging drugs are achievable. Stipp, a science writer formerly with *Fortune* and the *Wall Street Journal*, tells the story of the transformation of the field and the scientists behind it, revealing how findings on gerontogenes, the anti-aging effect of calorie restriction, the link between dwarfism and longevity, the secrets of weirdly long-lived animals, and revelations from the study of human centenarians are coming together in a way that promises to radically shrink death's dominion. He also explores the larger social and economic implications of this prospect, which could change life more than any other medical advance on the horizon. ■ *Stipp can be reached at 781-859-5254 and http://davidstipp.com. Press representative for the book is Christy D'Agostini at christy.dagostini@us.penguingroup.com.*

Human Genetics: The Basics
by Ricki Lewis (NASW), published by Routledge

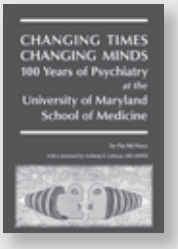


When an editor from Routledge Press asked Lewis, who teaches "Genethics" at the Alden March Bioethics Institute of Albany Medical Center and is a genetic counselor with CareNet Medical Group in Schenectady, N.Y., to write the first science book for its "The Basics" series, she jumped at the chance. "After two decades-plus of writing textbooks, it was refreshing to cover the same topics in narrative style in a much shorter book," she says. The six chapters that make up *Human Genetics: The Basics* provide an overview of the field of human genetics, starting with "From Ancestry to Destiny," through "From Mendel's Peas to Double Helices," to "Genetic and Genomic Technologies." Although she is still writes textbooks (three are currently in progress), Lewis is very happy to have transitioned to other forms of nonfiction writing including a novel. ■ *Contact Lewis at 518-210-2017 or rickilewis54@gmail.com.*

Delivery: From Ferrying Warplanes Across Oceans to Bringing Heroic News From A Megaflood
by Milton Golin (NASW), published by iUniverse/ASJA Books

Golin, a Chicago editor/publisher became the first assistant editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* who was not a physician. The youngest of 10 children of Russian immigrants, Golin has had many adventures including flying the Himalayan "hump" as an aviator in Burma and China during World War II. He earned the Air Medal for nine hump missions and campaign ribbons with three bronze battle stars in six theaters of war. He returned to Chicago and in civilian life became an investigative reporter and editor in Chicago, which sometimes was a harrowing as his war service: He covered air crashes, serial murders, childhood and other health disorders, and wartime crises. He has combined his military and journalistic experiences into a roman-à-clef novel. ■ *Golin can be reached at 312-944-793 or cptmdgolin@aol.com.*

Changing Times, Changing Minds: 100 Years of Psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine **by Pat McNees (NASW), published by the University of Maryland Department of Psychiatry**



McNees, a Bethesda freelance writer, describes the history of the department of psychiatry at the University of Maryland which came into existence through Maryland state legislature funding after an exposé in1949 in the *Baltimore Sun* described understaffing and deplorable conditions in the state mental hospitals. According to McNees, there was great hope for psychiatry after World War II, during which the federal government had learned first-hand the relative effectiveness of a psychiatric intervention administered quickly and on-site for shell-shocked military personnel. Federal funds for psychiatric training had become plentiful as new psychotropic drugs introduced in the 1950s began proving effective at relieving many symptoms of psychosis. More federal funds for biomedical research became available, too. In 1950, Jacob Finesinger, M.D. was recruited from Harvard to be the first full-time chair of the department. He was also the first director of the Psychiatric Institute, which opened in 1953 to provide patient care, psychiatric training, and research into the causes and prevention of mental illness. Since then, the department has grown greatly; its history in many ways mirroring that of American psychiatry. ■ *McNees can be contacted at 301-897-8557or patmcnees@gmail.com).*

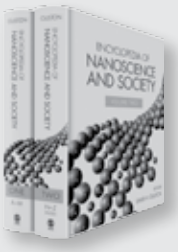
Old Abe, Eagle Hero, The Civil War's Most Famous Mascot **by Patrick Young (NASW), published by Kane Miller Publishers**

This is an updated, expanded, and newly illustrated version of a book Young published in 1965, several years before becoming a science writer. Written for ages 5 to 9, *Old Abe* is the true story of an eagle the spent three years with a Union regiment fighting in the states bordering the southern Mississippi River, including at the Siege of Vicksburg, and his activities after the war. The book is getting good early reviews on the Internet, particularly from librarian bloggers one of whom said she "was caught up in this 'biography,' fascinated by the facts, and intrigued by this novel mascot." ■ *Website for the book is www.OldAbeEagleHero.com. Young can be reached at 301 498-4251 or young@nasw.org.*

The Many Worlds of Hugh Everett III: Multiple Universes, Mutual Assured Destruction, and the Meltdown of a Nuclear Family **by Peter Byrne (NASW), published by Oxford University Press**

Author Peter Byrne tells the story of Hugh Everett III (1930-1982), who's "many worlds" theory of multiple universes has had a profound impact on physics and philosophy. Using Everett's unpublished papers and dozens of interviews, Byrne paints a detailed portrait of the genius who invented an astonishing way of describing our complex universe. Everett's mathematical model (called the "universal wave function") treats all possible events as "equally real," and concludes that countless copies of every person and thing exist in all possible configurations spread over an infinity of universes. Everett also wrote a classic paper in game theory, creating computer algorithms that revolutionized military operations research, and performed pioneering work in artificial intelligence for top-secret government projects. Afflicted by depression and addictions he died young, but left behind a fascinating record of his life, including correspondence with such philosophically inclined physicists as Niels Bohr, Norbert Wiener, and John Wheeler. In recent years, the existence of a universe of universes has gained traction in scientific circles as an explanation of physical reality. ■ *Byrne can be reached at 707-338-6534 and pbyrne@sonic.net.*

Encyclopedia of Nanoscience and Society **edited by David H. Guston, published by SAGE Publications, Inc.**



Nanoscience has garnered billions of dollars of funding and has been hailed as ushering in the Next Industrial Revolution. But, for such a richly anticipated field, it has made its way into products all around us—from odor-eating socks to cosmetics and medications—without much fanfare, while popular media offer competing visions of nanotechnology as cornucopia or Armageddon. Somewhere in between are social scientists, ethicists, and others reflecting on our understanding of the broad implications of nanotechnology, gauging its promises and risks, assessing the impacts of policy decisions, and communicating the meaning of nanoscience research. The newly released, two-volume *Encyclopedia of Nanoscience and Society* is the result. Edited by David Guston, director of the Center for Nanotechnology in Society at Arizona State University, the book is accessible and jargon-free and contains approximately 425 entries by contributors from the disciplines of sociology and psychology, economics and business, science and engineering, computing and information technology, philosophy, ethics, public policy, and more. ■

NASW President
Nancy Shute
Freelance
NANCY@NANCYSHUTE.COM

President's Letter

Reporters love a news peg, so I count

MYSELF LUCKY TO HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF NEWS TO REPORT IN MY FIRST LETTER AS NASW PRESIDENT. BUT BEFORE I DIVE INTO WHAT'S NEW, I NEED TO MAKE SURE I'VE PROPERLY CHRONICLED THE PAST.

I'm so fortunate to be following in the footsteps of Mariette DiChristina. In her two years as NASW president, Mariette worked hard to build new management structures robust enough to support the organization's increasingly complex and professional mission. Those include a new finance committee to oversee spending and a complete overhaul of NASW's bylaws to conform with current law. Mariette has deftly guided our partnerships with the Arab Science Journalists Association and the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing. At the same time, she has ensured that NASW continues to speak out for the free flow of information, and for the highest standards of science writing. In short: an impossible act to follow.

Mariette also recognized the need for us to think beyond today. As a result, NASW held its first-ever strategic planning session with the NASW board on Oct. 5, in New Haven. I suspect I'm not the only one who showed up at 8 a.m. wondering if the day would be lost to corporate bureaucratospeak. But facilitator Helene Mazur, a professional facilitator and founder of Princeton Performance Dynamics, kept us on task.

When the board was asked to name NASW's three core values, we found it surprisingly easy: collaborative, ethical, helpful. By 5 p.m., we had identified NASW's strengths and shortcomings, discussed our stakeholders and their needs, and crafted a list of action items to meet those needs.

Not a group to let grass grow under their feet, even in winter, the new board has leapt to the task. Here's what's afoot:

- A new program committee, made up of members from the freelance, staff, PIO, and finance committees, is coordinating our programs, with the aim of making our efforts more effective and efficient. Chair Robin Lloyd quickly activated the committee, which considered and approved requests for sponsorship of remote access for the ScienceOnline11 conference, to be held in early January. Stay tuned for announcements on a new grant program for members in early 2011!
- A new committee will consider how NASW can better serve the needs of science writers employed by news organizations. Staffers used to constitute the majority of NASW members, but due to the collapse of mainstream media, they are now a brave few. Vice President Peggy Girshman is leading this effort.
- In order to build on NASW's new website as a hub for member resources and networking, NASW will hire a part-time web editor and recruit interns. Internet committee chairs Adam Rogers and Mike Lemonick are overseeing the ongoing development of digital resources.
- The membership committee is evaluating how NASW can help journalists who often cover science and medicine but don't consider themselves science writers, and other journalism, PIO, and writer organizations. They'll also be investigating new services for members, such as discounts for training through organizations like the Poynter Institute.
- A task force will review the qualifications to be an officer of NASW.
- Executive Director Tinsley Davis will explore how her office could make use of outsourcing, part-time staff, or volunteer efforts to meet NASW's growing need for infrastructure support.

Plans are already well underway for NASW's mentoring and internship fair at AAAS in February. We'll also help sponsor the traditional science writers' party at AAAS, organized by DCSWA. Calls for session proposals for ScienceWriters2011 in Flagstaff, Ariz., will hit your in-box soon. And this year we've got a new adventure in store: the fourth World Conference of Science Journalists, June 27-29, in Cairo. NASW is a major sponsor, and past president Deborah Blum, as program chair, has built an amazing lineup, with leading science journalists from around the world. You don't want to miss it. Stay tuned for announcements on travel grants for NASW members!

When the board was asked to name NASW's three core values, we found it surprisingly easy: collaborative, ethical, helpful.

Many of us are trying to invent the future of science writing—or at least invent ways to do good work, and get paid. Writers have always been underpaid and marginalized, though these times are tougher than most. But when we work together, we have power—power to make our profession better, for ourselves and for society.

NASW has been a huge help to me in my life as a science writer, and I'm honored to be able to help lead an organization that I love. I'm looking forward to working together to invent our future. ■

DAVIS COURTESY OF MARK D. COHEN; DICHRISTINA COURTESY OF LYNNE FRIEDMANN

NASW Secretary
Beryl Benderly
Freelance
BLINK@AOL.COM

NASW Annual Membership Meeting Minutes

THE MEMBERSHIP MEETING WAS CONVENED ON NOV. 6, 2010, IN NEW HAVEN, CONN. PRESIDENT NANCY SHUTE CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 8:15 A.M.

Shute thanked the workshop and anniversary planning committees for their excellent work and also introduced the members of the new board.

She reported that the board had held a strategy-planning meeting the previous day, then described the action items developed at that meeting. They include:

- Hire a paid half-time web editor and an intern to assist the editor. The editor will report to the Internet committee
- Establish a task force to re-examine membership criteria
- Establish a task force to re-examine the qualifications for leadership in NASW
- Name an overarching program committee that will include one member from each of the freelance, PIO, and the newly formed staff journalist committee
- Establish a committee to promote the concerns of staff journalists

Board member Dan Ferber reported for the committee that had drafted a proposed Article VIII for the revised NASW Constitution, which deals with suspension or expulsion of members. The NASW members present at the annual meeting cast their votes on the proposed new article by paper ballot.

President Shute presented the Diane McGurgan Service award to member Jennifer Cutraro for her outstanding work on the internship fair.

Treasurer Ron Winslow reported for the finance committee. He stated that the board had voted to raise annual dues by $10 (to $85); the first rate increase in eight years. He explained that NASW had changed its fiscal year and also is using a new auditor to examine the organization's

Dispatches from the Director

Tinsley Davis
Executive Director
DIRECTOR@NASW.ORG

A Debt of Gratitude

One of the tasks for the annual IRS information return that NASW files is an estimation of the number of volunteers that serve the organization. To make tracking this easier, I developed a spreadsheet. Upwards of 220 members and others have helped NASW out in the past year. The number, while not all volunteers are members, represents about 10 percent of the membership who have given of their time in some form or another to help out with everything from annual meeting planning to contributions to this very magazine. The names are listed on page 28. I think you will agree that it looks pretty impressive to see all of these in one place. Please take the time to say thank you next time you see one of the volunteers. Listing names also means running the inevitable risk of leaving someone out. If I have done so, please drop a note to director@nasw.org

Thank you to our 2010 volunteers, and thank you in advance to those who are already engaged for 2011—including our new board members and officers.

NASW appreciates the dedication of its volunteers

Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

This list would not be complete without special acknowledgement of the more than 12 years of volunteer service that our former president Mariette DiChristina put into this organization. Over the years of increasing leadership responsibilities, she consistently found time in her schedule when there was none. Volunteering means balancing priorities, and I've never met a more adept juggler. Thank you to Mariette and to all the volunteers who give of their for your time, talent, and dedication to NASW. ■

Mariette DiChristina applied patience, mindfulness, sensitivity, adaptability, and creativity in all of her volunteer endeavors.

records. For these reasons the audit was not complete and the budget was therefore not available for inspection at the time of the annual meeting. He said that the budget will be posted for the information of the membership as soon as it becomes available.

Board member Mitch Waldrop introduced the new NASW website and thanked both the Internet committee and cybrarian Russell Clemings for their excellent work in developing it.

Authors Coalition liaison Beryl Benderly reported on Authors Coalition funding, stating that, in addition to its regular coalition payments, NASW would soon receive an exceptionally large one-time amount because of the liquidation of an escrow fund in Germany. Once a procedure is established for submitting ideas, members will be encouraged to suggest possible uses for the funds.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:45 a.m. ■

REVISED ARTICLE VIII *Votes Tally* ☑

At the annual meeting of NASW, held Nov. 6, 2010 at the Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale, the motion to amend the NASW constitution with regard to procedures for suspension or termination of membership passed.

Total Votes . . . . . 157 total votes
Yes . . . . . 149 votes
No . . . . . 8 votes

Cybrarian
Russell Clemings
CYBRARIAN@NASW.ORG

Cyberbeat

They say Rome wasn't built in a day. But

WE THOUGHT FOR SURE THE NEW NASW WEBSITE WOULD BE BUILT INSIDE OF SIX MONTHS, IF NOT LESS. SILLY US. BY THE TIME WE RAISED THE CURTAIN ON NOV. 2, MORE THAN 11 MONTHS HAD PASSED SINCE OUR DEC. 1, 2009, KICKOFF CONFERENCE CALL.

To say it proved to be a lot more work than we were expecting would be an understatement. Freshening our five-year-old design was only the beginning. We also converted our membership database to an entirely new system and added a raft of new interactive features to the site.

We hope you will use these new features—including a public blogging platform, enhanced discussion groups and comment functions everywhere—to help make our site a prime destination for information about science and science writing.

We also hope you will keep sending us feedback about the site—especially bug reports and critiques of its usability. We recognize that the job was not finished when we unveiled the redesign. Your comments will help us set priorities for future work.

In the meantime, here's a cook's tour of the site's major new features, with some tips on how to use them. You can learn more by reading an article on the site itself via this shortened URL **http://bit.ly/ij6OwK**.

A PLACE TO BLOG AND BE SEEN

Before starting this project, we surveyed our Internet committee for its wish list. The most asked-for feature was a blogging platform that would be open to all members and visible to the entire world.

But as we refined our plans we quickly realized we couldn't stop with that. Free services like Blogspot are already more than happy to give you enough space for your most profound observations. And if you're lucky, they might be read by your mom and closest friends.

At the same time, we were determined to make our web page livelier and more dynamic, with fresh content added on a regular basis. So, in the spirit of killing two birds with one stone, we designed a system that allows us to pull content from the member blogs and post it on our front page.

The benefits are twofold: better visibility for member blog posts, and better content for the organization's front page on the web. In time, we sincerely believe this combination can transform the NASW.org site into one of the web's best sources of science-related news and commentary.

If you're a current NASW member, your member blog is already set up and ready to go. Just log in, then follow the "My NASW" link near the top of the page. Once you do, you'll see a "Write a blog post" link. From there, just give your post a title, a short (500 words maximum) summary that contains the gist of your post, and the body. See the right sidebar for tips on formatting your text and adding images.

Be especially sure to polish the summary. It's what will appear on the "member blogs" page and the main front page, if your post is selected for display there. It needs to be written to draw readers to your work. When you're done with your post, use the "preview" button to check your work, then the "save" button to publish it.

LISTSERVS ON STEROIDS

It has been almost 15 years since NASW first moved its discussion groups to the e-mail based "listserv" format. At the time, in 1996, it was a major step up in technology from the old CompuServe forums. Now, it seems almost quaint.

As a result, we've completely rethought how our discussions should work. The result is another major step (forward, we hope) in technology.

By the time you read this, we hope to have moved all of our current listservs onto the website and transformed them into web-based discussions. You can still participate via e-mail, if you prefer. But you can also follow the discussions on the site in an easy-to-read threaded format.

Our new groups have a couple of other new features that members can take advantage of:

- Create your own discussion group. Need to set up a list for a

short-term project or have a subject that's not quite right for the established lists? Any member can create a new group, choose its members, and decide whether its work will be visible to the public. Go to "discussions" and look in the right sidebar of either "my discussions" or "member-created discussions" for details.

■ Set up a wiki. Designed to facilitate group authorship and editing, wikis form the technical foundation of Wikipedia and many other collaborative websites. Our new system allows you to set up wiki documents in any member-created discussion group.

COMMENTS, COMMENTS EVERYWHERE

Making our website more interactive was another major goal of this redesign. We've accomplished that by enabling the comment function on almost every piece of content throughout the site.

Both NASW members and registered guests will see comment forms below the full (not summary) versions of most content on the site. Comments are subject to a series of policies that are based on our longstanding but newly revised discussion group policies. The basic thrust of those policies is simple: We encourage free debate as long as it remains civil.

PERSONALIZED SCIENCE NEWS

Say goodbye to the ugly science news ticker at the top of our home page. It's been replaced by a more flexible list of feeds that members and registered guests can customize. To find it, follow the "My NASW" link at the top of the page, then see the "My science news" tab.

You can nominate any RSS or Atom news feed for inclusion in our master list of available feeds. The only restriction is relevance—any feed that is reasonably related to science or science writing is acceptable. Once approved, your feed will appear in our list and you can add it to your "My science news" tab. We will also select the best feeds for inclusion in our front-page science news block.

AND IN CONCLUSION…

For the best experience on the new NASW.org site, you should always be logged in with your member user name and password. Logged-in users will see more content than anonymous users and will have options, like commenting, that aren't available to anonymous users.

The new site also permits non-members to see more content than anonymous users, and to comment on that content, as long as they give us a valid email address and create a user name and password. If you have friends or colleagues who would be good member prospects, please feel free to suggest that they register, have a look around, file some comments, and participate in our public discussion groups. ■

Correction

The fall issue of *SW* incorrectly reported the amount of money awarded to recipients of the 2010 Rennie Taylor/Alton Blakeslee Graduate Studies Fellowship. The actual amount is $5,000 for the academic year (not $2,000). The same article failed to acknowledge The Brinson Foundation as providing financial support for the 2010 Taylor/Blakeslee fellowships. ■

Deborah L. Blum
Program Committee Chair
WCSJ 2011
DBLUM@WISC.EDU

News from Afar

DINNER AT THE PYRAMIDS. A RECEPTION AT THE FAMED CAIRO MUSEUM; HOME TO THE WORLD'S BEST MUMMY COLLECTION. NOBEL-PRIZE WINNING SCIENTISTS. BEST-SELLING AUTHORS. ACCLAIMED SCIENCE JOURNALISTS AND BLOGGERS FROM FIVE CONTINENTS. SESSIONS EXPLORING EVERYTHING FROM INFECTIOUS DISEASE TO PHYSICS, GOVERNMENT SECRECY TO SCIENCE IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD, INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING TO WRITING ABOUT SCIENCE FOR CHILDREN.

All of this and more will be found at the 7th World Conference of Science Journalists, to be held in Cairo, Egypt from June 27-29. The conference, expected to draw more than 800 science communicators from around the world, is co-sponsored by NASW and the Arab Science Journalists Association (ASJA).

This is the first time that associations from two different countries have partnered to host a World Conference of Science Journalists. There are other firsts as well: first such conference to be held in the developing world; first conference to be held on the African continent; first conference to be held in an Arab state.

"With a truly international program with strong representation from the global South, the conference is tailored to the need of science journalists worldwide," says Nadia El-Awady of Cairo, co-organizer of the conference and president of the World Federation of Science Journalists. "From workshops on the most pressing issues facing science journalists today to discussions of the newest technologies at hand to improve their work, there is something for everyone."

NASW and ASJA won a competitive bid to host the conference. Both associations have been working non-stop since to build a great meeting. Acting as NASW international liaison, I've worked since 2009 as program chair for the conference. Last year, NASW president Nancy Shute joined me as program coordinator for U.S. speakers. My graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, Erin Kapp, a student member of NASW, has worked as program manager, spending countless hours working with session organizers and keeping the online program up to date.

The program itself reflects the deep commitment of NASW members to this international joint effort. Former NASW presidents including myself, Mariette DiChristina, Lee Hotz, Joe Palca, Richard Harris, and Cris Russell are all moderators, speakers or organizers in the Cairo program. Cris, as president of our sister organization, the Council for Advancement of Science Writing (CASW) has also organized a session on "Science Journalism in the Age of Denial" and CASW is funding that session.

The National Association of Science Writers is funding 10 speakers to the Cairo conference and also—here is the really good news—will also be providing travel grants for 10 members of NASW to attend the conference. We will be launching that

June 27-29, 2011 • *7th World Conference of Science Journalists*, Cairo, Egypt. www.wcsj2011.org

Sept. 4-8, 2011 • *6th Science Centre World Congress*, Cape Town, South Africa. www.6scwc.org

May 7-10, 2012 • *Planet Under Pressure: New Knowledge, New Solutions*, London, United Kingdom. http://www.igbp.net/page.php?pid=531

July 12-16, 2012 • *5th Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF2012)*, Dublin, Ireland. www.esof2012.org

Upcoming Meetings

travel award program in early February.

Among the other NASW participants in the program are: Phil Hilts, head of the Knight Science Journalism Program; Bruce Lewenstein of Cornell University; Mike Lemonick of Climate Central; Lynne Friedmann, editor of *ScienceWriters*; Tom Levenson, MIT science writing program; Rick Borchelt, NCI; Ivan Oransky, Reuters Health; Jennifer Oullette, Cocktail Party Physics; Tom Siegfried and Alex Witze, of *Science News*; Jim Cornell of the International Science Writers Association, freelancers Shannon Brownlee and Jeanne Lenzer; Curtis Brainard of the *Columbia Journalism Review*; and Marc Abrahams of the *Annals of Improbable Research* and the Ig Nobel Prizes.

The conference will be held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Cairo; located on the Nile River. Although the main meeting begins on June 27, there will be pre-conference training workshops on June 26, ranging from learning digital skills to reporting on climate change. There will also be a day of field trips starting on June 30, which will include Whale Valley in the Western Desert to study evolution; along the Nile to look at environmental problems to the Nile valley and delta; and to Qatar's Science and Technology Park.

Please check the conference website for updates (**www.wcsj2011.org**). And contact me at deborah.blum@wcsj2011.org if you have any questions. ■

Pam Frost Gorder
Assistant Director
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Our Gang

Jim Barlow, director of science and research communications at the University of Oregon, has been dabbling as a travel writer, chronicling his adventures around Oregon and Washington State. For "a thoroughly confusing look at the Northwest," he says, check out his blog **http://wwww.barlowtravelerblog.com**. Camping in the Cascades, anyone? Ask him for directions at jebarlow@uoregon.edu.

The History of Science Society (HSS) awarded the Watson Davis and Helen Miles Davis Prize for best general audience book to **Marcia Bartusiak**, adjunct professor and executive director of the graduate program in science writing at MIT. The prize committee called *The Day We Found the Universe* "a beautifully written, informative book on a critical topic in the history of science." Bartusiak assembled her story of astrophysics in the 1920s and 1930s through archival sources and oral histories to create a "rich, complex, yet crystal-clear narrative." She received her prize in November at the HSS's annual meeting in Montréal, Canada. Congratulate her at bar2siak@mit.edu.

Nancy Fliesler, senior science writer in the Department of Public Affairs at Children's Hospital Boston, just launched a new blog called Vector (**http://vectorblog.org**). It reports and comments on research and innovation in pediatric and adult medicine, at that hospital and beyond, touching on scientific, business, and policy issues. Fliesler is chief editor, and she shares the blogging duties with writers, researchers, and clinicians from around the hospital—and occasional outside experts. Write to her at nansona@comcast.net.

In October, *ScienceWriters* editor **Lynne Friedmann** received the 2010 Andy Mace Award for Contributions in Public Relations—a special award given by the San Diego Press Club—for her many contributions to science communications. In November, she traveled to Tokyo as an invited speaker at a symposium commemorating the opening of the Science Media Centre of Japan. Congratulate her at lfriedmann@nasw.org.

Rick Borchelt has left Johns Hopkins University for the National Cancer Institute, where he is now special assistant for public affairs to NCI director Harold Varmus. Borchelt will coordinate communications between and among the institute's communications, media relations, and stakeholder relations groups. The best perk, he says: an 11th floor window office on the hill on the Bethesda campus overlooking wooded environs that promise loads of warbler-watching in the spring. "First thing I brought to the new office was a spare set of binoculars to watch the resident red-tailed hawks," he adds. Ask him what the hawks are up to at rickb@nasw.org.

Freelancer **Raven Hanna** just relocated from San Francisco to the Big Island of Hawaii, in the jungle on the side of the most active volcano on Earth. She says: "I figured that, as a self-employed science communicator, I can live anywhere. So why not here, where nature is raw and the visible Milky Way is a nightly reminder that we live on an amazing planet?" You can't fault her logic. Send best wishes to ravenhanna@gmail.com.

Freelancer **Roberta Kwok** received the Walter Sullivan Award for Excellence in Science Journalism-Features from the American Geophysical Union (AGU). She was selected for her March 2009 *Nature* piece, "The Rock That Fell To Earth," which recounted the tale of an asteroid that was detected in space and then tracked by many earth scientists and civilians, some of whom retrieved bits of it from the desert in Sudan where it crashed. The judges praised Kwok for making "AGU science extremely accessible, even fun." She received the award at the AGU national meeting in December. Read the article at **http://bit.ly/fcOFy** and write to Kwok at robertakwok@gmail.com.

Melissa Lutz Blouin, director of research communications at the University of Arkansas, now has a new title—president of

GORDER PHOTO COURTESY OF JO McCULTY

the University Research Magazine Association (URMA), which is an organization of 100-plus magazine editors and writers who work for research magazine publications at universities and nonprofit research institutions. Perfect timing, since she and the University of Arkansas will host URMA's 2011 national meeting in May. Congratulate her at blouin@uark.edu.

Freelancer **Wendy Meyeroff** of WM Medical Communications recently wrote the website content for Cypin Production. She now writes news releases for the company, which links U.S. and China biopharma experts. She's also taken what she calls a strange segue—into banking. "I—who can't even balance my checkbook—got called somehow to write for the Independent Banker's Association," she explains. Give her your two cents at wendy@wmmedcomm.com.

As of October, **Dave Mosher** is a full-time contributor to *Wired Science* at Wired.com (**http://wired.com/wiredscience**) where he's covering everything from physics and astronomy to technology and biology. "I somehow convinced Wired.com to let me work out of NYC, so I'm still located on the east coast," he explains. "Alas, everyone thinks I moved to the west coast—probably because I did three weeks of training, getting to know everyone there. I miss everyone on the west coast, especially the kegerator-turned-robot called Beer Robot (@beerrobot on Twitter)." Write to him at davemosher@gmail.com to ask how to build a beer-bot of your own.

Wendy Lyons Sunshine has joined About.com, a website owned by the New York Times Co., as Energy Guide for its Industry and Trade channel. She'll be writing, editing, and blogging about energy-related topics, and welcomes review copies of related books and reports. Contact her at wendy@polishedwriting.com.

Two NASW members won 2010 AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards. **Hillary Rosner** won the award for Small Newspaper—Circulation less than 100,000 for her story "One Tough Sucker" in the *High Country News*. And **Richard Harris** won in the Radio category, for a story he wrote with National Public Radio cohort Alison Richards entitled, "Follow the Science: Calculating the Amount of Oil and Gas in the Gulf Oil Spill." The awards honor professional journalists for distinguished reporting for a general audience. Rosner and Harris will each receive $3,000 and a plaque at the 2011 AAAS Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. in February. Write to them at hillaryrosner@mac.com and rharris@nasw.org, and find links to their stories at **http://bit.ly/eRBKcO**.

Following her recent Knight Science Journalism Fellowship, **Eugenie Samuel Reich** has taken a job with *Nature*. She'll cover the physical sciences for the journal's Cambridge, Mass. office until May 2011. Write to her at eugenie.reich@gmail.com to ask what she'll be up to after that.

Canadian freelance and children's science writer **Shar Levine** spent a week in September as a 2010 Ocean Science Journalism Fellow at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI). Earlier in the year, she was invited to participate in the National Center for Atmospheric Research Science Journalism Fellowship, in Boulder, Colo.

NASW president and freelancer **Nancy Shute** is now reporting part-time for National Public Radio's science desk, covering health and medicine. "I'm learning the mysteries of radio from the best of the business," she says, and also contributing to NPR blogs. She's still writing and editing for other news organizations, and squeezing in volunteer work for NASW and the World Conference of Science Journalists, adding, "Busy is good!" Tell her you agree at nancy@nancyshute.com.

The American Geophysical Union launched the AGU Blogosphere (**http://bit.ly/gE1Iub**), a new community of Earth and space science blogs that includes seven independent blogs written by scientists and three blogs written by AGU staff and contributors. **Maria-José Viñas**, public information coordinator at AGU, is the community manager, and her colleague, Public Information Specialist **Kathleen O'Neil**, is a regular contributor. Write to them at mjvinas@agu.org and koneil@agu.org to ask whether the blogosphere is a layer of air above or below the troposphere.

Jan A. Witkowski, executive director of the Banbury Center at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, got what she called "at least 20 minutes of fame" when she and colleague Alex Gann came upon nine boxes of correspondence from scientist Francis Crick. Lost since the mid-1970s, the letters, postcards, and photographs detailed more than 25 years of successes, failures, professional friendships, and animosities that Crick encountered on his quest to discover the DNA helix. Published in the Sept. 30, 2010 issue of *Nature*, Witkowski and Gann's analysis of the correspondence shed new light on this critical time in the scientist's life. Ask her for more details at witkowsk@cshl.edu.

Freelancer **Cathy Yarbrough** just created a new website for the Scripps Translational Science Institute (**http://www.stsiweb.org**). She's also celebrating her fifth year of working at the American Society for Cell Biology's annual meeting as manager of the press room, assisting fellow NASW member **John Fleischman**. Write to Yarbrough at sciencematter@yahoo.com.

Bora Zivkovic left his position as Online Community Manager at the Public Library of Science to become blog editor at *Scientific American*. He's temporarily moved his blog on circadian rhythms ("A Blog Around the Clock") to Wordpress (**http://blog.coturnix.org/**) en route. Meanwhile, he's joined the board of the Science Communicators of North Carolina (**http://www.sconc.org/**); got hired as a blogger/editor at Science In The Triangle (**http://scienceinthetriangle.org/**); is in the final stages of organizing the fifth ScienceOnline conference (**http://scienceonline2011.com/**); and is editing the fifth anthology of the best writing on science blogs, *Open Laboratory*. Write to him at coturnix@gmail.com to ask how he manipulated his circadian rhythms to accomplish all of this in 24-hour days.

Joann Rodgers, for more than 25 years executive director of media relations and public affairs at Johns Hopkins Medicine, retires from that post Jan. 1, but stays on part-time as a faculty scholar and senior advisor for strategic communications at Johns Hopkins' Berman Institute of Bioethics. She also will continue teaching at the Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, serve as a science editor at *Johns Hopkins Medicine*, consult on communications for a variety of institutions, and freelance as a magazine writer and author. Her e-mail address remains unchanged: jrodgers@jhmi.edu. ■

■ ■ ■

Our Gang seeks career news updates—whether you are a staff writer, freelance, broadcaster, blogger, editor, educator, student, or hybrid.

Suzanne Clancy
Freelance
SCLANCYPHD@YAHOO.COM

Regional Groups

CHICAGO

Chicago Science Writers reconnected for drinks on Oct. 7 to get caught up on summer activities and welcome students in the science writing program at Northwestern to the group. Afterwards, they walked to the Field Museum for an engaging talk about the impact of global warming on the Great Lakes region and on Chicago, in particular. Speaker Donald Scavia, Ph.D., director of the Graham Environmental Sustainability Institute at the University of Michigan, painted a bleak picture of the coming years, pointing out that some of the climate changes brought on by pollution and other factors have already begun. For example, reduced ice cover during the winter in the Great Lakes means more evaporation and has led to a lowering of lake levels because of increase in evaporation during the winter. Weather events are likely to be more severe (watch for those blizzards!), but over time, the Chicago area's climate will more likely resemble Texas. The lecture was organized by the Chicago Council on Science and Technology, which provides a speaker series in addition to opportunities for research institutions in the area to work together.

LOS ANGELES

In September, Science Writers of Los Angeles (SWoLA) visited the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena to see the new Mars Science Lab rover (Curiosity) and talk to some of the mission scientists. Unlike her smaller rover cousins Spirit and Opportunity, Curiosity will be the size of a Mini Cooper and has the ability to carry a science payload of 70 pounds. Curiosity is scheduled to be launched in November 2011 and land on the red planet in August 2012. The group also had the opportunity to tour the Deep Space Network Operations Control Center, the spot that controls the radio communications link for NASA spacecraft and some satellites. NASW member Whitney Clavin set up the tour.

In October, about 12 SWoLA-ers took an early morning ferry ride to Santa Catalina Island where they were hosted by the Catalina Conservancy during a half-day jeep tour of the island's interior. Catalina Island is home to non-native buffalo (brought to the island as background props on a movie shoot in the 1920s), as well as endemic species and subspecies, including foxes, squirrels, and birds—many of which were spotted on the tour with the help of the sharp-eyed conservancy tour guides. The jeep tour explored much of the island and stopped at the island's small airport where science writers lunched on bison burgers while learning about sustainability from Carlos de la Rosa, the chief conservation officer. Some of the new projects starting up on Catalina include a new non-hormonal birth

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AAAS

CLANCY PHOTO COURTESY OF MARC LIEBERMAN

control method for the bison and a way for hikers to use smart phones to photograph, describe, and tag invasive species for removal. Patricia Maxwell organized the day's events and made sure that no one missed the boat!

NEW YORK

SWINY kicked off its fall season on Sept. 28 by co-sponsoring a program with the New York Academy of Sciences and Syndax Pharmaceuticals, Inc., entitled Epigenetics and Cancer: The Next Evolution in Cancer Therapeutics. Moderated by SWINY co-chair Joe Bonner, the roundtable discussion included Jean-Pierre Issa, M.D., co-director, Center for Cancer Epigenetics, Institute of Basic Science Research, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston; Stephen B. Baylin, M.D., deputy director of the Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center at Johns Hopkins University and leader of the American Association of Cancer Research Stand Up to Cancer Epigenetics "Dream Team"; and Edward A. Sausville, M.D., Ph.D., associate director for clinical research, Greenebaum Cancer Center, University of Maryland.

On Oct. 9, SWINY held another fun social at the Windfall Tavern in midtown Manhattan, where members and friends had a chance to loosen up, catch up, and network. In the spirit of continued collaboration with other science writers groups in New York, SWINY co-chair David Levine shared his extensive knowledge as a panelist at the New York Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) on Oct. 5. The program, entitled A Presentation Geared to the Needs of New and Transitioning Medical Writers, was designed for scientists interested in careers in medical writing.

Many SWINY members joined nearly 600 science writers at the NASW Annual Meeting, ScienceWriters2010, in New Haven. SWINY co-chairs David Levine and Joe Bonner both contributed to the program: How to be an Effective Science Public Information Officer in the Changing Media World (moderated by Levine with Bonner as a panelist) and Experiments in New Media: Beautiful Failures and Startling Successes (Bonner co-organized and served as moderator).

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Northern Virginia Community College geology professor and blogger Callan Bentley led DCSWA members on a rousing tour of the geology of Washington, in September, pointing out the Rock Creek Shear Zone, stalactites hanging from the Beach Drive tunnel, and the effects of urban chemistry on the Duke Ellington Bridge. In October, DCSWAns got an inside look at the Smithsonian National Zoo's conservation and research facilities, located in Front Royal, Va., where they learned about breeding programs for cheetahs, clouded leopards, and cranes. Also in October, DCSWAns visited the DC-based U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation, where they heard from a panel of experts, including OSTP senior policy advisor Jason Rao and USAID science and technology advisor Alex Dehgan, about the relationship between science and diplomacy.

Author Jamie Workman spoke to members in early December about his award-winning book *Heart of Darkness*. And the month was capped off with the annual DCSWA Holiday Party, held this year at the National Geographic Society. The party also included the call for submissions to the 2011 DCSWA Newsbrief Award for Short Science Journalism, which offers a prize of $500 to the winning author of a print, online, audio, or video piece in 2010. The contest is open only to DCSWA members. More info is at **www.dcswa.org**. ■

In Memoriam

Lucy Kavaler
Author, editor, and freedom-to-write activist

Lucy Kavaler, author and human rights activist, died Oct. 30. She was 87 and had been an NASW member since 1968.

Her books frequently tackled topics usually reserved for scientists, and her special gift was to make them fascinating for the general reader. In reviewing her book *Mushrooms, Molds, and Miracles* the *New Haven Register* declared that "Lucy Kavaler did for fungi what Audubon did for birds." The *New York Times* Book Review deemed *Freezing Point* "an excellent example of the virtues of good science writing."

Kavaler was first published at the age of six when her mother sent a poem she had composed to a children's magazine. She was paid $1.

Kavaler was a graduate of Oberlin College, magna cum laude, with honors in English and was awarded a Sloan-Rockefeller Fellowship in Science Writing at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

Early in her career, she wrote for and edited magazines, became a medical editor of *Infectious Diseases*, and later served as associate editorial director at Physicians World Communications, whose publications included *Primary Cardiology*. At PW, Kavaler created *The Female Patient*, a ground-breaking publication that examined general medical issues in terms of female physiology. She was a consultant to the Skin Cancer Foundation with responsibilities for communications and editing the foundation's *Annual Journal*.

Her career as an author took off when a series of articles about debutantes in a Sunday newspaper magazine section was "discovered" by a publisher and led to *The Private World of High Society*. She wrote a total of 17 books that included biography, historical fiction, and non-fiction.

In addition to writing and editing, Kavaler worked for human rights, particularly free speech. She was an active member of PEN, the international organization of poets, essayists, and novelists, and served on its Freedom-to-Write Committee that helped gain the release of writers imprisoned overseas. Kavaler pioneered the PEN Prison Writing Program to encourage U.S. prisoners to express themselves. *(Source: The Kavaler Family)*

■ ■ ■

[*ScienceWriters* has learned belatedly of the following death.]

Irving S. Bengelsdorf
Chemist, science writer, editor

Irving S. Bengelsdorf, a longtime science writer, editor, and columnist died June 22, 2007. He was 84 and had been an NASW member for 41 years.

Back in the 1960s, not many research chemists made the career switch to journalism, but that is what Bengelsdorf did when he gave up a job at U.S. Borax to become science editor at the *Los*

IN MEMORIAM continued from page 33

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Letters to the Editor

Given that this year marks my 40th as a full-time freelance (or, if you prefer, freelancer) I want to comment on Dawn Stover's "How I did it: The Transition from Staff to Freelance" (*SW*, fall 2010) The advice given is solid, but the piece encourages two perceptions about freelancing that have created problems for me during my career. I voluntarily left my position as curator of publications of the New York Zoological Society and my office-with-fireplace at Bronx zoo to try freelancing but, even so, often have had to correct the opinion that I have been laid off or fired from a "real" job. This view long was the norm for bank loan officers. I would have preferred to read a piece by someone who chose freelancing not out of necessity.

Secondly, the reference to getting one's life back encourages the idea that we work in our pajamas. Freelancing can be a tougher grind than a staff job. The boss can be fiercely demanding, doesn't pay for sick days, vacations or health insurance, and never leaves your side.

I, too, moved to a relatively rural area when I switched. It still is sufficiently rural that I can hunt a few steps from my back door. Be mindful, however, that living away from the big city decreases the frequency of face-to-face exposure to editorial contacts and colleagues. Speaking of such, as a freelance gets on in years, it is more important than ever to make fresh contacts. At age 72, I know from sad experience how contacts can evaporate because of retirement from their jobs or from existence on this planet.

Ed Ricciuti
Freelance
Killingworth, Conn.

■ ■ ■

Genevive Bjorn's report in "The Free Lance" column (*SW*, fall 2010) on the Knight Fellows/ASJA-sponsored "Future of Freelancing" conference at Stanford University was a solid, helpful account of the meat of the two-day meeting. I can say that with some credibility since I was there, and I applauded this, to my knowledge, first stab at defining what kind of world freelancers want to inhabit as well as the one for which they should prepare.

To my mind, what was left out of this report was the revealing attitude shared by many of the editors and panelists that in this brave, new future the freelancer would be expected to use social media tools and skills to promote both their own work and a publishers' product(s). This is part of nearly every discussion and speech I attended on how most, but not all, editors foresaw themselves making assignments as well as how they expected freelance contributors to boost magazine and book sales.

For the social media-based "local/neighborhood journalism" espoused by AOL representatives and struggling local newspaper editors, this expansion of the freelance writers' traditional role into that of product promoter and salesperson was a given. You had some item published and you should tout it, subtly of course, to your Facebook friends and Twitter followers.

When cornered with direct questions about how much they intended to pay for the enhanced services—making and keeping friends and followers takes time, after all—these editors' responses were not encouraging. Even the book editors who spoke seemed to share some of this feeling that writers' social media connections should help them sell product. Writers who do that, I suspect, will quickly lose more readers than gain them—unless you have something in the nature of J.R. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Then all bets are off.

Vic Cox
Freelance
Goleta, Calif.

ScienceWriters Welcomes Letters to the Editor

A letter must include a daytime telephone number and e-mail address. Letters submitted may be used in print or digital form by NASW, and may be edited.

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CAREY PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIRGINIA TECH

Visiting Scholar Program at Virginia Tech

John A. Carey, award winning writer and editor, with three decades of experience covering science, medicine, the environment, and other areas for magazines including *Business Week*, *The Scientist*, and *Newsweek*, was this year's Virginia Tech's College of Engineering Visiting Scholar.

"Reporters have it drummed into them that stories have to be balanced. So they may go out and find one expert on each side..."

His talk, "Why Scientists Should Help Stop the Decline in Journalism," was presented on Sept. 21 to Virginia Tech faculty, staff, students, and to the public.

The visiting scholar program is funded by a gift from engineering alumnus Bob Jebson of Culpeper, Va., a 1956 metallurgical engineering graduate and a member of the College of Engineering's Committee of 100.

An admirer of technology communication, Jebson directed a $50,000 gift to the College of Engineering's public relations program, and worked with Lynn Nystrom, director of news and external relations for engineering, to develop the guidelines that call for a nationally recognized science and technology writer to spend a few days on campus each year.

Carey was a senior correspondent for *Business Week* from 1989 until 2010. He wrote hundreds of stories, from quick-hitting breaking news to in-depth features for the magazine. Fifteen of his articles were cover stories including "The many benefits of high priced oil," "Business, yes business, wants action on climate change," and "From back surgery to bypass operations, many medical procedures are dubious."

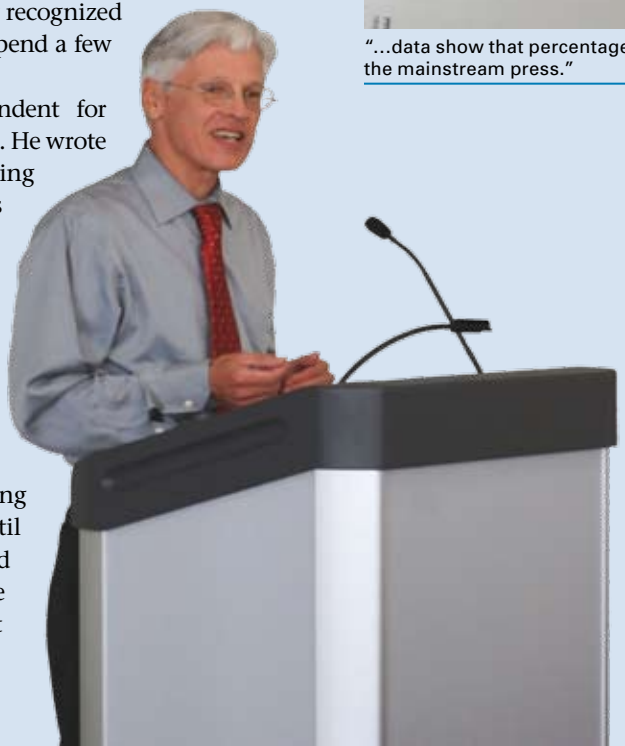
Carey was the associate managing editor of *The Scientist* from 1988 until 1989. He managed staff writers and the freelancers who wrote for the publication. While a reporter at *Newsweek* in the 1980s, he wrote on science, technology, medicine, and other topics. He covered the first space shuttle missions, the Arkansas creationism trial, the AIDS epidemic, new ideas about evolution, the America's Cup races, and many other events.

He is the director of the Evert Clark/Seth Payne Award for Young Science Journalists, responsible for managing the science writing contest for journalists under the age of 30.

Carey, currently a freelancer, graduated from Yale University in molecular biophysics and biochemistry magna cum laude, and has a master's degree in marine biology from the University College of North Wales, Bangor, and a master's of forest science in forest ecology from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. ■

(Source: news release)

"...data show that percentage of science stories in blogs is far higher than in the mainstream press."



"There is and will always be a huge hunger for stories that tell people the truth, giving them knowledge they didn't have before. While self-interest is a powerful force, there is a reality out there—and the facts can be an even more powerful force."
—John Carey

Volunteers Make a Difference

In fiscal year 2009-2010, the following individuals generously volunteered their time and talent to NASW governance, standing committees,* ScienceWriters *magazine, annual workshops, student mentoring, and special projects. Thank you to the following members and supporters for the many ways you give to our mission.

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A blue whale skeleton resides in the Beaty Biodiversity Museum.

Celebrating Science Writing for Children North of the Border

By Shar Levine

One of the big problems facing children's science writers is not getting kids to love science—they naturally love the subject—but getting the message out to teachers and librarians.

Visit a local library or book store and you'll find that science occupies a fraction of the children's section compared to fiction and picture books.

In an effort to change the way that teachers and librarians view science, a children's science writers' festival called Celebrate Science was held in Vancouver on Sept. 25 at the Beaty Biodiversity Museum on the campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC). Co-organizers of the inaugural half-day event were myself and Jo-Anne Naslund from the UBC Education Library. Together we gathered a group of noted writers from the Children's Writers and Illustrators of BC Society as well as an editor of a children's science magazine.

At the time of the event, the museum was not yet open to the public. Thus, we were able to obtain free use of the facility which features a magnificent skeleton of a giant blue whale suspended from the ceiling of the grand hall. Another key element in festival planning was to raise awareness of and support for the Canadian Children's Book Centre (CCBC). This association meant prominent pre-event placement on the book centre's website which has thousands of followers. It also provided sponsors with tax receipts issued by the CCBC. And, finally, authors who spoke at the event received coverage in the CCBC magazine.

Sponsorship with the university and the education library provided mailing lists and other marketing opportunities. Naslund contacted a network of teachers, librarians, students, and literacy organizations throughout the province and across the country. This meant festival advertisement in all target markets—most notably every school and library in Vancouver—at no cost.

The goals for Celebrate Science were simple. The festival allowed attendees to meet science writers, learn about their books and their philosophy towards science literacy, and to share new techniques for teaching science in the classroom. Of utmost importance, we wanted to help teachers and librarians to enjoy science and to find new ways of introducing the subject to their students.

Keynote speaker was Jaymie Matthews, an entertaining, astro-paparazzo perhaps best known for a quote that became a headline in *Discover* magazine: "Exploding Star Contains Atoms from Elvis Presley's Brain—Scientists Confirm the King of Rock & Roll Lived in Another Galaxy 170,000 Years Ago!"

Celebrate Science was a paperless event with event information —including "Science in a Swag Bag: Experiments you can do with Materials Taken from the School Cafeteria," along with a video and all the materials necessary to perform the activities—and a list of the Best Canadian Science Writers for Children as selected by Canadian Science Writers contained on a memory stick.

An additional highlight of the festival was wine tasting for the panelists at the Wine Research Centre at UBC. The centre, which is not open to the public, features a cupboard containing some famous graffiti: The signatures of six Nobel laureates. The event even paid homage to the scions of Sir Isaac Newton's apple tree. Not far from the Beaty Museum are seven Flower of Kent trees, grown from a cutting of that famed apple tree in Cambridge, England.

Next year's Celebrate Science will be bigger and better. We hope to involve more writers and illustrators and have a national sponsor. Those interested in more information about the event or who would like to participate, please contact Shar Levine (sharlevine@shaw.ca). ■

NASW member Shar Levine is a freelance writer and president of the Children's Writers and Illustrators of British Columbia Society.

BEATY MUSEUM PHOTO COURTESY OF DEREK TAN; BUTTONS DESIGNED BY CAROL KERR GRAPHIC DESIGN, CAROLKERR.COM; C&EN COVER COURTESY OF AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY (ACS)

NASW and ScienceOnline2011

From Jan. 13 to 15, NASW underwrote the livestreaming and archiving of conference sessions at ScienceOnline2011; the fifth annual international meeting on science and the web (scienceonline2011.com).

Held in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina, the annual event attracts scientists, students, educators, physicians, journalists, librarians, bloggers, programmers, and others interested in the way the web is changing the way science is communicated, taught, and conducted. NASW's goal in sponsoring the livestreaming was to ensure that members and others interested in the content but unable to attend could learn alongside this actively engaged community.

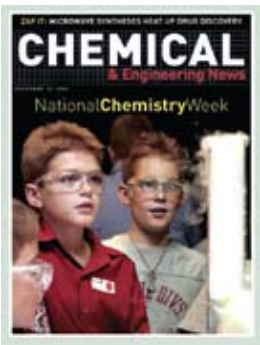
Nancy Shute and Robin Lloyd were among the 10 or so NASW attendees. They wore and gave away 500 of these colorful buttons as conversation starters in an effort to promote NASW. ■

C&EN Archives Online

The American Chemical Society (ACS) has launched a new resource that gives instant access to more than eight decades of content from its weekly newsmagazine *Chemical & Engineering News* (*C&EN*). Called *C&EN Archives* (http://pubs.acs.org/cen-archives), it includes more than 500,000 pages of content from 85+ years of *C&EN*.

C&EN Archives chronicles the chemical enterprise and the multiple other scientific disciplines that involve chemistry. *C&EN Archives* is fully searchable and accessible via the same user-friendly platform that enables readers to peruse their current electronic editions of ACS' suite of 38 peer-reviewed scientific journals.

C&EN Archives includes both quick search and advanced search options using keywords, authors, dates, and article titles. A browse-by-issue functionality enables readers to view the table of contents of each issue, with the option to go to the next or previous issue with a single click. Or users can browse a cover gallery to find the issue they need. In addition, a free abstract view provides a quick overview of the article, displaying the first 150 words. ■



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NOMINATIONS DUE BY 31 JULY 2011

IEEE-USA to Award $1,500 Honorarium to Journalist Who Contributes to Greater Public Understanding of Engineering

IEEE-USA is awarding a $1,500 honorarium to recognize – print or electronic – journalists who contribute to a greater public understanding of the contributions of technology professionals to the social, economic and cultural aspects of life. IEEE-USA will present up to two $1,500 awards in 2011.

During a special luncheon ceremony for sci-tech journalists in Washington on 7 July 2010, IEEE-USA awarded $1,500 honoraria to:

- *Holly Morris*, reporter for Washington's FOX5 Morning News, for her live coverage of the National Engineers Week Discover Engineering Family Day
- *Randy Atkins*, senior program officer for media and public relations at the National Academy of Engineering, for his engineering innovation podcast and radio series broadcast on Washington's WTOP FM and Federal News Radio, WFED AM

For more information on the IEEE-USA Journalism Award, visit ***www.ieeeusa.org/volunteers/awards/award8.html*** or contact Pender McCarter at ***p.mccarter@ieee.org***.

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**Student member*

TAX DEDUCTION

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renews temporary provisions—particularly when they benefit millions of self-employed individuals.

Why does Congress consistently pass short-term tax trimmers that become long-term? The key reason for the budgetary tomfoolery: to make projected revenue losses seem less than they actually are, thereby making Uncle Sam's books appear better than they actually are. ■

SW2010 RECAP

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for the NSF, said that the public barely distinguishes between science and pseudo-science. She favored stressing the practical ways that science affects everyday life, like the chemistry of cooking or GPS.

But Chris Mooney, author of *Unscientific America: How Scientific Illiteracy Threatens our Future*, said the public is somewhat engaged and cited the uproar over the demotion of Pluto from planet status. On the other hand, half of Americans don't accept the theory of evolution. He suggested that mass entertainment and Hollywood have helped increase scientific literacy, but not enough. He said pairing scientists with rock stars like Joe Perry works.

Jon Miller, director of the Center for Science Literacy at the University of Michigan, said that if people don't know what an atom or molecule is, they won't understand nanotechnology, so he advocated improving science education at all levels, especially secondary. On a positive note, Gen X is the most scientifically literate generation ever, he said. Gen Xers surf and are selective about what they read online. He did not think the Pluto issue was a serious one. We have to think in terms of how the Internet has changed everything "because we are a just-in-time world."

As for solutions involving science writing, Mooney said scientific organizations are rethinking how best to communicate with the public. Another approach, emphasizing the human interest side of science came from the audience. Miller said it couldn't counteract attitudes about science resulting from cases of scientific fraud and doctors who are engaged in drug clinical trials and yet take money from pharmaceuticals.

Co-moderator Rick Borchelt asked each how they would use one dollar to fix the problem. Miller said 50 cents for pre-college education, 25 to improve college courses (because we're failing there worst), and the rest for adult learning of all kinds. Mooney called for the government to subsidize careers in science communication for journalists and young scientists who did not get tenure.

Funk said she would put the money into the education system, especially standards for science learning, which is being eclipsed by math and reading standards. ■

Karen A. Frenkel covers science, technology, and their impacts on society.

NASW 75TH

continued from page 6

expand workshop offerings, retool the NASW website, build the Words' Worth freelance database, and provide travel and training grants to members.

2008 saw the end of an era: The Diane McGurgan years. Diane served as NASW's manager and executive director for 30 years. For most of that time she was the organization's sole staff member. To honor her dedication to science writing and the organization, in 2002 the annual Diane McGurgan Service Award was created with initial funding from longtime NASW member Louis Lerner. Each year the award honors an NASW volunteer whose service exemplifies Diane's dedication to the organization. Since 2008, executive director Tinsley Davis has nimbly guided the organization forward.

In the past two years, the digital revolution that led to the meltdown of mainstream publishing and the recession have brought new challenges to NASW members. They have met those challenges by learning new skills, creating new jobs, and redefining what it means to be a science writer in this new century. ■

CASW

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Nobelists Harold Varmus and Carol Greider, and government leaders Jane Lubchenco and Marsha McNutt, stressed the need for scientists to improve communication with the media, as well as the public and politicians.

We currently offer briefings, dubbed "brown bags" for their lunch offerings, that bring leading science writers to universities and other research institutions to talk to scientists about how and why we do what we do. An excellent video on our website (**http://bit.ly/egsoke**) shows *Scientific American* editor Mariette DiChristina, veteran *Wall Street Journal* medical writer Ron Winslow and the *New York Times*' Denise Grady, a recent Cohn prize winner, on a CASW-organized panel at Yale Medical School. These days, we fortunately seem to have fewer scientists in the audience complaining about being misquoted and more who are genuinely interested in improving how they communicate. (Let us know if you would like CASW to bring a distinguished "brown bag" science-writing panel to your institution.)

Throughout its history, CASW has maintained a close working relationship with NASW, and we look forward to continuing our joint efforts. CASW has created a special niche as an independent educational group dedicated to working with science writers, educators, and scientists to improve the coverage of 21st century science.

And, oh, yes, things have changed on the science front since 1960. Today the space race is little more than a crawl, with U.S. manned spaceflight on the back burner. But astronomy burns brightly; scientists said recently there may be three times as many stars in the universe as previously thought. Extraterrestrial intelligence has not been found, but we did have a media feeding frenzy over those controversial arsenic-eating microbes in California's Mono Lake. These days the drug industry is more interested in finding a blockbuster weight-loss pill than a better contraceptive. And, as to genetics, the long promise of personalized medicine seems to be finding pay dirt in the wake of the human genome revolution.

So, not to worry, science writing is likely to be very busy and in business for at least another 50 years. No more celebrations. We've got work to do.

CASW has long benefitted from the extraordinary leadership of Ben Patrusky, assisted by the inimitable Diane McGurgan. In 2005, veteran science writer Paul Raeburn took the reins of New Horizons. All can be reached through casw.org. ■

SCHOLARLY PURSUITS

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"Television broadcast coverage of this food contamination crisis was not focused primarily on the information in the FDA press releases," Nucci and her colleagues found. "Journalists' demonstrated selectivity in disseminating the government information subsidies examined here, focusing on the crisis and controversy of the investigation rather than on information pertinent for consumer health." This is in sharp contrast to earlier studies, they found, in which "government information subsidies passed almost unchanged through media gatekeepers." This is "likely a result that journalists are not public health agents—once they have reported that there is an issue with contaminated food they move on to talking about the why's and how's of the contamination," the article posits. "The primary focus on the outcome of the investigation of the contamination rather than public health information is due to a critical difference in perspective between scientists and journalists on the role of the media in communicating science." By Nucci et al.'s accounting, news reports routinely failed to provide the public with actionable public health information offered by FDA, choosing to report instead on the investigation of where and how this particular episode happened.

The finding "begs the question as to how to bridge the gap between scientist and journalist in terms of roles and responsibilities to the American public," the article notes. In this case, it explains, FDA's information subsidies were able to influence the inclusion of stories but were not able to control story content critical for public health. While stopping short of offering solutions, they recommend additional research "on the relationship between the government agencies charged with food safety and the journalists who cover and report on this topic, their understood roles and responsibilities, and consider ways to create shared expectations between the needs of the scientists to communicate specific information and the needs of journalists to serve as critical investigators of science information." ■

IN MEMORIAM

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Angeles Times. His column was called "Of Atoms and Men" and ran in the paper from 1961 to 1969. He was praised for making arcane scientific issues understandable to the average reader.

After leaving *The Times*, he worked for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, where he was director of science communication for several years.

During much of that time, he also was a contributing science columnist for the *Herald-Examiner* until it folded in 1989.

Over the years, he also was a familiar face on local college campuses, teaching at UCLA and as an adjunct professor at USC.

A native of Chicago, Bengelsdorf earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Illinois and his master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Chicago.

He started writing about science for newspapers in the 1950s while working as a research chemist at the General Electric Research Lab in Schenectady, N.Y. He moved to Southern California in 1960 for a research chemist post at U.S. Borax Research Corp. in Anaheim.

In the early 1990s, he and his family moved to Oceanside, Calif. where he continued to do consulting work for JPL, mainly as a grant writer. He took his "Of Atoms and Men" column to a new audience at the *North* (San Diego) *County Times*.

In addition to his newspaper work, Bengelsdorf wrote the book *Spaceship Earth: People and Pollution* (1969) and was a coauthor of *Biology: A Unique Science* (1978). ■

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For the first time, the World Conference of Science Journalists will take place in the developing world. The 7th biennial conference opens in Cairo, Egypt this summer, and is being crafted by the Arab Science Journalists Association and its content partner, your very own National Association of Science Writers. ■ WCSJ2011 provides a unique opportunity to bring together science journalists from developing and developed countries to share, learn, and form dynamic professional relationships. In addition to the conference program there will be special workshops, excursions, and field trips to explore the region (see *SW* page 21 for details). ■ In 2009, over 900 science writers attended the WCSJ conference in London. This is a meeting you don't want to miss. Learn more today at www.wcsj2011.org and visit nasw.org to apply for special NASW travel fellowships. Follow @WCSJ2011 for Twitter updates.

WCSJ Cairo 2011

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