THE IRE JOURNAL

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MARCH/APRIL 2005

THE WAR AT HOME AND ABROAD

ABOUT THE COVER
U.S. soldiers conduct house-to-house searches during a combat operation in Samarra, Iraq. The soldiers are with the 1st Battalion, 77th Armor Regiment, 1st Infantry Division.

Cover Story
Pages 22-32

Cover photo by
SFC Johancharles Van Boers, U.S. Army

Stressing quality of effort as IRE reaches 30th year

BRANT HOUSTON

This year marks IRE's 30th anniversary and at the June annual conference in Denver we will celebrate how far we have come as an organization and how much further we want to go.

After 30 years of work and growth, IRE does the most on-the-road training of any journalism organization, reaching out to members and newsrooms whose budgets leave little money for training or travel. IRE also collaborates with dozens of other journalism groups, hosting Web sites and listservs and creating new and relevant seminars.

In addition, IRE takes strong stands on issues of protecting sources, secrecy and freedom of information, picking our spots carefully since we are an educational organization, not a lobbying organization.

While we are pleased our membership has increased over the years, we still focus on the quality of what we do, not the numbers, and how to get training to the most journalists who want and need it.

Consider our schedule for the first half of this year. It's quite a list, but well worth noting:
• Seven Better Watchdog Workshops about investigative reporting on the beat: at the Nieman program in Cambridge, Mass.; in Orlando; Little Rock, Ark.; Charleston, S.C.; Sacramento; Kansas City; and Raleigh, N.C.
• Special workshops on mapping and statistics, one of them in Arizona.
• Two broadcast workshops in Columbus, Ohio.
• The Annual Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference in Hollywood, Calif.
• Sessions on FOI at numerous NewsTrain seminars for mid-level editors.
• A workshop on investigating science with the Knight Science Journalism program at MIT.
• A Better Watchdog Workshop day and special sessions for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the Society for Professional Journalists.
• Sessions at the special seminar on nonprofits at the University of Mississippi.
• Three CAR boot camps and a special editor boot camp in Columbia, Mo.
• Two workshops on the newest twists in investigating campaign finance.
• Sessions at seminars throughout the country run by the Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism at the American Press Institute.

Meanwhile, the IRE Resource Center helps more than 200 news organizations each year, while the NICAR Database Library assists more than 100 in data analysis. We publish journals, beat books and run an extensive Web site for our 5,000 members and thousands of other journalists.

Thirty years ago IRE was a great idea brought to fruition by a few hundred journalists who wanted to help each other and further the cause of great investigative work. Since then, simple yet brilliant ideas emerged. IRE decided to run a contest in which all entries were archived for future reference instead of being thrown away. Then IRE decided to put out a handbook to show the methodology and resources needed for investigative reporting.

As the 1980s progressed, IRE began an ambitious outreach effort, extended itself past an annual conference and created ongoing newsroom seminars and regional conferences despite having a full-time staff of just five or six.

In the 1990s, IRE took the lead in blending new technology and social research methods into long-term and daily journalism work, pursuing collaborations with fellow organizations, and increasing the diversity of its membership.

As the 21st century began, IRE expanded its international efforts, helping to form the Global Investigative Journalism Network and assisting journalists in other countries in forming IRE-like organizations.

Now, IRE has taken on a new initiative – IRE Espanol - to work more closely with Spanish-speaking journalists both in the United States and Latin America. We are creating Web resources

Brant Houston is executive director of IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. He can be reached through e-mail at brant@ire.org or by calling 573-882-2042.

IRE hires Beth Kopine as new research director

IRE has hired Beth Kopine as its new Eugene S. Pulliam research director. She will coordinate efforts in the IRE Resource Center, assisting members with research needs, maintaining Web resources and managing the annual IRE Awards.

She previously served as visual resources curator for the art history and archaeology department at the University of Missouri. She has a master's degree in library and information science. She succeeds Carolyn Edds, who joined the *St. Petersburg Times*.

The IRE Resource Center is a reserve of more than 20,000 print and broadcast investigative stories and more than 2,000 tipsheets on how to cover specific beats or do specific stories. Kopine can be reached at 573-882-6668 or beth@ire.org.

IRE members score wins in annual duPont Awards

Several IRE members were part of broadcast teams winning 2005 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards for overall excellence in broadcast journalism.

They included **Brian Ross**, chief investigative correspondent and writer of ABC News and Primetime Thursday's "Nuclear Smuggling" project; **Neal Shapiro**, executive producer, and **Andy Lehren,** producer, of NBC News and Dateline's "A Pattern of Suspicion"; **Deborah George**, editor of "Mandela: An Audio History," produced by NPR and Radio Diaries; **Stuart Watson,** reporter, and **Rick Yarborough,** producer, of WCNC-Charlotte's "Medicaid Dental Centers" investigation; and **Mark Smith**, producer of "State of Denial" by WFAA-Dallas.

INVESTIGATIVE UPDATE

• **Gary Webb**, an investigative reporter whose work spurred debate and controversy, recently died. Authorities reported he died of self-inflicted gunshot wounds to the head. Webb was best known for a controversial series in the *San Jose Mercury News* linking the CIA to the crack cocaine epidemic. At the time of his death, Webb was a staff writer at the *Sacramento News & Review*. Visit www.ire.org/garywebb.html for more about Webb and his work.

• An independent review panel concluded "a widespread breakdown of fundamental processes" at **CBS News 60 Minutes** was responsible for a report about President Bush's Texas Air National Guard service on Sept. 8, 2004. Much of the report was later retracted by the network. Among the panel's recommendations was the creation of a standards executive. The 224-page report is available at www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/complete_report/CBS_Report.pdf.

• A Canadian Supreme Court decision has ended a $2.7 billion libel suit brought against the *Toronto Star* by the Toronto Police Association. The class-action suit was a response to the *Star*'s award-winning series on racial profiling. The series is available from the IRE Resource Center (Story No. 19866).

• More than 4,500 journalists have signed a **petition** expressing support for their colleagues as an increasing number of reporters have been cited for contempt in federal court for refusing to testify about their sources. IRE has joined more than 40 other organizations in lending support to the effort spearheaded by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (www.rcfp.org/standup).

• The newly opened **Brandeis Institute for Investigative Journalism** will allow established journalists to pursue major investigative projects with the support of student researchers. It wants to provide a national model to bolster the practice of investigative journalism. Florence Graves, founder of *Common Cause Magazine*, is the institute's director, and Pulitzer Prize-winner Rochelle Sharpe, an IRE member, is the senior fellow.

Recent stories worth noting

• Frank Bass and Randy Herschaft of **The Associated Press**, using declassified documents, found that a panel established by President Nixon (in the wake of the Munich Olympic terrorist attack) warned of dirty bombs and the vulnerability of commercial jets. See key documents at http://wid.ap.org/documents/nixonterror.html.

• Mike Brunker of **MSNBC.com** spent three months following the sale of anabolic steroids on eBay, finding that "a few of the auctions occurred in the open but many used the simple ruse of listing the drugs as 'books about steroids' to avoid detection by the site's security team." See http://msnbc.msn.com/id/6809149.

• Mark Schapiro of the **Center for Investigative Reporting** reports for public radio's **Marketplace** that "while the Bush Administration unravels decades of hard-fought environmental protections," the European Union is confronting American manufacturers with the need to meet stricter health and environmental standards or give up the European market. See http://marketplace.public radio.org/shows/2005/01/13/PM200501136.html.

• **WESH-Orlando** and **KHOU-Houston** have compiled hundreds of cases of Ford F-150 trucks and SUVs catching fire. Both stations say there have been problems before with the switches at the center of a recall, and both say the recalls could go wider. Visit WESH.com and KHOU.com.

MEMBER NEWS

Joe Adams has received a national Sunshine Award from the Society of Professional Journalists for his public-records workshops and his www.idiganswers.com Web site, which focuses on FOI news and the use of public records in Florida journalism. Adams is editorial writer and opinion page editor for *The* (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*. ■ **Vikas Bajaj**, business and government writer at *The Dallas Morning News*, has been named vice president and convention chair of the South Asian Journalists Association. ■ **Roberta Baskin**, a former IRE board member and long-time broadcast journalist, has been named the new executive director of the Center for Public Integrity. ■ **Alicia Blaisdell-Bannon** moves from managing editor/content at the *Cape Cod Times* in Hyannis, Mass. , to managing editor/features and newsroom writing coach. ■ **Russell Carollo** and **Mei-Ling Hopgood** of the *Dayton* (Ohio) *Daily News* won the 2004 International Consortium of Investigative Journalists Award for outstanding international investigative reporting. "Casualties of Peace" exposed the dangers Peace Corps volunteers face and was featured in the July-August 2004 issue of *The IRE Journal*. ■ **Nancy Cole**, a former freelancer, has joined the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* as a business reporter specializing in agriculture coverage. ■ **James Crawley** is now a national correspondent covering military and veteran affairs for Media General News Service's Washington bureau. He previously covered the military, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. ■ **Jack El-Hai** is author of the recently published "The Lobotomist: A Maverick Medical Genius and His Tragic Quest to Rid the World of Mental Illness," a biography of psychosurgery pioneer Walter Freeman (John Wiley & Sons, January 2005).

Send Member News items to Len Bruzzese at len@ire.org and include a phone number for verification.

HOLLYWOOD PANELS, CLASSES AIM TO MAKE YOU A CAR STAR

BY THE IRE JOURNAL

Enter stage right! It's your moment to shine.

Interested in taking that first step into computer-assisted reporting? Want to enhance already developing skills? Need to push your proven skills into new topic areas? The Annual Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference is where it all comes together.

The CAR conference is set for March 17-20 in Hollywood, Calif. It will be hosted by KNBC-Los Angeles and the *Los Angeles Times*. Sponsors include *The Orange County Register*.

There will be welcoming panels to assist participants in making the best use of the conference. For those new to CAR, the conference will include a collection of hands-on classes tailored for a mini-boot camp experience.

Check out the lineup of panels and workshops covering broadcast issues, research techniques and every newsroom beat.

Preliminary panel schedule
(Check www.ire.org/training/hollywood05 for the latest details)

OPTIONAL ADVANCED DAY
Thursday, March 17

- **Preview of advanced topics of the day**
- **Thinking outside the software box:** Developing tools that go beyond pre-packaged software to do exactly what you want
- **Advanced Microsoft Excel functions**
- **New tools for new data from the U.S. Census Bureau**
- **Making the best use of open-source software**
- **Dishing up data in the newsroom:** SQL Server and MySQL
- **String functions in Microsoft Access**
- **The latest in mapping:** Spatial analysis, avoiding pitfalls and other issues
- **Using the programs Perl and Python**
- **Using ASP to spread the data in your newsroom**
- **The advantages and issues of social network analysis**
- **Using statistics effectively and safely**
- **Using Visual Basic and Access for file management and clean up**
- **Overview of best practices in using statistics for CAR stories**
- **Web scraping**
- **SQL Server best practices:** Efficiency, speed and accuracy

REGISTRATION

Registration: $150   (Students: $100)

To attend, you must be a current IRE member.

Conference Site:
Renaissance Hollywood Hotel
800-468-3571

MAIN CONFERENCE DAYS
Friday, March 18

- **Preview and how to get the most out of this conference** (for those new to CAR)
- **Law and Order – Part One:** Delving into homicide and other justice stats
- **Internet 101:** Finding information and searching effectively online
- **Special effects:** The power of maps for investigations and presentations
- **Homeland security budgets, programs and boondoggles**
- **Internet 202:** The invisible Web and other secrets of the online world
- **Planes, Trains and Automobiles (and boats):** A tour of critical transportation safety data
- **Catch 22:** Military databases and contractors
- **Sweet Charity:** Getting inside the nonprofit world
- **Disasters:** Using data to cover wildland fires, hurricanes and earthquakes
- **Land Grab:** Probing property records
- **The Number:** A primer in math
- **Broadcast News – Getting started: How to deal with the special challenges of less time and fewer resources**
- **Caregiver CAR:** Inside the nursing home and assisted living worlds
- **We the People:** Get ready for the every-year Census
- **Broadcast News – The sex offender story as a model for CAR investigations**
- **The Matrix:** Access, influence, connections and using social network analysis to map relationships
- **Predator:** Using data on payday loans and other consumer issues
- **Broadcast News – Hit and Run:** Using CAR for quick investigations

Saturday, March 19

- **Mr. Smith Goes to Washington:** Campaign finance and 527s, PACs and lobbyists
- **Blackboard Jungle 1**: Deciphering scores and achievement
- **Secrets revealed:** Great federal datasets you may be missing
- **Blackboard Jungle 2:** From teacher performance to financial miscues
- **Fast and Furious:** Analyzing driving issues from commuting to drunks
- **1984 and its sequels:** Electronic information - open records laws and negotiations to get data
- **The Longest Yard:** Using sports data and catching those missed opportunities
- **The Border:** From immigration to crime data
- **Dodging data bullets:** Making your stories error free
- **The Magician:** Doing quick CAR stories from simple applications and tools
- **That's Entertainment:** Data for investigating Hollywood and its businesses
- **Conceiving and planning projects using CAR**
- **CAR in everyday life:** Tricks of the data trade to get you through the simplest tasks
- **City hall and under the dome:** Covering local and state government
- **Writing and editing the CAR story**
- **Method over madness:** Social research, common sense and investigative journalism
- **The Desk Set:** Backgrounding and probing business with CAR
- **Law and Order- Part Two:** Courts and prisons

Sunday, March 20

- **Internet 101**
- **The Sequel:** How to apply what you have learned and strategies for the newsroom
- **Covering hospitals**
- **Beyond Erin Brokovich:** Meaningful analysis and stories on agriculture, pollution and other environmental threats
- **Teacher's Pet:** How to plan and teach CAR in the newsroom and classroom
- **Falling Down:** Investigating the infrastructure of bridges, dams and roads

HOLLYWOOD CAR

Hands-on classes

When you sign up for classes, they will be marked "B" for beginners, "I" for intermediate or "A" for advanced. Classes marked as "Mini-Boot Camp" will be set aside for 36 pre-registered CAR beginners. Special morning panels will be coordinated with specific hands-on classes in the afternoon. The combination will give participants a mini-boot camp experience with plenty of opportunity to apply what they learn. See the complete list of hands-on classes and register for them at www.ire.org/training/hollywood05.

CLASSES WILL INCLUDE:

- **Excel 1**: Performing simple calculations and sorting.
- **Excel 2**: Calculating ratios and rates in Excel.
- **Excel 3**: Learn pivot tables, filtering and more.
- **Beyond basics 1**: Using advanced Excel functions
- **Excel and Internet**: Importing data from the Web into spreadsheets
- **Importing data into Excel**
- **Access 1**: The purifying experience of filtering your data. Learn to select and sort data items you choose.
- **Access 2**: Summarizing databases with counting and summing
- **Access 3**: How to join tables, matching information from one file to another.
- **NEW** **Beyond basics 2**: An introduction to string functions in Access.
- **Database Building**: Using Access forms to ease the process
- **Moving into Access**: Learn filtering with Excel, an introduction to filtering with Access.
- **Build your own database**: The ins and outs of how to structure and maintain a database you create.
- **Mapping 1**: Displaying data geographically with ArcView 9
- **Mapping 2**: Importing and selecting data by attribute (ArcView 9)
- **Mapping 3**: Geocoding to merge databases with street addresses into maps (ArcView 9)
- **Mapping 4**: How Spatial Analyst can pinpoint places and improve stories. (ArcView 9)
- **An introduction to SQL Server**: What's it got that desktop apps don't. How to import, view and query the data.
- **SQL automation**: How to spend zero time on those tedious, recurrent tasks of importing, manipulating, analyzing and publishing data with data transformation service.
- **MySQL**: Introduction to a low-cost alternative to SQL Server.
- **Web sites and search techniques for reporters**

- **Backgrounding people on the Internet.**
- **Background businesses on the Internet**
- **Making the most of the U.S. Census Bureau's Factfinder**
- **Downloading and analyzing Census demographics to help cover your community**
- **Perl**: An introduction to Perl and regular expressions
- **NEW** **Beyond basics 3**: Using VBA in Access to control files, run queries and automate data cleanup
- **NEW** **Scripting away your data woes 1**: VBScript as a tool to format, clean and organize data for use in any database software.
- **NEW** **Scripting away your data woes 2**: Perl as a tool to format, clean and organize data for use in any database software.
- **NEW** **ASP**: From your desktop to theirs; data sharing made easy
- **Web Scraping 1**: Using Perl to grab data from the Web
- **Web Scraping 2**: Using Perl to grab data from the Web (attendance in Web Scraping I required)
- **Introduction to social network software**
- **SPSS 1**: Navigate SPSS, using descriptive statistics and frequencies. Create basic counts and percentages to help you understand your data.
- **SPSS 2**: Doing crosstabs to show the data in different ways, and statistical tests
- **SPSS 3**: Basic linear regression techniques and diagnostics
- **NEW** **SPSS 4**: Scripting with SPSS to automate time-consuming tasks.
- **UltraEdit and others**: Using text editors to clean your data and text manipulation
- **NEW** **Optimizing with SQL Server**: Using indexes and other tools to spot slowdowns and speed up your queries.
- **NEW** **Here's your chance – grill NICAR SQL Server teachers about your own data problems**
- **Downloading and analyzing campaign finance data**

Speakers

These are just some of the expected conference speakers and instructors:
- **David Boardman**, *The Seattle Times*
- **Ziva Branstetter**, *Tulsa World*
- **Ron Campbell**, *The Orange County Register*
- **Danielle Cervantes**, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*
- **Sarah Cohen**, *The Washington Post*
- **Anthony DeBarros**, *USA Today*
- **Steve Doig**, Arizona State University
- **David Donald**, IRE and NICAR
- **Jaimi Dowdell**, IRE and NICAR
- **Joe Ellis**, KDFW-Dallas/Fort Worth
- **Matthew Ericson**, *The New York Times*
- **Mike Fabey**, *Savannah Morning News*
- **Larry Gillick Jr.**, East Carolina University
- **Matt Goldberg**, KNBC-Los Angeles
- **Joel Grover**, KNBC-Los Angeles
- **Holly Hacker**, *The Dallas Morning News*
- **Chris Halsne**, KIRO-Seattle
- **Jeff Harris**, KPIX-San Francisco
- **Brad Heath**, *The Detroit News*
- **Tim Henderson**, *The Miami Herald*
- **David Herzog**, NICAR and Missouri School of Journalism
- **Sean Holstege**, *The Oakland Tribune*
- **Brant Houston**, IRE and NICAR
- **John Jackson**, *Los Angeles Times*
- **Mark Katches**, *The Orange County Register*
- **Jennifer LaFleur**, *The Dallas Morning News*
- **Daniel Lathrop**, The Center for Public Integrity
- **Andy Lehren**, Dateline NBC
- **Rick Linsk**, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*
- **John Maines**, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*
- **David Milliron**, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*
- **Ron Nixon**, Minneapolis *Star Tribune*
- **Dick O'Reilly**, Consultant
- **Paul Overberg**, *USA Today*
- **Cheryl Phillips**, *The Seattle Times*
- **Aron Pilhofer**, The Center for Public Integrity
- **Jeff Porter**, IRE and NICAR
- **Carl Prine**, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*
- **Neil Reisner**, Miami *Daily Business Review*
- **Janet Roberts**, *The New York Times*
- **Natalya Shulyakovskaya**, *The Orange County Register*
- **Doug Smith**, *Los Angeles Times*
- **MaryJo Sylwester**, *USA Today*
- **Tom Torok**, *The New York Times*
- **Enric Volante**, *Arizona Daily Star*
- **Paul Walmsley**, IRE and NICAR
- **George Watson**, *San Bernardino Sun*
- **David Wethe**, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*
- **Holly Whisenhunt Stephen**, WOAI-San Antonio
- **James Wilkerson**, *The New York Times*
- **Margot Williams**, *The New York Times*
- **Derek Willis**, *The Washington Post*
- **Debbie Wolfe**, *St. Petersburg Times*

2005 CAR Training

These unique seminars, taught by IRE and NICAR's experts, train journalists to acquire electronic information, use spreadsheets and databases to analyze the information and to translate that information into high-impact stories. In addition, IRE and NICAR provide follow-up help when participants return to their news organizations.

Boot Camps:

Columbia, Mo.
• March 20-25
• May 15-20
• Aug. 7-12

Mapping Data for News Stories Boot Camp:

Columbia, Mo.
Uncover news stories by mapping data with geographic information system software.
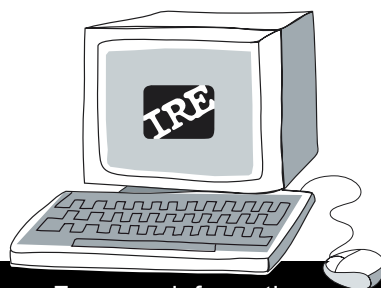• Aug. 19-21

Boot Camp for Editors:

Columbia, Mo.
Tailored to the needs of newsroom managers.
• April 8-10

For more information:
www.ire.org/training/ bootcamps.html

Sunshine Week will highlight importance of open government

BY AMANDA BUCK
THE IRE JOURNAL

Journalism organizations across the country have united to host a weeklong celebration of sunshine. Sunshine laws, that is.

Sunshine Week will kick off March 13 in an effort to spur public discussion about the importance of open government. More than 50 news outlets, journalism groups (including IRE), universities and the American Library Association are supporting the event.

Sunshine Week's goal is to get people talking about the importance of the Freedom of Information Act and sunshine laws, says coordinator Debra Gersh Hernandez.

Signed into law in 1966, FOIA requires government agencies to provide public access to government information unless protected by certain exemptions. States also have versions of the act. These laws are sometimes referred to as "sunshine laws" because they are designed to bring government into the open.

Scott Bosley, executive director of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), says the groups sponsoring Sunshine Week united behind a concern for what they see as increasing restrictions on government information. This year's push to go national with what started as a Florida focus is being spearheaded by the ASNE with a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

"The impetus for the whole thing, frankly, is that all these organizations are concerned about what appears to be a growing trend toward less open government," Bosley says. The change began before 9/11 but has worsened since then, he says.

Many cite Former Atty. Gen. John Ashcroft's October 2001 change of FOIA policy as evidence of that shift. Referencing national security concerns prompted by the terrorist attacks, Ashcroft required government agencies to evaluate national security, law enforcement and personal privacy concerns when considering an FOIA request.

The idea of designating a day to honor open government began in Florida during 2002. At that time, the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors (FSNE) encouraged the state's newspapers to publish editorials, editorial cartoons, op-ed pieces and articles on the importance of open government on Sunshine Sunday. In the first year, 26 of the state's 40 daily newspapers participated. The following year, that number rose to 36, says Tim Franklin, former editor of the *Orlando Sentinel*.

Joe Adams, editorial page writer and op-ed page editor for *The Florida Times-Union* in Jacksonville, has been involved with Sunshine Sunday since it began.

"It's really exciting to see this extending beyond the borders of Florida and becoming a national thing," Adams says. Like Bosley, Adams says access to government records has been in danger in recent years.

"Really, Sunshine Sunday has been a way to regain some ground lost to the tidal waves of terrorism and privacy concern," Adams says.

Although Florida long has been at the forefront

WHAT'S AVAILABLE

Web sites with useful information for Sunshine Week:
• **Sunshine Week:** www.sunshineweek.org
• **ASNE:** www.asne.org
• **IRE:** www.ire.org/foi
• **Florida Society of Newspaper Editors:** www.fsne.org
• **Joe Adams' home page:** www.idiganswers.com
• **SPJ's Open Doors project:** www.spj.org/foia_opendoors.asp
• **Coalition of Journalists for Open Government:** www.cjog.net
• **Freedom of Information Center:** http://web.missouri.edu/~foiwww

Sunshine Week materials expected to be available from www.sunshineweek.org:
• Op-eds and articles for use by print and online media
• Story ideas for print and broadcast outlets
• Video news packages for television broadcasters
• Stories of citizens using FOI laws
• Information for libraries setting up community FOI programs
• Links to online FOI information and resources

of open government – its first open records law was passed in 1909 – that does not mean the state's citizens have the luxury of complacency.

"We've had a lot of challenges," Adams says. "It's sort of like hurricane season. Every year, you're going to have storms, just like in the legislature you're going to have proposals to close records. Some years they're not that bad. Other years they really hit you hard."

According to FSNE, about 300 exemptions to open government laws were defeated in the legislative sessions following Florida's three Sunshine Sundays. The group attributes many of those victories to increased public awareness the Sunshine Sundays helped generate.

Adams, an IRE member, has been involved with freedom of information issues for much of his career. The author of the "Florida Public Records Handbook," he leads seminars on open records laws and operates a Web site (www.idiganswers.com) on the subject.

He says a common misconception about freedom of information laws is that they concern only the press.

"These are very down-to-earth, rubber-meets-the-road, everyday issues for people," Adams says. "Too often, the value of what public information can bring is simply not realized."

The Times-Union has participated in the Sunshine anniversaries since 2002, writing editorials and publishing editorial cartoons. Adams says plans are under way at the newspaper to expand participation this year, perhaps by hosting a public forum.

Franklin, now editor of *The* (Baltimore) *Sun*, says his newspaper plans to do an in-depth news story on the issue.

"Sometimes, I think as an industry we've viewed this issue as 'inside baseball,' so we've been reluctant to write about it," he says. "But, given the scope of the assault on open government these days, I think we have an obligation to cover this issue – just as we would cover any other seeming shift in public policy."

Hernandez says non-journalism organizations, including the League of Women Voters, have expressed interest in participating in Sunshine Week.

Bosley says the goals of Sunshine Week are simple.

"It's not about us," he says. "It's about what the public misses when the government processes aren't open. It's about putting that message out there."

Organizers hope awareness generated by Sunshine Week will help defeat challenges to open government laws across the country. If the week is successful, they would like to see it become an annual event.

Amanda Buck is a Missouri School of Journalism graduate research assistant at IRE.

For journalists, murder, not war, is leading cause of death

JOEL SIMON

Violence, and the threat of violence, has had a profound impact of the coverage of the war in Iraq. Foreign reporters in Baghdad these days are largely confined to their hotels. They rely on Iraqi stringers to gather information because they are unable to move around the country unless they are embedded with U.S. forces.

Their fear is understandable. Twenty-three journalists were killed in Iraq in 2004, along with 16 media workers. Many more were threatened, assaulted, and kidnapped. Journalists have been targeted by insurgents, caught in crossfire, and killed by fire from U.S. forces.

That death toll from Iraq pushed the number of journalists killed around the world in 2004 to 56 – the highest total in a decade. The deadliest year for journalists since the Committee to Protect Journalists began compiling detailed statistics was 1994, when 66 journalists were killed, mostly in Algeria, Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

But even in a year marked by war casualties, the leading cause of death was murder. Thirty-six of the 56 journalists who died in the line of duty in 2004 were murdered, continuing a long-term trend. As in previous years, most of those killed around the world were local reporters, photographers, editors and camera operators covering events in their own countries.

Even in Iraq, where crossfire was the leading cause of death among journalists, at least nine of the 23 journalists killed were deliberately targeted.

The Philippines, where eight journalists were killed during 2004, was more typical. Radio reporters in the rural and provincial areas have been executed in a shocking series of attacks that has outraged the Philippines press community. Most were reporting on local corruption. Despite pledges from Philippine authorities to pursue the murderers, little progress has been made in any of the cases and Philippine journalists are extremely skeptical that the government has the interest or resources to solve the crimes. Police

Twenty-three journalists were killed in Iraq in 2004, along with 16 media workers. Many more were threatened, assaulted, and kidnapped. Journalists have been targeted by insurgents, caught in crossfire, and killed by fire from U.S. forces.

officials even suggested that journalists carry guns to protect themselves.

The record in countries like Iraq and the Philippines is even more disturbing when one considers that the murder of a single journalist can have a powerful deterrent effect. Just look at the U.S./Mexico border, where drug gangs have used selective violence against the press to suppress coverage of their activities.

In June, gunmen in Tijuana ambushed and killed Francisco Ortíz Franco, an editor with the muckraking weekly *Zeta*. A CPJ investigation linked the murder to the powerful Arellano Felíx drug cartel. Few in Tijuana would dare follow in Ortìz's footsteps.

Another terrible example was the murder of *Forbes Russia* editor Paul Klebnikov, a U.S. citizen, who was gunned down in Moscow in July. While the motive for that killing has not been firmly established, Klebnikov was one of Russia's top investigative journalists and had reported widely on organized crime. His murder, which is the 11th contract-style killing of a journalist since President Vladimir Putin came to power just five years ago, was widely interpreted as an attack not only against Klebnikov, but against any journalist considering reporting on the country's "mafia."

In a year of record violence against the press, the free flow of information around the world has been seriously curtailed. Much attention has been focused on the foreign correspondents hunkered down in their hotels in Baghdad, who are simply unable to report the complex events shaping Iraq's future.

But the situation is similar in on other parts of the world, where violent criminals set the limits of news coverage. Along the Mexican border, in the Philippines and in Russia, governments have failed to provide basic security for the press and in some instances have actively thwarted their efforts to report freely. That is a terrible blow not only to journalists themselves, but to the societies they serve.

Joel Simon is the deputy director of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Denver to host IRE Annual Conference in June

BY *THE IRE JOURNAL*

This year's IRE Annual Conference will focus special attention on regional topics, such as environmental coverage of the West, while also taking a look at a host of broader issues, including the rise of secrecy in America, ensuring information authenticity and investigating business.

The conference, which will be held June 2-5 at the Grand Hyatt hotel in Denver, will offer nearly 100 panels featuring experts on the panel topics and many award-winning print, broadcast and online journalists. IRE's 30th anniversary will be recognized throughout the conference.

The conference begins with an optional day on Thursday, June 2, that includes a writing track, computer-assisted reporting topics and criminal justice reporting sessions.

Friday and Saturday will feature showcase panels on the rise of secrecy in America and the struggle to keep broadcast investigative journalism alive.

In addition to the showcases, other panel themes presented this year include:
• Caregiving and social welfare – reporting on nursing homes, assisted living and the pharmaceutical industry.
• Reporting on the war – reviewing military policies, bids and contracts.
• Ensuring authenticity – identifying phony Web sites and authenticating documents and tipsters.
• Presenting investigative stories – writing, editing and thinking visually.

A special gathering will be held for the inter-

national journalists attending, and the annual IRE Awards luncheon will be held on Saturday.

A special track for broadcasters will be offered throughout the conference, as will numerous fast-track and "first day on the beat" sessions.

The local host of this year's conference is *The Denver Post*, and sponsors include 9 News-Denver and the Scripps Howard Foundation on behalf of the *Rocky Mountain News*.

To register or find the latest updates on this year's conference visit www.ire.org/training/denver05. Hotel reservations can be made online or by calling 800-223-1234 and asking for the discounted IRE room block before May 6.

Stand up and be counted

Plan to cast your ballot in the 2005 IRE Board of Directors election.

The election will take place June 4 at the IRE Annual Conference in Denver. Members unable to attend the annual membership meeting at the conference will be allowed to participate via absentee balloting.

Absentee balloting is meant to supplement, not replace, IRE's traditional election process, which encourages membership meeting attendance as a sign of commitment to the group and to involve as many members as possible in discussions of importance.

Members attending the annual conference are still expected to cast their votes at the membership meeting. Only those not planning to attend the meeting – and requesting a ballot in advance – will be able to vote before the conference.

Requesting ballots

Ballots will be distributed during the June 4 membership meeting and will include the names of all candidates meeting the previous day's deadline for declaring.

Requests for absentee ballots will be accepted from April 11 to May 16 and include only the names of candidates who declare by the absentee ballot deadline. IRE members whose membership status will be current through June 30, 2005, may

Running for the board

The IRE Board of Directors serves as the governing body of IRE. The board meets three times a year in person – and in conference calls – to debate and vote on issues. Directors serve on committees and task forces made up of board members and appointed non-board members.

IRE members considering running will have a shot at one of six seats this year, although incumbents may seek re-election.

Although members have until June 3 to get on the "election-day ballot," candidates have an opportunity to also be on an absentee ballot that will be made available to members not able to attend the conference.

To get on both ballots, candidates must declare by April 4. Declaring consists of sending a candidacy statement with brief biographical information to the IRE offices.

Candidate information will then be posted on the IRE Web site.

If you don't make it onto the absentee ballot, statements will be accepted as late as May 27 for Web posting.

Candidates who wait until the conference to announce must deliver a one-page statement/bio to the IRE executive director or deputy director

by noon Denver time on Friday, June 3. These – along with the previous Web announcements – will be posted on a bulletin board in the main conference area.

At the Saturday afternoon (June 4) membership meeting, candidates will need to be nominated and seconded from the floor by two other IRE members. There will be no nominating speeches, but candidates will have two minutes to address their peers. The ballot at the membership meeting will include all candidates declared through the June 3 deadline. Absentee ballots will be opened and counted along with the ballots cast at the meeting.

Immediately following the board elections, there will be a separate election for two IRE Awards contest judges. Those candidates will be nominated and seconded from the floor.

Board candidates wanting to appear on the absentee ballot and/or the IRE Web site, should submit a candidacy statement/bio limited to 500 words. An accompanying photo is encouraged. Send announcements via e-mail to elections@ire.org. Please include contact information.

FOI REPORT

request absentee ballots by phone, e-mail or in person. Each ballot will be sent to the address of record for that member along with information on how to fill out the ballot properly. Please send requests to elections@ire.org. Completed absentee ballots must be received at the IRE offices by May 27 to be valid.

Only international members requesting absentee ballots will be allowed to vote via e-mail.

Absentee ballots will not be made available at the annual conference nor will they be accepted there.

IMPORTANT DATES

April 4 – candidate declaration deadline to make it onto absentee ballots

April 11 – candidate statements will start being posted at www.ire.org

April 11 – members can start requesting absentee ballots

May 16 – deadline for requesting absentee ballots

May 27 – deadline to declare candidacy and still be posted on Web site

May 27 – deadline for absentee ballots to reach IRE offices

June 3 – deadline to get on election-day ballot

Trickle-down fascism could be emboldening a county clerk near you

CHARLES DAVIS

As is so often the case, my colleague and friend Brant Houston has hit the nail on the head. In the last issue of *The IRE Journal*, Brant's "From the IRE Offices" column discussed the rapidly deteriorating relationship between journalists and public officials, and highlighted the Kafkaesque world we now inhabit.

Brant was quite right to lay at least some of the blame on the professional ambivalence that has left us flat-footed in the face of outrage after outrage. From the assault on confidential sources to Maryland's gubernatorial tantrums, the national picture is indeed grim. From my perch at the Freedom of Information Center, I'd like to add another missive from the front lines of press freedom: The press we love is under siege.

Chicken Little, you say? Another tenured radical running around screaming about the First Amendment?

Well, I'll plead guilty to the tenured radical part, but I'm no Chicken Little.

The evidence is overwhelming: The First Amendment, bulwark of liberty, will be tested in the next few years like never before. The hard-fought liberties won in the courtrooms of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s likely will stand the test of time, but we'll still face fresh outrages every day, as emboldened officials filled with disdain for the very democratic "values" they rail on and on about challenge the very heart of newsgathering.

Bill Moyers, upon retiring from a career spent fighting the powers that be, recently put it this way: "The greatest threat to our industry lies not in the high drama of prior restraint – we won't see another Pentagon Papers-style showdown, as governments don't want the PR fallout of true banana republic repression. No, what we are seeing instead are fresh challenges to our ability to gather the news, sprinkled with some good old-fashioned strong-arming. In each instance, with rare exceptions, we're not raising nearly enough hell when we are silenced, detained, arrested or flakked to death.

"Our meek response to the heavy hand of government began in earnest in those horrible days after the tragedy of 9/11, when, quite understandably, the press was eager to please and terrified of offending readers even if the job occasionally demanded exactly that. The federal government – sensing a rare opportunity to gain the upper hand in information control – concocted a potent mix of secrecy and jingoism, equating tough questions about government policy with no less than sedition."

Well, the problem is, state and local officials watch television and read newspapers, too, and they follow the lead of Washington when it comes to information control. Soon, we began to see the press facing all manner of official and unofficial intimidation, from statehouses to city council chambers. (For example, see page 12.)

I call it "trickle-down fascism." Authoritarianism in Washington soon finds its way to the local water board, as everyone becomes ruler of his or her own little fiefdom, wielding power like a modern-day despot, unafraid of the ramifications of the behavior and, more importantly, completely unfazed by trampling on the First Amendment rights of journalists to do their jobs and gather the news.

You might argue that we have always fought these battles, that we have always faced ham-handed locals with no appreciation for First Amendment values. True, but … have you been paying attention lately?

While we all have been paying close attention to the subpoena wars, just look at what the past few months have brought:

• Last spring, The Associated Press sent a reporter to Hattiesburg, Miss., to cover a speech by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. As Scalia spoke, a U.S. Marshal stepped in front of the reporter and demanded that she turn over the digital recording she was making to back up her notes. She tried to say no, but the marshal ignored her and erased Justice Scalia's words from memory on the spot. The AP bravely fought the heavy-handed marshals, successfully, I might add, and bully for them.

• In February, a New Jersey photojournalist was

Charles Davis is executive director of the Freedom of Information Center, an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and a member of IRE's First Amendment task force.

DISASTER AFTERMATH

Designated shelter collapses under winds; flawed design, materials, oversight exposed

BY MELANIE PAYNE
THE (FORT MYERS, FLA.) NEWS-PRESS

Sometimes the story isn't about what's there, it's about what is not. That was the case with our coverage of a disaster that befell Arcadia, a small community north of Fort Myers, Fla.

The Turner Agri-Civic Center, an American Red Cross-designated shelter, collapsed under the winds of Hurricane Charley – endangering the lives of nearly 1,400 people and leaving taxpayers to wonder how a 2-year-old, multi-million dollar structure could fail so easily.

The Turner Center was used mostly for concerts and livestock shows. But it had been designed to serve as a hurricane shelter that could withstand 140-mph winds.

When Hurricane Charley threatened the Gulf Coast of Florida, people were advised to evacuate coastal areas and many fled to Arcadia, the DeSoto County seat about 60 miles inland. By the time Hurricane Charley roared through the town, its winds were between 89 and 110 mph.

People took refuge in the Turner Center, leaving behind flimsier structures like mobile homes and frame buildings. The Red Cross had set up operations in the Turner Center, recording names and holding on to valuables and medication for those who had arrived beginning early in the morning of Aug. 13, 2004.

As the storm whacked the building, witnesses said something strange began to happen. One described the Turner Center as "breathing." Another said it "fish-mouthed" – opening and closing with the winds as the metal roof began to separate from the wall.

Emergency personnel who were in the Turner Center decided to move people to the west side of the building which seemed more stable. In a few minutes the east side of the roof lifted off, ripping up lighting fixtures and ventilation pipes. The east wall collapsed onto an area where children had been playing just moments before. Amazingly, no one was killed and only one injury was reported.

Locating key documents

While the question of the Turner Center collapse nagged the newsroom, more pressing hurricane-related tasks and stories demanded our attention. It wasn't until the last of the four hurricanes hit our state six weeks later that we were able to turn our attention to DeSoto County and the Turner Center.

The first trip to DeSoto County was to gather documents related to the construction of the building and to see the site. Reporter Steve McQuilkin and I drove to the Turner Center and before we could leave the car, we were surrounded by armed security guards who blocked us from using a small digital camera, threatening us with arrest. The facility manager refused to see us. This was to be the first of many county officials who declined to provide information.

> " … poor record keeping impeded both our investigation and the county's in determining exactly who was to be held responsible for the disaster. "

We headed to the nearby county administration offices. The building permit office had no information on the Turner Center. Neither did the finance office. We were informed that all public records related to the Turner Center had been shipped to an attorney in Tampa about a three-hour drive away from our newsroom.

We called the attorney from the car and he agreed that we could view the documents in his office.

There we found 14 storage boxes. The records were in no particular order and seemed to have been boxed in haste and thrown together from various sources.

We spent several hours trying to locate key documents such as building permits, inspection reports and the engineer's drawings. We also gathered the names of key contractors and found some of the minutes from weekly construction meetings. What emerged was woefully inadequate but the missing documents became key to the story.

We made attempts to talk to all of those involved – the construction manager, architect, metal building contractor, county officials who oversaw the project, the county attorney and the county manager. Only the architect agreed to be interviewed.

Our editor, Betty Wells, understood that getting the documentation would take time and gave us plenty of it, allowing reporter Jeff Cull and I to make numerous trips to Arcadia to scrounge for documents.

We made a list of the documents we couldn't find and pressed DeSoto County officials to try to locate them. Bit by bit they began to turn up, discovered in various files and boxes spread throughout the county administration offices.

What became clear as we progressed with the investigation was that without engineering drawings we wouldn't be able to see if the structure was supposed to have stood up to the hurricane.

The same lack of organization and attention to detail that we found in the county's record keeping we found to be reflected in the construction of the

The Turner-Agri Center lies in pieces. It was serving as a hurricane shelter to 1,400 people in Arcadia, Fla., when Hurricane Charley hit with 89-110 mph winds.

$8 million project two years earlier.

Rather than hire an independent engineer to oversee construction and protect the interest of the taxpayers, the county commissioners designated the job to the county administrator despite his lack of construction or engineering experience and the fact that he was busy running the county.

The county did provide us with weekly construction meeting notes from the project. But some were missing from the original documents we were given. When the county public information officer located the missing meeting notes, we discovered another problem. The architect's request for a key certification – one that might have led to the discovery of design flaws – was dropped in order to use a metal building contractor whose bid was nearly one-third less than those submitted by the two other bidders. This was a crucial piece of documentation because the metal building that formed the core of the building was the structure that triggered the collapse.

Lack of oversight

From the meeting notes we pieced together a tale of a rural county without experience in major construction projects that hired contractors and professionals and left them to do their jobs with no oversight. This is contrary to the method used in most public projects. We showed that by interviewing other counties to see how they ran their construction projects. We could show through meeting notes that the DeSoto County officials devoted more scrutiny to paint colors, bronze plaques and flagpoles than they did to the structural integrity of the building.

The lack of oversight by county government and the hiring of a low bidder who did not use the latest and best technology ultimately led to the failure of the building. And poor record keeping impeded both our investigation and the county's in determining exactly who was to be held responsible for the disaster.

The story came up in legislative cabinet meetings in Tallahassee the day after publication. Legislators were told that hurricane shelter standards would be a topic for the legislature during the upcoming regular session.

The article also drove news organizations, including ours, to pursue stories on the overall shelter system in the state, taking a hard look at the safety of buildings meant to protect us in a disaster.

A month after the story ran in our paper, a preliminary report by an insurance company's attorney linked the center's failure to the clips used to secure the metal building – one of the likely theories presented in our report.

The attorney cautioned, however, that it was uncertain whether it was the spacing of the clips, the number or the type that was used, because key construction documents were missing.

Melanie Payne is an investigative reporter at The News-Press.

Proposed federal shield laws emerge from leak probes

DAVID B. SMALLMAN

It is no secret that reporters across the United States have recently been threatened with or actually served jail sentences (or, in one egregious instance, house arrest) for refusing to reveal confidential sources. Reflecting both the seriousness of the problem and a willingness of media constituencies with disparate interests to unite against a common threat, two measures seeking to create a federal shield law have recently been introduced in Congress.

Whatever the likelihood that either bill will be enacted – and barring a regime change, prospects are uncertain – the apparent failure of the courts to reign in prosecutors has at least now triggered a political response. The absence of a national standard that protects journalists, according to U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher, a co-sponsor of the House bill, is degrading the core protections provided to the news media under the First Amendment.

Both of the proposed federal shield laws would create an absolute privilege for disclosure of information about confidential sources and a qualified privilege for disclosure of related newsgathering materials.

Free Flow of Information Act of 2005

Introducing the bill in the U.S. House on Feb. 2 (the same day that President Bush delivered his 2005 State of the Union address), co-sponsor Mike Spence told his colleagues that the legislation "will provide reporters with protection from being compelled to disclose sources of information in any federal, criminal or civil case, without meeting strict criteria."

Congressman Boucher explained that "[r]eporters rely on the ability to assure confidentiality to sources in order to deliver news to the public, and the ability of news reporters to assure confidentiality to sources is fundamental to their ability to deliver news on highly contentious matters of broad public interest."

The proposed shield law, which is favored by many press lawyers (who had a hand in its drafting), closely follows existing Justice Department guidelines for issuing subpoenas to those involved in newsgathering activities. Known as the DOJ

Policy With Regard to the Issuance of Subpoenas to the News Media, 28 C.F.R. § 50.10, those guidelines were adopted during the early 1970s in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal. For decades they have provided a largely effective mechanism for avoiding unnecessary or overzealous prosecutions. Because the DOJ policy was just that – more of a guideline than a rule, as Captain Jack Sparrow in "Pirates of the Caribbean" might put it – they have been subject to shifting emphasis in the post-9/11 era between the public's need for information and the ostensibly fair administration of justice. In the hope of restoring greater equilibrium to that process, the Free Flow of Information Act seeks to make the guidelines mandatory.

Free Speech Protection Act of 2004

Three weeks after the re-election of Bush, and as the annus horribilis for journalists drew to the end, Sen. Christopher Dodd introduced S. 3020, which was the first proposed federal shield law for reporters since 1987.

According to a summary of the bill prepared by media attorney Kevin Goldberg, it was based primarily on existing press shield laws in the District of Columbia and in Maryland. As with the proposed House legislation, it would provide "covered persons" with an absolute privilege for disclosure of confidential sources and a qualified privilege for disclosure of related materials, such as notes, outtakes, visual images and other data.

When the draft legislation was initially circulated among interested parties, it drew some criticism because the definition of "covered persons" appeared to exclude freelancers. While the broad definition of "news media" that includes "any printed, photographic, mechanical, or electronic means of disseminating news or information to the public" may partially address that concern, a "pick your battles" mentality suffused discussions about the scope of protection needed.

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VOTE RECORDS

Routine shredding, recording errors make tracking voter fraud difficult

BY GREG REEVES
THE KANSAS CITY STAR

The political season is over, but now is a better time than ever to check the voter registration database in your state for double voters and other forms of vote fraud – especially since many of those records may be destroyed before you can even launch a query.

Also, with a new mandate in place for most states to create an online, interactive, statewide voter registration database by the end of this year (even though many have requested a deadline extension) – investigating this issue may become easier.

Looking into voting fraud began for me last summer when I found three people who had voted twice in one or more elections in 2000 or 2002, including a Kansas City lawyer who did it in four elections.

The ups and downs I encountered in reporting this story could contain valuable lessons for all who tackle these big statewide voting files. The steps I took included:

• **Matching databases.** Voter registration databases are available to reporters in most states. The best list I have found of state-by-state access to these databases is at www.techline.org. I matched the Missouri voter database of 3.9 million records with the Kansas file of 1.5 million records. Both tables included name and date of birth, ward and precinct information and voter history.

Using a simple query in Visual FoxPro, I matched the tables on last name, first name, middle name and date of birth. The query found nearly 30,000 people registered in both states. The next step was to query the new file to find out whether any of them had voted twice in the same election.

The voter history in the Missouri table consisted of 20 fields – the past 20 elections in which the voter had voted.

In Kansas, however, the vote history was only four fields – the presidential and congressional elections of 2000 and 2002, four elections in all.

I inserted a logical (true/false) field in the new file to act as a flag for double voters.

Then I wrote a Visual FoxPro program using a memory array that looked at each person's Missouri voting history, then skipped to the next record and examined his or her Kansas voting history.

If there was a match – that is, if the voter had voted in both states at any of four elections in 2000 or 2002 – the program flagged both records. I verified my results with state officials.

• **Documents search**. In each case, I needed at least four documents – photocopies of voter registration cards in both states, and copies of the poll book pages showing that the voter had actually gone to the poll and cast a ballot in both states.

Unfortunately, about half the counties I called had already shredded their bulky poll books from 2000 and 2002, as allowed by law. The signature evidence I would need to prove double voting no longer existed in these counties.

So the first lesson of this story is do not wait until a year or more has passed if you want to look for vote fraud – the records may no longer be there.

The second lesson was even tougher – the voter history in both state databases was rife with errors. Time after time, when I asked for copies of the poll book pages, county clerks would discover that voters had signed the wrong line in the poll book or election clerks using barcode scanners picked up the wrong line, attributing a vote to the wrong person. The computer records – the official state databases – were wrong.

My list of apparent double voters dwindled quickly. Records for half of them no longer existed, and I was getting tired of finding data errors in counties far and wide.

And, like many projects, this one took multiple paths. At the time I was looking for double voters across the state line, I was seeking people who may have voted twice in two counties in Missouri, or two counties within Kansas.

From the Missouri table, I found more than 90,000 people who were registered in two counties. Like many states, Missouri's voter registration database was bloated with people who had moved away or died. The 1993 National Voter Registration Act, designed to make ballot access easier, also made it more difficult to purge voters who had moved.

Although some 700 people in Missouri were flagged by the program as double voters, they were really just errors in the state database – the same kind of glitches I was turning up in comparing Kansas and Missouri data.

• **Narrowing the search**. Investigative reporter Mike McGraw suggested I turn to www.merlindata.com, a subscription service that allows Social Security number lookup by name, date of birth, city or ZIP code anywhere in the country. This helped me eliminate records of those who, although they shared a common name and date of birth, were actually two different people.

I entered names into MerlinData. This proved invaluable not only in eliminating persons with the same name and date of birth, but in verifying the addresses of persons registered in two counties.

For the interstate voting story, I decided to focus on two-dozen strictly local persons who had apparently voted in Kansas City, Mo., and again in Johnson or Wyandotte County across the state line in Kansas.

After some legal wrangling regarding access to poll books, I took my list of 24 possible double voters to the Kansas City election office. A clerk retrieved several large stacks of poll books from the vaults. An election director guided me through the poll books. One by one, we checked people off my list as data errors. For three people on the list, however, we found signatures that left little doubt they had voted in both states in one or more elections. The election director, who had earlier told me the records were sealed, thanked me for my work.

• **Personal stories.** I called the three people I found to have double-voted, and had long interviews with each. The lawyer who had voted twice in at least four elections at first denied it, but when I faxed him eight pages of his signatures in both states, he called back and said those were in fact his signatures. He later came to the newsroom and said he had no particular motive for voting twice, it was just something he did.

The other double voters were a 39-year-old Kansas businesswoman who wanted to support a Kansas City tax proposal, and a retired railroad worker who said he owned property in both states so he had the right to vote in both.

All three were charged with vote fraud in federal court in October. Two have pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges and face sentencing. The third – the lawyer who double-voted four times – was scheduled to plead guilty Feb. 9. The charge carries a maximum penalty of a year in federal prison.

While my investigation was full of twists and turns, the 2002 Help America Vote Act may make it less difficult for journalists in the future. HAVA mandated that states create an online, interactive, statewide voter registration database by 2004. Most states asked for more time to comply with this provision, but change is coming.

These databases should make it easier for officials to eliminate duplicate registrations and other avenues to vote fraud, at least within state boundaries. Still, preventing double voting across state lines is a long way off, election officials told me.

Greg Reeves is database editor at The Kansas City Star. He has done computer-assisted reporting there since 1989.

Revealing the teenage mind through immersion reporting

BY STEVE WEINBERG
THE IRE JOURNAL

The question of access is important for journalists everywhere. When *U.S. News & World Report* staff writer David Marcus started investigating boarding schools for troubled teenagers, he could have assumed that access would be denied by the superintendents of those private, usually expensive institutions. Instead, he assumed nothing and asked – receiving permission not only from management but also from the teenagers and their parents.

With access to a controversial therapeutic boarding school in western Massachusetts, Marcus watched as Academy at Swift River admissions officers decided who to accept and who to turn away. (The academy received far more applications than the 120 or so spaces available, despite tuition, lodging and meals running $5,000 a month.)

He attended group therapy sessions, academic classes and meetings of supervisors. He volunteered as a writing teacher, coming to know the troubled teenagers. He hung out with them on campus, tailed some of them during their visits back home, and accompanied one group on the five-week, pre-graduation, roughing-it field experience in Costa Rica. He even moved his family to live near the school.

The result: "What it Takes to Pull Me Through," which is immersion journalism at its zenith.

"By the end of the 14 months," Marcus says, "I'd heard about the traumas they'd endured, the friends they'd made and lost, the dreams they clung to. I learned the secrets that they had kept for years from their parents, teachers and guidance counselors – the very people who might have helped them."

Messed-up teens

Every journalist who writes about minors must grapple with issues of privacy, including naming sources and subjects. Marcus asked parents and the teens to sign a release granting permission to write about them. All 16 sets of parents approached by Marcus signed, "including a couple of divorced parents who hadn't seen eye to eye on many other matters," he says.

Even though some students told Marcus he could use their real names, he opted to use pseudonyms for all the parents and children. He says his decision was based on humaneness rather than journalistic principles.

"I didn't want anyone to be identified years from now as 'that kid in the book about messed-up teens,'" Marcus says.

He did, however, use the real names of Swift River counselors and classroom teachers.

Marcus ended up liking all the teenagers and all the parents, but says he set aside that affection while writing. "I'd feel like a nicer person if I airbrushed all the blemishes from the portraits, but this book wasn't about being nice. It was about letting readers learn from the mistakes that parents and kids make."

Expressing remorse

The book almost did not happen. When Marcus' editor at *U.S. News & World Report* asked him to explore the rise of boarding schools offering therapy to troubled teens, the veteran journalist hoped to avoid the assignment.

An experienced foreign correspondent for the *The Boston Globe*, *The Miami Herald* and *The Dallas Morning News*, Marcus thought writing about troubled teens sounded, well, too foreign.

The editor insisted. After Marcus got past his reluctance to accept the assignment, he turned his experience in foreign cultures into an advantage. "I was writing about something we all assume we know – the 29 million teenagers who live right here," he says. "I tried to approach them with the fresh eyes of a foreign correspondent."

The result of Marcus' research appeared in the magazine during October 2000. Instead of finding the "rich, uppity brats" he expected, Marcus met "humble, introspective kids, many who expressed remorse about their arguments with parents, their carousing, and other recklessness."

Their behaviors before entering the therapeutic schools included extensive use of illegal narcotics, repeated unprotected sex, frequent school truancy, stealing from merchants and parents, eating disorders and suicide attempts. It turns out that a significant percentage of the children are adopted, and thus suffer from feelings of rejection by their biological parents.

The reaction Marcus received to the magazine stories was extensive and intensive, he says.

"A doctor from Florida called to say his 16-year-old daughter had just been expelled from school for selling Ecstasy. A mother in California wrote that her 14-year-old boy had run away after using the family's credit card to download pornography," he says.

A reporter for a high school newspaper called to tell Marcus about a friend who crushed Adderall pills so they could be snorted, and of another friend with bulimia so severe that she purged daily.

"You don't know what it's like to be a teenager now," the high school reporter commented.

Marcus realized he had at least two lengthy stories to explore: one about "the complicated, troubling, dangerous lives of some teenagers;" and the other about the controversial, usually high-priced therapeutic programs across the nation aimed at teenagers and their parents.

He decided to focus his reporting on three questions:
1. Why did certain teenagers find themselves in trouble at home and at school while their siblings and friends avoided problems?
2. How could family members have intervened earlier?
3. What lessons can be drawn from expensive therapeutic programs priced too high for most families to afford?

Journalists before Marcus had immersed themselves in the world of troubled teens, sometimes producing superb books. (Two that stand out are "A Tribe Apart: A Journey Into the Heart of Adolescence" by Patricia Hersch from 1998 and "Our Last Best Shot: Guiding Our Children Through Early Adolescence" by Laura Sessions Stepp from 2000.)

Marcus, however, wanted a narrower focus. "I wanted to observe a therapeutic program," he says, "to see one group of kids learning about themselves and about one another."

Like journalists everywhere dealing with sources who have reasons to be less than completely truthful, Marcus had to sort out what he could believe. During his first visit to Swift River, some of the students lied to impress him, which he found out about later, after those same students came to trust him.

Marcus learned not to push for exclusives in such an unstable, highly charged atmosphere. "I wanted things to come out just as they would without my being present," he says. "I told the kids not to disclose secrets to me. In fact, I warned that if anyone tipped me off to a plot to run away, we'd immediately go to a counselor. And gradually
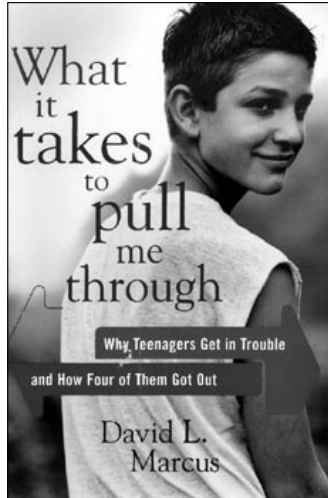
**What it Takes to Pull Me Through:
Why Teenagers Get in Trouble,
and How Four of Them Got Out**
By David L. Marcus
Houghton Mifflin, 352 pages, $25

QUICK HITS

Investigations don't have to take months or years; tips on getting the story and making the deadline

BY ERIC NALDER
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

Whether you have five weeks to investigate income tax loopholes, or two days to expose safety flaws in the country's largest ferry system, it can be done. I know, because I did it.

I'm going to share with you eight tips on how you can do these quick-hit investigations, using examples from my own work.

The first involves a tax tip from a public relations person who e-mailed one of our photographers. She suggested we help her client sell luxury boats by publicizing a loophole in a Bush Administration tax law that was saving yacht buyers millions.

The second story came after a tip from a former congressional staffer who suggested in an e-mail we look at the inadequate supply of life rafts on Washington State ferries – especially since our readers were then seeing the newly released movie "Titanic."

The nice thing about tips is that they are the quickest way to a story (hunches are the slowest). And even though such investigations can sometimes grow – the tax probe grew into a three-part series – I still beat the clock. My tips:

1. Talk to your neighbor.

Everybody reads clips, but few reporters interview their fellow staff members though they are the best initial sources. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* investigative reporter Phuong Cat Le provided a U.S. Coast Guard database containing details on nearly every recreational boat in America over 28 feet in length. My desk mate at *The Seattle Times* found at her desk a National Transportation Safety Board report containing a paragraph on our inadequate ferry life rafts. Nice quick start.

2. Get a player's list.

The Coast Guard database provided a good start for the tax break loophole story. I sorted the data by vessel age, length and geographic location. Likely targets were narrowed using the Web-based database search tool Accurint, which gave phone numbers and ages for owners. It also helped decipher who was behind boats registered under company and partnership names.

Not stopping with one data dump, Le and I found other boat-registration databases at the state licensing and revenue departments, which provided vessel prices and other information not in the federal database. We downloaded this stuff immediately, but state privacy laws had eliminated vessel and owner names. Le helped solve that by merging the state and federal databases using common hull numbers and other identifiers.

Asking experts about these identifying numbers, I found another shortcut: I could use the first few letters of a hull number to pinpoint the manufacturer, deciphering those letters with help from a Coast Guard Web site that deals with manufacturer recalls. Manu-

facturers' Web sites provided me pictures and data on the yachts (more about that later), and sales outlets.

For the ferry story, I had at my desk some old and new state phone books, and some payroll information. Newsrooms should annually update government payroll data for quick access to the names of current, and, more importantly, former employees. And you should never discard a phone book.

In doing these kinds of stories, I suggest you close your eyes and ask the question: "Where would these people write down their names?" Depending on available time, cull bankruptcy records, court files, unions, professional associations, school yearbooks, recorded documents like deeds, yacht club rosters (does your publisher or station manager belong to one?), company newsletters, Web sites, Factiva, Nexis and Google. For one investigation, I read copies of the Fort Lewis, Wash., newspaper six months back to find the names of soldiers in a particular unit.

3. Do a test run.

My clip search on the yachts revealed no other reporters had landed similar stories, but was I fishing for salmon or dogfish? For a quick test, I interviewed the yacht seller whose public relations person first contacted us, and, for ferries, I talked to the guy listed in the phone book as the safety director for the ferry system.

The yacht seller was only vaguely (and inaccurately) aware of the tax law and his initial answers were discouraging. But the magical question, "How do you know that?" got me to a Web site where an Annapolis, Md., yacht seller was promoting the deal. I didn't call that guy right away – because a naïve reporter can scare off an unwilling source – but his Web site gave the information I needed to contact Congress.

I find that cold-calling congressional staffers has a low success rate, so I talked first to our Washington, D.C., bureau reporter Charlie Pope. Using his name with the people he recommended I had a 100 percent success rate. (If you lack a Washington reporter, call one at a better-staffed newspaper. With courtesy and a confident demeanor you can get their help, without giving away too many details of your story).

Congressional staffers outlined the targeted tax law (though it took several follow-up calls for accuracy). They also confirmed that yacht buyers could abuse the law, though its intent was to stimulate small business growth. One staffer criticized the abuse of the law on the record, a misuse that would turn out to be more outrageous than my initial informant indicated.

A reporter from another newspaper suggested I call a tax lawyer who turned me on to another tax lawyer who provided more valuable documents, expertise and quotes – all very quickly. By asking everyone the "how do you know that" question, I was soon in contact with many more experts and gathering useful paper.

My first call on the ferry story was to the system's safety director who said he was new on the job, but gave me the name and current location of his retired

Yacht buyers have saved millions thanks to a tax loophole.

Phil H. Webber | Seattle Post-Intelligencer

A Puget Sound ferry.

successor. The retired guy revealed that the shortage of life rafts had been the subject of a long internal fight. He favored more life rafts, but some skeptical interviewing revealed he hadn't fought too hard. I drained both men of everything they knew in one interview.

In both cases, I now realized these stories were worth pursuing.

4. Quickly subpoena your documents.

No, I don't have subpoena power, or time in this case for a Freedom of Information Act process, but I have psychological methods. First, I learn from sources or Web sites where key documents live and how they interact with each other. I walk into an office like I own it (though not arrogantly) and softly talk with authority. I never ask a records keeper *whether* they will provide a document, but in the best cases I *tell* them where the paper is located and how they can get it to me quickly. I avoid questions that can elicit a simple "no."

For example, the current ferry safety director mentioned a document – the Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection – that contains the number of life rafts, the capacity of each and the maximum passenger load of each ferry. Asked to describe the records, he mentioned a file cabinet at ferry system headquarters. I eased out of him the precise location of the file cabinet (next to the general manager's desk), the drawer (the top one), and the exact location in that drawer (near the front).

When I called the ferry system public relations person to tell her what I needed she said she'd check and call back. I was able to say to her, "No, don't worry, they are in the front of the top drawer of the gray file cabinet next to the general manager's office and I'll be down at 2 p.m. to pick them up." I was in control.

After taking these steps, you can always send out FOI requests for documents that will help you obtain follow-up stories.

5. Get organized.

Most reporters are disorganized and see tidiness as a time waster, but it's a *time saver*. Always number the pages of your notebooks and index their contents on the flap. In your computer, insert "marker words" in your interview notes and your downloaded documents – words like *quote, *contact and *check. No other words begin with an asterisk, so your search function will quickly locate these words, taking you therefore to your best quotes, the names of people to interview and the stuff you need to check. You can use other "marker words" for other purposes.

Also, if time allows, enter material from interviews, clips and documents into a chronology on a computerized spreadsheet – column one contains the date something happened, column two the event details and column three the location in your files where you obtained the information. Chronologies will eventually reveal connected events and empower you to write with authority. You should also create dossiers on your sources and "to do" files.

This eliminates frantic searching and pacing. Plus, my databases reveal stuff. With ferries, I entered the data on life rafts into an Excel spreadsheet. Sorting it revealed that the situation was worse than the Titanic, only one life raft for every seven passengers on a fully loaded Washington State ferry. Of course, always triple-check your data.

6. Interview with power.

Time spent in preparation cuts down on the number of interviews because you'll avoid refusals. My yacht owners were geographically dispersed so I interviewed by phone, but before dialing I had produced dossiers containing details on their yachts, their businesses, their families and other tidbits obtained from research (I even took virtual tours of yachts on manufacturer Web sites).

In the first breath I said I was a reporter doing a story on the "tax advantages of boat ownership," and in the second breath I was discussing their cool yacht (no manipulation here, I love big boats). Proud of their boats, they soon were describing the purchase details.

My enthusiasm and confidence was infectious, my background knowledge enticing, and the result you'll see in the stories. Yacht owners detailed the money they saved on tax breaks and the various loopholes they used. One gave a blow-by-blow account of signing for his new yacht offshore to avoid state sales tax.

Similarly, you should interview experts in an organized manner, with a checklist, and arrange for follow-up interviews to nail down accuracy. Seek a teacher-student relationship. Ask experts to fax or e-mail documents on every point they cover. Check what they say with other experts

Dealing with government agencies, insist on the

highest-level interviews possible and urgently and repeatedly call back. Be nice. Karma is important.

7. Hang around.

"Reporting by hanging around" sounds time-consuming, yet it saves time. For yachts, I attended a floating boat show conveniently scheduled at Seattle's Lake Union. I listened to buyers and sellers talk and introduced myself. Stories flowed. More tax breaks were described. Sources were mentioned. My story grew.

For ferries, I made two visits to the ferry system office using psychological methods to take over the place. I arranged to use the copy machine (a place where people gather), told them where I wanted to sit, introduced myself to workers, walked through doors ahead of my hosts, and at one point gently put my feet on a table in a relaxed manner. Here's a little test – find in my ferry story the quote I got when my feet were on the table.

I also took a ferry ride, where I met a nervous woman who had just the night before seen – you guessed it – the movie "Titanic."

While doing all this I was constantly on the cell phone, arranging for documents and interviews.

8. Write soon and look for holes.

I drafted my stories early, with plenty of time for more reporting. Holes appeared and I expected them. I called and re-called experts, and found new ones. I re-contacted yacht owners and ferry officials to confirm every fact and opinion. While this sounds tedious, it does more than assure accuracy.

A confident reporter writes faster.

Now get to work. You spent too much time reading this article.

Eric Nalder, a reporter for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, has received two Pulitzer Prizes, two IRE Awards, including the 1994 book award for "Tankers Full of Trouble." He has worked for the San Jose Mercury News and The Seattle Times.

SCHOOLS
Superintendents profit by consulting for firms that want schools' business

BY SCOTT PARKS
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Sometimes, a good story grows from humble roots.

I was working on a profile of Dallas Independent School District Superintendent Mike Moses late in 2001. During my research, I learned that his employment contract allowed him to earn outside income through consulting. I also learned he was moonlighting as an executive recruiter for school districts in need of a new superintendent. His employer was a big Houston law firm, Bracewell & Patterson.

At the time, the relationship intrigued me and I filed it away. We knew that Moses, a high-profile former state education commissioner, would be very much in the news in Dallas.

Over the next two years, Bracewell & Patterson started getting business from DISD. And Moses continued consulting for the firm.

I filed an open records request for billing records and other documents I hoped would shed some light on how Bracewell & Patterson had come to work for the DISD and whether Moses had been directly involved in getting school board members to hire the firm.

The records showed that Bracewell & Patterson had done about $7,000 worth of business with DISD in the late 1990s. They also showed that Moses, barely a month after starting work at the district, successfully recommended to trustees that they add the firm to their sizeable stable of outside law firms.

During the next three years, Bracewell & Patterson earned more than $700,000 in legal fees from DISD. Periodically, the law firm paid Moses thousands of dollars to conduct superintendent searches under its corporate banner. Texas law does not prohibit such relationships.

The story about Moses and Bracewell & Patterson ran in May. In June, he announced that he would no longer moonlight for the firm. There's no evidence the events are related, but Moses announced his resignation as superintendent in July.

Skunks at the church picnic

Call me naive, but I had always thought of a school district as the community organization that educates children. The legal records prompted me to see school districts in a new light: as a big pot of taxpayers with money that many corporate inter-

ests want to tap. It had never occurred to me that a superintendent or school board member would take money from a company that holds a contract in their district.

As key components of the story, I conducted several interviews with ethicists who criticized the superintendent-law firm relationship. For those voices, I went outside Texas. I wanted to talk to people who had never heard of Mike Moses or the DISD.

As is often the case, the story prompted tipsters to call with information about other superintendents with relationships to companies that sell products and services to school districts.

Soon, it occurred to education editor Mike Drago and me that we had a subject ripe for exploration. After a search of the literature, we determined that major newspapers had never systematically explored the subject. All we found were periodic anecdotes about superintendents or school board members in hot water for crossing ethical lines.

So, the series was born. We called it "Extracurricular Income: When School Leaders Moonlight."

Drago wrote open records requests to obtain the

employment contracts for superintendents in the 30 largest school districts in Texas. We wanted to know how many contracts, like the one Moses had in Dallas, contained clauses that allowed superintendents to earn outside income from consulting.

While we waited for those records, a source in the public education community told me I should look into a Nebraska-based company called Education Research and Development Inc.

It just so happened that ERDI was about to hold its summer conference at Rancho Mirage, a resort town in the California desert. So, photographer Richard Pruitt and I decided to show up uninvited.

Not surprisingly, we were treated like skunks at the church picnic.

ERDI is the brainchild of former school superintendent Mike Kneale. It's a vehicle for companies that want access to school superintendents. The companies, textbook publishers and the like, pay ERDI to bring the superintendents to the conference. As incentive, ERDI pays the superintendents $2,000 plus expenses to attend the conference.

The conference focuses on what ERDI calls corporate panels – two company executives and five superintendents who spend three hours in a hotel meeting room. The companies use the superintendents like a focus group. What do they think of this product idea? What advice do they have for how to make an initial sales pitch, and to whom should it be made?

Along with the ERDI story, we ran a list of participating superintendents and companies. Education reporters and school district watchdogs all over the United States reacted to the story.

No one knew that companies had figured out a

Richard Michael Pruitt | The Dallas Morning News

Mike Kneale, founder of ERDI, welcomes school district officials from across the country to a conference he hosts. ERDI helps companies market their services and products to school districts.

way to develop relationships with school superintendents in out-of-the-way resort locations.

Meanwhile, results of our open records requests for superintendent employment contracts showed that school boards in 23 of Texas' largest 30 districts had allowed superintendents unlimited opportunities to consult in their spare time with few limitations.

One of those contracts belonged to Yvonne Katz, superintendent in Spring Branch ISD, a suburban district in Houston. Through a confidential source, I had learned that Katz moonlighted as a marketing consultant for Energy Education Inc., a Texas-based company that sells energy conservation programs to school districts.

The source and the source's records provided solid evidence of Katz's conflict of interest.

EEI is among a number of companies that employ school superintendents and retired superintendents to scout out contracting opportunities in school districts.

We also used the Texas Freedom of Information Act to obtain school district records for this story. It revealed that Katz went to work in Spring Branch in August 2002. Three months later, she recommended EEI for a multimillion-dollar contract in her district. The board, unaware of her financial relationship with EEI, voted unanimously to adopt the contract.

Katz told me her contract did not require her to tell the school board any details about her moonlighting. A month after our story, she resigned with three years left on her contract. She and the school board said she retired.

Relationship marketing

As I write this, some Texas lawmakers are calling for a ban on superintendents taking money from companies that hold contracts in their districts. And some superintendents have decided to give up their paid consultancies with companies that sell products and services to school districts.

The series also has prompted the Texas Association of School Administrators to review its advice to school boards as to what outside work ought to be allowed for district officials.

Our series is still unfolding. Its success has depended upon a reporter and editor who share a commitment to the story on a long-term basis. It also is dependent on human sources, public records and the candor of business people who see their attempts to influence superintendents as just another aspect of relationship marketing, a tried-and-true corporate practice.

Over the years, many superintendents and companies have come to see their intertwined financial relationships as normal. Our stories, however, revealed a substantial gap between what they see as normal and what the general public will accept as appropriate.
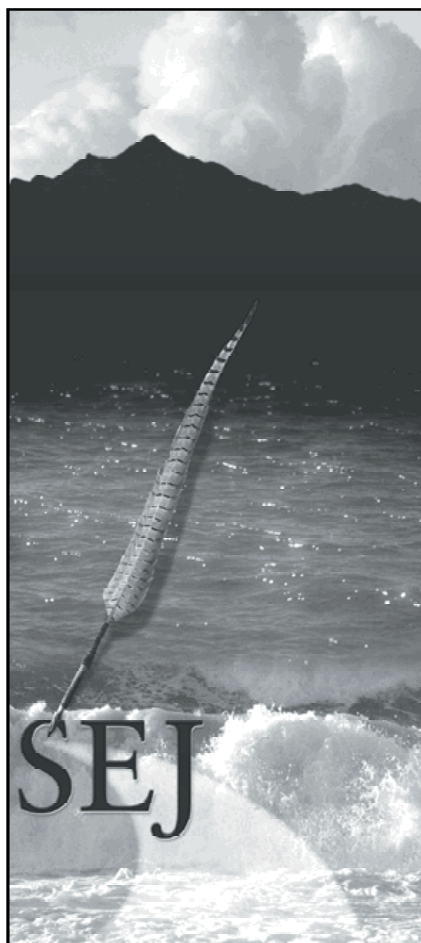
The next frontier for our series will explore school board members and their financial ties to companies that seek business in their districts.

Conflict of interest laws in Texas are based on the idea of transparency. School board members can be financially involved with school district vendors as long as they disclose their interests and abstain from any vote having to do with those interests.

Common sense tells us that most of the 7,000 school board members in Texas are well-meaning community volunteers. They are unpaid and spend several hours a week on school board service.

Common sense and the stories we've turned up so far also tell us there may be more to school district governance than community service.

Scott Parks is an education reporter for The Dallas Morning News.

WORKPLACE SAFETY
Federal, local data show
falls kill construction workers daily

BY BARBARA CLEMENTS
THE (TACOMA) NEWS TRIBUNE

For the past three years, there was one project that seemed to get recycled on my beat sheet, again and again. "Look into the most dangerous jobs in Washington State." It had become a running joke between my editor and me.

Yes, this year, we'd get to this project. Someday. Between dailies. Between Sunday projects. Between vacations on an already-slim team.

I tried not to get too discouraged when I saw *The New York Times* take the idea nationally and, of course, win the Pulitzer for Public Service in 2004. Or The Associated Press' excellent stories looking at Hispanic injuries and deaths in fieldwork.

Yet, I felt there was still a story to be told in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration data on workplace injuries and fatalities.

At one point, I even handed over the project to the new workplace reporter on the business team; we basically switched beats. Even though that was short-lived, her open records requests for several cases were handed back across the cubicle divider to my desk.

Last May, I decided no more excuses. This project was going to happen. I called IRE and had the Database Library send me the cleaned-up OSHA data going back to 1972. I had the information in about an hour.

There the data sat for about two months, as again I wrote daily stories, took vacation or covered for others on vacation. Getting synchronized with my co-reporter David Wickert also was difficult, as he was on a different team with a different beat and a different editor.

In June, Wickert, the newspaper's lead computer-assisted reporting staffer, was finally freed to begin sorting through the huge Access files.

It required at least two weeks of fiddling with the database, learning what each column code meant, and what each number meant in each column. Truly, it was like learning another language so we could look at the columns and know that "53" in the Washington counties' column meant Pierce County (home base for *The News Tribune*) and "1500" was the main industry code for construction. It also required Wickert to link data by incident number since the files were so huge.

We also had to decide where to draw the line.

The data went back 30 years. We decided to make the cut at 10 years – back to 1994. Eventually, we trimmed the scope to 1998 forward, since the state Department of Labor and Industries only had records back to that date. All the rest had been tossed for space reasons.

Now, we had to narrow the story's focus.

At one time, the story had been proposed as a

Lui Kit Wong | The News Tribune

A construction worker – without a safety harness – works atop the second-floor roof of a home being built near Tacoma.

feature, with a "you are there" look as we traipsed along after a firefighter, logger, fisherman, etc. But a senior editor on the project quickly let us know she wasn't interested in that.

She wanted a hard-hitting report, not something that would make her cry in her cereal. The numbers quickly led us in that direction anyway. While there were a high number of workplace violations among the sectors we expected – logging, trucking and fishing – the construction industry came away with the most violations by far.

The state Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation program backed up this observation, as did the data from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health collected under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We didn't reach this point until late August or early September, after summer vacations were completed.

Wickert continued to take the lead on the story, since he was massaging the data. I took some of the highlights from his initial cuts and began bouncing the results off industry experts and labor leaders.

The project's deadline moved from weekend to weekend through the late summer and fall, and then into the winter.

Finally, the project received a jump-start that neither of us expected.

Deaths by falls

On Oct. 21, a 41-year-old woman who ran a dirt excavation business with her husband was trapped and crushed in a 12-foot trench while she was working on a home in East Tacoma.

We'd been struggling with local data that showed many of the major accidents were up to a decade old. This gave the story an immediate edge.

WEB RESOURCES

- **www.nicar.org/data/osha** – A cleaned-up version of the OSHA workplace safety database is available from the IRE and NICAR Database Library. It consists of inspections in all states and U.S. territories from 1972 to February 2004. If you've received this data from IRE before, you'll find quite a few changes and additional information. For the first time, IRE used SAS software to recover every piece of information from a series of 10 OSHA tapes. As a result, six additional data tables are available. Much of it is for internal OSHA administrative tasks, but the additional tables can help identify problems addressed by OSHA's national or local programs, outline the history of changes in penalties, identify inspections or other events that are related, review the debt-collection procedure, and more.
- **www.osha.gov** – The online version of the OSHA database is invaluable. It includes additional narrative information.
- **www.cpwr.com** – The Center to Protect Worker's Rights, which is the research arm of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO.
- **www.bls.gov** – The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While it is easy to get buried in this Web site, it does have a nifty feature that lets you sort national fatality data by almost any criteria when you go to the Safety and Health Fatalities section. Have an agency Web expert guide you in from here, as the Web site has recently changed. For data questions, contact the staff at 202-691-6175 or blsdata_staff@bls.gov.
- **www.cdc.gov/niosh** – The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, or NIOSH, has a great Web site and helpful staff. The site has a specific link to facts about the construction industry.

Wickert pushed to get a story looking specifically at trench death into the paper as quickly as possible. I was initially reluctant to do this, wondering if it would take the edge off of the main story. But that turned out not to be the case.

Getting in the trench collapse story into the Oct. 31 Sunday edition established our credibility with the construction industry and churned up tips on other places to look, other people to interview.

It helped that the story turned up some facts even the experts didn't know, including that one construction worker dies each week in a trench collapse, according to CDC data. It was at this time the state labor department – which had been sluggish on getting us data and accident reports – seemed to loosen up a bit.

We decided to focus the final story on construction deaths by falls, since falls were the primary culprit in most of the deaths in the construction industry, both nationally and locally.

We backed up our OSHA and FACE data with studies from various sources, including the NIOSH records and the Construction Industry Research and Policy Center, based at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

All the data underscored the point that three construction workers a day die in the United States, with one of those deaths each day associated with a fall. Falls, in general, were the chief cause of death among construction workers in any given year, both locally and nationally.

Most of the falls could be traced back to fall-protection devices – in layman's terms, harnesses – that were either not used or used incorrectly.

Looking at the actual local incident reports, as well as national reports, we found most of the falls were preventable. Most of the blame could either be traced back to the construction site supervisor ignoring safety rules or workers ignoring the rules.

On the enforcement side, it quickly became clear by doing simple math that state Department of Labor and Industries workers were overworked, with 170 inspectors covering 165,000 businesses in the state.

Fines also lacked any clout, as the initial workplace fine usually started at $100. L&I inspectors and safety experts agreed that many contractors will simply write off the fines as a cost of doing business.

Construction workers were hard to contact. Many of the construction workers are recent Mexican immigrants, who are reluctant to talk or have limited English skills. Toward the end of the project, we finally found a worker who agreed to talk. Our graphic artist, Fred Matamoros, who speaks fluent Spanish, conducted the interview.

Finding pictures for the story was also problematic. Whenever we'd show up at a construction site, the workers would spot us and, harnessed or not, would disappear. Photographer Lui Kit Wong finally went out solo and shot construction workers, both with harnesses and without, from public roads. He was the one who found the roofer who eventually spoke with us.

Ducking violations

After the story ran on Dec. 5, the response was immediate. Construction company owners called to say they had clipped the article to show to their supervisors and insist that safety harnesses be worn on the job site.

One local legislator said he planned to use the report to try to strengthen fines that can be levied when inspectors spot a workplace violation. L&I officials, who had been wary of us, liked the piece and finally delivered some of the accident reports the week after the story ran.

We plan to use the documents in follow-up stories, including how easy it is for a business to duck a workplace violation when a business is finally fined by the state.

A journalist for 20 years, Barbara Clements has won state, regional and national awards and worked for The News Tribune in Tacoma, Wash., for a dozen years.
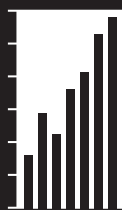
As the United States scrambles to fight terrorism at home and abroad, questions emerge about the effectiveness of the battles. Journalists, at times hamstrung by government secrecy, are nevertheless ferreting out information on everything from global relief agencies that the FBI claims are funding terrorists to the condition of equipment upon which soldiers have placed their faith.

THE WAR AT HOME AND ABROAD

CIVILIAN CLAIMS

Database reveals Iraqis filing

over alleged abuses, killings

By Russell Carollo and Mike Wagner
Dayton Daily News

An Iraqi man points out bullet holes inside the car where his brother, Tahsin Ali Hussein al-Ruba'i, died. He failed to stop at a checkpoint and was shot and killed by U.S. troops in Baghdad.

More than 4,000 never-before released records documenting alleged abuses against Iraqi civilians by U.S. military personnel came to us – as most good stories do – by accident.

Last year, the newspaper was updating its copy of the Army tort claims database, which we had used for previous projects. Reporters filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the Army.

In January 2004, when reporters starting looking at the first version, it was clear we had something that offered a previously unseen picture of the Iraq war. By the time we realized what we had, the data was months old. We asked for a more recent version of the database, which we received in June.

The database contained 4,611 never-before released civilian claims from Iraq – hundreds alleging abuse and misconduct by American military personnel. We soon realized we had the only copy of the most comprehensive public record released to date of alleged acts against Iraq civilians by American forces, which do not otherwise systematically track civilian casualties.

Foreign Claims Act

Many of the Iraqis filing claims were much like the one filed by the family of Tahsin Ali Hussein al-Ruba'i, killed when he drove his orange-and-white 1983 Volkswagen Passat taxi to an American checkpoint in Baghdad.

The 32-year-old knew it was dangerous to drive at night. But on July 1, 2003, his infant daughter, Tabarek, had the flu and he decided to risk driving to his in-laws so he could pick her up and take her to a hospital.

A man selling kabobs along the road 50 yards from the checkpoint where al-Ruba'i was killed was so concerned that the makeshift checkpoint had no lights, cones or signs that he started waving and yelling at unsuspecting motorists.

Al-Ruba'i apparently never got the warning.

Soldiers opened fire with rifles and mounted machine guns, riddling his taxi with bullet holes and killing him, witnesses said.

"They (the soldiers) were the reason for what happened. They didn't point to him and tell him to stop," said the kabob vendor, Taha Mehdi al-Jabouri. "They treat us in a savage way."

The family filed a civil claim asking for $2,500 from the American military, but the claim was denied.

Claims in the database were filed under the Foreign Claims Act, a law that allows foreign nationals to file civil claims against the United States government and collect damages. About 78 percent of the claims are for incidents occurring after President Bush declared major combat operations over on May 2, 2003.

The database provides the date of alleged incidents, the date the claims were filed, the locations of the alleged incidents, the military unit involved and a description of the allegations, ranging from a few words to a couple of paragraphs.

But the obstacles in turning the database into a story were huge.

Several dozen cases had exact addresses, and a handful even identified the victims by name or age. Six cases identified attorneys, two in the United States, two in Iraq, one in the Netherlands and another in Switzerland. In most cases, however, the Army removed the name of the claimants, leaving a city or neighborhood as the only information identifying the claimants.

Even with the name and address, there was no guarantee we could track down the victims. Travel outside of Baghdad was too dangerous, and even certain areas of the city weren't entirely safe.

We went to our Cox Washington Bureau for help, and our reporters were teamed with Larry Kaplow, Cox's correspondent in Baghdad.

Reporters Russell Carollo and Mike Wagner pored over the database and other records and tracked down attorneys and others who might know about the cases, feeding information to Kaplow so he could search neighborhoods in Baghdad for people who filed claims. The reporters soon found that some human rights groups had detailed records, including names and addresses, on some of the same incidents described in the database. By matching dates and locations, reporters were able to identify claimants through the human rights groups.

Further, Wagner found an attorney in Michigan who had filed dozens of claims, many involving abuse of detainees. With those records, Kaplow was able to locate the clients in Iraq.

Ken McCall, the *Daily News* database reporter, conducted a detailed analysis of the database, which contained 17 tables and – in the copy we got – many duplicate records. It soon became apparent that the fields contained in the various lookup tables would not give us all the information we wanted. An incident synopsis, we found, contained rich detail about victims, types of locations (such as checkpoints), types of violence and damage sustained by civilian claimants that were not reflected in searchable fields.

The only way to get that data was to read all 4,611 claims and recode new fields, an exercise that took McCall many days but yielded information no one else had. Among the findings, the claims alleged:

- At least 438 deaths and 468 injuries to civilians.
- At least 204 deaths and 110 injuries to children, sons or daughters, or nieces or nephews.
- 1,007 vehicle accidents involving Iraqis and U.S. forces.
- 300 claims of bombs destroying homes, buildings, livestock or crops.
- 259 shooting incidents resulting in at least 128 deaths and 172 injuries.
- 39 shootings at checkpoints.
- 772 claims of theft or confiscation of personal property by U.S. troops.
- 48 claims of money stolen during a raid.
- 34 claims of money or other property taken at checkpoints, including at least nine vehicles, $194,000 in American money and 11.6 million Iraqi dinars.

We also found that Iraqi death claims paid less than 1/20th of death claims received by the Army from other parts of the world during the same 18-month period beginning in January 2003.

Meanwhile, for Kaplow, finding a family that filed a claim, which could take days even with names and address, was only the first step. Witnesses, too, had to be located, and sometimes families were of little help finding them.

Lingering too long in the streets of Baghdad asking questions was too dangerous, so Kaplow often sent a translator to identify a family or witnesses first. Then he would accompany the translator to interviews. In the case of the taxi driver who was shot at a checkpoint, the translator was able to locate the kabob stand owner and another witness by just going to the scene of the shooting.

Through Kaplow's reporting we were able to establish probably our most significant finding: That the growing insurgency in Iraq was being fueled, in part, by the kinds of incidents described in the claims.

"In the beginning, the children saw the Americans and their weapons and gear and binoculars and wanted to follow them and look at them," Wafa Abdel Latif al-Mukhtar said.

Children like her 12-year-old son, Mustafa, idolized the American soldiers, she said.

But Mohammad's opinion changed after his twin brother, who was sleeping on a rooftop to escape the heat, was apparently mistaken for a sniper and shot and killed by an American soldier.

"Now, Mustafa said that when he sees them he wants to be the first to kill them," al-Mukhtar said.

Wedding party gunfire

Not long before we began publishing the two-part series on Oct. 24, paper files of some of the more significant cases we had requested under FOIA arrived. On a number of documents, we were able to see through the black marker used to hide names and addresses, giving us a number of new examples.

In one of those documents, we were able to see through the black ink and read the name, "Nott," who we identified in a Nexis search as 1st Lt. Leif E. Nott. With the help of his family, we learned Nott had been killed along with an Iraqi detainee in an incident the military was not eager to publicize.

The July 30, 2003, incident occurred as the 24-year-old Nott led a patrol to investigate shots fired near their military compound in Balad Ruz, according to Army Sgt. Mickey Anderson and Army records of the incident. The shots turned out to be a few participants at a large wedding party firing in the air to celebrate, according to Anderson and the records.

Anderson said the 200 to 300 Iraqis at the party welcomed the soldiers, offering them cake and juice. As a precaution, the soldiers put plastic handcuffs

Anisa Nouradin, the mother of Mazen Antoine Nouradin, sits in her living room in Baghdad. Her son was shot and killed by U.S. troops in Iraq.

on the groom, the best man and the father of one of the men, and confiscated an assault rifle.

None of the three men was considered dangerous, Anderson said, and they likely would have been released after a routine questioning.

According to Anderson and Army records, as the patrol was about 200 yards from the compound, a Bradley Fighting Vehicle positioned near the entrance opened fire, triggering more fire from other soldiers in the compound.

Anderson, Nott, an Army medic, the patrol's Iraqi translator and the three Iraqi detainees were all hit by gunfire.

Nott and one of the detainees, identified in claims records as Abu Hassan, later died. Hassan's widow, who was left with nine children to support, received $2,500 for her civil claim, according to the records, which clearly identify the incident as "friendly fire" and "not in response to enemy activity."

The Army told a different story to Nott's family and to the public.

After his death, Nott was promoted to captain and awarded a Bronze Star, and the citation for the medal says he "responded to a unprovoked attack on his troop headquarters." That same account was repeated in a newspaper story.

"The report was a joke," said Nott's father, Les Nott. "Nobody wanted this to happen, but it did happen. And after they had to deal with it, there was one driving factor and one driving factor only: to make sure that nobody gets blamed."

MILITARY ACCIDENTS

NON-COMBAT FATALITIES SHOW

DANGERS OF EQUIPMENT FAILURES

MICHAEL FABEY
SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS

Brennan Linsley | The Associated Press

A U.S. Army ambulance, containing the body of an American soldier killed in an apparent accident, sits amid the debris left by an overturned military truck in northern Iraq.

War zones can be dangerous and deadly for soldiers – even when not actively engaging the enemy.

Through statistics from the Army Safety Center, the *Savannah Morning News* found about 200 soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq died because of military accidents.

That was an important story for us because we're home to Fort Stewart's 3rd Infantry Division, which was redeploying to war zones after its lightning-fast march to Baghdad from Kuwait in the first weeks of the 2003 Iraqi conflict.

Managing Editor Dan Suwyn, however, wanted us to take the local story a step further by looking into how these accident statistics compared with other times of war.

What we found had national implications, as we learned about accidents that continued to plague the Coast Guard's helicopters, and questions about the Army's chain of command.

Russian roulette

When I first got the military-homeland security beat in June 2004, the region was hosting the G-8 Sea Island Summit. As a result, the Coast Guard patrolled the skies and seas with an expanded security mandate.

Our request to accompany them on boat trips was no problem, but air training and patrol requests were denied. The reason: repeated aircraft engine trouble.

Researching the subject, I found a recent U.S. General Accountability Office report on the problem. We printed a story quoting the GAO saying pilots played Russian roulette every time they climbed into the Dolphin helicopter cockpit.

A few weeks later, Richard O'Reilly, then of the *Los Angeles Times*, spoke at an IRE conference in Atlanta. His subject: How to get aviation mishap data from different military services. After his panel discussion, he told me I could use the same techniques for the Coast Guard. [O'Reilly is now a consultant with IRE on special database projects.]

I banged out a Freedom of Information Act request for the Coast Guard data, and then went to the Army Safety Center Web page to check stats on Apache and Black Hawk helicopters stationed here and around the world.

After finding a page that broke down accidents by aircraft type, the year they occurred and other interesting parameters, I copied and pasted the tables and saved them in a file.

Little did I know that my research would very soon come into play.

That night, the Army had the first Apache fatalities of the year – and the first for that helicopter type at Fort Stewart.

That began my persistent requests to the military for the database structure and field list of the different databases. My requests were ignored.

Meanwhile, there was a second Apache fatality, this time in Iraq. I found basic details online at the safety center site. But when the center found out I was digging there, it removed the data from the public pages. Center personnel said the pages should never have been on the public access portion of the Web site to begin with, and they have not returned.

I did receive a CD of mishap tables from the center, but it had no fields for aircraft types, making some of my queries, present and future, unanswerable.

Dayton Daily News investigative reporter Russell Carollo, who used similar data to track major Apache problems about five years ago, had some advice.

QUICK HINTS

- Don't just take the numbers at face value. Find ways to compare. Remember the old journalism maxim: So what?
- While exotic search engines or Web sites are great, the simple ones, like Google, can be quite useful. Learn how to narrowly define your searches.
- Chances are, if it's military, the GAO has done a report on it. Go to www.gao.gov and look around. Another good bet is the Congressional Research Service, whose reports are not available to the public per se, but can be released by researchers or staffers of Congress.
- When you find something on a government Web page, copy it and file it IMMEDIATELY. That data may not be there later.
- Be persistent when filing FOI requests. Make sure you ask the right person and keep calling. When asking for data, make sure you get the record layout.
- Don't discount any data – even apparently incomplete information. Save it; it could prove quite useful later.
- Consider doing an ongoing series instead of one big project.
- When you get your data, "interview" it. See what the fields are and what kind of information could be contained there. Think of what database manager or other software program might be best to dig out the most pertinent information. Learn how to use different managers – each has its own benefits and quirks.
- Don't bog down readers with everything you've learned, especially in the lead. Think graphically.
- Learn the slang, codes and anything else you'll need to translate. This is especially true when dealing with the military, which never met an acronym it didn't like.

"This database is almost worthless," he said. "You need to go back and get them to give you aircraft types."

I finally got a record layout (a complete list of fields) from the Army and put together another FOIA request for a fuller database.

Vietnam comparisons

Because I was scheduled to head to Iraq as an embedded reporter when the 3rd redeployed, we decided to publish stories without waiting for all the requested data.

With senior editor Steven Austin turning what could have been bland articles into narrative gems, our three-day package included the personal story of one of the pilots killed in the local accident, disaster details of the only deep-attack Apache mission attempted during the 2003 Iraq invasion and the questionable developmental history of the Apache using GAO, Congressional Research Service and other government reports.

After these stories ran, the Army Aviation Warfighting Center at Fort Rucker, Ala., invited me and photographer John Carrington to observe training and interview the commanding general.

When the general said the Army had lost, on average, about a helicopter a month in Iraq, I asked for more information from the center. I was sent a complete list of aviation mishaps – as well as a general list of ground accidents.

Again, the numbers seemed compelling, but my managing editor's initial question still had me wondering: How would it compare to what happened in Vietnam, which had been used as a benchmark for other elements of the Iraqi war?

I began to wonder if perhaps the incomplete database the Army had sent earlier would be useful after all.

It was an Access file, so I sorted by date, going back to 1972.

The database had a field for countries where the accidents occurred, so I asked for a list and count for each, all of them in two-letter codes – VM for Vietnam and VS for South Vietnam.

It showed that there were more helicopter accidents but fewer ground accidents during the later Vietnam years than during recent Afghanistan and Iraq operations.

But what country had the most? During what years?

I determined the worst years and countries for accidents were during the Cold War, in places like Germany and Korea.

With fields showing the severity of accident and type, I could do an even more detailed analysis, especially with SPSS, a powerful software program for managing data and doing statistical analysis.

But, as IRE and NICAR training director David Donald explained, that statistical software doesn't like Access database formats. So I exported selected fields from the main document to a DBF file and used an old FoxPro 2.6 database manager to check it.

I used SPSS to run frequencies and discovered soldiers everywhere were more likely to be involved in more dangerous ground accidents than those in the air.

Fight for data

During the writing of the story, we became stuck on the lead. I took the tossed salad approach, throwing in everything.

Charlie Cochran, the assistant leader of my team, gave it more focus by pointing out that the lead needed to say it was more dangerous for accidents during peacetime, according to the newspaper's own analysis. Period.

My team leader, Suzanne Donovan, tightened the story and made it more readable by using breakouts. Design editor Stephen Komives pulled all the pages together.

What began as a simple look at non-combat fatalities grew into something else – stories examining continuing Coast Guard helicopter dangers and problems with the Army's chain of command – none of which would have been written if we hadn't continued to fight for the data to which we were entitled.

We learned that Army officers failed to follow simple safety regulations, incorrectly paired inexperienced pilots and fostered an atmosphere that could more easily lead to mishaps.

Michael Fabey is the military and homeland defense reporter for the Savannah Morning News. He has covered defense, homeland security and military issues for the past four years.

MILITARY AIRCRAFT STORIES

To read more stories by journalists who have covered military aircraft crashes, visit the IRE Resource Center (www.ire.org/resourcecenter). Here is a selection of stories available at the Resource Center:

- **Story No. 19873** – An investigation of the nation's aerial firefighting program found that many of the aging planes should never have been flying in the first place. It found a spotty safety record by a contractor who had the wings snap off two air tankers in mid-flight, and that no single registry or agency keeps track of accidents involving so-called public service aircraft. The series traced the use of the air tankers to an apparently illegal transfer of military aircraft, showing that the investigation of one crash was hampered because the plane once was used to fly spy missions for the CIA. It found there is poor financing and supervision of the crucial program, findings echoed in a report by a special government commission. Scott Sonner, Don Thompson, Robert Gehrlee, Ray Locker, The Associated Press (2002)

- **Story No. 19777** – The Harrier attack jet can take off and land vertically, much like a helicopter. It can also be the single most dangerous plane to fly in the U.S. Air Force, leading to 143 major accidents and the loss of one-third of the entire fleet. Forty-five Marines, including some of the nation's finest pilots, have died in the cockpits of these machines. The *LA Times* uncovered many of these shortcomings, and showed how the military moved haltingly to fix known shortcomings that had taken pilots' lives. Alan C. Miller, Kevin Sack, *Los Angeles Times* (2002)

- **Story No. 15844** – This 18-month, six-part series investigates the causes of crashes among military aircraft. Thousands of pages of accident reports were reviewed and even more computer records were examined. Russell Carollo, *Dayton Daily News* (1999)

José M. Osorio | Chicago Tribune

A man raises his Koran after noon prayers in the main courtyard at the El Azhar Mosque in Cairo, where hundreds gathered to protest U.S. and British actions in Iraq.

FUNDAMENTALISM

KNOWING HISTORY, CULTURE HELP

IN TRACKING PAPER, PEOPLE TRAILS

BY SAM ROE
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

America's relationship with Islamic fundamentalists could be the nation's No. 1 issue over the next decade. So how can reporters more thoroughly, accurately and fairly cover this crucial topic?

During the past year, the *Chicago Tribune* published "The Struggle for the Soul of Islam," an occasional series that was two years in the making and written by staffers from the foreign, national, metro and projects desks. The series explored the roots of Islamic fundamentalism, how many moderate voices have been silenced, and what's at stake for Muslims, Islam and the West.

The series included stories documenting how a Chicago-area mosque was taken over by fundamentalists; how a wealthy Saudi businessman used his U.S. charity to help wage jihad on three continents; and how the Muslim Brotherhood, the world's most influential Islamic fundamentalist group, has operated secretly in America for 40 years.

Some reporting tasks were tricky. Language barriers, self-styled "experts" and misleading government statements all presented headaches.

And because Islamic fundamentalism is such a politically charged topic, subject to considerable spin, reporters must seek out as many original documents and first-hand sources as possible.

Here are several tips for reporters and editors considering similar stories:

Public records

Begin with public records. Property records, IRS filings and lawsuits will get you off to a good start.

Property records will tell you who owns a mosque. If it is owned by a group called the North American Islamic Trust, it might be a sign that the mosque is conservative. NAIT is a nonprofit that helps build and preserve mosques, and it has been criticized for aiding only conservative mosques.

Many Islamic groups and charities seek tax-exempt status from the IRS and submit annual 990 IRS forms, which contain officers' names and salaries. The more detailed application for tax-exempt status often gives the group's mission and why it believes it should not pay taxes.

The *Tribune* would not have been able to document the takeover of the Chicago-area mosque without records from a little-known 1981 lawsuit in which the local American Arabian Ladies Society sued mosque leaders over the mosque's ownership. The suit contained correspondence, minutes of meetings, membership lists and fund-raising brochures.

"It not only contained hundreds of pages of documents on the history of the mosque, but also the names of people who were important in that history," reporter Laurie Cohen recalls. "That provided our basic list of people to talk to."

Annual reports

Get annual reports, election results. Some mosques compile annual reports of their finances and activities, similar to what companies provide shareholders. These are not public reports, so you'll have to find a mosque member to give you copies.

These annual reports revealed the scope of the Chicago-area mosque, showing how many members it had and what programs it sponsored. The reports also contained subcommittee reports, progress reports from the president, and fund-raising data.

We learned that much of the mosque's money was sent to Palestine and some was given to three U.S. charities whose assets were later frozen by the government because of suspected terrorism ties.

Also, many mosques and Islamic institutions have elected boards. You might want to interview those who have run for office to discover

the policy differences.

Researchers

Use terrorism researchers carefully: There are a handful out there, and they might help you on the condition that they be named in your story.

Terrorism researcher Steven Emerson gave us an audiotape of an Islamic conference in which a local imam spoke. We translated the tape into English and found that the imam was raising money in the name of suicide bombers.

French terrorism researcher Jean-Charles Brisard provided us with documents regarding a jihad training camp in Afghanistan that was financed by the Saudi businessman who was the subject of one of our reports. These documents provided a rare look at the day-to-day problems the Saudi financier faced. Fighters, for example, often squabbled with camp cooks and didn't want to do morning exercises.

But terrorism researchers are far from perfect, and their opinions are just that. Consult them for any documents that they might have. If they make an allegation, ask to see the supporting evidence. Some terrorism researchers make leaps of logic and fact that reporters should not.

Language

Prepare for language barriers. Arabic names can have a variety of English spellings, which makes finding people and making connections extremely difficult.

To make it easier, keep a record of all the different spellings you run across. This helped us in researching the Saudi financier.

He declined to be interviewed, so we needed to get inside his head by other means, such as his writings. We heard he might have written a book or two, but we couldn't locate them under the common English spelling of his name: "Batterjee."

So, we tried other spellings we had seen in documents. We searched online university card catalogues, such as those provided by Harvard and the University of Chicago, plugging in "Battergy," "Betarji" and "Batargy." Still, no luck.

Finally, we got a hit with "Batraji" – an unusual spelling we saw only once in the thousands of documents reviewed.

That led us to three books written by Batterjee. One laid out his view that Muslims should try to create Islamic states – by force if necessary. Another contained a photo of him dressed in camouflage and standing among fighters in Afghanistan during the Afghan civil war. That picture ended up on Page 1.

These books were in Arabic and, like many of the documents we collected, portions had to be translated. The unfortunate truth is that the best documents you find might not be in English.

History

Know some Islamic history. This will not only help you produce nuanced stories, but it will also help you ask the right questions.

During our research, we kept coming across a group of young Muslims who, back in the 1960s, had helped start several conservative Islamic groups in America. We found this very interesting, but our

Heather Stone | Chicago Tribune

A man hangs an American flag from the Mosque Foundation mosque in Bridgeview, Ill.

editor, George Papajohn, pushed us to dig deeper. We did, learning that many of these Muslim students represented the beginnings of the Muslim Brotherhood in America, an underground group that has had influence on Islamic mosques and schools.

Likewise, it helps to understand various wars. When prosecutors say someone was a fighter in Afghanistan, it is important to know when. Was it in the 1980s when the United States was battling the Soviets there, too? Was it in the early 1990s, during the Afghan civil war, when the United States was aiding fundamentalist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar?

The *Tribune* was fortunate to have on its reporting team Stephen Franklin, who spoke some Arabic, and Noreen Ahmed-Ullah, a Muslim whose expertise as well as her attire – she covers her hair in the manner of devout Muslims – helped win the confidence of sources.

Ahmed-Ullah thinks non-Muslim reporters can develop rapport with sources by attending mosque functions, meeting leaders and going to holiday dinners.

"Reporters should know something about the culture because they are going to have to relate to these people before they get into the nitty-gritty," she says. "Talk the lingo, at least."

Foreign correspondent Kim Barker says many Muslims in America "are understandably suspicious of reporters, or of anyone they see as representing the interests of the government. They lump journalists into that group. It takes months to try to overcome those suspicions."

Sam Roe is a Chicago Tribune projects reporter.

MILITARY SOURCING

CHASING BOOT CAMP VIRUS

LEADS TO ARRAY OF RESOURCES

By Michael J. Berens
The Seattle Times

The e-mail began provocatively: "I'm going to do something I've never done for any reporter."

A military source had sent a lengthy message containing unpublished "confidential" statistics detailing the rebirth of a deadly virus that infected up to 2,500 boot camp recruits monthly – one in 10 soldiers.

I had been prowling for weeks on adenovirus, a common flu-like germ that had an extraordinary grip on U.S. boot camps. The Defense Department developed a vaccine in 1971 to thwart the virus. But the oral vaccine – two pills – was abandoned in 1996 as too costly. The virus quickly reached epidemic levels, killing at least six recruits since 2000.

In the harsh calculations of military health care, at least two soldiers are projected to die each year until the vaccine is recovered, no earlier than 2006.

The source heard about my search and sent the hard data. But the source demanded absolute confidentiality. The information was off-limits for publication.

Yet, within days, those numbers – the first accounting of the full human toll – were published in a *Seattle Times'* special report.

How the newspaper safely got those numbers into print – how any reporter can snag potent national scoops – highlights a vast underworld of little-known yet public military reports, memos and transcripts scattered like crumbs along little-known byways of the Pentagon.

Imagine if you could sit in a room for two days as military doctors, commanders, even generals, parade in front of you to deliver updates about military health care. Further imagine they freely provide transcripts of their conversations, even copies of their PowerPoint presentations.

You can. This valuable resource is the Armed Forces Epidemiological Board. (www.ha.osd.mil/afeb/default.cfm).

Can't attend the meetings? No problem. Everything is posted to the Web site within days.

No topic is forbidden

The AFEB is a civilian board of medical advisors, with top civilian researchers ranging from the Mayo Institute to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The board meets several times a year, rotating meeting spots among military bases.

Meetings consist of military doctors and leaders providing detailed presentations about health care issues. The board often recommends a course of action, sometimes writing letters to top Pentagon brass seeking immediate action. Sometimes they simply offer a sympathetic ear as military doctors vent their concerns.

It's important to understand that military doctors have a degree of autonomy and independence not enjoyed by many other military posts. The meetings can be free-wheeling, with extraordinarily candid discussions about problems and shortcomings.

AFEB files are journalism gold. Transcripts are a window of unprecedented access to military information not readily provided in any other public forum.

My source was unaware that previously privileged information had been provided to the AFEB board, which made it public under military rules.

No topic is forbidden. Learn about pregnancy rates, which peaked during the first Gulf War. Examine the debate over Gulf War Syndrome. Track how the military is unprepared for diseases, particularly in the Far East, as the Korean conflict continues to flare. Sexually transmitted diseases, troop mortality rates, alcoholism – they're all

tracked in textured, scientific detail.

Much of the historical background involving adenovirus – as well as the current infection rates – came from AFEB meetings. At one point, an angry assistant secretary of defense addressed the board and military leaders about the virus, terming the vaccine lapse as a "major screw up." It's hard to find better quotes.

Since the board is composed of civilians, reporters can more readily reach out for interviews and context outside military control. Most board members are comfortable discussing topics and information presented in AFEB meetings.

A good reporting technique is to download all the transcripts and PowerPoint presentations. It's possible to do a global PDF find command, which sifts through the thousands of pages for keywords like "adenovirus." Take the time, however, to read transcripts; the insights are invaluable.

Web-based transcripts go back only to 1994. For earlier years, transcripts are maintained in hardbound volumes at the Army surgeon general's office and can be examined on request. The transcripts are especially rich with information about the first Iraq war and the military's wrestling match with Gulf War Syndrome.

Do your homework

The fragmentation of the military can be used to advantage if reporters take the time to invest in a little research.

A good place to start is an online Army publication, the Medical Surveillance Monthly Report.

This 40-plus-page publication specializes in hard data, the kind of armor needed for groundbreaking stories. Articles reveal sources of information, which allow reporters to backtrack the flow of information. An archive of past editions is at www.amsa.army.mil/1MSMR/MSMR_TOC.htm.

ARMED FORCES EPIDEMIOLOGICAL BOARD

Meetings of the Armed Forces Epidemiological Board are public, although portions are classified. In this case, reporters are asked to temporarily leave the room.

Reservations for attendance can be made at 703-681-8014, which is the Office of the Army Surgeon General. The next meeting is scheduled for March 22-23 at Fort Dietrick, Md.

For those unable to attend, transcripts and presentations are posted to AFEB Web site, curiously pocketed away under the Web banner "calendar of events" on the AFEB home page, www.ha.osd.mil/afeb/default.cfm.

Recent issues explored Iraq battlefield injuries, HIV infection rates, general hospitalization rates and malaria.

The Navy has broad authority to investigate health care issues affecting all branches, such as adenovirus. Pay special attention to the activities of the Naval Health Research Center in San Diego (www.nhrc.navy.mil).

The Navy site is a portal to key military studies and other important Web sites, such as the Global Emerging Infectious System (www.nhrc.navy.mil/geis/), which tracks military disease rates globally.

No matter the health care story, your trail will eventually end at the office of U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense William Winkenwerder

(www.ha.osd.mil). Or, more accurately, with someone on his communications staff. A good place to start: 703-681-1765.

I have found the office to be accessible and useful, although military reporting is often exasperating in the best of circumstances. Do your homework, know your topic and ask concrete, focused questions for best results.

Perhaps the best source of information comes from soldiers, past and present. There are a plethora of groups. One homespun Web site is a portal site to many specific organizations (www.members.aol.com/veterans/warlib6.htm), which includes basic information on how to request military information.

However, few sites are as useful or current as Military.com (www.military.com). The site has a useful e-mail alert service that delivers top head-

lines each day.

A popular trolling ground for story ideas – gauging the pulse of military issues – can be found at the informative, self-promotional site of David H. Hackworth (www.hackworth.com). Take the information with a strong grain of salt, but read about emerging and intriguing issues, such as lack of M-16 ammunition for troops in Iraq or troubles in recruiting.

Military reporting can require a labyrinth of seemingly puzzling sources. The military has never heard of an acronym it doesn't like, or one that's too long. And it likes to change them all too often. But for the determined reporter, there's a large body of untilled information waiting to be plowed.

Michael Berens is an investigative reporter at The Seattle Times.

Stories from the
IRE RESOURCE CENTER

To read more stories by journalists who have covered terrorism and homeland security, visit the IRE Resource Center (www.ire.org/resourcecenter). Here is a selection of stories available at the Resource Center:

• **Story No. 21353** – Throughout its counties, California officials deal with the misappropriation of homeland security funding. Some of the smaller counties used the anti-terrorism funding for minor repairs such as fixing courthouse doors, instead of becoming better prepared for future terrorist attacks. Sean Holstege, Michele Marcucci, Mike Oliver, Ian Hoffman, *The Oakland* (Calif.) *Tribune* (2004)

• **Story No. 20723** – The series looks at how Washington has waged war against al-Qaida since 9/11 by paying more than $20 million to friendly Muslim security services. The stories also explore the roots of the global jihad and the links between organized crime and terrorism. David E. Kaplan, Monica Ekman, Laurie Lande, Aamir Latif, Ilana Ozernoy, Kevin Whitelaw, *U.S. News & World Report* (2003)

• **Story No. 21249** – This extensive 11-story investigation of terrorism in the U.S. deals with a spectrum of issues ranging from suspected terrorists who were granted U.S. citizenship to links formed between al-Qaida and Saudi Arabia. It also looks at "how war in Iraq drained resources from the hunt for bin Laden." Lisa Myers, Jim Popkin, Albert Oetgen, Rich Gardella, Aram Roston, Doug Pasternak, Sarah Evans, Steve Capus, NBC News (2003).

• **Story No. 20865** – *The Washington Post* traced the path of the region's first wave of homeland security aid from its distribution through its final use, a trail that has been largely unexamined by federal regulators. The reporters found that much of the $324 million directed to the Washington region after the 9/11 attacks remained unspent or was funding projects with questionable connections to homeland security. The analysis looked at contracts, grant proposals, and purchasing databases. Jo Becker, Sarah Cohen, Spencer Hsu, *The Washington Post* (2003)

• **Story No. 21270** – The roots of al-Qaida to Southeast Asia are traced, based on a terrorist plot that occurred in that region in 1995, which was a blueprint for what happened on 9/11. With rare footage shot in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, hundreds of intelligence documents and access to top-level sources throughout the region, this documentary shows how al-Qaida has grown in power and influence, spreading through the region, gathering followers and executing some

of the world's most violent terrorist plots. Maria Ressa, Ken Shiffman, Jess Liwanag, Kathy Quiano, Armand Sol, Scott McGhee, Conrado Palileo, René Santiago, Gino Bruno, CNN (2003)

• **Story No. 18986** – A report on terrorism, which "describes the troubling – sometimes chilling – circumstances that has made so many countries incubators for terrorism. It illustrates the depth of the problems and the complexity of the relationships that must be resolved before this new war can be won." The report looks at finance, politics, the military, the roots and the individual nations involved worldwide. Bruce Finley, Gwen Florio, Steve Lipsher, David Olinger, *The Denver Post* (2003)

• **Story No. 20167** – A study done by researchers at Syracuse University found that the number of terrorism cases prosecuted since 9/11 has sharply increased, but that the severity of the crimes the "terrorists" commit has dropped. The median sentences for crimes categorized as "terrorism" dropped from two years in 2001 to just two months. Eric Lichtblau, *The New York Times* (2003)

• **Story No. 19714** – Since 1991, an Arabic magazine called *Assarat Al Mustaqeem* started publishing in Pittsburgh, distributing over 2,000 copies in the United States and some all over the world. The reporters uncovered ties between the magazine and other influential radical Muslim groups, and found the magazine to contain militant articles, advocating jihad and the killing of Jews. Betsy Hiel, Chuck Plunkett Jr., (Pittsburgh) *Tribune Review* (2002)

• **Story No. 18979** – This story reveals that up to 2,000 Americans have fought in holy wars around the world – Afghanistan, the Balkans, Kashmir and Chechnya – since the early 1990s. Most of the jihadists are Arab Americans, but others are as diverse as America itself, and include native-born whites, blacks and at least one Puerto Rican, the report found. David E. Kaplan, *U.S. News & World Report* (2002).

• **Story No. 20166** – For years, the Justice Department has overstated its number of arrested and convicted terrorists, inflating the numbers with largely harmless crimes that have no connection to terrorism. One example of cited terrorism: a tenant fighting eviction called his landlord, impersonated an FBI agent, and said the bureau did not want the tenant evicted. Mark Fazlollah, Peter Nicholas, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (2001)

TERRORIST WATCH

Gathering string, freelancers pays dividends after FBI raid

By Mark Morris
The Kansas City Star

Every reporter needs a hobby. And since 9/11, my hobby has been the Islamic American Relief Agency, a religious charity in Columbia, Mo., about 125 miles east of my office in Kansas City.

That interest paid off large for *The Kansas City Star* on Oct. 13, 2004, when the U.S. Treasury Department designated the agency as part of a global network of charities that had supported Osama bin Laden and a host of other regional and international terrorists. That same day, an FBI-led task force raided the charity's Columbia offices, carting off truckloads of computers and records.

The Treasury designation was an administrative procedure that froze the charity's assets and made it illegal to contribute to them. The FBI raid was part of a separate criminal investigation that has not, to date, resulted in charges.

With notes and documents I had gathered in the intervening three years, *The Star* produced not only a strong story on the daily developments, but a 60-inch sidebar and graphic that looked at the emergence of Islamic charities in the fundamentalist culture of 1980s Sudan.

The work also connected me with two remarkable young journalists – Jaimi Dowdell and Aaron Kessler – from the Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia for whom IARA-USA was far more than a hobby.

Just after 9/11, IARA-USA was a small blip on my radar. One of its former Web masters, Khaleel Ziyad, had been identified in federal court records as the man who bought the satellite phone that al-Qaida used to coordinate the U.S. embassy bombings in East Africa.

Also, in 1999, the U.S. State Department had yanked a couple of federal relief grants for water and health projects in Africa because, cryptically, they weren't in the "national interests."

Still, IARA-USA's executive director proclaimed after 9/11 that the charity was all about international relief work and had no links to terror. The agency quickly began raising money to purportedly aid the victims of the Twin Towers attack.

Local law enforcement sources told me on background that they had been interested in the agency for some time. But no charges against the agency or its officers ever had been filed.

Terrorist fundraising

With Ziyad representing a firm link to terrorism, I focused on him in my post-9/11 reporting and put IARA-USA on the back burner. Still, I kept a file open on the charity. With the FBI turning its full attention to exposing terrorism supporters on U.S. soil, it was only a matter of time before they returned to IARA-USA for a second look.

Over the next three years, I occasionally returned to my IARA-USA file, adding the basics, state incorporation records, IRS 990s, pages from their Web site and occasional news articles in which the agency solicited contributions for relief efforts.
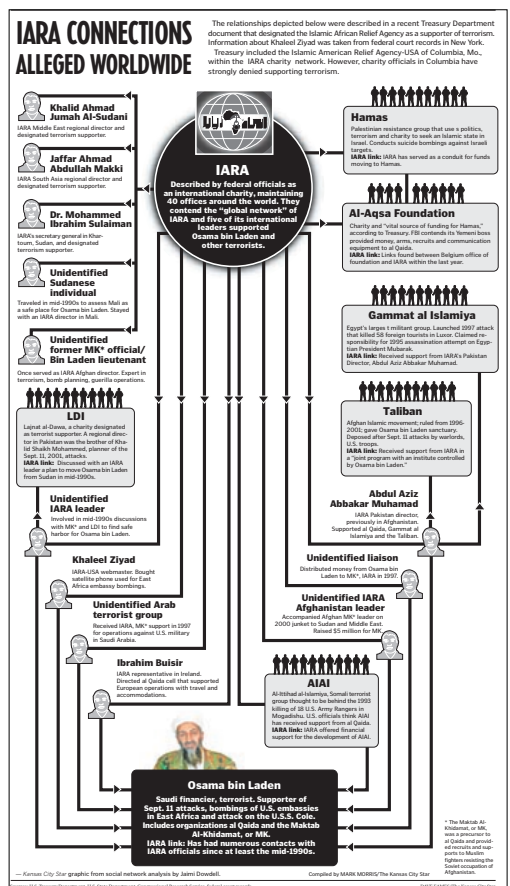
From time to time, terrorism analysts dropped nuggets in my direction, but often those seemed to stretch the available evidence too far. And often, the links boiled down to the two elements I already knew about: Ziyad and the canceled relief grants.

In the late summer of 2004, I heard chatter about a renewed interest in terrorist fundraising by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in Kansas City. Thinking that IARA-USA might be a likely subject, I began adding to my charity file in earnest, looking in particular for links between the agency in Columbia and a similarly named charity in Sudan, the Islamic African Relief Agency.

An FBI agent removes a computer from the Columbia, Mo., offices of the Islamic American Relief Agency. Federal agents raided the offices, removing equipment and boxes of documents.

Shauna Bittle | Columbia Missourian

IARA CONNECTIONS ALLEGED WORLDWIDE

The relationships depicted below were described in a recent Treasury Department document that designated the Islamic African Relief Agency as a supporter of terrorism. Information about Khaleel Ziyad was taken from federal court records in New York. Treasury included the Islamic American Relief Agency-USA of Columbia, Mo., within the IARA charity network. However, charity officials in Columbia have strongly denied supporting terrorism.

— *Kansas City Star* graphic from social network analysis by Jaimi Dowdell. Compiled by MARK MORRIS/The Kansas City Star

CHECK OUT UPLINK

Jaimi Dowdell provides more detail on the social network analysis portion of *The Kansas City Star* coverage in the March-April issue of *Uplink*, the newsletter of the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting (www.ire.org/store/periodicals.html).

Nexis searches of African and European news sources proved helpful for finding the few news references to IARA in Sudan over the years. Though Sudan is the largest country in Africa, it's not well-served by the Internet. Even the government's official Web site is glitchy, with some links connecting directly to pornographic sites.

But by the time FBI agents knocked down the doors on Oct. 13, my IARA-USA file had grown to a full banker's box of documents that included United Nations relief reports, research on the agency's officers and information on terrorism financing. My electronic records included a PDF copy of the 9/11 Commission report, which could easily be searched electronically. (It's available on the commission's Web site and is essential reading.)

Within days of the raid, I got one of my luckiest breaks in the story: A call from IRE, asking if I'd like to speak with two of its members who had worked for IRE and recently graduated from Mizzou. Both Jaimi Dowdell and Aaron Kessler had spent the previous year reporting on IARA-USA. But before Oct. 13, they had had no luck interesting their local editors in a fuller telling of the IARA-USA story.

Kessler, a determined fellow, had spent months corresponding with IARA-USA officials, probing them on connections with other international charities. Dowdell, a specialist in social network analysis, had constructed elaborate graphics, showing how the charity was linked to a host of other entities in Missouri and across the country.

After a few phone calls, my editors were convinced that a freelance arrangement would benefit *The Star's* readers and give Dowdell and Kessler a place to show off a year's worth of persistent reporting.

Soon we all were ensconced in a newspaper conference room, comparing notes and sharing files among four laptops. But our critical new information still had us puzzled.

The Treasury designation of the global network of the Islamic African Relief Agency, including IARA-USA, came with a dense three-and-a-half-page report that described the network's links to terrorism and provided details of how some of its officers contributed.

None of it was in chronological order and it referenced individuals and organizations that we'd never heard of, such as Lajnat al-Dawa, a Kuwaiti charity, and Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya, a Somali terrorist group.

To clean up the clutter, Dowdell began entering every scrap of data from the Treasury report into her social network analysis software. To clarify the terrorist organizations, we added information from other sources, such as the U.S. State Department's "Patterns of Global Terrorism," the Congressional Research Service and federal court records.

After two days of noodling, we showed editors the rough draft of a graphic that showed eight hard links between the IARA network and Osama bin Laden and other ties to Hamas, the Taliban and Gammat al Islamiya, an Egyptian militant group. They wanted to get the information into the paper quickly and I glibly offered a weekend piece.

I was misguided.

By this time, IARA-USA in Columbia had hired Shereef Akeel, a splendid lawyer from Michigan who insisted that the Missouri agency had no organizational ties to IARA in Sudan or to any other international charity that the Treasury department had linked to the "global network."

We took those concerns seriously. While the Treasury Department had listed IARA-USA as part of the network, it hadn't described a single instance where someone in Missouri had done anything wrong.

Gathering string

Running a story that told the tale of a global network with ties to bin Laden and explored the purported links between the Missouri charity and the global network proved impractical. So, we settled on two stories.

Working with our pooled notes and a mountain of e-mail between Kessler and IARA-USA officials, we crafted a story that let the lawyer have his say while showing that the agency had never been shy about associating itself with organizations that investigators said had supported terrorists. Some of our best examples were Web sites for those international charities that showed IARA-USA as their U.S. office.

While that work was under way, Dave Eames of *The Star's* art department was transforming our first draft of the social network analysis into a smart graphic that consumed most of an inside page when it finally ran. The article that accompanied the graphic just after Thanksgiving described the connections that the social network analysis had illuminated and discussed the terrorist organizations. Terrorism experts also provided context.

Reaction to the graphic was gratifying. A couple of larger newspapers and several law enforcement entities asked for copies of the graphic, which is available at both *The Star* and the IRE Web sites (www.ire.org/sna).

The lessons from this tale are instructive:
- If something seems interesting, stay curious. We gathered string on IARA-USA for a long time before it turned into anything. I collected documents for three years, while Kessler and Dowdell worked for a year before bringing their research to *The Star*.
- Like you, federal investigators can be creatures of habit. They are likely to return to previous subjects.
- Don't be afraid of new tools that can help readers see a story. We never had considered social network analysis software before Dowdell and Kessler showed it to us.
- Collaboration can bring a wealth of insights. I'm a 51-year-old, mid-career reporter, and working with two fresh J-school grads brought energy and urgency to the project.
- Be patient with the learning curve. We don't write many international terrorism stories off the city desk. But with so much of the FBI's resources now focused on terrorism, we can all expect to write more.

Mark Morris is the federal courts reporter for The Kansas City Star.

GOVERNMENT POLLUTION

Despite warnings, no one cleaned, contained dangers left in community by Army depot

BY SCOTT STREATER
FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

The telephone call was nothing special – the kind reporters receive all the time.

A man, wishing to remain anonymous, claimed he had a big story for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Pollution from an old Army supplies depot south of downtown Fort Worth, he said, had contaminated the soil in a nearby neighborhood with lead and other toxic chemicals. He claimed there were studies documenting the pollution at the Fort Worth Federal Center. He said had not read the alleged studies, however, nor did he know which federal or state agency had conducted them. In short, he didn't know a whole lot.

I certainly had my doubts when I hung up the phone. Still, I was intrigued.

I called the Environmental Protection Agency's regional office in Dallas. The EPA confirmed there had been environmental assessments conducted at the site, though no one seemed to know much about it. I filed a Freedom of Information Act request asking for copies of every site screening report or remedial investigation done in the past decade at the federal center, built in 1941.

And then I forgot about the whole thing. That is until a number of weeks later when I received a box in the mail from the EPA. It contained thousands of pages of environmental assessment reports, detailed soil and water sample results, maps – and a bill for more than $200 in copying costs.

Not sure what to expect, I plowed through the records between story assignments and after work. Sure enough, it turned out my anonymous tipster was right.

The Army for decades had stored tons of lead ingots, manganese ore and other raw materials outside in uncovered piles, without berms or retention ponds to control storm water runoff. As might be expected, the records included reams of data documenting toxic pollution at sometimes very high concentrations throughout the Fort Worth Federal Center's 278 acres.

What hooked me, however, was documented evidence that the toxic pollution had spread to a popular city park and a lake that was once part of the federal center. I discovered that federal inspectors had warned years ago that children and other park users were at risk of being exposed to these cancer-causing agents in the soils and in the lake. They had recommended the pollution be cleaned, or at least fenced off, to protect children who use the playground and residents who eat the speckled trout and channel catfish in the lake.

The records showed:

- Soil contamination on a YMCA preschool playground at the federal center. Investigators detected at least four toxic chemicals in the soil, including a pesticide that can cause developmental delays in children.
- Soil contamination on the playground at heavily used Greenbriar Park, immediately south of the federal center. Among the toxins measured was selenium, which even in small concentrations can cause brittle hair and deformed nails.
- Lead and pesticides such as dieldrin and DDT in sediment and water samples in Greenbriar Lake. The manmade lake was built more than 50 years ago to capture storm water runoff from the federal center, but was billed by the city as "a community fishing lake."
- Recommendations that federal center operators "evaluate methods for limiting human exposure" to the contaminants. In 2000, inspectors suggested

TIPS

Words of advice to environmental reporters tackling similar stories:

1. Conduct preliminary research on your own. Order the documents – and read them – prior to discussing a possible story with your editors. This keeps the pressure off of you to produce a story when you're not sure you have one. In addition, editors are much more likely to give you the time you need to work on an in-depth story if you've done your homework before pitching the story.

2. Don't be intimidated by complex data. I'm the first to admit that I sometimes feel overwhelmed when confronted with a pile of government reports filled with complex data. But I also get excited because experience tells me that great stories await those reporters persistent enough to climb the mountain of paper.

3. Develop a list of trusted experts with whom you can discuss your findings. You'll avoid embarrassing errors if you do this. Call your state environmental regulatory agency and local university, and ask to talk to experts who can discuss the technical aspects of what you've found.

Jill Johnson | Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Emily Contreras, 2, plays on a slide at Greenbriar Park in south Fort Worth. The park, located next to the Fort Worth Federal Center (background), has contaminated soil.

digging up the pollutants to protect children at Greenbriar Park. Nothing was done.

- Chemical waste and debris believed to be buried in various spots at the federal center – including dozens of 55-gallon drums of Agent Orange, the Vietnam War-era defoliant linked to health problems ranging from diabetes to cancer. Investigators suspect as many as 75 metal drums are buried beneath an asphalt parking lot, making them harder to find.

- A suspected mix of buried chemicals and construction debris at the park, just north of the playground and near the lake. Inspectors hired by the Army Corps of Engineers found expansive soil depressions, 10-feet wide and hundreds of feet long, which they described as "characteristic of landfill cells." Inspectors measured high levels of arsenic and several toxic metals in the soils. And they warned that the contaminants' location "represents both a potential for migration to the nearby lake, and an exposure pathway to human populations."

It was time to approach my editors. I summarized the documented data in a one-page outline and pitched the story. They were enthusiastic, in part because the story came as the General Services Administration, which manages the federal center site, was set to sell a 25-acre section to the City of Fort Worth. The city plans to convert the property into a vehicle maintenance center.

I burned up the phone lines. I discovered the Army Corps of Engineers was planning another site investigation that will include taking soil samples from the city park and water and sediment samples from the lake. At first, the Corps insisted the pollution posed no health threat. But when questioned about specific recommendations concerning human exposure pathways and the need to clean the pollution to protect park users, John Lambert, the Corps' technical manager at the site, acknowledged the obvious: They really didn't know if the park is safe.

"That's why we're doing an investigation," he said.

When I posed these same questions to the city's top environmental official, he responded that all inner-urban parks and lakes are dirty. As for eating fish in Greenbriar Lake, he advised that a good rule of thumb at any urban waterway is to throw back what you catch.

"Spend all day fishing, then go out to Red Lobster," he said.

But no signs warned against eating the fish. When I drove to the park, I had no problem finding residents who were fishing for rainbow trout and catfish, and who planned to eat the fish they caught. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department routinely stocks the lake with trout, and fishing tournaments are held there. No one I encountered at the park was aware federal regulators had measured toxic chemicals in the water.

Preschool administrators also said they were unaware of the pollution problems. The YMCA

administrator in charge of the day care shook his head in disgust when I handed him a grainy photograph showing two federal inspectors in white protective clothing digging up soil samples near an outdoor playhouse at the day care, which overlooks Greenbriar Park.

We published a story last September, detailing our findings. Reaction from the community was swift. I received dozens of e-mails and phone calls from concerned parents and nearby residents.

"I am outraged about what is occurring right in front of us," wrote one mother whose child attended the preschool. Another man offered to give me three catfish he caught at the lake to be tested. Carol Lawson, who has lived near the federal center for 35 years, organized a neighborhood meeting with city staff to discuss the situation.

City leaders appeared to be in no hurry to take action. But Lawson and her neighbors pushed them to address our story. In early October, three weeks after our stories were published, the city announced it would conduct a comprehensive environmental assessment of the park and the lake, and clean up whatever pollution it finds. The city's study will be done this year.

"It's incumbent upon the city to make sure the park is safe for the citizens," said Roger Grantham with the city's Department of Environmental Management. "We owe them that. It's a no-brainer, in my opinion."

The city also posted signs for the first time warning local anglers to throw back the fish they catch in Greenbriar Lake. And the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department agreed to test the biological tissue of fish in the lake for toxic chemicals.

"The park is a place where we're going to have families, people old and young alike, and it is absolutely essential that it be a safe environment, one where we are comfortable saying our citizens can go there without fear," Mayor Mike Moncrief said.

The city's commitment to conduct the study helped soothe concerns among some park users. But neighbors continue to await any cleanup of buried waste, polluted soils or water.

Scott Streater is a national award-winning environmental reporter at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. He was a finalist in last year's IRE Awards for "Radioactive Water Flowed to Thousands of Homes."

Stories from the
IRE RESOURCE CENTER

The IRE Resource Center contains stories written by journalists who have successfully covered pollution and the environment. IRE members can find stories from the Resource Center at www.ire.org/resourcecenter. The following is a selection of stories that examined environmental pollution.

• **Story No. 19022**: "Home Deadly Home: Toxins in air." Industrial chemicals that were streaming under the neighborhoods of thousands of Americans had become a gas harmful to those exposed to it. Regulators had done little despite two decades of warnings from the scientific community. Mark Obmascik, *The Denver Post* (2003)

• **Story No. 18650**: "Hidden Hazard." An examination of the volume of toxic chemicals released each year into the air, water, land and underground, and the possible contribution of this pollution to high rates of cancer and other health problems. Scott Streater, Anton Caputo and Jenny LaCoste, *Pensacola News Journal*. (2001)

• **Story No. 19691**: "Industry vs. Environment: Air of Concern; Unclear Future." Explores how Riverside County government officials fostered and subsidized polluting industries in a community that already had some of the worst air pollution in the nation. The pollution was found to be hurting the health of the community's children. David Danelski, Jennifer Bowles, *The* (Riverside, Calif.) *Press-Enterprise*. (2002) [Danelski wrote about the coverage in the September-October 2003 issue of *The IRE Journal*.]

• **Story No. 18653**: "Fallout." Hunters Point Shipyard, which used to house the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory, had mishandled "nearly every kind of radioactive material known to man." The investigation revealed that tons of radioactive material had been dumped into San Francisco Bay; radioactive fuel had been burned, discharging its smoke into the atmosphere; radioactive scrap metal was sold to private companies; and unsuitable radioactive containers were dumped at a site 30 miles from the city. Lisa Davis and John Mecklin, *SF Weekly*. (2001-02)

JUST PUBLISHED!

Covering Pollution: An Investigative Reporter's Guide
by Investigative Reporters and Editors
*in cooperation with the Society of Environmental Journalists*

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This guide seeks to be immediately useful to investigative journalists. Although it offers extensive resources for in-depth and time-intensive investigations, its main focus is to show you how you can get to the heart of an investigation quickly and without waiting months for Freedom of Information Act requests to be fulfilled.

Much of the information in this guide focuses on how to use Web-based, federal database searches to get the data you need to both find and drive environmental investigations, but you'll also find numerous tips from veteran reporters about how to handle other aspects of investigative environmental journalism, including interviews and writing.

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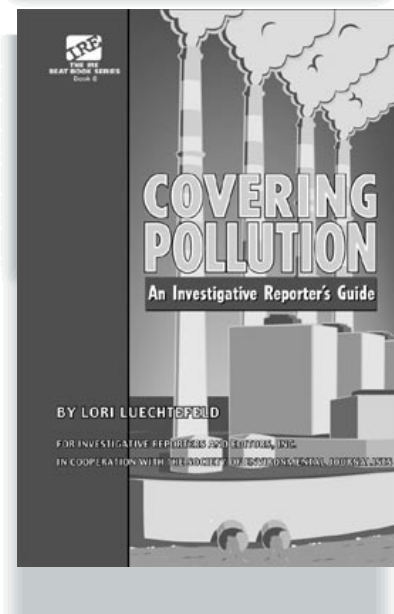
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Pseudoephedrine, shown fresh from the production line in India, is the essential ingredient in most cold medicines and meth. Only a handful of manufacturers exist to serve the legitimate market.

METH

Policies rejected, despite data proving government pressure effective on drug flow

BY STEVE SUO
THE (PORTLAND) OREGONIAN

Success is not a term many of us easily associate with the war on drugs.

That's why my editors at *The Oregonian* were incredulous in early 2003, when I presented evidence that crackdowns on the U.S. supply of methamphetamine ingredients had profoundly disrupted the drug trade twice during the 1990s. Each time, the data showed, meth abuse declined significantly.

Landing the story would take nearly two years of reporting in Oregon, California, Washington, D.C., Canada and India. It would require expertise in the chemistry of meth, drug-company lobbying, and the international trade in pharmaceutical ingredients. I would amass eight file drawers of documents, 500 pages of typed interview transcripts, and several gigabytes of data.

The search revealed that the meth trade is uniquely vulnerable to government pressure, and that the federal government has rejected policies that exploit this weakness. The resulting five-part series, "Unnecessary Epidemic," described how a strategy to control meth chemicals could roll back the rising tide of meth abuse.

Since publication in October, the Bush administration has issued a series of meth initiatives that echo many of *The Oregonian's* findings. U.S. Sen.

Gordon Smith, R-Ore., has used the newspaper series to build support in Congress for the White House plan.

The series is at www.oregonlive.com/special/oregonian/meth. The following is a summary of some analytical and investigative techniques I used.

Eerily similar pattern

Good reporters make their own luck. I just got lucky.

I had acquired a database of more than a million drug treatment patients from state agencies in Oregon, California, Washington and Colorado. The anonymous records included information such as admission date, primary drug of abuse, and treatment outcome.

My goal was to gauge the success of Oregon's unique treatment system. According to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, Oregon had treated more meth addicts per capita than any other state. Addiction experts said this was because the innovative Oregon Health Plan had greatly expanded poor people's access to rehab.

But when I calculated the number of patients entering treatment for meth addiction each month, it seemed I had been misled. I saw no sudden burst in admissions when the health plan opened in May

1995. Meth treatment admissions had been rising long before that. The number actually dropped in late 1995, and again in 1998. When I charted treatment admissions in the other states, they followed an eerily similar pattern.

Something bigger was happening, unrelated to the way one state provided drug treatment. It had something to do with meth.

I asked other agencies for statistics related to the number of people using the drug: arrests for the possession of synthetic drugs; emergency room visits for meth overdoses; and reports of meth-related property crime.

Finally, I examined a key measure of the meth supply: purity. When dealers are short on product, they typically dilute it with additives. Users pay the same price as before for a weaker drug, raising the cost of getting high. Such changes can be tracked through the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's System to Retrieve Information from Drug Evidence database.

All the numbers for supply and demand moved in tandem. Whenever the purity of meth went up, so did every indicator of meth use. When purity fell – in 1995-96 and 1998-99 – meth use plummeted across multiple states.

I took a trip to the Portland State University library to confirm what I was seeing. Sure enough, dozens of journal articles showed that the demand for addictive drugs is elastic. In other words: Even addicts cut back when prices rise or purity falls.

So, what had caused the meth shortages that led users to quit?

Signs of struggle

My hunt for answers showed that much of what I had read about meth was wrong.

Article after article quotes cops saying meth abounds because the drug is easy to make. The recipe is on the Internet. The ingredients are sold in any supermarket.

Such stories have badly skewed the public's perception of the meth problem.

Only 20 percent of meth consumed nationally is made by users themselves, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. About 80 percent comes from a small number of "superlabs," mainly in California, that can churn out as much meth in a single batch as 1,500 home labs.

Mexican drug cartels operate the California labs by procuring truckloads of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, common ingredients in cough and cold medicine. Small-time meth cooks who "smurf" packets of Sudafed off the shelf can't touch the cartels' production level.

To understand how this centralized assembly line developed, I spent time in the field with the California drug cops. I scoured Nexis and court records. I hounded DEA retirees. I created a chronology.

It turned out the first major rise in meth purity coincided with the first widespread reports of California superlabs in 1991 and 1992. A federal indict-

ment showed these were the years in which Mexico's Amezcua Contreras cartel discovered how to buy ton quantities of ephedrine on the international market.

In 1995-96, the superlabs suddenly stopped using ephedrine and switched to pseudoephedrine. Congressional testimony obliquely noted that DEA had stopped foreign shipments containing 170 tons of ephedrine. I learned from the trade press that the world output of ephedrine at the time was just 1,200 tons.

I found signs of a struggle afterward. A DEA report at the time described a near doubling of black market ephedrine prices. Court papers showed the Amezcua brothers discussing the disruption at a November 1995 meeting. A forensic chemist in California told me lab operators were so desperate that they made fake methamphetamine from August 1995 through early 1996.

The DEA had created a massive upheaval in the world chemical trade.

Hard to replicate

Of course, the traffickers adapted. Meth production rebounded as soon as traffickers located steady sources of pseudoephedrine. The 1998 shortage ensued after Congress regulated pseudoephedrine; it ended when traffickers circumvented the rules.

What made the story compelling was that I could show government officials had allowed such adaptations to occur.

From interviews with DEA officials and transcripts of congressional hearings, I learned law enforcement officials had warned Congress not to create loopholes in the regulation of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Members ignored those warnings and obeyed the drug industry's wishes.

From court and DEA records, I found that the agency had failed to consistently police the black market in pseudoephedrine. DEA-licensed sellers stayed in business after receiving 20, 30 and 40 warnings. Two companies convicted of federal felonies still hold DEA licenses.

From trade journals, scientific publications and a trip to India, I discovered there are only nine major producers of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in the world, and their processes are hard to replicate. Yet, the DEA invests little in monitoring the flow of chemicals from this short list of suppliers.

Finally, in a random search of "pseudoephedrine" on the U.S. Patent Office Web site yielded the biggest surprise of all. Pfizer, maker of Sudafed, holds a patent on a version of pseudoephedrine that cannot be converted to meth. Pfizer has never put the product through the costly clinical trials needed to bring it to market.

None of these findings meant much on their own. But the series established that choking the flow of meth chemicals can make a huge difference. That raised the bar of accountability on Congress, the drug industry and the DEA.

Of course, you can accomplish more in two years than in two weeks. But this project held a number of lessons for executing enterprise stories

of any scope:

1. Think broadly. Any prosecutor, chemist, economist, treatment counselor, pharmaceutical executive or customs inspector knows more about his or her piece of drug policy than I do. But most have tunnel vision. I saw the connection between identity theft in Portland and studies of addiction in monkeys.

2. Think scientifically. The academics I consulted found my analysis persuasive for two reasons: It was supported by economic theory and previous academic studies, and I approached my data skeptically. Rather than bet everything on one imperfect indicator of meth use, I used multiple barometers.

3. Think journalistically. Statistical correlation makes boring reading. Without a real-world chronology to test cause and effect, correlations also can be bogus. Human anecdotes can confirm your findings and bring them to life.

4. Read academic journals. Search www.ingenta.com, then head for the library.

5. Be a LexisNexis nut. Make your local story authoritative by checking it against a wealth of U.S. and international publications. In reading what others have written, you also will learn what not to write.

6. Trust no one. This story threw me into a babbling brook of hearsay. Iowa police think anhydrous ammonia is a vital meth ingredient; in California, it's not. Check every assertion with sources in other regions and disciplines.

7. Use trusted artists. If you regularly use computer-assisted reporting techniques, you probably enjoy making charts. That doesn't mean anyone understands them. Have an artist dummy out your idea and critique it. Edit and re-edit the guff until everyone gets it.

In a series of phone calls and emails to the DEA's public affairs staff over the course of a year, I related every fact and figure that I intended to publish about the agency. I asked repeatedly to interview Administrator Karen Tandy, so she could respond to our findings about the DEA's record on chemical control. My requests were declined.

Tandy responded to the series on the DEA Web site, saying the series "short changes DEA's efforts and successes." She said the stories wrongly indicated that methamphetamine and control of its chemical ingredients were low priorities for the agency. She highlighted a recent decline in California superlab seizures and a number of DEA actions against pseudoephedrine distributors.

For Tandy's letter and the response from Sandra Mims Rowe, editor of *The Oregonian*, see the blog entry for Dec. 7 at: www.oregonlive.com/weblogs/publiceditor.

Steve Suo uses computer-assisted reporting to cover crime for The Oregonian. His past assignments included politics and the 2000 Census. He holds a master's degree in public policy from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Fredrick D. Joe | The Oregonian

By studying mold from a rotting apricot bought from a public market, Indian scientists in the 1970s developed a unique yeast strain. It turned molasses into a compound needed to manufacture pseudoephedrine. India now accounts for about one-third of the world's supply of the chemical and every gram begins with offspring from this test tube.

Books

I learned that girls had been beaten by former lovers, and boys had come close to attempting suicide at home. I learned all kinds of frightening information, but I found out at the same time as the others in the group did."

His revelations are useful not only to troubled teenagers and those charged with their welfare, but also teenagers who seem relatively normal and reporters covering them all.

"By looking at the kids dealing with heavy drug use or depression or family problems, I want to illuminate the larger story about adolescence in the 21st century. Most teenagers are doing very well. But every kid sits in classes with someone who is struggling with eating disorders or emotional issues, or goes to parties with someone who uses hard drugs, or considers taking a ride from someone who is drinking," he says.

Steve Weinberg is senior contributing editor to The IRE Journal and a former executive director of IRE.

FOI Report

covering a train derailment near Woodbridge, N.J. When he stepped onto railroad property to try to get a picture of the wreckage, the local police who were controlling access to the scene packed him into a squad car and drove him away.

- On Election Day, journalists covering the presidential election were barred from polling places in several areas of the country and one was arrested for photographing voters outside a polling place in Florida. In Ohio, a federal appeals court overturned media restrictions while a Texas newspaper in President Bush's hometown reported harassment after endorsing Kerry.

A Florida sheriff's deputy chased, tackled, punched and arrested a freelance investigative journalist from Long Island who was photographing voters outside of Palm Beach County's main elections office Sunday afternoon, according to a *Palm Beach Post* reporter who witnessed the event.

- In Minnesota, a new law required journalists to get letters of approval from city election clerks or county auditors before interviewing at polling

sites, where they could remain for a maximum of 15 minutes.

And the numbers grow, seemingly every week. The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press recorded about 30 arrests or detainments of journalists in the past two years.

In earlier times our governing bodies tried to squelch journalistic freedom with the blunt instruments of the law – padlocks for the presses and jail cells for outspoken editors and writers. Over time, with spectacular wartime exceptions, the courts and the Constitution struck those weapons out of their hands.

We have the weapons to fight trickle-down fascism, and it is no less than our duty to do so. It's never easy, nor popular, to stand up to the local despot, at the height of his power, but never has it been so important. We must fight every unconstitutional infringement of the right to gather news, in every locality, every day. Only consistent, dogged determination will beat back the forces of repression, which seemingly never take a day off from their quest to silence us.

Member news

■ **Lisa Getter**, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter at the Washington bureau of the *Los Angeles Times*, has been named editorial director of United Communications Group in Rockville, Md. UCG operates a group of business-to-business publishing companies. Getter is a former member of IRE's board of directors. ■ **Jeff Golimowski** has moved to KAKE-Wichita as an investigative reporter. He previously served as community reporter at WJLA-Washington, D.C. ■ **Diana Henriques,** reporter for *The New York Times*, has won the 2004 Worth Bingham Prize for her series last year about financial firms taking advantage of military personnel. ■ **Sandeep Junnarkar,** freelance writer and Weil Visiting Professor of Journalism at Indiana University in Bloomington, has been named to this year's board of the South Asian Journalists Association. Junnarkar is also SAJA's journalism awards chair. ■ **Paul Kostyu,** statehouse bureau chief for Copley Ohio Newspa-

pers, has been selected one of six fellows to take part in the Kiplinger Program in Public Affairs Journalism at Ohio State University this spring. He also was recently elected vice president of the Ohio Legislative Correspondents Association. ■ **Toby A. Lyles**, formerly a news researcher with *The* (Raleigh, N.C.) *News & Observer* is now a news researcher with *The New York Times*. ■ **Bob Mahlburg** has joined the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*'s investigative projects team. He previously worked in the state capital bureau of the *Orlando Sentinel*. ■ **Jo Craven McGinty** has joined *The New York Times* as a database specialist. She was a reporter on the enterprise desk at *Newsday* and formerly worked as academic adviser to IRE and NICAR. ■ **Rich Murphy** has joined WTTG-Washington, D.C. as managing editor. He was the executive producer of special projects/photojournalism at WTSP-Tampa/St. Petersburg. ■ **Bonnie Pfister** has joined The Associated Press as a reporter based in Trenton, N.J. She previously

worked at the *San Antonio Express-News*, where she was a business writer and Mexico border bureau chief. ■ **Don Podesta** has been named assistant managing editor overseeing newsroom copy desks at *The Washington Post*. He was previously deputy assistant managing editor for planning and administration at *The Post*. ■ **Cathryn Poff**, producer at KRON-San Francisco, has been awarded an International Reporting Project Fellowship, and will focus on Liberian refugees in Ghana. ■ **Janet Roberts** has left her position as computer-assisted reporting editor at the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* to join the *The New York Times* as database editor. ■ **Roshini Rajkumar** has joined WDIV-Detroit where she will report for its undercover team and do general assignment reporting. Previously, she worked as a reporter and fill-in anchor for KMSP/WFTC-Minneapolis. ■ **Sally Schulze** is the new weekend anchor at WESH-Orlando. She moves from KIRO-Seattle where she was the East Side bureau chief.

Legal

Bloggers need not apply?

As both bills move through their respective committees, compromises will be proposed and alliances sought to keep the proposals alive. What has already surfaced, however, is an underlying debate about who is a "journalist" entitled to protection from disclosure of otherwise anonymous, confidential sources. While there has been expressed antipathy to opening the floodgates so that anyone with a Web site – the 21st century version of the lonely pamphleteer – could invoke the same privileges as CNN, ABC or *The Washington Post*, actual sympathies may prove surprising.

For some, the prospect of an efficient cadre of bloggers standing ready to question, revile or undermine traditional news outlets is an answered prayer (goodbye Dan Rather), and if expanding the privilege assists in that endeavor, so much the better. Regardless of whether federal shield legislation is enacted, and because a well-framed pretext can trigger an override, it would probably be a mistake for journalists to assume that even an "absolute" legal privilege will protect them when pursuing especially sensitive or important stories. A more prudent approach, perhaps, is to raise the level of the game through additional education. Assume the worst, and study the information management techniques of financial institutions, offshore entities and covert operators, who utilize cryptography, translucent databases, steganography (messages hidden within messages), virtual dead drops and other craft to restrict unauthorized access to data or preclude knowledge about answers to certain questions.

From the IRE offices

in Spanish, planning bilingual programs, and making sure to include pertinent issues in the Latino community in our conferences and seminars.

IRE has managed to do all this in its 30 years with limited resources, a small staff, a dedicated board of directors and the overwhelming generosity of our members – members who consistently and happily volunteer to organize seminars, teach, write articles and beat books, and most of all help the organization and each other at every turn.

As we work to build a substantial endowment, we hope those donors who can help us will not only see what we have done, but also can imagine with us all we can do in the next 30 years and realize the important role IRE plays in helping journalists keep business and government accountable and societies democratic and free.

IRE SERVICES

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS AND EDITORS, INC. is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting within the field of journalism. IRE was formed in 1975 with the intent of creating a networking tool and a forum in which journalists from across the country could raise questions and exchange ideas. IRE provides educational services to reporters, editors and others interested in investigative reporting and works to maintain high professional standards.

Programs and Services:

IRE RESOURCE CENTER – A rich reserve of print and broadcast stories, tipsheets and guides to help you start and complete the best work of your career. This unique library is the starting point of any piece you're working on. You can search through abstracts of more than 20,000 investigative reporting stories through our Web site.
Contact: Beth Kopine, beth@ire.org, 573-882-3364

DATABASE LIBRARY – Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. The library has copies of many government databases, and makes them available to news organizations at or below actual cost. Analysis services are available on these databases, as is help in deciphering records you obtain yourself.
Contact: Jeff Porter, jeff@ire.org, 573-882-1982

CAMPAIGN FINANCE INFORMATION CENTER – Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. It's dedicated to helping journalists uncover the campaign money trail. State campaign finance data is collected from across the nation, cleaned and made available to journalists. A search engine allows reporters to track political cash flow across several states in federal and state races.
Contact: Brant Houston, brant@ire.org, 573-882-2042

ON-THE-ROAD TRAINING – As a top promoter of journalism education, IRE offers loads of training opportunities throughout the year. Possibilities range from national conferences and regional workshops to weeklong boot camps and on-site newsroom training. Costs are on a sliding scale and fellowships are available to many of the events.
Contact: David Donald, ddonald@ire.org, 573-882-2042

Publications

THE IRE JOURNAL – Published six times a year. Contains journalist profiles, how-to stories, reviews, investigative ideas and backgrounding tips. *The Journal* also provides members with the latest news on upcoming events and training opportunities from IRE and NICAR.
Contact: Len Bruzzese, len@ire.org, 573-882-2042

UPLINK – Newsletter by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. Published six times a year. Often, *Uplink* stories are written after reporters have had particular success using data to investigate stories. The columns include valuable information on advanced database techniques as well as success stories written by newly trained CAR reporters.
Contact: David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-884-7711

REPORTER.ORG – A collection of Web-based resources for journalists, journalism educators and others. Discounted Web hosting and services such as mailing list management and site development are provided to other nonprofit journalism organizations.
Contact: Brant Houston, brant@ire.org, 573-882-2042

For information on:

ADVERTISING – Pia Christensen, pia@ire.org, 573-884-2175
MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – John Green, jgreen@ire.org, 573-882-2772
CONFERENCES AND BOOT CAMPS – Ev Ruch-Graham, ev@ire.org, 573-882-8969
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Mailing Address:

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If you have hotel or general conference questions, please contact Ev Ruch-Graham, sr. conference coordinator, ev@ire.org or 573-882-8969. If you have registration questions, please contact John Green, membership coordinator, jgreen@ire.org or 573-882-2772.

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Cancellations need to be sent via e-mail to jgreen@ire.org. There is a $50 processing fee for all cancellations until June 1, 2005. Refunds will not be given for cancellations after June 1.

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# REQUIRED READING FOR YOUR NEWSROOM

HOME MORTGAGE LENDING:
How to Detect Disparities

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jo Craven McGinty guides reporters through understanding and using Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data. Included are specific story ideas and lists of tipsheets and stories available through IRE.
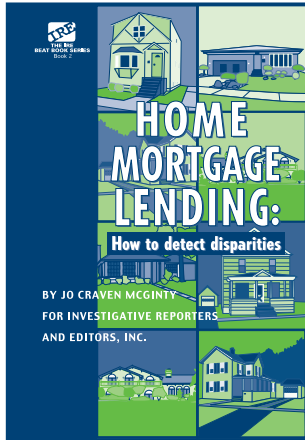
UNDERSTANDING CRIME STATISTICS:
A Reporter's Guide

Covers using Uniform Crime Reports, National Crime Victimization Survey, National Incident-Based Reporting System, other major statistical sources, writing the crime statistics story and database analysis of crime statistics. Includes law enforcement contact information and stories and tipsheets available from IRE.
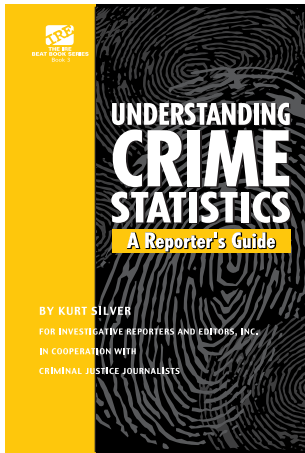
NUMBERS IN THE NEWSROOM:
Using Math and Statistics in News

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Sarah Cohen guides journalists through working with numbers, including fractions, rates, percents, per capitas, measuring change, making inflation adjustments, understanding averages, working with graphics, doing budget stories, questioning surveys and polls, and much more.
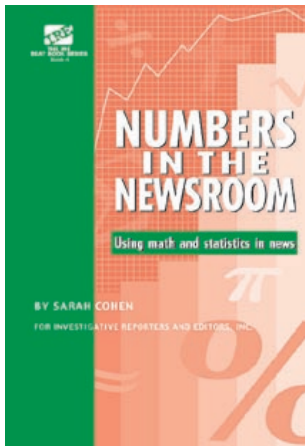
COVERING AVIATION SAFETY:
An Investigator's Guide

Learn to develop a crash plan for your newsroom, report from the scene of a crash, start an aviation beat, interpret aviation records, negotiate Web data and investigate planes and airlines on deadline. Includes related stories and tipsheets available from IRE, as well as FAA regional contact information and useful Web sites.
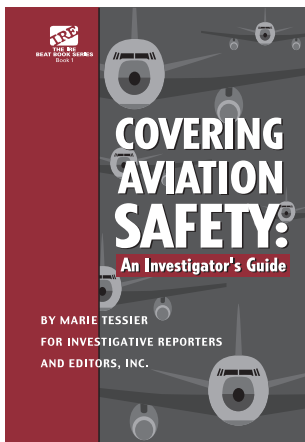
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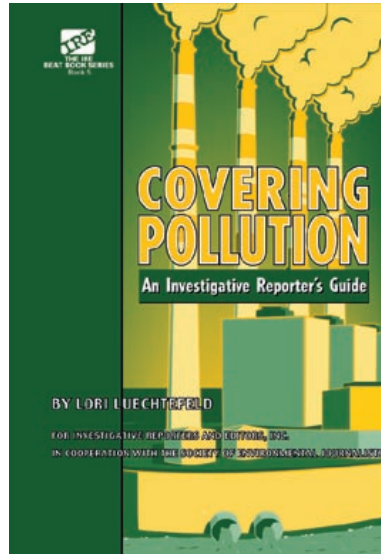
An Investigative Reporter's Guide

by IRE in cooperation with SEJ

This primer gives an overview of useful resources reporters can use for local investigations into environmental pollution. Its main focus is to show how to get to the heart of an investigation quickly and without waiting months for FOI requests to be fulfilled. Filled with examples and references to stories, tipsheets and other resources available from IRE and SEJ.

UNSTACKING THE DECK:
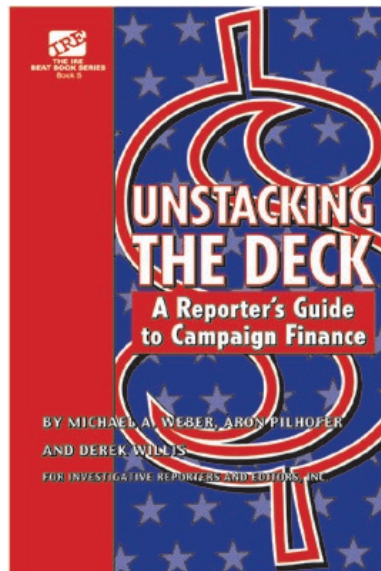
A Reporter's Guide To Campaign Finance

Invaluable for pursuing stories about the impact of money on elections, political parties and candidates at the federal, state and local levels.
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