THE IRE JOURNAL

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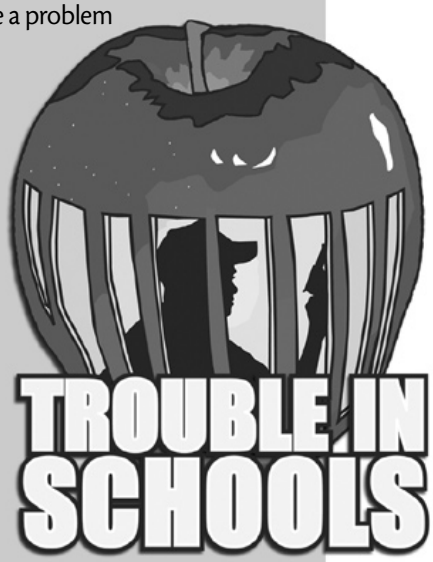

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THE IRE JOURNAL

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Hurricanes revive investigative reporting; need for digging deeper

BRANT HOUSTON

Whenever anyone questions whether aggressive investigative journalism is necessary for any free and democratic society, the disasters spawned by hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the United States will provide the affirmative answer for a long time to come.

The dazzling coverage of the disasters also will hamper and expose the deep cynicism of the media-bashing politicians, ideologues and corporate public relations hacks who have tried and partially succeeded in creating a more timid press.

Consider the outstanding record of our colleagues:

- *The* (New Orleans) *Times-Picayune* (and NPR, *National Geographic* and *The New York Times*) produced plenty of warnings about the flawed levees and the lack of emergency planning for anything above a Category 3 hurricane in New Orleans and the nearby coast. (See our special report beginning on page 14.) *The Times-Picayune* also wrote about federal resources being redirected to Iraq and the war on terrorism.
- On-the-ground reporting by the press after the hurricanes exposed the magnitude of the disasters and pressured the federal government to respond.
- The press has continued to hold government accountable for its lack of preparation, for the pathetic response by officials – both elected and appointed – and for the free-wheeling purchasing and contracts.
- In the past four years, the press has written repeatedly about deteriorating infrastructure – roads, bridges, dams and levees in the United States – that presents as great a threat as a terrorist attack. Of course, government officials ironically were shutting down access to data about the frailty of the infrastructure because of their concerns of possible use by terrorists. (Especially ironic because that data had been available on the Web or through electronic sources for so long that the proverbial horse was long out of the barn.)

We can only hope this revival of great watchdog journalism is no passing phase and the momentum will lead us into a new era of investigative stories. At the same time, despite the staff cuts throughout the mainstream press, there are additional signs of a new fervor:

- Some bloggers, who are not political operatives or those who have less-than-candid agendas, are showing passion and zest for revealing untruths and are seeking journalistic training. Citizens with non-journalism jobs are disturbed enough by the lack of news coverage in their communities that they are jumping into the information fray.
- The nonprofit centers in investigative reporting and innocence projects are flourishing.
- Radio investigative stories thrive as NPR and American RadioWorks consistently produce in-depth pieces.
- A network of journalists has formed in the spirit of IRE's Arizona Project to investigate the environment in Russia that allowed the assassination of Forbes editor Paul Klebnikov in Moscow. (For further information, see page 5 and an overview piece at http://mediachannel.org/blog/node/1150.)

And as always, the ever-diminishing mainstream staffs at newspapers and television stations still find ways to do enterprise and investigative work. Further, many news organizations are realizing that aggressive, investigative reporting is what distinguishes good journalism from shills and pseudo-news people.

At the same time, investigative journalists throughout the world are forging ties and building new networks. For example, the recent Global Investigative Journalism Conference, created by IRE and the Danish group DICAR, attracted more than 400 journalists from at least 30 countries to Amsterdam last month.

Despite the traumatic transformation the news media is going through, every sign points to a renewed spirit among those outraged by injustices, dangerous incompetence or the abuse of the weak and poor.

For investigative journalists, it is not a time to despair but a time to go to work.

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.

2006 CAR Conference on tap for Newark in March

Next year's annual Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference is set for March 9-12 in Newark, N.J. at the Hilton Newark Gateway Hotel (just a hop, skip and a jump from Manhattan).

The conference will feature an Advanced Day for CAR veterans as well as special tracks for broadcasters and beginners. A mini-boot camp for those new to CAR reporting will be open to the first 36 people to sign up.

As always, print and broadcast experts from around the country will speak on panels that focus on topics as diverse as the U.S. Census, crime, education, local and state government, freedom of information, transportation and more. Hands-on classes will cover spreadsheets, database managers, mapping, statistics and the latest in cutting-edge technology.

To register, make hotel reservations, or find the latest information on the conference, please go to www.ire.org/training/newark06.

Journalists investigate murder of editor; Greene to consult

IRE member Richard Behar is coordinating an international alliance of reporters and media outlets to investigate the July 2004 assassination of Paul Klebnikov, the editor in chief of the Russian edition of *Forbes* and the first American reporter murdered in Russia.

Called Project Klebnikov, the group aims to uncover new information about the killing, pursue some of the stories Klebnikov was working on at the time of his death and test a model of international media collaboration on stories that are too complex or risky for any one outlet to undertake, says Behar, a prize-winning journalist who left *Fortune* and *Time, Inc*. last year.

Bob Greene, the *Newsday* journalist who spearheaded the Arizona Project, is now advising and consulting on Project Klebnikov. But unlike the Arizona Project – the collaborative investigation into the 1970 car bombing of *Arizona Republic* reporter Don Bolles that resulted in a single, 23-part series – Project Klebnikov reporters will share information through a virtual bureau and publish or broadcast their own stories in their affiliated media outlets on an ongoing basis.

The group's Web site is www.projectklebnikov.org.

IRE members take home top journalism awards

IRE members made an outstanding showing in several contests sponsored by a variety of organizations. (Members' names are in bold):

Capitolbeat Awards, from the Association of Capitol Reporters and Editors

- **Eric Eyre** of the *Charleston Gazette* won the John Aubuchon Freedom of Information Award for his series, "The Fall of West Virginia House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta."
- **Josh Margolin, Kelly Heyboer and Dunstan McNichol** of *The* (Newark, N.J.) *Star-Ledger* won in beat reporting, daily newspapers (circulation over 75,000).
- **Kimberly Kindy** of *The Orange County Register* won in columns/commentary/analysis daily newspapers (circulation over 75,000) for her Watchdog Columns.
- **Scott Finn** of the *Charleston Gazette* won in in-depth reporting, daily newspapers (circulation under 75,000).
- **Leah Rush, Daniel Lathrop, David Dagan** and Susan Schaab of The Center for Public Integrity won for in-depth reporting, online publications.
- **John O'Connor** of The Associated Press (Springfield, Ill.) won in in-depth reporting, wire service reporting.
- **Kathy Hoffman** of The Associated Press (Detroit) won in single report, wire service reporting.

National Press Club Awards

- **Tod Marks, Mari McQueen,** and Jeff Blyskal of *Consumer Reports* won the Consumer Journalism Award for periodicals.
- **David Rummel** of PBS's Frontline won the Consumer Journalism Award for television.
- **Mike Soraghan** of *The Denver Post* won the Washington Correspondence Award.
- **Charles Layton** of the *American Journalism Review* won the Arthur Rowse Award for Press Criticism, single entry, print/online.
- **Elaine Grossman** of *Inside the Pentagon/Inside Washington Publishers* won the Newsletter Journalism Award for analytical reporting.
- **Peter Eisler** of *USA Today* won the Robert L. Kozik Award for Environmental Reporting for print/online.
- **Diana K. Sugg** of *The* (Baltimore) *Sun* won the Online Journalism Award for distinguished online contribution.
- **Barbara Hansen, Kevin McCoy** and Julie Appleby of *USA Today* won the Joseph D. Ryle Award for Excellence in Writing on the Problems of Geriatrics.

Florida Press Club Excellence in Journalism Awards

- **Ian Katz** of the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* won in business writing (circulation over 90,000).
- **Duane Marsteller** of the *Bradenton Herald* won in business writing (40,000 to 90,000 circulation).

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MEMBER NEWS

Roddy Boyd is covering Wall Street and terror finance at the *New York Post*. He was previously a business reporter at *The New York Sun*. ■ **Jerry Ceppos** has retired after six years as vice president/news at Knight Ridder. Previously, Ceppos was executive editor of the *San Jose Mercury News* and president of the Associated Press Managing Editors association. ■ **Bill Dedman** has joined *The* (Nashua, N.H.) *Telegraph* as managing editor for readership. Dedman was a correspondent and full-time consultant for *The Boston Globe*. ■ **Adam Goldman** has moved from The Associated Press' Las Vegas bureau to its New York City bureau, where he is a general assignment reporter. ■ **Vince Gonzales,** a news correspondent with CBS News, was named Broadcast Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists for his body of work, including extensive investigative reporting on the Enron scandal. ■ **Angie Drobnic Holan** has left her position as a researcher at the *The Tampa Tribune* to work as a news researcher at the *St. Petersburg Times*. ■ **Brian Joseph** has moved from *The* (Palm Springs, Calif.) *Desert Sun*, where he covered city hall, to *The Sacramento Bee*, where he is a general assignment reporter. ■ **Prerna Mona Khanna,** medical correspondent at KTVT-Dallas/Fort Worth, has won an N.S. Bienstock Fellowship from the Radio-Television News Directors Foundation. ■ **Dave Lieber** is "The Watchdog" investigative columnist at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. He was the paper's metro columnist. ■ **David McCumber** has been promoted from managing editor to executive editor of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. ■ **Paul McEnroe** has been selected as one of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma's 2005 Ochberg Fellows. McEnroe is a projects reporter at the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis. ■ **Ron Nixon** has left his post as computer-assisted reporting editor at the *Star Tribune* to become a projects editor on *The New York Times'* computer-assisted reporting team. Before working at the *Star Tribune*, Nixon was training director for IRE and NICAR.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40 ➢

Send Member News items to Pia Christensen at pia@ire.org and include a phone number for verification.

OVERCHARGE

CAR training pays off in examination of state purchase card program's flaws

By Steve Lackmeyer
The (Oklahoma City) *Oklahoman*

Quietly, without making local headlines, Oklahoma in 2000 followed the lead taken by several other states and began to pursue implementation of a purchase card program that was hailed as a way to cut costs and make purchases easier.

Five years later, *The Oklahoman* is doing what nobody else has done since the program's inception: examining the card charges with an independent, critical eye to see how the cards are being used.

Teaming up with John Perry, the paper's database editor, and Ryan McNeill, a state Capitol reporter, we're discovering that the cards are routinely being used for expenses ranging from stays at expensive resorts and hotels to unexplained $183 meals charged by state troopers.

Nobody offered this information to us. There were no shortcuts. We haggled with state officials over getting electronic records of the card charges. Then, we had to rely on Perry's ability to create a usable database out of tens of thousands of transactions that were provided to us as hundreds of spreadsheet versions of monthly bills.

Confession list

Our first lead to the story started with what could have been a one-day story of a state employee charged with embezzling money. Angela Hanson was considered a steady employee – a "go-to" person – at the state's tourism department. Over the past two years, the agency had dealt with a 25 percent budget cut, extensive staff turnover, and a restructuring of state government that left it under the command of the state commerce secretary.

Co-workers thought Hanson was the daughter of a wealthy family. She was certainly generous; she bought a cake and flowers for one co-worker's wedding and rented a conference hall for the local school's cheerleader performances.

Hanson had a state-issued charge card, and despite prohibitions against it being used for restaurants and hotels, charges began appearing throughout the past year for visits to boutique hotels and meals at Red Lobster, Chili's and upscale restaurants.

E-mails we obtained show purchase card supervisors were provided an assortment of explanations for the charges. And when their questions weren't satisfied, they were met with a mix of martyrdom, hostility and even flattery.

And when that didn't work, supervisors were reminded of a missing "blue file" containing all the required receipts. Where did it go?

It was not any of the alleged illegal expenditures that triggered an investigation. Instead, Hanson's card was used again to reserve a hotel room for a tourism conference. It was a job-related expense, but the rules simply didn't allow the cards to be used to reserve hotel rooms.

Hanson provided a list of personal expenditures to state investigators that showed charges for the wedding, for the cheerleader performances and for an array of items bought over the Internet.

As criminal charges were being filed, we began to dig into the purchase-card program. Reporters discovered Hanson had just filed for bankruptcy when she received a card that she would use to charge up to $70,000 a month. Her address was a doublewide mobile home on her parents' rural property.

Robb Gray, the state's tourism director, admits Hanson could still have the card if not for that hotel room reservation.

CAR training payoff

It's not as if there weren't hints that problems existed with the charge cards. We learned most of the cards had gone two years without being examined by auditors. The last audit, curiously, was never finished.

The Oklahoman

Analysis of a audit on Oklahoma's purchase card system found receipts not verified or reviewed. Pictured here is Kathy Taylor, state secretary of commerce.

When problems were found with cards belonging to 19 of 20 agencies being examined, the audit was dropped and no reports were issued to the agencies.

So how do you examine more than 2,000 cards and tens of thousands of transactions? This is a CAR project, and just a few months ago, that would have terrified me.

Truth is, like many in the newsroom, I relied on our talented, but overworked database editor to do the heavy lifting on something like this. And if Perry couldn't find the time to do it, well … .

I was one of the hundreds of reporters from around the world who attended the 2005 IRE Conference in Denver. In one short week, I went from knowing nothing about spreadsheets and databases to having enough know-how to make a spreadsheet talk to me and at least be able to navigate a database.

By teaming up with Ryan McNeill, who already has a good grasp of spreadsheets, we obtained manuals for the state purchasing card software and learned what data fields are maintained by the state and the bank that issues the cards.

The state was reluctant to comply with our requests for electronic records. Their response ranged from questions as to whether it was subject to the Open Records Act to uncertainty as to whether they had the capability of complying.

Still, they quickly went along with our requests for electronic records of names of people and agencies that provided cards. The state also provided us electronic records detailing who took training, and when, for using the cards.

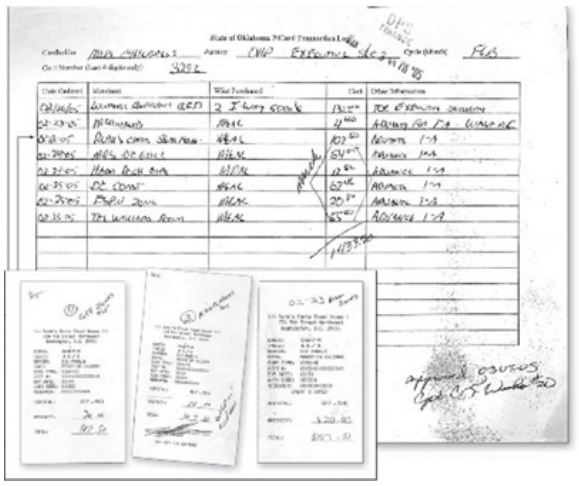
At the same time, the state purchasing officials were showing uneasiness with our request for electronic records of actual card charges.

Here is where our preparation paid off. By studying the manual for the software programs used for the cards, we knew the data was there, ready for us to peruse.

The first response was to offer it up in electronic PDF image files. That's no good (I know that thanks to Denver). You might as well get thousands of paper records. They then offered up rich text format records. Perry cringed at the thought.

Paying the tab

The Department of Public Safety's purchase cards are being investigated after a discovery by *The Oklahoman* that charges on troopers' state-issued purchase cards include expensive meals and are not backed up by detailed receipts.



Having seen the software manuals, we knew there was yet another option: Since the state gets to download spreadsheets of monthly statements, why couldn't they provide us the information that way?

We sorted through electronic monthly statements while Perry, free of the "mundane" work, launched into writing a program that could convert the charges into readable data that would allow us to sort through all of the tens of thousands of transactions at once.

Key to all of this would be the merchant category codes, known as "mcc's." Every merchant has one. For a hotel or restaurant, it can help you sort through a spreadsheet and compile a list of charges to restaurants or hotels. It is less helpful if you are talking about Wal-Mart, which is coded as "food," even if you buy office supplies.

But it is a tool that, when used correctly, can help sort through thousands of transactions.

Increasing scrutiny

Patterns quickly emerged as Perry began to crank out sample test lists of various agencies.

To date, *The Oklahoman* has reported a handful of stories showing that no financial background checks are required before a card is issued to a state worker. We have shown that agency heads can issue as many cards as they wish to whom they wish. We have shown that extensive problems were found in the last unfinished audit – problems that might have made someone like tourism director Gray more suspicious earlier.

We have shown the cards have received little independent scrutiny, and how problems have emerged with their use across the country.

The more we crunched the data, the more juicy details emerged, such as the fact that thousands of dollars were charged by troopers for meals that have no detailed receipts.

In response, Gov. Brad Henry ordered the hiring of three additional auditors to oversee the card program. And, in the first audit of any of the cards in two years, State Auditor and Inspector Jeff McMahan reported problems with the way the card issuer, JPMorgan/Chase Bank, oversaw its side of the card program.

Also, McMahan and John Richard, director of the state Department of Central Services, announced a plan to scrutinize once every three years each charge card used by employees of state agencies.

Richard also said he was having his staff trained to match the "data mining" completed by *The Oklahoman* in its computer-assisted analysis of more than 46,000 transactions dating to July 1, 2004.

Despite the new scrutiny, McMahan and Richard's audit plan does not address tens of thousands of cards issued to employees of state colleges and universities.

Steve Lackmeyer has worked with The Oklahoman since 1990 and is special projects reporter. John Perry has worked with The Oklahoman since 1988 and is database editor. Ryan McNeill has worked at The Oklahoman since 2000 and is a Capitol bureau reporter.

PAY TO PLAY

Money managers for public fund contribute to political campaign coffers to gain favors

BY MARK NAYMIK AND JOSEPH WAGNER
THE (CLEVELAND) PLAIN DEALER

A growing political scandal in Ohio that ties an unknown coin dealer to the state's top elected officials has thrust the all too common – but often ignored – "pay-to-play" politics to front pages of the state's newspapers.

The overdue attention is reshaping Ohio's 2006 governor's race and could influence the politics of the 2008 presidential race in Ohio, still considered the bellwether state that determines who occupies the White House.

The story began when *The* (Toledo) *Blade*, the daily newspaper serving Northwest Ohio, revealed that the state-run workers compensation fund invested $50 million with a coin dealer from Toledo who is a prodigious fundraiser for Republican officials and causes.

As the *Blade* and other newspapers further scrutinized the highly unusual investment – now at the center of a state criminal investigation – one thing became crystal clear: political contributions and connections greased the wheels of state contracts.

The Plain Dealer looked beyond the coin dealer to see if other companies managing money for the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation gave to the state's top leaders.

Money manager explosion

In Ohio, the Republican Party has had a virtual lock on every nonjudicial statewide office for the past 16 years.

We found that almost two-thirds of the 212 current and former companies hired by the Bureau to invest its money gave a total of nearly $5 million to Republicans and their causes while virtually ignoring Democrats from Jan. 1, 1997, through 2004.

We focused on this eight-year period because the state loosened its investment policies during this period, allowing more firms to seek contracts to manage the Bureau's money. The number of money managers exploded from just five in early 1997 to 156 active ones by 2005, according to the Bureau records reviewed by the paper.

Gov. Bob Taft, whose relationship with the coin dealer is part of a broad ethics investigation, topped the list of politicians benefiting from the money managers' political largesse.

Taft successfully ran for governor twice during that period and accepted more than $700,000 in contributions from these companies.

The workers compensation money managers include large banks and their subsidiaries, well-known national investment companies and small firms. Their donations largely went to the state's best-known Republicans and GOP committees. They gave generously to the attorney general, secretary of state and state auditor, who all have held more than one statewide office and are Republican candidates for governor in the 2006 election.

The money managers also contributed heavily to Taft's failed 2003 Third Frontier campaign. That effort sought voter approval to raise $500 million through the sale of bonds – a potential boon to money managers – that would be invested in high-tech research jobs.

Only one Democrat gained significant notice of the money managers. Former Attorney General Lee Fisher, who ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1998, ranked 10th in the *Plain Dealer* analysis, though he received much less money than any of the top Republicans.

Gaining access

To conduct our analysis, *The Plain Dealer*'s computer-assisted reporting editor, Dave Davis, created a database of more than 2.8 million campaign contributions. The database included every state campaign committee and state politician, whose records were available on the secretary of state's Web site. We used our archives and political connections to identify which committees supported Republican and Democratic causes.

Davis searched the database for contributions from employees of money managers, their parent corporations and political-action committees to Ohio politicians and state party accounts. We tried to identify spouses of top executives, who often donate to candidates. The contribution figures attributed to the investment firms are conservative because we could not easily identify exactly who owned some of the investment firms. Also, at the larger banks, the large number of employees made it difficult to identify spouses of executives before deadline.

The analysis also included contributions made to two federal party accounts – the Republican and Democratic national state elections committees. We chose to add these because some money raised for these accounts makes its way back to Ohio elections.

Money managers, real estate developers and lawyers have long been the top contributors to politicians in power. As our story again illustrated, some give to win the attention of politicians and ultimately lucrative contracts, a system often referred to as "pay to play."

The bureau money managers who contributed the five largest amounts to politicians and committees earned a total of nearly $11 million in fees and commissions between early 1998 and June of this year, according to state records. We were unable to total up the fees of all the firms because the state could not produce the records before we ran the story.

The headlines about political contributions and revelations that a few money managers with political ties have mismanaged millions of dollars have many state leaders demanding reform. As a possible model, the state is studying a policy adopted last year by the New Jersey State Investment Council. The policy bans the council from hiring any investment firms that have contributed to statewide candidates or committees within two years of the time the firms seek a contract, and it bans them from contributing money while holding a contract.

Money managers interviewed denied that any connection exists between their contributions and the contracts, which are awarded through competitive bidding.

But their claims appeared a bit hollow when our politics reporter Joe Wagner found about two-dozen money managers used lobbyists to gain access to the bureau. As one state watchdog noted: "If (money managers) truly believed the competitive bidding process is aboveboard, they wouldn't be putting their resources into lobbyists and campaign finances."

Mark Naymik has been the Plain Dealer politics writer for the past four years. Joseph Wagner covers suburban politics for the paper.

BREAKTHROUGHS

FUNDING IRE's FUTURE

2005 Annual IRE Endowment Appeal

Please make your annual contribution to **IRE**!

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James B. Steele
Editor-at-large for Time Inc.

We're Halfway There!
IRE has reached the halfway point on its $5 million Breakthroughs drive, thanks to the generous support of individuals, media corporations and foundations.

Make your mark in IRE history today by joining the hundreds of IRE members who have donated and pledged to IRE's endowment fund. Help us raise a stable, long-term source of funding for IRE's mission of fostering excellence in investigative journalism. Only investment income from the fund will be used; the principal is set aside in a reserved fund, and will always remain to provide investment income in future years. The fund is already generating significant monetary support for IRE programming.

All endowment gifts make a difference because, taken together, they form a strong foundation that continues to grow for years to come.

If you value quality investigative journalism and recognize the importance of keeping governments, businesses and individuals accountable, then please pledge to the IRE endowment fund this year. And, for a short time longer, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation will give $1 for every $2 you donate or pledge under a $1 million partial matching program.

IRE stands for – and promotes – the best in journalism. Help us make sure IRE will always be there to promote excellence in this essential field of journalism and inspire thousands of journalists to practice the best journalism they can. Year after year, IRE offers quality education and guidance for reporters, editors and producers through resources and services that uphold high professional standards and instill a passion for public service journalism.

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NO CONSENT

Families unaware county profiting from selling dead relatives' brains for private research use

By Chris Halsne
KIRO-Seattle

After months of bickering, waiting, and threats of legal action, the medical examiner finally plunked a pile of records on my desk. It didn't take long to see why he was so hesitant.

King County had been harvesting the brains of mentally ill people who came through the morgue. In return for sending at least 180 brains to a private, out-of-state research lab, the medical examiner's office collected $1.5 million. The money was a staggering sum (far exceeding the actual costs of organ harvesting), but what really caught my eye was a county e-mail from the lab.

An employee at the Stanley Medical Research Institute in Bethesda, Md., wrote, "I have been reviewing our brain files and find that I am missing some of the consent forms."

I immediately realized our investigative team had a difficult and emotional task ahead of us. How exactly do you approach a family to ask if they knew their dead loved one's brain was traded for money?

Investigative producer Bill Benson handled the matter with caution and care. After spending weeks making sure we were calling the correct and legal next of kin, he dialed the phone. Benson introduced himself, then asked what they knew (if anything) about King County's organ harvesting program. He listened, nudged them slightly into a new direction, and listened some more. The people provided nearly everything we needed for our investigation, without us having to ask very many questions.

We heard some funny stories about their loved ones lives and tragic details of their deaths. All of these families also had painful stories about how mental illness played a role in both.

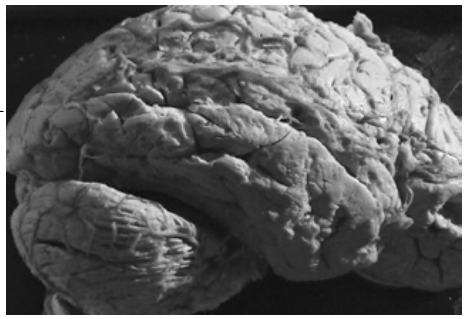
> "In return for sending at least 180 brains to a private, out-of-state research lab, the medical examiner's office collected $1.5 million."

A pattern soon emerged. King County was engaged in a slick sales pitch for body parts. They didn't ask next of kin to sign any consent forms. The families had never heard of Stanley Medical. Most thought the medical examiner was taking a "tissue sample," not harvesting the entire brain. None knew private medical records were being mailed to the private lab. None knew that money was changing hands.

Chris Halsne | KIRO-Seattle

Inside the morgue at the King County Medical Examiner's Office, where brains were harvested for the Stanley Medical Research Institute.

Chris Halsne | KIRO-Seattle



This half of a human brain was donated for research/educational purposes by an unknown donor.

Next-of-kin consent

This story was less about King County's profit, and more about uninformed consent.

With that in mind, we narrowed our focus on the 180 consent forms the medical examiner provided us. Names of the deceased and next of kin were redacted due to medical privacy laws. The letter began, "I have read the material provided to me by the King County Medical Examiner Division regarding the Stanley Medical Research Institute..."

Below that was a line that said, "Signature of legally authorized person." This was whited-out, but on many of the copies, there was the tail of a "Y" or the top of an "e." *Someone* had signed these forms. The county led us to believe for weeks that the names of the next of kin lie hidden beneath.

After telling the county that we were prepared to put four families on air who said they never read any material and never signed any consent forms, the medical examiner's press aide changed positions. The new spin was that Washington law allowed the medical examiner staff to sign the forms for next of kin, as long as they received verbal consent on the phone. Next of kin did not actually read the material or sign the forms.

The county now had a big problem. It had no audio or written records of what was said between the coroner's staff and the families of dead mentally ill clients lying in the morgue.

Excellent brains

There were several secondary stories developing. From the start, we noticed that the number of brains mailed to Stanley Medical was greater than the number of consent forms. That could have meant poor record keeping, but left open the possibility that some families gave zero consent, never even speaking at all to the medical examiner.

We later confirmed that suspicion in at least two cases. Some brains were harvested without the knowledge of any family member.

We located a limited number of families through a combination of well-placed sources, obituaries

and government incompetence. The county made several redaction errors, partly because of the volume of our request. Its failure to fully disguise a few names helped speed up the process of locating families whose relatives' brains were harvested.

Videographer David Weed had the difficult task of visually telling this story without offending our viewers. Variety was the key when it came time to edit.

Barring the suspension of privacy rules included in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, the only way to find more families would be to start airing some stories on our newscast. Despite having a number of still-outstanding public records requests (not to mention that we were nowhere near a sweeps period), we went to air. Our decision to make this an evolving series of investigations was the right one.

After airing the first investigation, we followed up with six more stories in April. We exposed a case in which a family gave no consent at all. We tracked down a former employee who told our viewers about enormous pressure to obtain "excellent brains" for Stanley. ("Excellent brains" were defined in a memo as coming from young men with schizophrenia or other serious mental illnesses.)

We aired allegations of using questionable subpoenas to send Stanley Medical private mental health, banking, housing, prescription and medical histories without consent from next of kin. Several families immediately filed legal action against the county. The director of the health department "resigned to pursue other opportunities."

Some lessons learned:

- Check out your local coroner and the trading of body parts. King County called the $1.5 million it collected a "grant." Ask what kind of "grants" your local coroner or medical examiner receives, and the purpose.
- Ask about consent procedures for organ donation, and then find out if the policy mirrors reality. Be careful to ask specific questions differentiating between organ donation from corpses and organ donation from living patients.
- Take a good look at the money trail. We focused extensively on the true costs of harvesting the brains and other organs. King County was collecting monthly checks that exceeded real costs by at least three times that amount. Since it can be illegal (and is certainly unethical) to "sell" organs, the Stanley contract was carefully written. Stanley promised to pay King County money equal to the salary and benefits of a full-time pathologist, but limited the brain-harvesting duties to one-quarter of that doctor's day.

Chris Halsne joined KIRO-Seattle as investigative reporter in December 1999. His honors include the 2004 Edward R. Murrow award for investigative reporting.

William Luther | Express-News

Employees use lifts to get to upper sections of military aircraft being maintained at Boeing's San Antonio facility at KellyUSA.

MILITARY BOON

Federal contract data shows economic boost to locals from private defense contractors

BY L.A. LOREK
SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

Earlier this year, I broke the story that the National Security Agency, the nation's cryptology branch, planned to open a satellite campus in San Antonio.

Then sources started talking about how the local military contracting community would expand as the super secretive NSA beefed up its operations here.

That led me to wonder: Just how big is the local defense contracting industry? Phone calls to city, economic development and military sources led nowhere. No one seemed to know the size of the industry in San Antonio. With wars in Iraq and Afghanistan raging, the time seemed right to find out.

During the first Gulf War, I covered the defense contracting industry for the now-defunct *San Antonio Light,* so I had an idea about who some of the players might be. But that was more than a decade ago, and the city had changed along with the defense contractors.

To get an idea of how big the industry had become, I visited the Defense Department's site for procurement at http://siadapp.dior.whs.mil. This site, known as the "Directorate for Information Operations and Reports," provides statistical information. It has procurement data that lets anyone track how much or how little each state and county gets in defense contracting dollars. It has historical information going back to 1951.

I also checked the Federal Procurement Data Center, part of the U.S. General Services Administration, at www.fpdc.gov. It contains data similar to the Defense Department's site. I found the "Geographic View" particularly helpful. It gives state-by-state statistics for the past several years. It also lists each state's top defense contractors and the top 10 states by procurement for the past five years. The site is great for graphics information and quick-hit stories.

For this story, I looked at the defense contracting dollars awarded to Bexar County and surrounding counties for 1998 to 2003 and data for other big metropolitan areas in Texas such as Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston and Austin.

To get more specifics on the actual contracts, database editor Kelly Guckian bought the federal contracts database from IRE and NICAR. The database contains thousands of contracts so we filtered it for Department of Defense coded ones. (See sidebar.)

First, we looked at contracts awarded to companies listing San Antonio as the place of performance and San Antonio-based companies by doing queries using Access database software. We also looked at contract amounts, the agency awarding the contract and products or services purchased.

A word of caution when working with this data: If you live in a city with military bases, like San Antonio, make sure to look out for locally based contracting offices. The U.S. Air Force's Human Systems Wing at Brooks City-Base issues nearly $1 billion worth of contracts every year. Even though the office is located here, almost all of the contracts are performed elsewhere and are not awarded to San Antonio-based companies. If you filter the data for place of performance, those contracts should not show up.

For each year, we crunched the data to come up with the top 20 military contractors. Then we exported that data into Excel spreadsheets. Looking at several years' worth of data helps to identify trends.

Pentagon outsourcing boom

Once we had the top contractors, I visited the Defense Department's site at www.defenselink.mil/contracts to search for contracts awarded to companies doing business in San Antonio. I plugged in the names of companies that kept showing up in the top contractors list such as Boeing, Lockheed, Valero, Tesoro, Labatt, Kalmar Industries and Reyes Industries, along with San Antonio and Texas to get more detail on the contracts. I checked those award announcements against what I found in the federal contracts database.

Then I called the local contractors to verify the numbers. Most of them cooperated and gave full details about the contracts and verified the amounts. A few declined to comment.

One thing I found is that some of the San Antonio companies participate in a lot of ongoing defense contracting work as subcontractors. The officials at South West Research Institute, a nonprofit research and development center with $399 million in revenue last year, told me that their total defense contracts were actually higher than what I had figured.

Another word of caution is that companies can go by different names. For example, Lockheed Martin is also known as Kelly Aviation Center in San Antonio.

And some companies have subsidiaries with different names that also receive contracts.

Next, I set up several onsite interviews and tours of the local contractors' operations along with our photographers. We visited Boeing's massive plane maintenance plant at the former Kelly Air Force Base, now KellyUSA. Boeing has largely taken over the work of repairing and refurbishing C-17 cargo planes and KC-135 tankers that the Air Force once did at the site.

Thanks to Pentagon outsourcing, KellyUSA, a victim of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, known as BRAC, has become a bustling defense contracting site. Today, it has more than 13,000 employees and 60 tenants.

Just like Boeing and KellyUSA, the overall research showed that San Antonio followed the nationwide trend of the Pentagon turning to private companies to do work once reserved for soldiers and pilots, producing a defense contracting boom locally to provide everything from oil and food to aircraft parts and weapons research.

But the truly amazing part was how much this industry evolved locally since the last Gulf War when San Antonio had a handful of makers of the meals ready to eat (MREs) and some aviation contractors.

Today, San Antonio is home to some of the nation's largest military contractors such as Valero Energy Corp., Tesoro Refining and AGE Refining Co. None of them made the list four years ago, but the demands of war also have boosted the demand for oil. In addition, service contractors specializing in security and research and development have had a business boom, including Booz Allen Hamilton, Titan Corp and Karta Technology. With the NSA's expansion, the number and size of those contractors should expand even more.

Endless story possibilities

Overall, the research showed that the top 20 contractors in the San Antonio area received $2.5 billion worth of contracts from defense-related agencies in 2003 alone, double the 2002 amount and nearly quadruple the $650 million awarded in 2000.

In addition to small businesses, the defense-contracting boom helped boost the bottom lines at corporate giants including SBC Communications and Zachry Construction, all of which have won defense work.

The story generated a lot of response from defense contractors and local officials who were also surprised at the size of industry. Now I'm working on a follow-up looking at the 2004 defense contracting data and I'm also examining some specific contracts and companies. The database provides endless story possibilities.

J. Michael Short | Express-News

Brenda Carmona stitches components of the Tactical Load Bearing Vest at the Reyes Industries Inc. southside factory.

L.A. Lorek is a senior business writer at the San Antonio Express-News. She previously worked as a senior writer for Interactive Week Magazine and as a technology columnist and specialty writer at the South Florida Sun-Sentinel.

Procurement database available

By Jeff Porter
The IRE Journal

They make highways you drive on, aircraft you see at military bases, computers that drive federal government Web sites. They do business in almost every country on the planet, your state and, likely, in your own community.

"They" would be procurement officials at every federal agency, and in fiscal year 2004, they obligated more than $300 billion of public money.

The IRE and NICAR Database Library offers one critical tool for journalists to account for those dollars – the Federal Procurement Data System databases. Maintained by the U.S. General Services Administration through its own private contractor, the data includes transactions worth more than $2,500. NICAR has data starting with the 1979 fiscal year, through the 2004 fiscal year. The data was updated in May 2005. The next update will occur in mid-2006.

With about 70 executive branch agencies – including the Homeland Security and Defense departments – reporting, the transactions for 2004 show a long list of services or products being contracted, including telecommunications, maintenance, office furniture, food products, nursing home care contracts, consulting services, military equipment, computer equipment and software, janitorial services, removal and cleanup of hazardous materials, hotel/motel lodging, construction of troop housing, textile fabrics and fuel products.

The data also list the location where the work is being performed, and it is also possible to analyze contracts awarded to small and disadvantaged businesses, veteran or women-owned small businesses, nonprofit organizations or foreign companies. The database notes whether the contract was subject to various preference programs, such as those under the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program.

The IRE Resource Center also offers several tipsheets and stories that might be helpful. For example:

- **Tipsheet No.1765:** Adam Bell of *The Charlotte Observer* provided a tipsheet during the 2002 CAR Conference on ways to tackle the military contracts in the database, and some pitfalls to avoid along the way.
- **Story No.21675:** The Center for Public Integrity outlines $900 billion in defense contracts in the six fiscal years between 1998 and 2003. After assembling Pentagon databases into a single table of 2.2 million records, the study identified and profiled the Defense Department contractors who received at least $100 million in the past six years. Among other findings was the fact that no-bid contracts accounted for 40 percent of the Pentagon's business.

For more information about the database, contact the Database Library at 573-884-7711 or visit www.ire.org/datalibrary/databases/fedcontacts. Contact the Resource Center at 573-882-3364 or e-mail rescntr@ire.org to order reprints or tipsheets. You can search for additional stories and tipsheets from www.ire.org/resourcecenter.

Jeff Porter is director of the IRE and NICAR Database Library.

Hurricane Katrina was sprawled across all or part of 16 states on Aug. 29, 2005, when a NASA satellite captured this image.

SPECIAL REPORT: DOING INVESTIGATIONS AFTER A HURRICANE

When the wind dies down, the water drains away and the cleanup begins, journalists must tackle a number of hurricane investigations ranging from environmental issues to consumer scams to whether the government fulfilled its responsibilities to citizens. Past stories on weather-related issues provide clues on where to start, while databases and records provide context and meaning to stories.

COASTAL AREAS

Resources abound for checking out pollution, rebuilding efforts, wetlands

By Rhituparna Chatterjee and Amanda Buck
The IRE Journal

In recent weeks, local and national journalists have done an outstanding job of covering one of the deadliest natural disasters this country has ever seen. But as commendable as that coverage was, there are more stories to be told about storms such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Throughout the year, investigative journalists can serve as watchdogs by looking into a host of factors that contribute to or amplify natural disasters. Investigations into the effects of pollution on coastal areas, rebuilding efforts, and the disappearance of wetlands and barrier islands are just a few possibilities.

Broad, long-term inquiries and shorter term, more localized questions provide journalists with a host of reporting possibilities. Those who know what and whom to ask will be better prepared to tell tomorrow's stories today, just as Mark Schleifstein and John McQuaid did with "Washing Away," the *Times-Picayune* story that predicted the New Orleans disaster years before it happened.

The following resources are intended as points of entry for those interested in investigating the science of coastlines.

Post-disaster pollution

- The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences' Web page offers an extensive collection of resources for covering post-Katrina environmental problems. Resource categories include chemical emergency response management, chemical pollutants, biological pollutants and basic safety information for the general public. Visit www-apps.niehs.nih.gov/Katrina/resources.
- The Environmental Protection Agency offers a Web page with a list of resources including EPA response activities, protecting human health, New Orleans environmental and habitability assessment, and water issues at www.epa.gov/katrina.
- Some states have Water Resources Research Institutes that provide information about post-hurricane water pollution issues. The programs can be accessed at http://water.usgs.gov/wrri. State water pollution associations also can be traced through the national Water Environment Federation at www.e-wef.org.

Rebuilding coastlines

- The American Planning Association's Katrina response page, at www.planning.org/katrina, has links to Web resources and post-Katrina news coverage. In addition, APA offers training sessions for the press and the public, and provides educational materials year-round regarding development issues.
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Web site, www.ferc.gov/industries/hydropower/safety.asp, catalogues reports of hydroelectric dam inspections. Since these dams are highly susceptible to storm damage, the reports offer information for coastal safety before and after a hurricane. FERC also plays a key role in inspecting natural gas pipelines.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Pipeline Safety provides relevant records and statistics at http://ops.dot.gov.
- The U.S. Department of Energy posts reports on pipelines, oil refineries and energy networks at www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/security/Oil.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal Zone Management program regulates coastal development and provides access to reports and decisions through links and maps at http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/czm/national.html.
- Stories available from the IRE Resource Center include Story No. 14973, "Shoreline in Peril" by Thomas Maier and John Riley, *Newsday*, Aug. 18-20, 1998. Also, "Exclusive Beach Towns Rely on Government Dollars to Rebuild," by Gilbert M. Gaul and Anthony R. Wood, was published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in May 2000. It is Story No. 21380.

Coastal Ecology

- The United States Geological Survey regularly studies coastal ecology and the impact of hurricanes on it, including specific damage to barrier islands and coastal wetlands. Results can be found at http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/hurricane-impacts.
- The USGS, in collaboration with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts, has studied coastal vulnerability to hurricanes. It provides detailed information on these studies at http://coastal.er.usgs.gov/hurricanes/mappingchange/vulnerability.html.
- The National Estuary Program can be found on the Web at www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries. An EPA program established in 1987, it aims to control water quality in estuaries and protect their overall ecology.

Other resources

- Radford University journalism professor Bill Kovarik published a series of hurricane-related articles online at the Poynter Institute. The series discusses major issues and points reporters in the direction of relevant resources. Access it at www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=68&aid=88256.
- The Society for Environmental Journalists (SEJ) has a list of resources useful for covering disasters and disaster vulnerability and the preparedness of coastal areas. It is at www.sej.org/resource/post_hurricane.htm.
- The USGS conducts studies on weather, environment, disaster vulnerability and more. Its study reports are available on the Web, as are links to other resources within and outside the agency. The site also offers links to geographic information systems and map-making tools that reporters can use while investigating various coastline or other environmental issues, www.usgs.gov.

Amanda Buck and Rhituparna Chatterjee are graduate research assistants for IRE and the Center for Science, Health and Environmental Journalism, a program of IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism.

Michael Spooneybarger | Tampa Tribune

Rescuers launch a boat to save a family in front of a Comfort Inn hotel flooded just off Interstate 10 in Pascagoula, Miss. as Hurricane Katrina batters the area.

STORY TOOLS

Databases deliver punch, details to natural disaster reporting

By Jeff Porter
The IRE Journal

In preparation for the aftermath of natural disasters like hurricanes, several U.S. government databases, regularly updated by the IRE and NICAR Database Library, can add impact and perspective to stories. Consider:

- The storm events database details such events around the country, including hurricanes and floods. Covering 1950-2004, the database can be a useful newsroom tool for adding punch to your weather stories. For instance, you will have a resource to determine how the storm ranks against previous ones in your area and beyond. (www.nicar.org/data/storm)
- The Small Business Administration is a big player in assisting the owners of homes and businesses after a declared disaster, and the SBA disaster loan database can help quantify that impact. The database includes such information as the individuals' name or company name, which disaster, the amount and, for businesses, whether the loan was fully paid or went bad. (www.nicar.org/data/sba/sbadis.html)
- The federal assistance database lists U.S. Department of Agriculture disaster loans to farmers. With this database you will be able to track federal assistance – grants, loans or insurance – and see where and how much money is obligated. (www.ire.org/datalibrary/databases/faads)
- The federal contracts database allows a journalist to sift through federal dollars awarded to businesses for levees, dams, bridges and other infrastructure projects. A search of the Federal Emergency Management Agency can locate large contractors and details about dollar amounts, bidding process and more. This could be relevant as FEMA and other agencies contract with companies around the country in cleanup and repair. (www.ire.org/datalibrary/databases/fedcontacts)
- Hurricanes threaten with floods that can overwhelm dams. Failed dams can threaten people. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' National Inventory of Dams includes information about whether the agency classifies a dam as "high hazard," meaning that if a dam fails, people are threatened downstream. It also indicates whether the dam owner has an emergency action plan, in case a disaster does occur. The data also includes information about dam inspection, ownership and age. (www.nicar.org/data/dams)
- The National Bridge Inventory dataset includes evaluations for bridges throughout the United States. A field that might be of special interest deals with "waterway adequacy," indicating how often water flows over the bridge and describes the resulting traffic delays. The database includes the status of each bridge, as well as specific details relating to the location, age and ownership. (www.nicar.org/data/bridges)
- Two Environmental Protection Agency databases – the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Information System, and the Toxics Release Inventory – can provide insight into the potential toxic chemicals that could be released into floodwaters. Both include specific locations, so by combining them with maps of flooded areas, a journalist could pinpoint problem areas. (www.ire.org/datalibrary/databases/cerclis and www.ire.org/datalibrary/databases/toxic)

Jeff Porter is director of the IRE and NICAR Database Library.

MAPPING

Storm questions answered through geographic information systems

By David Herzog
The IRE Journal

Thirteen years ago Hurricane Andrew unleashed widespread destruction in Dade County, Fla. At the time, this Category 4 storm, with its 130-mph winds, was the most costly hurricane to strike the U.S. coast in eight decades.

Soon after the storm, reporters and editors at *The Miami Herald* began examining the recovery effort and noticed contrasts in the pattern of destruction: Some subdivisions where homes had suffered minimal damage stood beside subdivisions in which homes had been rendered uninhabitable.

Four months later, in a report that relied heavily on the use of geographic information systems (GIS), *The Herald* answered the question for its readers: Recently built homes fared worse because of shoddy construction and lax new-home inspections.

Steve Doig, then at the *Herald*, used a GIS program to map home destruction patterns and then overlaid a wind contour showing wind speeds. GIS programs allow journalists to custom-build their own maps layer by layer and discover geographic relationships inside data.

In this case, the news that Doig uncovered was the lack of a consistent geographic relationship between high wind speeds and destruction. So, Doig – now a journalism professor at Arizona State University and a member of IRE's board of directors – and his colleagues dug deeper into their data about home damage and exposed the construction and inspection problems.

Now, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, journalists are reporting on similar stories using the GIS program:

- John Kelly of *Florida Today* mapped Brevard County census data for a Sept. 14 report that told readers how tens of thousands of elderly, young and impoverished people who lived in flood-prone areas would have difficulty evacuating for a hurricane.
- John Maines at the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* recently mapped disaster areas and Federal Emergency Management Agency aid for the newspaper's Sept. 18-19 series about FEMA's wasteful spending.

The mapping helped the newspaper show that FEMA granted aid to recipients in counties far from where disasters struck in Florida, California, Michigan and other states. (For direct links to these stories and others, visit Extra! Extra! on the IRE Web site at www.ire.org/extraextra.)

Still, even before Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, other journalists have been using GIS to report on hurricanes and their aftermath. For example:

- Jeff Cull of *The News-Press* in Fort Meyers, Fla., showed how residents of Miami-Dade County received more FEMA aid per household than some counties on the other side of the state, where Hurricane Charley struck in 2004. (For more details see the July-August 2005 *Uplink*.)
- During the 2004 hurricane season, Matthew Waite of the *St. Petersburg Times* used hurricane data posted on the Web by the National Hurricane Center, spreadsheets and GIS to create storm-tracking maps. (See the May-June 2005 *Uplink*.)

Journalists interested in getting started with GIS should first know a little about how to do spreadsheet and database analysis. IRE and NICAR have resources for journalists who want to learn about GIS, including:

- "Mapping For Stories: A Computer-Assisted Reporting Guide," an IRE Beat Book by mapping veterans Jennifer LaFleur of *The Dallas Morning News* and Andy Lehren of *The New York Times*. The book provides step-by-step GIS lessons tailored for journalists. For more information about the book and companion data visit www.ire.org/store/books/mapping.html.
- Mapping Data for News Stories mini-boot camps for journalists twice a year in Columbia, Mo. The next training session is scheduled for Jan. 6-8. For more information, see www.ire.org/training/mapJan2006.html.

David Herzog is an assistant professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and serves as the academic adviser for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, a joint program of the school and IRE. He is also the author of "Mapping the News: Case Studies in GIS and Journalism," (ESRI Press).

Some reporters cover city hall. Science journalists cover

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- Carey Goldberg, *The Boston Globe*

DELUGE OF DOLLARS

Tracking money, lawsuits reveals true cost of storm

By Catherine Rentz Pernot
The IRE Journal

The wide swath of damage and mistakes involved in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita make prime ground for interesting business stories, from used car fraud to nursing home malfeasance. A check of a few business stories, along with some investigative sources from the IRE and NICAR Database Library, reveal some story ideas for journalists.

Consumer protection

More than 35,000 cars damaged by Hurricane Floyd in 1999 were sold to buyers unaware of the cars' histories, according to a Sept. 19, 2005, Associated Press article. After almost every hurricane, the Better Business Bureau issues warnings about such lemon sales. Some "unscrupulous" dealers buy flooded cars at a discount, refurbish them and resell them despite potential damage to the electronic and safety systems, according to the article. Sources for the story included the Better Business Bureau and Carfax, a Fairfield, Va.-based firm that investigates automobile histories.

In addition, *The New York Times* reported in a Sept. 8 article, "After the Storm, the Swindlers," that Florida's attorney general has filed a fraud lawsuit against a man who set up the Web site domains "katrinahelp.com" and "katrinadonations.com." The article reported that attorney generals in several states are cracking down on Internet sites asking for donations for Katrina's victims. State attorney general offices should have information on lawsuits filed. The IRE and NICAR Database Library has a database of tax-exempt organizations, including charities. The exempt organizations table features the organization's name, address, contact person, total annual income, total assets, and codes describing their activities.

Local damaged businesses

Several unlikely businesses, "from a Utah motorcycle dealer to an Ohio Subway sandwich shop," did not even know the funds they received after 9/11 from the Small Business Administration were from relief programs, according to a Sept. 14 Associated Press report.

Which unlikely businesses have received loans from past hurricanes in your area? Reporters could search the SBA Disaster Loans database, available from IRE and NICAR, to find such local businesses. The database includes how much money was borrowed and whether or not the loan was repaid.

Along the same lines, a 1996 *American Spectator* article looked at President Clinton's promises to give out Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) money and its effect on taxes. Clinton had given out more FEMA money than his predecessors despite reports from the inspector general that there was little incentive for local governments to pay back FEMA loans. (IRE Resource Center Story No. 13497)

Litigation

Katrina's wake is creating business for lawyers and troubles for nursing homes, insurance companies and real estate agents. Several lawsuits are expected against facilities that left the elderly behind as the waters mounted, according to a Sept. 16 article, "Lawyers plan for waves of litigation," in the *Houston Chronicle*.

Are any of the nursing homes affiliated with facilities in your area? What are the practices of the local nursing homes? One way to check lawsuits against nursing homes is to search your state's online judiciary case database. For example, Missouri's Case.net has a database searchable by litigant name. Another way to find out information about local nursing homes is to search quality reports at the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations at www.jcaho.org or contact the state department that regulates nursing homes.

Four reporters at the 2002 CAR Conference wrote a tipsheet for the IRE Resource Center on investigating nursing homes. The tipsheet explains how the authors used computer-assisted reporting in their stories about nursing homes and the vulnerability of elderly people. The handout points to some useful Web sites with online databases (IRE Resource Center Tipsheet No. 1544).

Local economies

"In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, people watching images of poverty along the Gulf Coast may have wondered, 'How many poor places like this are there in this country?' The easy answer is, quite a few," said Daniel Altman of *The New York Times* in "The Disaster behind the disaster: Poverty," published Sept. 18.

Seeing the poverty-stricken areas of the Gulf Coast affected by Katrina, reporters might look into the poverty rates of local areas prone to natural disasters. The U.S. Census Bureau released two poverty reports in August: "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004" and "Income, Earnings, and Poverty Data from the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS)." The reports are available at www.census.gov.

New Orleans and Houston are two of the nation's largest ports. How much trade has been affected because of hurricanes? Reporters can find a special report on month-to-month shares of trade at Gulf ports at the U.S. Census Bureau. The same site offers the amount of corn, soybeans, computers, natural gas and other materials transported through ports in New Orleans and Mobile.

Jay Nolan | Tampa Tribune

Hurricane Katrina sent a strong storm surge into Mobile which mainly suffered from power outages and flooding, including this stretch of Water Street.

Catherine Rentz Pernot is a journalism graduate student working as a data analyst in IRE and NICAR's Database Library.

ON TARGET

Hurricane Katrina's impact predicted in 2002 *Times-Picayune* investigation

By Beth Kopine
The IRE Journal

Regardless of where you tuned in for coverage of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, you probably heard mention of *The* (New Orleans) *Times-Picayune's* series "Washing Away." The five-part series that ran in 2002 eerily foretold the events that unfolded in New Orleans in the hours and days following landfall of one of the most catastrophic storms to hit the United States. The series immediately became a primer for the disaster playing out in real time on the Gulf Coast.

As part of their entry in the 2002 IRE Awards, John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein detailed how they put together this stunning series. Having covered general stories on the region's hurricane preparedness and diminishing wetlands, McQuaid and Schleifstein saw the potential for a more in-depth look at what impact a Category 4 or 5 hurricane might have on the city of New Orleans, which sits several feet below sea level surrounded by the waters of Lake Pontchartrain, the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

The Times-Picayune investigation was exhaustive, looking at the science of storms, geographical and environmental issues particular to the area, as well as the state of the New Orleans' infrastructure. In a situation in which the reality was not if – but when – a major hurricane would hit New Orleans, McQuaid and Schleifstein addressed questions central to the survival of the city and its residents. Could the extensive levee system adequately protect the city? Was there an emergency plan in place for the evacuation of the city in the event of a major storm? What would it take to prepare the city for the inevitable? None of the answers they uncovered were promising, but they provided a blueprint for shoring up the emergency preparedness plans for the area.

To determine the impact of a direct hit to New Orleans, McQuaid and Schleifstein had to persuade scientists to re-conceive how they used computer-modeling systems. Generally, these were used for "broad, overlapping views" of storms for emergency planners. For this story, they had the scientists create models illustrating the landfall of a storm on a singular path heading directly at the city. National and state officials were hesitant to allow access to these models because of concerns with publishing the findings and exposing potential troubles in the region. In the end, the information was made available without the paper taking any legal action.

McQuaid and Schleifstein revealed a region incredibly vulnerable, both in terms of its structure and – arguably of greater importance – its population. In a city marked by poverty, the investigation showed the poor would have to rely on a public evacuation system to escape a hurricane.

Resources, from buses to drivers, were inadequate for the number of New Orleanians dependent on the service. It was predicted that a failure of this untested and under-publicized plan could result in the death of 25,000 to 100,000 people.

By looking at the environmental factors specific to the area, McQuaid and Schleifstein show how critical it is for wetland reclamation projects to be successful for New Orleans to steel itself against future storms. Before coastal development encroached upon the wetlands, they served to naturally tame storm surges.

McQuaid and Schleifstein contacted geologists and geographers from area universities to gather this information on the environmental issues unique to the region. Additionally, they interviewed a number of scientists from other organizations such as the National Hurricane Center, the National Weather Service's Hurricane Research Division and hurricane research think tanks at universities. Marrying data from these sources, McQuaid and Schleifstein were able to show how environmental and geological changes had, over time, made New Orleans far more susceptible to the ravages of moderate to strong hurricanes.

In a synopsis of their investigation, McQuaid and Shcleifstein explained that "despite billions of dollars spent on levees to protect Louisiana's coastal communities from hurricanes, those communities are becoming more vulnerable to even moderately sized storms as the state's coastal wetlands disappear. [*The Times-Picayune*] found that the hurricane levees surrounding New Orleans and its suburbs are not the effective barriers to storm surge that the public believes, and even their designers admit that more protection is needed. Moderate-sized storms can result in higher surges that overtop levees because the vast swath of wetlands that once protected coastal communities is disappearing at an alarming rate."

Reportedly, this series did not go unnoticed by local, state and national emergency preparedness officials. Some officials were said to have credited the series with raising awareness of the potential risks associated with a major storm making a direct hit on New Orleans. At the same time, *The Times-Picayune* reported in the years since "Washing Away" that appropriations were continually reduced as money and manpower were siphoned off to cover the war in Iraq.

Beth Kopine is director of the IRE Resource Center. To order a copy of the questionnaire that accompanied The Times-Picayune entry (No. 19841), please e-mail the IRE Resource Center at rescntr@ire.org or call 573-882-3364.

Michael Spooneybarger | Tampa Tribune

A Red Cross truck sits flooded with other vehicles in front of a hotel just off Interstate 10 in Pascagoula, Miss., as Hurricane Katrina batters the area.

FEMA FUNDS

Check out where money goes when disaster strikes your area

By Sally Kestin and Megan O'Matz
South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Last year's four hurricanes devastated much of Florida but spared Miami-Dade County. Yet, the Federal Emergency Management Agency handed out more than $31 million to residents there for Hurricane Frances, a storm that struck 100 miles away, we found.

The government paid for new wardrobes, rooms full of furniture, cars and thousands of televisions in Miami-Dade. Our investigation spread to other states, finding that FEMA awarded millions in disaster aid to communities minimally affected by disasters. The reports prompted three federal investigations that have confirmed widespread waste and mismanagement in the aid program and led to the indictments of 14 Miami-Dade residents on federal fraud charges. Bills have been introduced in Congress to reform FEMA.

When a disaster strikes close to home, the natural response is to look at how much relief is getting to victims and how fast. But what if money is going to people who were not affected? Florida is cursed by hurricanes, but many tips listed here can apply to any region of the country that is declared a federal disaster area because of flooding, storms, earthquakes, tornadoes, etc.

The program

FEMA has two primary types of disaster assistance. One type, Public Assistance, reimburses local governments for preparation, cleanup and rebuilding after a storm. Something as simple as tree stump removal can run hundreds of thousands of dollars. The second type, the Individuals & Households Program (IHP), provides money to people in disaster areas for losses that are not covered by insurance – furniture, clothing, home repair and cars, as well as disaster-related medical, dental and funeral expenses.

We concentrated on the IHP program.

Pinpoint the damage

Check FEMA's Web site, www.fema.gov, or the Federal Register for the presidential declaration and amendments. This will tell you what counties or what areas of your state were declared a disaster and eligible for assistance.

Start by asking FEMA for a county-by-county breakdown in your state of how much money the agency is giving to people through its Individuals & Households Program. The information may be on the agency's Web site, or may be available only by calling the main disaster assistance office and asking for it. It will tell you by county the number of aid applications, the number ruled eligible and amounts paid out.

Look for oddities. Compare totals by county. Did anywhere outside the affected area obtain a windfall?

For hurricanes, check Web sites for the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, www.noaa.gov, and its Hurricane Research Division, www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd, to download PDF maps and Arcview shapefiles showing wind speeds and rainfall amounts. Where did the storm hit? Where did the money go?

FEMA's Mapping & Analysis Center (www.gismaps.fema.gov) is a goody basket for CAR reporters and graphics artists. Maps show estimated wind speeds and rainfall, flooded neighborhoods, number of people in shelters, power outages, damage estimates, etc.

Look to local landmarks for the extent of destruction – golf courses, zoos, malls, etc. Were they affected? Local power companies can pinpoint power outages and tell you how long service was interrupted.

County and city governments may track the number of damaged homes. Check with disaster coordinators, building officials and planning departments for another measure of damage.

FEMA's Web site has historical disaster facts and contacts. Most states have their own emergency management Web site with similar information. In Florida, it is www.floridadisaster.org.

Valuable records

Obtain copies from FEMA of the preliminary damage assessments. This will state how much damage local, state and federal officials estimated occurred. Compare that to how much FEMA actually awarded and how many applicants ultimately applied and received aid. Did officials actually do a preliminary damage assessment?

FEMA has procedures in place to do preliminary damage assessments but bypasses the step for severe catastrophes. FEMA did not do a preliminary damage assessment in Miami-Dade before declaring it a disaster area and was widely criticized for it. Congress is considering requiring the assessments.

File a Freedom of Information request with FEMA for individual claim records by disaster for your counties by ZIP code. The agency will not release the names or other identifying information about the recipients, however, citing the Privacy Act.

The *Sun-Sentinel* and three Gannett newspapers are suing FEMA to force the agency to disclose the information. Simply having the ZIP codes, however, will help you better define where the money went. The records also show verified losses. How many television sets, air conditioners, computers, washers and dryers, etc., did FEMA pay for? How many cars?

Count bodies

FEMA pays for disaster-related funeral expenses. Using FEMA's claims data, look for how many funerals and burials the agency covered. Compare that with the number of deaths the local medical examiners attributed to the disaster. Do they match or are they far off? Why? We found that FEMA paid for 315 funerals when the medical examiners attributed 123 deaths to the hurricanes. FEMA paid for people who died of cancer, AIDS, strokes and self-inflicted gunshot wounds.

Check out inspectors

The newspaper found that two private companies, under contract at FEMA to provide and train inspectors, hired thousands of people quickly after the hurricanes and dispatched them with little training. The inspector general of the Department of Homeland Security cited the inspectors' lack of training as a factor in the high number of errors made in Miami-Dade County.

The newspaper also found that FEMA inspectors entrusted to enter disaster victims' homes and verify damage claims included criminals with records for embezzlement, drug dealing, robbery and other crimes. This story was labor-intensive, time-consuming, and a pricey endeavor.

Neither the companies nor FEMA would provide the names of the inspectors. The newspaper gleaned the names of more than 100 from confidential sources, Web sites, aid applicants, and news stories. Using Accurint, Nexis, and AutoTrack we obtained addresses, phone numbers, names of relatives etc., and kept track of it all in an Excel spreadsheet.

Run the names through local court records and PACER to find convictions. We checked court records in multiple counties and states for each person based on prior addresses. Most courts require you to mail a letter and include a check or money order (even for small sums like $2). The costs can add up. We used FedEx at times to speed the process.

Don't forget to get mug shots from police, jails, etc.

For information on the computer-assisted reporting aspects of disaster coverage, see IRE Tipsheet No. 2284 from the *Sun-Sentinel's* presentation at the 2005 CAR Conference in Hollywood, Calif.

This information was presented at the 2005 IRE Conference in Denver. The complete coverage is available online at www.sun-sentinel.com/fema.

"The year at Stanford was a wonderful experience in mind expansion and agility. I left with a greater enjoyment of ambiguity, fluidity and uncertainty — which, while somewhat unsettling at the time, made it easier, 20 years later, to cope with the rapid change and vagaries of the new media world. The fellowship provided a pivot for career change and personal growth, the weather was terrific and I made some close friends."

Jack Davis
President, publisher and CEO, Hartford Courant
Knight Fellow 1978

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Frances Robles
Correspondent, Miami Herald
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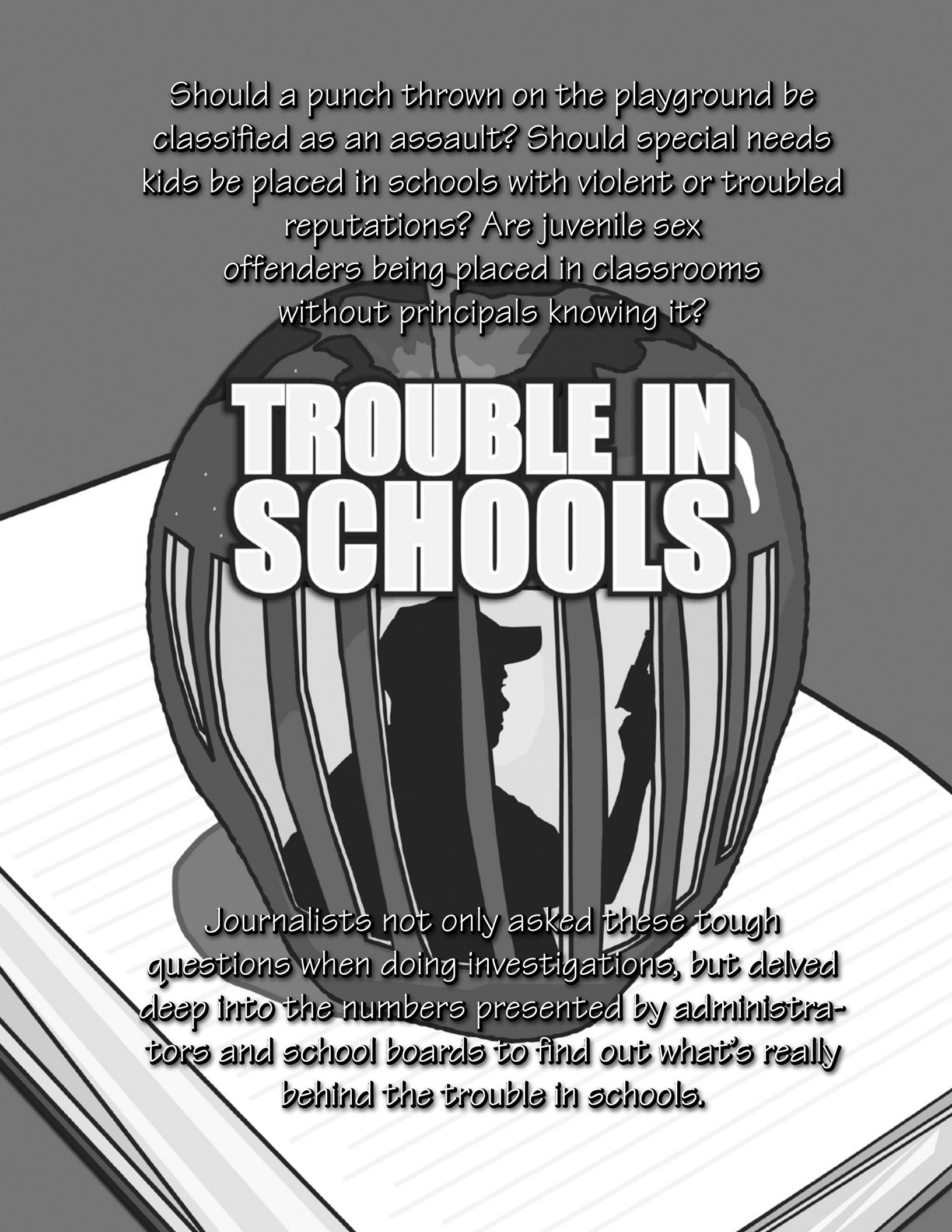
Should a punch thrown on the playground be classified as an assault? Should special needs kids be placed in schools with violent or troubled reputations? Are juvenile sex offenders being placed in classrooms without principals knowing it?



Journalists not only asked these tough questions when doing investigations, but delved deep into the numbers presented by administrators and school boards to find out what's really behind the trouble in schools.

FALSE DATA

School crime reports discredited; official admits 'we got caught'

By Liz Chandler
The Charlotte Observer

We were suspicious from the start. North Carolina's annual school crime report showed Charlotte had one of the lowest crime rates.

It didn't make sense – not in the state's largest urban school district, where complaints about ineffective discipline are common.

Education reporter Peter Smolowitz questioned the figures. School officials stood by them, boasting that their policies were working.

The *Observer* dug deeper.

We began with two reporters but our team grew to six. Our task was to find out what crimes and threatening incidents were happening at schools.

Smolowitz chased suspension data. Using the state's Open Records Act, he obtained data detailing how many students were suspended – and for what reasons – at each of Charlotte's 140 schools.

Reporter Melissa Manware gathered police data. How many crimes were reported and how many arrests were made at each school? she asked. She also tapped a surprising source: Police letters notifying schools about students arrested for off-campus felonies.

I interviewed experts to help interpret numbers and frame stories. CAR specialists Ted Mellnik and Adam Bell crunched our data.

Officially, Charlotte schools reported 537 crimes on the state's 2003-04 report. But our research found thousands of crimes and threatening incidents had taken place that year.

For example, Charlotte reported just one sex crime on the state's report. Yet our data showed 579 Charlotte suspensions for sex-related offenses – including 300 serious enough to send kids home for a week or more, and 73 that prompted officials to consider expelling or sending students to alternative schools.

We found similar discrepancies in the number of assaults, weapons and other crimes.

There was something else, too: Suspensions had soared. One in six students was suspended at least once in 2003-04. That suggested schools were either suffering serious behavior problems, or relying on suspension as their primary disciplinary tool. Was that working?

We knew we had two important stories. One would offer the first comprehensive report on violence in schools. The other would examine discipline practices.

By the time our data was ready, we had just a few weeks before summer vacation – and we still had a lot of reporting to do.

Crime and context

School crime is a sensitive subject. Yes, our research found many more incidents than Charlotte had reported publicly. But that didn't necessarily

Christopher A. Record | The Charlotte Observer

Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Officer C.R. Artis talks on his radio while keeping an eye on students during a lunch break at Vance High School. When Vance High School opened in 1997 it was considered cutting edge. Located near the booming University City area, the school was loaded with donations from nearby IBM, headed by an award-winning principal and located in the innovative Governor's Village. But school reassignment has transformed the school. The building was constructed for 1,800 students but now overflows with 2,400, and many students and parents are concerned about gang fights.

John D. Simmons | The Charlotte Observer

Benny D. Thomas, in camouflage gear acting as drill instructor, is a trainer with "Right Choices" boot camp. The camp is a form of alternative discipline. Each morning at school he puts the students through a battery of exercises.

mean our schools were unsafe. The school crime rate we calculated was still well below the city's general crime rate. We didn't want to overstate the problem and scare people. So the context and framing had to be just right.

We brought in investigative reporter Lisa H. Munn to sort through subtleties.

Why did police document more crime than Charlotte reported to the state? Were Charlotte schools reporting crime accurately? What risk did these crimes pose to students? How many suspensions involved violent or threatening behavior – and had they been reported to anybody?

"It was almost overwhelming, the number of documents and definitions and bureaucratic guidelines for reporting school crime," Munn says. "In every incident we looked at, you were dealing with so many groups – the local schools, the central office, state school officials, police and the students involved."

We scoured police reports to find real people involved in school crime, as victims and perpetrators. We interviewed teachers, students, administrators and police. We sorted data to focus on violent

John D. Simmons | The Charlotte Observer

Data revealed that more crime is actually taking place in schools, contrary to what the school district reported. Here, students participate in the "Right Choices" boot camp.

John D.Simmons | The Charlotte Observer

Nick Johnson, 17, an East Mecklenburg High School junior, stopped to have a friendly chat with School Resource Officers J.S. Cashion (center) and D.N. Horne during his lunch hour.

John D.Simmons | The Charlotte Observer

Desireé Wislon, 12, a seventh grader at Spaugh Middle School in Charlotte, hugs Officer Abby Banner. Arrest, crime and suspension data show incidents of violence and threatening behavior that probably should have been reported to the state but were not.

and threatening behavior. We searched for national context, a scarce commodity because of record-keeping differences in each state.

Hurdles erected

School officials posed our biggest obstacle. They resisted requests for information and interviews. They offered incomplete and confusing explanations. They kept poor records.

Photography wasn't easy either. The schools tightly controlled what they would allow us to shoot. Fortunately, school police officers let us tag along.

Internally, debate erupted over how to present our package. Some staffers favored a traditional three-day series. But we decided to split publication over two weekends for readers' sake. Significant stories on two Sundays seemed more digestible than three straight days of long stories.

On June 5 – the Sunday before school ended – we published the school crime story. It told readers that more violence and threatening behavior was happening in schools than officials disclose. It reported that Charlotte schools failed to list some crimes on the state report – and that the annual report vastly understates crime for a variety of reasons.

A week later, we ran an authoritative piece declaring Charlotte's zero-tolerance discipline practices weren't working – and might actually be making kids' behavior worse. We found big racial disparities in who got suspended. The next day, we offered a story on possible discipline solutions.

Our stories were tight and told with sidebars, breakouts and graphics, a departure from the traditional 100-inch story that dominates projects. We ran a full-page guide listing each Charlotte school and its number of crimes, arrests and suspensions in the 2003-04 school year.

Getting results

The stories hit home. Charlotte school officials immediately launched an inquiry, then adopted significant changes in discipline policies. They also pledged to get their crime numbers right – and to report them publicly.

"We have put ourselves in a position where we have been discredited ..." Larry Gauvreau told fellow school board members. "We swept it under the rug. We got caught."

The state's Board of Education also reacted. It is devising new rules and considering sanctions for schools that misreport crime. The state plans audits and training for principals, so parents can trust the state's school crime report.

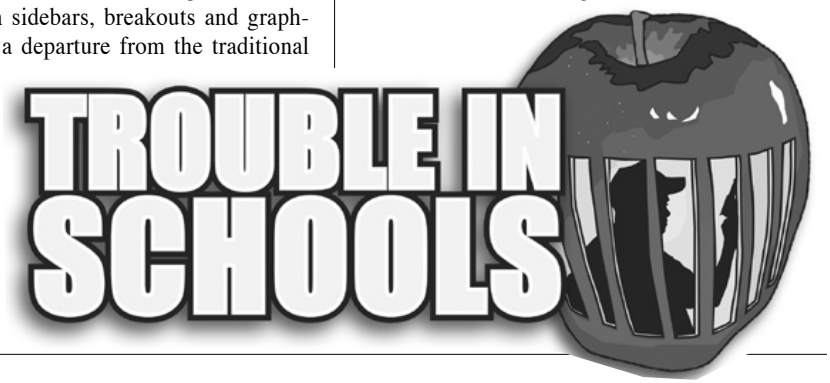
"People want to know that their child is safe," one state board member said, "but the [schools'] story must reflect the truth."

Liz Chandler is an investigative reporter at the Charlotte Observer, and a 2003 Nieman fellow. She shared a 2004 IRE Award for an Observer series on drunken driving.

Useful Web sites

Tipsheets available from the IRE Resource Center (www.ire.org/resourcecenter) can provide you with Web sites that are helpful when doing investigations on schools. For example:

- National Center for Education Statistics (www.nces.ed.gov) can provide information on family income, race, special education, mobility rates and attendance.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (www.naesp.org)
- National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (www.cse.ucla.edu)
- National Parent Teacher Association (www.pta.org)
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (www.aacte.org)
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (www.nbpts.org)
- Education Finance Statistics Center (www.nces.ed.gov/edfin)
- Educational Resources Information Center (www.eric.ed.gov) is a federally funded national information system, including more than a million abstracts of documents and articles on education research and practice.
- Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families (http://casey.umd.edu)



NUMBERS GAME

Reporting of violence varies in schools; accountability found to be a problem

BY JEFF ROBERTS AND DAVID OLINGER
THE DENVER POST

When is an assault not an assault?

The answer to that question can be found at a lot of elementary, middle and high schools in Denver, its suburbs and elsewhere in Colorado.

- A child is beaten on his way home from middle school by five older boys in ski masks.
- Five girls ambush a 10th-grader with a blow to the head. They hold her down, pull up her sweater and burn her with a cigarette.
- A 13-year-old girl suffers bruised kidneys and blood in her urine after a girl jumps her from behind.

None of these were assaults. Not according to the yearly "report cards" – or School Accountability Reports (SARs) – the schools delivered to parents last year along with their child's performance on the state assessment tests.

The SARs have been released by the Colorado Department of Education each fall since 2001. Parents get a nice folded pamphlet with all sorts of information about their kid's school such as student-teacher ratios, academic ratings, teacher experience and average daily attendance.

The pamphlets – a million copies are printed every year and each one is available for download on the Internet – also are supposed to reveal how many times schoolchildren have been caught with drugs, alcohol and dangerous weapons, as well as how many "assaults/fights" happened on campus the previous school year.

The news media gets most of the information in a huge spreadsheet. We typically sort the data to see how many schools were rated "Excellent," "High," "Average," "Low" or the dreaded "Unsatisfactory," which holds consequences for schools labeled as such. We compare the schools to previous years' ratings and look at whether there is a correlation between how well a school is rated and factors such as poverty, length of school year and teacher experience.

Wide reporting variance

The report cards had been out for a while this year when a student at Montbello High in northeast Denver was fatally stabbed in the school lunchroom. That prompted us to closely examine the "assaults/fights" category on the SARs.

After scrubbing the spreadsheet for duplicate data (some schools combine elementary, middle or high school levels), then sorting it and using Excel's pivot table reports to aggregate the information by school district, we quickly saw something odd: While Jefferson County, the state's largest school district, listed nearly 650 fights and assaults on its report cards to parents, Denver Public Schools (the state's second largest district) listed only 103.

Even odder: suburban Cherry Creek schools, with more than 46,000 students, reported just one fight for the entire school year, as did the Aurora school district with more than 32,000 kids. Some neighborhoods in Aurora, a suburb just east of Denver, are as "urban" and economically challenged as any in the state. But if you believed the SARs, high school kids in Aurora never fight with one another.

And what did the SARs show as the most violent school in Colorado? A middle school in Fountain, a suburb of Colorado Springs, which listed nearly twice the total assaults and fights reported by all Denver high schools.

Our spreadsheet work, which never got very complicated on this story, was mostly done at this point. We now knew there was likely a wide variance in how districts disclosed incidents of school violence, seriously calling into question the validity of information on the SARs. But we needed more data to be certain.

Police reports, detailing each time officers were called to a school because of violence, would be the key to making this a really powerful story. Even though the SARs might show no fights at a school, we suspected that police might say otherwise.

Getting the police data wasn't going to be easy. For reasons we've never quite understood, police departments in our area have historically balked at releasing "bulk" incident data that can be imported into a spreadsheet or database manager. Denver and Aurora police again told us we wouldn't be getting any databases, but they would provide us with some paper reports (after redacting all minors' names) for incidents at high schools during the previous school year.

That was all we really needed, we decided.

From the reports we learned that Denver police had recorded at least 345 assault arrests at high schools last year. The SARs listed only 38 assaults at Denver high schools.

In the Cherry Creek district, where there supposedly had been no fights at any of the high schools, a boy had been beaten by a classmate who used a watch as one would use brass knuckles, a police report showed. Another boy had been permanently disfigured by "a deep laceration to his right cheek." Another suffered a closed head injury and facial fracture.

There were a lot more examples like these.

At one school that reported no assaults, a boy had struck a classmate with a flagpole, inflicting injuries that caused the victim's father to take him to a hospital. At another, a boy had been stabbed in the forearm during a schoolyard fight. At another, a kid had been beaten with a baseball bat.

Conflicting police policies complicated our search for information.

Limited assault reports

The details provided to us varied greatly in the two cities, Denver and Aurora, where we sought incident reports on all aggravated assaults during a school year.

Hyoung Chang | The Denver Post

Fountain Middle School principal Deb Keiley contends her school is safe, and it's because they report even small skirmishes that the assault numbers were high.

In general, Aurora police censored only names of juveniles, while Denver police redacted almost everything from incident reports. Denver police also charged a fee for each report they produced, while Aurora police provided reports at no charge.

We traced the wholesale exclusion of school violence from accountability reports to a state interpretation of the law requiring such reports.

State education officials told us they had limited the "assaults/fights" category on accountability reports to first- and second-degree felony assaults. They did this for two reasons: They didn't want every shoving match listed as a serious incident, and there is no statutory definition of a fight in Colorado.

But that definition generally limited the reported assaults and fights to attacks using a deadly weapon or causing "serious bodily injury," which maimed the victim, damaged internal organs or posed a substantial risk of death.

In practice, some school districts used that limitation to exclude some attacks that police defined as second-degree felony assaults. Others insisted that a fight is a fight and reported each one to parents.

"We report fights very literally at this school," said Deb Keiley, principal of Fountain Middle, supposedly the state's "most violent" school. "We have high expectations of the students."

But the state definition allowed other school officials to decide that a girl held down and burned with a cigarette was not an assault victim; after all, a few small scars did not have to be counted as a serious bodily injury.

The student never returned to school after she was attacked. And what would the school classify as an assault or a fight? we asked.

"If I broke all the bones in [someone's] face," the principal told us.

David Olinger is a reporter for The Denver Post, and wrote a series of stories last year on children who died of abuse despite calls to the child protection system. Jeff Roberts is the Post's computer-assisted reporting editor.

Glenn Asakawa | Denver Post

A student who is assigned to cafeteria detention cleans tables while wearing an orange vest that school adminstrators say helps keep track of him. The school accountability report shows that this school has more assaults and fights than all the high schools in Denver and Aurora combined.

REGISTRY FLAWS

Police confusion leads to schools unaware of juvenile sex offenders attending class

By Ofelia Casillas
Chicago Tribune

While the list of Illinois' adult sex offenders is accessible to anyone on the Internet, a similar registry of about 1,100 juveniles who have committed sex crimes is largely kept secret, leaving some school principals unaware that young sex offenders have enrolled in their schools, a *Chicago Tribune* investigation found.

We found that while state law says school officials are supposed to be told by law enforcement when a juvenile sex offender is enrolled, not all police interpret the law that way and some decline to divulge the names.

Further, some local police departments will not tell principals the names of sex offenders in their schools even when they ask, although state law permits police departments to share the information with schools.

In fact, it was just by chance that an East Peoria woman discovered that a boy who was found guilty of molesting her 7-year-old son was in the same physical education class as her teenage son.

The 16-year-old was registered as a sex offender with the Illinois State Police. But because of the disarray surrounding the juvenile sex offender registry, the information didn't get to the school until the mother informed officials.

"I'm just one person in Peoria," the mother said. "If mine fell through, how many other kids are out there that these schools don't know about?"

Scott Smith, co-director of a consulting firm that trains school officials on how to deal with students who are juvenile sex offenders, said schools are entitled to such information.

"Schools sometimes don't even know there are two registration lists for adult and juveniles," Smith said. "They sometimes don't know juveniles are not on the Internet. All they see are adults, and they come to the conclusion: I guess we don't have any."

Protecting children

Sex crimes committed by juveniles can be as serious as those by adults, ranging from public indecency to assaults. Of the juveniles registered, 41 percent were found guilty of aggravated or criminal sexual assault, and 33 percent committed aggravated criminal sexual abuse, according to state police data.

But while working on another story about juvenile offenders, I learned that informing the public about young sex offenders is problematic. The juvenile justice system shields the names of youths who commit crimes, based on the belief that they can be rehabilitated and deserve a fresh start as adults. With treatment and support, juvenile sex offenders are less likely than adults to commit another sex crime, experts say.

As we investigated the story, we informed officials at several suburban schools that at least one of their students was on the state registry for

committing a sex crime. And in each case, school officials were unaware of it because of confusion surrounding law enforcement's understanding of the law and their responsibilities.

The Illinois State Police compile the sex offender registry and share it with county sheriffs' departments, which in turn are supposed to inform schools. Local police also have the information, typically because the youths have to register where they live.

Inherent struggle

Gwendolyn Klinger, former state representative, was the original sponsor of the law passed in the 1990s.

"Schools were among the three mandatory groups to be notified," Klingler said. "You are looking at places where notification would do the most good in protecting children."

Still, officials with Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office acknowledge there is a problem with notification. Cara Smith, Madigan's policy director, said the agencies involved with the sex offender registry have met to discuss how to fix it.

"We are prioritizing sex offender registration for juveniles and community notification for that population," Smith said. "There is an inherent struggle with coordinating registration while at the same time protecting confidentiality."

While working on this story, we did exhaustive interviews with dozens of law enforcement officials and it was a challenge to get the schools to investigate the matter themselves, or even get a list of schools with offenders. We had two background sources independently help us.

Still, in Chicago, officials say the system is working. The Chicago Police Department has registered roughly 60 juvenile sex offenders and has a procedure for informing school officials.

"It's critical, very important for administrators to know," said Andres Durbak, the Chicago Public Schools director of safety and security. "By letting the principal know and allowing the principal to establish a system of monitoring these students, of course, it raises the level of security and safety in a school environment, without a doubt."

Chicago Public Schools officials evaluate a student offender's age, history and offense before forming a plan to help that student at school, said James Bebley, the district's first assistant general counsel. Usually, at least the principal knows.

"It could be they are not allowed to participate in physical education, it could be they are not allowed to have contact with members of a certain sex, it could be an adult is with them the entire time," Bebley said. "You have to remember these kids still have a right to education, and they still have privacy rights."

Ofelia Casillas has been a staff reporter at the Chicago Tribune for more than four years. She currently covers social issues/child welfare.

Juvenile sex offenders in Illinois

There is confusion over a state law that requires police officials to tell educators about juvenile sex offenders enrolled in their schools.

OFFENDERS IN COOK COUNTY COMMUNITIES

1. Bellwood	2
2. Berwyn	1
3. Calumet City	1
4. Chicago	58
5. Chicago Heights	1
6. Country Club Hills	1
7. Des Plaines	1
8. Dolton	2
9. Elk Grove	1
10. Hanover Park	2
11. La Grange	1
12. Lynwood	1
13. Matteson	1
14. Mt. Prospect	1
15. Oak Lawn	2
16. Oak Park	1
17. Palatine	1
18. Rolling Meadows	1
19. Rosemont	1
20. Sauk Village	1
21. Stickney	1
22. Streamwood	3
23. Worth	1

OFFENDERS IN SIX-COUNTY AREA
as of Jan. 3, 2005

Cook	88
Lake	87
Kane	35
Will	25
DuPage	24
McHenry	15

COUNTIES WITH MOST OFFENDERS
as of Jan. 3, 2005

Cook	88
Lake	87
Peoria	72
Winnebago	63
Iroquois	46

Source: Illinois State Police
Chicago Tribune

A CASE STUDY

At Zion-Benton Township High School, Principal Steve Baule did not know there was a registered sex offender at his school, because the Lake County sheriff's police did not tell him.

The department's policy was to notify only those schools in areas without a local police department. "In incorporated areas, it's up to the local police department to notify the schools," said Lake County Sheriff Sgt. Rick White.

So, when the *Chicago Tribune* informed Baule that he had a sex offender in his school, he turned to his local police for answers.

He didn't get many.

"Our police department has an understanding that they can't by law tell us that the person is here," Baule said. "It's information that would be nice to have."

Zion Police Department Lt. Dwight Ower said his agency keeps track of nine juvenile sex offenders but could give their names only to the juvenile court, not to schools.

"We are prohibited from releasing that information," Ower said. "There are a whole range of issues schools need to be aware of related to safety.... They just cannot get it from the police department all of the time."

After our interview, Zion police consulted attorneys. The department has since determined it is able to tell Baule and other school officials about student offenders.

"Obviously there was a concern there," Baule said last week. "Things have changed, because the Police Department has decided they could provide us that information."

Baule has since informed a few top school officials so his staff has the context to better support the student.

The Lake County sheriff's office, too, is changing its years-old policy following our inquiries. The office plans to add the names of juveniles to a quarterly list of registered adult sex offenders sent to schools.

IRE AWARDS 2005

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For outstanding investigative reporting by a television outlet. Categories are: Network or syndicated program; Top 20 market; and Below Top 20 market.

Other Media:
For outstanding investigative reporting in other media such as Magazine, Newsletter, Specialty Publication, Book and Radio.

Online:
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IRE FOI Award: Honors individual or organization in any medium whose significant actions further open records or open government. You must submit TWO sets of copies if submitting an entry in the FOI category and in another category.

Student Award: Outstanding investigative reporting by a student in a college-affiliated newspaper, magazine or specialty publication (or while serving a print internship), or broadcast work that has been publicly reviewed, screened or aired.

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NOTE: Judges reserve the right to give more than one award in a category or to declare no winner in a category

The contest recognizes the best investigative reporting in print, broadcast and online media, and helps identify techniques and resources used by entrants.

For entry forms and additional information, visit our Web site at **www.ire.org/contest**

LEARNING CURVE

Special needs kids overrepresented in city's failing and most violent public high schools

BY JOHN KEEFE
WNYC-NEW YORK PUBLIC RADIO

For years, there had been rumbling (and grumbling) that kids with special needs were being "dumped" into New York City's worst high schools. Reporter Beth Fertig decided to see if enrollment numbers might reveal what the parents of these children had long suspected.

While our analysis could not detect evidence of intentional "dumping," it did show that special education students and English language learners were disproportionately overrepresented in the city's failing and most violent public high schools. At the same time, those kids – as a group – were losing out on the new, small schools created to improve education.

Fertig started by filing a request under New York's freedom of information law for enrollment data on each of the city's 337 public high schools. She asked for total enrollment, enrollment of special education students and enrollment of English language learners.

The data came in separate Excel spreadsheets, because the Education Department has separate offices responsible for tracking English language learners and special education students. We merged these spreadsheets into one document where we could keep track of both populations and compare them to overall enrollment. This proved especially difficult because the separate spreadsheets didn't overlap neatly. Each included schools that were missing from the other's list. After repeated requests, we got complete data for all of New York City's public high schools.

Once we had everything together, we wanted to make a quick check to see if there was a story here. We made a column calculating the percentage of special needs students in each school and then sorted the entire list by that percentage, in descending order.

At a glance it was easy to see the list was top heavy with big schools. And in New York City, the worst schools tend to be large ones.

Definitely looked like a story.

But there was another complication. New York City has about 80 specialized high schools, including those for students in jail, pregnant teenagers and students with severe learning disabilities. We decided these were oranges to the rest of the apples, and removed them from the list, noting so in our story.

Since Fertig covers education for us, she already had official lists of troubled schools. Included: schools deemed low-performing and failing by several measures, such as the federal No Child Left Behind law and the state's list of schools in danger of being shut down. She also had a list of schools the city considers violent and in need of extra police. We also identified the 100 small new high schools created as part of a three-year-old reform program spurred with funding by private foundations.

We created columns in our master spreadsheet for each of these attributes. If an attribute applied to a school, we put a "1" in the corresponding cell.

I did most of the analysis, and started by running multi-level sorts in Excel and saving each result as a new file. This quickly became a hassle. Fertig was still sorting out duplicate and missing data, and manually updating each file was not an elegant way to handle our data.

The solution was Access. Once I got the hang of writing queries (which I had tried for the first time just a few months earlier at a NICAR workshop), we could start asking questions. And when updated data came in, we plugged it into the table and simply ran the queries again.

One thing that kept our thinking clear was to write out questions together, in English, and then craft an Access query to match. This was a great way for reporter and data-cruncher to collaborate.

For example, we asked: How many total students, special education students and English language learners are in violent schools? I used the "sum" functions on the enrollment columns; for other attributes, such as violent schools, I looked for the 1's by applying a "greater-than-zero" expression to that column.

I copied the numerical answers to these queries into a summary Excel spreadsheet to compare the results with citywide totals (which we also asked of Access). For clarity, we wrote the questions right into the spreadsheet, too. Here's a sample:

Microsoft Excel - Summary Table (ext)

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Data Window Help

Arial 10 B

B17 =B10/B3

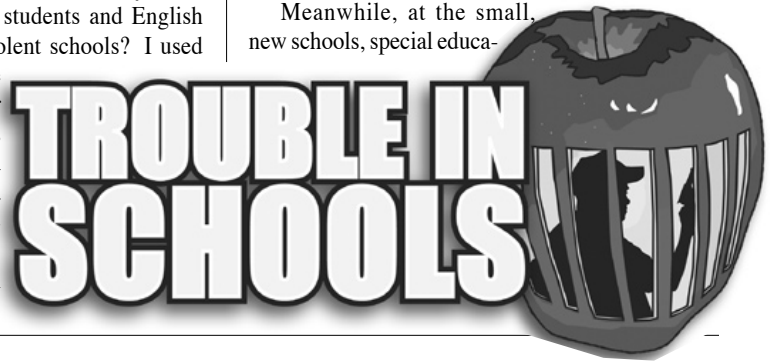
	A	B	C
1	**Overall Totals**		
2	Total Academic Enrollment	277,906	
3	Total Special Ed	33,192	
4	Total ELL	36,061	
5	Percentage of Academic Sch Studnts that are SpEd	11.9%	
6	Percentage of Academic Sch Studnts that are ELL	13.0%	
7			
8	**Lower Performing Schools**		
9	Total Students in Low-perf Schools (incl SURR)	196,019	
10	Total Special Ed in Low-Perf Schools (incl SURR)	27,195	
11	Total ELL in Low-Perf Schools (incl SURR)	29,085	
12	Percentage of Stdnts in Low Perf who are Sp Ed	13.9%	
13	Percentage of Stdnts in Low Perf who are ELL	14.8%	
14			
15	What % of all students are in low-perf schls?	70.6%	
16	What % of NON SpEd kids are in low-perf schls?	69.0%	
17	What % of ALL SpEd kids are in low-perf schls?	81.9%	
18	What % of NON ELL kids are in low-perf schls?	69.0%	
19	What % of ALL ELL kids are in low-perf schools?	80.7%	
20			

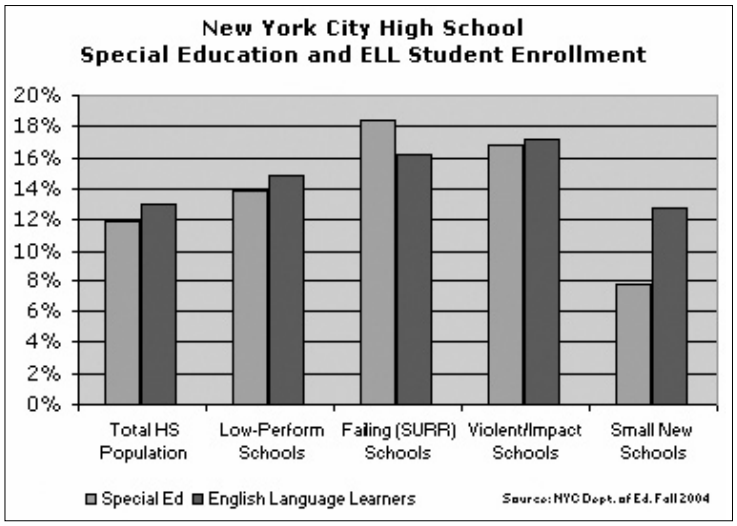
TOTALS, ETC.

Ready NUM

In the end, we found that while special education kids make up 12 percent of the high school population citywide, they make up 17 percent of students at violent schools. And they make up 18 percent at schools the state says are failing. We got similar numbers for English language learners.

Meanwhile, at the small, new schools, special educa-





tion kids are only about 8 percent of the enrollment. We put this Excel graphic (left) on the Web to illustrate our findings.

But graphs like this do not show up well on the radio. We had to be very thoughtful about how Fertig explained all of this verbally, and tried out the script on reporters in the newsroom. The feedback was great and made the story much clearer.

As a final check, we ran our numbers and the story past a consultant who is trained more extensively in CAR. She caught some phrasing problems and confirmed we had done our math right.

Before we broadcast the final story, we exported our data into a spreadsheet the Web department turned into a PDF file. By posting this along with the online version of the story, listeners could look up enrollment data for their school to see how it compares.

Representatives of the New York City Education Department said they had never done this analysis themselves, and were concerned about what it showed. But they did not dispute our findings. They said reforms were starting to take hold and that, for example, more special education teachers would be placed in the small, new schools as they grew. The special needs enrollments, they said, would look better in coming years.

John Keefe is news director for WNYC-New York, and Beth Fertig is a senior reporter.

Stories from the IRE RESOURCE CENTER

Many investigative stories about schools are available from the IRE Resource Center (www.ire.org/resourcecenter), ranging from health issues to construction to crimes. A sample includes:

- **Story No. 17671:** *New Jersey Monthly's* Sheryl Weinstein sheds light on the rise of school violence. The story uncovers a Department of Education report on school crimes showing that "violence is more prevalent in urban areas." The report lists the numbers of simple assaults, aggravated assaults, fights and bomb offenses at each New Jersey school district. The story looks at how more and more schools are installing security equipment, although "the most advanced path to safety, according to experts, is through programs that help students to manage anger." (2001)
- **Story No. 21658:** Maureen Nolan and Paul Riede of the *Post-Standard* (Syracuse, N.Y.) show students from high schools are being forced by school authorities to drop out of school and get a GED. This story looks at how false information on the current dropout rate is revealed by the authorities. This investigation also finds that the dropout rates that are posted publicly for parents and recorded for policy makers are highly understated. (2004)
- **Story No. 20155:** Debbie Cenziper and Jason Grotto of *The Miami Herald* report that "fueled by a $980 million bond referendum, Miami-Dade County Public Schools 15 years ago launched the nation's biggest and most aggressive construction program. But the school district has busted its budget on at least 39 of 44 new schools analyzed by *The Herald*, or about nine out of 10 since 1988." In its five-part series, *The Miami Herald* found "tens of millions wasted in slow, sloppy construction," missteps in the building process, delays and poor planning. (2003)
- **Story No. 21941:** Roger McCoy, Joel Chow and Chris Kettler of WBNS-Columbus (Ohio), found that radon, according to the National Academy of Sciences, is America's second leading cause of lung cancer. Average radon levels in Ohio are almost three times the national average. Several schools were tested, but did not fix their radon problems. (2004)
- **Story No. 21341:** Diane Rado, Darnell Little and Grace Aduroja of the *Chicago Tribune* found that 50 years after the Brown vs. Board of Education court decision promised better schools for black children, most black children in Illinois still are relegated to segregated and inferior schools. By analyzing test scores, student demographics and teaching and learning data at about 4,000 schools, a number of trends were revealed. For instance, schools with a majority of black students have larger class sizes, fewer fully certified teachers and more instances of being on the state's academic watch list. (2004)
- **Story No. 21265:** Tony Pipitone, Darran Caudle, Tim Arnheim and Brent Singleton of WKMG-Orlando looked at a purchase of almost $1.5 million of questionable software. Some schools in Florida were overstating their need for funds affecting poorer children who needed funds. (2003)
- **Story No. 18079:** *The Wall Street Journal* sheds light on how "well-to-do parents have become increasingly aggressive about trying to improve the public schools their children attend." Lisa Bannon examines the wealthy parents' motives to send their children to public schools, even when they have the means to pay for private schools. The story finds that some well-off parents have too high expectations for changing the public schools "overnight." (2001)
- **Story No. 21550:** This series of articles by Matthew Doig and Chris Davis of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* examined equality among schools by looking specifically at teacher qualifications. The reporters found that thousands of teachers struggled to pass basic skills tests and that one in three teachers failed an exam at least one time. Further, the reporters found the teachers who struggled the most on the tests were funneled into poor and minority schools, while those who did well went to wealthier white schools. (2004)

LOOKING AHEAD

Plenty of questions remain for journalists investigating problems at local schools

BY KENNETH S. TRUMP
NATIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY SERVICES

There are several critical points about school crime and violence that reporters and editors must understand before they tackle school safety issues.

1. Federal school crime statistics grossly underestimate school crime and violence. There is no federal law mandating uniform crime reporting and tracking for crimes at K-12 schools. When a reporter asks the U.S. Department of Justice how many rapes or aggravated assaults occurred in their city in each of the last 10 years, federal officials cite specific numbers based on actual criminal incidents that were reported to local police and collected at the federal level into an annual uniform crime report database. However, when a reporter asks the U.S. Department of Education about crimes committed in schools, they are given figures from individual or multiple limited academic surveys and research studies – not actual criminal incidents reported to local police and assembled nationally. The reason is simply that there is no federal mandatory uniform reporting and tracking for crimes that occur at K-12 schools.

That is why the U.S. Department of Education has been telling the public that crimes in K-12 schools have dramatically declined. In fact, most recently they claimed violent school crimes have declined 50 percent in the past decade. The problem is that, unlike Department of Justice data that is based on actual reported crimes to the police, the Department of Education data is based on a comparison of year-to-year academic surveys and research studies, not a total of actual crimes on campuses nationwide reported to police.

2. School safety is an extremely political issue in most school districts. Most parents have no clue as to how political an issue school safety is in their child's school district. Most parents and even many reporters do not fully grasp the extent to which some school officials will go to deny, defend and deflect attention away from the media and public knowing what school crime and serious discipline problems occur in their school.

Many principals, superintendents, and school board members think the public will perceive them to be incompetent leaders and poor managers if the public becomes aware of crimes, violence, and serious discipline problems that occur in their schools. They also think it will potentially jeopardize voter funding requests and parental/community support of the school district.

Claiming school crime is down also is beneficial to the U.S. Department of Education and Congress. If they had a more accurate count of school crime based on actual criminal incidents at schools instead of their current method of limited research surveys and studies, it would be likely that the public (and the education community) would call upon them to better fund school safety.

Instead, the education department continues to claim that school crime is declining based on limited surveys versus data on real offenses. This makes it easier to cut school safety funding. The best example is the 2006 proposed federal budget in which the Bush Administration proposed eliminating more than $350 million in state allocation grants for the Safe and Drug Free School Program. The House and Senate have written money back into the budget, but both proposals are much less than last year's appropriations, and the end result will likely be at least $30 million in cuts when compared to last year's budget for the program.

Within the U.S. Department of Education, they cut $10 million from their first year of funding for school emergency preparedness grants, down from about $38 million to $28 million in year two of this program. Ironically, both the Safe and Drug Free School proposed cuts and the school emergency planning cuts came around the same time the U.S. Department of Education sent out a letter telling schools to beef up security and emergency planning following the school terrorist attack in Beslan, Russia.

3. School crimes are grossly underreported by school officials to law enforcement. Historically many crimes on school property have been handled "administratively" by schools as in-house, disciplinary actions (suspension, expulsion, etc.) rather than reporting them to law enforcement. One reason for the underreporting of school crimes is unintentional in that school administrators are often not trained to distinguish crimes from noncriminal violations of school rules. The other reasons are often intentional, i.e., school administrators intentionally not reporting crimes to avoid adverse public and media attention, to protect their images and that of their school, and so on.

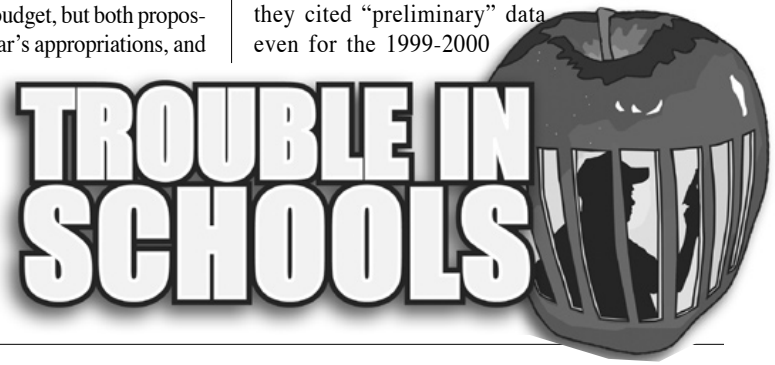
(See www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_crime_reporting.html for a discussion on this in greater detail.)

Reporters ask me time and time again after violent school incidents: "Is this a wake-up call?" My answer is always the same: "The question is not whether this latest tragedy is a 'wake-up call.' The real question is whether we are going to hit the snooze button and go back to sleep again. Will school safety be as important six months or six years after the tragedy as it was in the hours and days after the high-profile event?"

In most cases, the answer is, "No." It is not widely discussed by educators, parents or journalists – who are often busy covering "hot button" issues such as funding, test scores, school district governance and politics, and so on.

At the same time, educators will be the first to criticize the media for being overly dramatic or alarming in their investigations of school safety issues. But in my 20-plus years in the school safety profession, I have found that in far too many school districts there are only two things that seem to get the wheels of school bureaucracies moving on school security and emergency planning issues: Parent pressure and higher-profile media attention.

One of the points I want to stress is that even the U.S. Department of Education's limited data does not report on up-to-date school-associated violent deaths. In their last report on school crime in November 2004, they cited "preliminary" data even for the 1999-2000



School-associated violent deaths

Using commonly accepted definitions, I track school-associated violent deaths nationally based on news reports, information forwarded to me by educators and public safety officials, and other sources. This information, frequently referenced by reporters nationwide, is as up-to-date as possible in "real-time" format and online at www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_violence.html.

As you'll see from the chart on school-associated violent deaths, the numbers have started to go up the past two school years (2003-04 and 2004-05). This reflects what we see and hear from educators, school resource officers and others in the field – aggressive behavior, discipline problems, school crime and violence have increased in the past two to three years.

and 2000-01 school years. The federal government cannot even tell you the number of school-associated violent deaths from the past school year – and these are relatively small numbers in the big picture of school violence.

Here's one great tip for investigative reporters to get to the bottom of questionable school crime data: Compare and contrast multiple data sources to identify discrepancies in school crime and violence data. Get data collected from the following sources: within school districts (reports on categories of suspensions, expulsions, school security/police incident and offense reports, discipline data, etc.); crimes reported by the school district to local law enforcement (city police or county sheriff's, depending upon your jurisdiction); data reported by local school districts to their state department of education on school crime, violence, disciplinary actions, etc.; and grant applications submitted by local districts to state agencies seeking funding for school safety, violence prevention, discipline, and related programs.

These may include programs for grants under Safe and Drug Free School funding, for example. Look in the "needs assessment" sections of the grant applications submitted by local districts and you'll usually find some rather graphic data and statements outlining the extent of their safety problems in an effort by districts to get grant dollars.

Also, I suggest journalists look at:

- School safety funding cuts. Why are we cutting these funds when school deaths and incidents seem to be going up nationwide and locally?
- Testing school security and emergency preparedness. Even today, reporters and producers are still getting in and around schools, even checking in the office and getting nametags without questioning, six years after Columbine. In schools that are fairly well locked down, we often find that custodial doors, delivery doors, and/or kitchen doors are still left open during the school days. Can anyone gain access to air ventilation systems? Boiler rooms? Utility areas? If terrorists or others wanted to plant a bomb or sabotage the facility, this is where they might start.
- Web sites. Do schools unnecessarily put floor plans on the Web sites? Forget the terrorists, what about local sexual predators or noncustodial parents who might want to gain access to the school to abduct a child or cause other harm?
- School bus security. Buses have been targets of terror attacks in the Middle East for years. Can reporters find school bus depots with open gates that are unsecured during the day or night? Can they walk into school bus depot and mechanic areas unstopped and have access to buses, route information, keys on the wall, etc.? Are keys left in school buses on school lots? Are school buses left running and unattended on bus depot lots early in the morning or during the day, especially in the winter in colder communities? Do school districts have too much information on their Web site about school transportation routes, pick-up and drop-off points and times, etc., that anyone with ill intentions could get off the Internet? Could anyone gain access to school buses to plant explosives?
- Emergency teams and plans. Most schools rushed after Columbine to have written crisis plans and a list of crisis team members for their schools. But reporters need to ask: who is on the school's crisis team; how many times they met in the past year and the date of the last meeting; training details; when school officials last met with police, fire, and emergency management officials; whether tabletop exercises with public safety officials were done; number of lockdown drills in the last year and date of the last one.

We found one high school with 3,500 students that had a crisis plan stating that if they found a suspected bomb, they should grab mats, mattresses, and padding and place it around the suspected device until the police or fire chief removed it. This is definitely not a recommended procedure. My point is that there is a difference in just having a plan to tell the media and parents you have one, and actually having a meaningful plan.

Kenneth S. Trump is president of the National School Safety and Security Services in Cleveland, Ohio, and author of two books on school security and crisis issues.

Government Exhibit 133: Chapstick tubes with hidden microphones discovered in E. Howard Hunt's White House office safe in 1972. Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, who led the Watergate break-in team, were stationed in a Watergate Hotel room while the burglary was underway. During the break-in, they would remain in contact with each other and with the burglars by radio.

"If it weren't for those two reporters from *The Post*, I fear the Republic would have been lost."

- SELDEN RING, Philanthropist

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To learn more and download the nomination form, visit **http://annenberg.usc.edu.**

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REPEAT PROBLEMS

Claims of refinery safety found lacking; fatal accidents documented through data

BY LISE OLSEN
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The work order for March 23 at BP's gigantic refinery complex in Texas City was challenging yet routine: restart a huge hunk of refining equipment known as an isomerization unit after maintenance, known as a "turnaround" in industry lingo.

But what actually happened at the nation's third-largest refinery that day seemed straight out of a doomsday fiction novel.

Non-essential refinery workers received no warnings to clear the area when the unit restarted.

Instead, more than 100 people milled around the site – many packed into a trailer-turned-office parked too close to the action. Several supposedly automatic alarms failed to sound as the "Isom unit," used to make chemicals that boost the octane of gasoline, overflowed and flammable liquids flowed up and out of an antiquated piece of equipment known as a "vent stack," releasing dangerous toxins into the air and the ground. The resulting explosion happened within minutes and almost without warning.

Fifteen people died and more than 100 others were hurt. It was the worst U.S. refinery accident in more than a decade.

Though U.S. refiners insist that their facilities are safe, the same potential for disaster lurks in 33 states (as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) that contain the nation's remaining 144 refineries. Investigative reporters who dig into the limited, but intriguing, data available undoubtedly will find stories to pursue on their local refineries.

No refineries are less than 20 years old, many are over 50. Yet, nearly all are being run at or beyond their recommended capacity to meet the nation's growing demand for gasoline. Operators are under tremendous pressure to keep their facilities running at max and minimize downtime needed to maintain equipment.

Here's how writers at the *London Sunday Herald* summarized the problem:

"If you chose to drive an aging car at breakneck speed on a critical journey, you would scarcely be surprised if you were involved in a nasty accident. There are parallels with the oil refining industry where aging plants are working at 95 percent of capacity and struggling to keep pace with soaring demand. The refining industry has flirted with danger for too long, cutting costs and corners and failing to learn the lessons from accidents."

Unfortunately for investigative reporters, access to information about how refineries are run leaks out only in dribs and drabs.

Data limitations

All refineries have regular "chemical upsets" that involve releases of pollution and frequently relate to fires, explosions or other accidents. Environmental regulators, under the Clean Air Act, are supposed to track these releases, though their information is based on estimates and self-reporting by companies. In some states, like Texas, regulators make this "upset" information available on the Internet. It can be used to determine whether your local refinery has given off a lot of fumes – usually closely linked to near-misses and accidents – or if, on the other hand, it seems less volatile than others.

Ben DeSoto | Houston Chronicle

Damage from the explosion site at BP's refinery in Texas City. Visitors to the site were required to wear protective masks because of possible benzene leaks.

But it's the way the U.S. government collects and distributes accident and safety statistics about refineries that really keeps the public in the dark. It makes investigations especially challenging, though not impossible. It helps to know the limitations of the data:

• The government doesn't require the reporting of most accidents. OSHA Fatality and Catastrophic Incident reports, which are public records and available in a database index form through NICAR, are only required if at least one person is killed or at least three people are hospitalized in an accident. This means that even if a so-called event sends more than 100 people to the hospital for outpatient treatment, it is not reportable. Neither is a death that occurs more than 30 days after an accident, though burn victims can easily linger that long before death. More detailed logs that refineries keep about all accidents are not available to the public, though workers can view them. It would be worth trying to see if the company that owns your local refinery would be willing to supply more detailed data – some are open about their numbers – or alternatively, if local union members would leak information to you.

• **The government undercounts refinery deaths**. OSHA officials often categorize fatal accidents at refineries as "construction" accidents, because many involve contract workers whose employers specialize in construction and maintenance work. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, which compiles industry statistics, relies on OSHA's classifications. (See studies on illnesses and injuries as well as fatalities at the BLS Web site: www.osha.gov/oshstats/work.html)

• **Data on near-miss accidents is generally not collected by U.S. safety officials, but other countries consider this crucial.** For that reason, it is important to attempt to check with regulators in other countries. We found that in the United Kingdom, BP's home base, a series of accidents, including near misses, at BP's refinery in Grangemouth, Scotland, had drawn a record fine of more than 1 million pounds in 2002. The U.K. government said: "BP had fallen short of our high expectations for our management of safety and environmental performance." This information was gathered through research on British press Web sites – particularly the online archives of the BBC and *The Economist* magazine, the U.K. government's Health and Safety Secretary Web site and follow-up interviews with union, government and BP officials first contacted via e-mail.

Fatal accident information

Problems in the data itself became one powerful story.

In the last two years available, for example, the BLS reported no refinery deaths, while the *Houston Chronicle* found nine deaths by searching other public records and newspaper accounts. We did this story by first compiling OSHA-reported refinery deaths using the SIC code data field and then by cross checking for more accidents by looking for known refinery addresses or ZIP codes in the location field for additional deaths. We also compiled an archive of fatal accident news stories from industry newsletters and newspaper stories (often as briefs) and compared it to the database.

The "missing dead" story, which included a powerful anecdote about one of the uncounted deaths as well as interviews with retired and current government officials who compile the statistics, showed how everyone from industry groups to government economists knew the fatal accidents stats were misleading not only for

Carlos Antonio Rios | Houston Chronicle

After the latest BP explosion, any kind of noise coming from the Texas City facility makes people nervous. Here, a fisherman hears something and looks over at the chemical plant.

refineries, but also for other industries that rely heavily on outside contractors.

Yet, several attempts to reform the process had been blocked by industry groups. The story prompted two separate bills to close the loopholes that are pending in the U.S. House of Representatives. Progress on both has been slow.

Armed with our own refinery fatality data, we badly wanted to attempt to answer a question that reporters and readers shared. Was this an isolated tragedy for BP – or a pattern?

To at least partly answer that question, I examined which of the major U.S. refiners had the most fatalities in the last 10 years. Using the data I had compiled, I wrote directly to firms that are considered the nation's major oil companies. I gave them the data I had compiled on their facilities along with a list of questions. I told them I believed the public had a right to know more about their safety records because of what had happened at BP. In several cases, I asked to interview higher-ranking safety officials after gaining basic information from public relations people.

I asked them to confirm and correct the fatal accident information that I supplied as well as respond to other detailed safety questions. Several companies gave me information on accidents I had missed; others gave me data that led me to reclassify some accidents as natural deaths or off-site deaths.

Largely because I already had the OSHA data and had done my homework, all of the companies, including BP, eventually provided helpful responses, though I went back to some of them several times for clarifications or for further details.

The mergers between all of the big oil companies made the analysis more complicated, but in the end I decided to count companies that had been acquired by others as part of the records for the new owners. (Thus Valero was held responsible for Diamond Shamrock accidents, a company it acquired, just as BP was held responsible for Amoco refinery accidents in that period.) The Energy Information Administration on refineries, company Web sites and interviews were used to clear up ownership issues.

I excluded from the analysis natural deaths – two heart attacks – that had occurred at refineries.

Conclusions supported

In the end, the research showed that even before the March accident, BP had more separate fatal accidents than any other major oil company. As of the publication date on May 15, 2005, BP led the U.S. refining industry in deaths over the past decade, with 22 fatalities since 1995 – more than a quarter of those killed in refineries nationwide. Overall, BP had 10 times as many fatalities as that of its largest competitor, Exxon Mobil.

I also used the information I gathered to put together a list of nine refineries, including Texas City, which accounted for half of the fatal accidents nationwide.

It was impossible to compile a full list of all injury accidents at refineries because of the holes in U.S. government data.

We could have gone further and attempted to factor in chemical plants, which are closely related to refineries, as well as offshore oil platforms and drilling accidents for the same companies.

In the end, though, I think we were able to answer the question for our readers that indeed, it appeared that BP's safety record was not as good as that of its major competitors. I felt the conclusions about BP were well supported by not only by fatal accident data, but by the pattern of repeat problems in Texas City and by interviews with other industry specialists, as well as data from other sources.

The methods we used to evaluate BP easily could be duplicated for any large industrial facility or facilities with common ownership, including steel mills or meatpacking plants. Though the OSHA databases from NICAR give you only a base of fatal or catastrophic accidents, you can use it to create a powerful archive by cross-referencing it with industry directories, company Web sites, annual reports, wrongful death lawsuits, news stories and from the full paper files of OSHA death investigations, available through the Freedom of Information Act.

LINKS

- **The Houston Chronicle's series on refinery deaths** at BP and problems with the government data is posted at: www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/topstory/3182510#.
- **A ranking of the 144 operating U.S. refineries** by capacity is found at the Energy Information Administration, along with other information about refineries: www.eia.doe.gov/neic/rankings/refineries.htm.
- **OSHA:** A search engine covering basic data on OSHA accidents and violations is available at: www.osha.gov/oshstats. Buy the database from NICAR (www.nicar.org/data/osha) if you are serious about this.
- **EPA:** Information on environmental records of refineries is available through ECHO: www.epa.gov/echo. Also search for state Web sites to get information that is often more up-to-date.
- **National Response Center** compiles oil spill and chemical accident data. You can download the data or do queries at its Web site: www.nrc.uscg.mil/foia.html. (See note below about the Public Interest Research Group study.)
- **National Petrochemical & Refiners Association** is a source of industry safety statistics, which are slightly more complete than those issued by the U.S. government. The association has information on both refineries and petrochemical plants: www.npradc.org.
- **The American Petroleum Institute** is another good source of industry statistics and experts: http://api-ec.api.org/newsplashpage/index.cfm.
- **U.S. Public Interest Research Group**: Its study, "Irresponsible Care: The Failure of the Chemical Industry to Protect the Public from Chemical Accidents," provides helpful background: http://uspirg.org/uspirg.asp?id2=12860&id3=USPIRG&.
- **Refinery Reform Campaign**, another citizens' group, also has helpful information and contacts: www.refineryreform.org/News_TRLA_012505.html.

Lise Olsen is an investigative reporter for the Houston Chronicle.

NO JUSTICE

Police aid in hiding pedophile priests; victims dismissed or forgotten for years

By Michael D. Sallah and Mitch Weiss
The (Toledo, Ohio) *Blade*

John Connors twitched uneasily in his chair, struggling to explain the unthinkable: During a long and decorated police career, he covered up the crimes of pedophile priests.

It was not easy for Connors to share his secret with two *Blade* reporters. While moonlighting as a private investigator for the Toledo Catholic diocese, he helped religious leaders hide one of the most insidious problems confronting the church: priests raping and molesting children.

In his role as a diocesan investigator, Connors turned up more than a half-dozen cases of priests who crossed the sacred line, abusing children. But he never once took a police report, as required by law, or turned the incidents over to prosecutors, he confessed to the reporters. Instead, he briefed church leaders, who in turn, moved the priests to unsuspecting congregations.

What followed from that interview in March was one of the most exhaustive investigative projects undertaken by a newspaper into the role of law enforcement in the Roman Catholic Church sex abuse scandal.

> "Our investigation revealed the diocese not only cultivated Toledo police to conceal sex-abuse allegations against priests, but found law enforcement officials in other departments to do the same."

Connors was far from alone in the cover-up.

More than two dozen police officers, prosecutors and priests interviewed by the Blade's I-team admitted to participating in a decades-old practice of Toledo law enforcement aiding and abetting the diocese. The newspaper's investigation showed that at least once a decade – and far often more – priests suspected of rape and molestation were allowed by local authorities to escape the law.

Among the findings: a Toledo police chief threatened his cops for arresting pedophile priests in the 1950s; a Bellevue, Ohio, prosecutor refused in 1961 to report a notorious predator priest who admitted to raping altar boys; Toledo police detectives refused in the 1970s to take reports from parents whose children were molested by clerics.

Through interviews and, in some cases public records, the reporters were able to construct more than 17 cases of law enforcement officers concealing allegations of priestly abuse in the 19-county diocese since 1958. The story began with the first interview of Connors, and eventually led to priests who admitted to working with police to conceal the crimes.

Pain and suffering

When projects editor Michael Sallah was tipped off to Connors' role in the church scandal in February, he and other members of the paper's I-team debated whether to call him. Like any subject, Connors could decline to comment or simply hang up.

Tackling the abuse crisis wasn't exactly a new topic for a newspaper. Stories about the abuse crisis exploded in 2002, beginning with a remarkable series in *The Boston Globe* (later awarded an IRE Medal and a Pulitzer Prize). Other papers carried out their own aggressive reporting of the issue, including *The Blade*.

But we believed that fleshing out the complicity of law enforcement in the church scandal was the last piece of the puzzle in truly understanding why the problem was so pervasive.

"The role of police cannot be underestimated," said Bill Gray, a retired Toledo police detective. "This wasn't just about bishops. It was about police officers, too."

Our investigation revealed the diocese not only cultivated Toledo police to conceal sex-abuse allegations against priests, but found law enforcement officials in other departments to do the same.

"We always knew who we could turn to when someone was in trouble," said Jim Richards, a former diocese communications director.

Richards, who worked for the diocese between 1974 and 1995, assisted reporters in piecing together several additional cases, and identifying other key sources. we knew getting to Connors was crucial.

During the interview in the former policeman's home, we felt that by talking to Connors, 63, about the pain and trauma experienced by the victims – and keeping the discussion directly away from Connors – he would open up. And he did.

"I was the man they went to," he said, referring to church leaders. "I can tell you that truthfully."

The retiree said it was not until the abuse

scandal broke about three years ago that he fully understood the pain and suffering of the victims. Later, he said he became outraged by the Toledo diocese's reluctance to turn over a list of the offenders to *Blade* reporters in 2002.

"They wanted to keep it hidden," he said.

The reporters learned from Connors and others that late Police Chief Anthony Bosch, a former vice chairman of the Ohio Knights of Columbus, was responsible in the late 1950s for establishing a culture of protecting the church from scandal.

"It probably went on before that, but he was the first person most of us can remember who really went out of his way to keep us away from interviewing priests," recalled Gene Fodor, 65, a retired organized crime investigator. "Or we would be fired."

Seven other police officers interviewed by the reporters confirmed the chief's unwritten policy – one that continued with other police leaders after Bosch retired in the 1970s.

The reporters discovered the first known case of concealment occurred in 1958 when a Toledo police captain threatened to kill the Rev. Fred Garand, a suspected pedophile, but failed to conduct an investigation. It was critical for the reporters to find people who recalled the confrontation – witnesses who would go on the record.

They tracked down six people – including the wife of the police captain who confirmed the incident. "It doesn't look good today, but it wasn't part of our policy that this was considered to be a crime against youth and it had to be handled by police," said the Rev. Robert Lamatia, who admitted he hid Garand from the police captain.

Still seething

Throughout the reporting process, we knocked on doors instead of calling subjects. "We found that it was lot harder for people to say no when you went directly to them," says reporter Joe Mahr. "That was key."

For the reporters, it was sometimes frustrating because they would have to go back to the same home several times.

"This is a sensitive subject, but we could tell many wanted to talk," Mahr says. "We could see it in their faces and body language. They would say a word or two and stop. We could have walked away, but you can't give up. We interviewed some sources five, six times. We had to work hard to gain their trust – so they would open up and tell us."

When reporters went to the home of former Toledo detective Bill Gray, the former cop almost slammed the door on them. Gray liked to be warned about unexpected visitors. He didn't like reporters – but he knew and trusted Sallah, so after several awkward minutes, he agreed to be interviewed.

Sitting in his den, the Vietnam veteran was fidgety. He wanted to know why the journalists were pursing the story. Then Gray unloaded: he was still seething about the way he was treated by fellow officers after finally breaking protocol in 1984 and arresting a priest. When he walked into a shopping mall bathroom, he spotted the Rev. Robert Thomas engaged in sex with a 16-year-old boy. Gray took Thomas into custody, despite the priest's pleas.

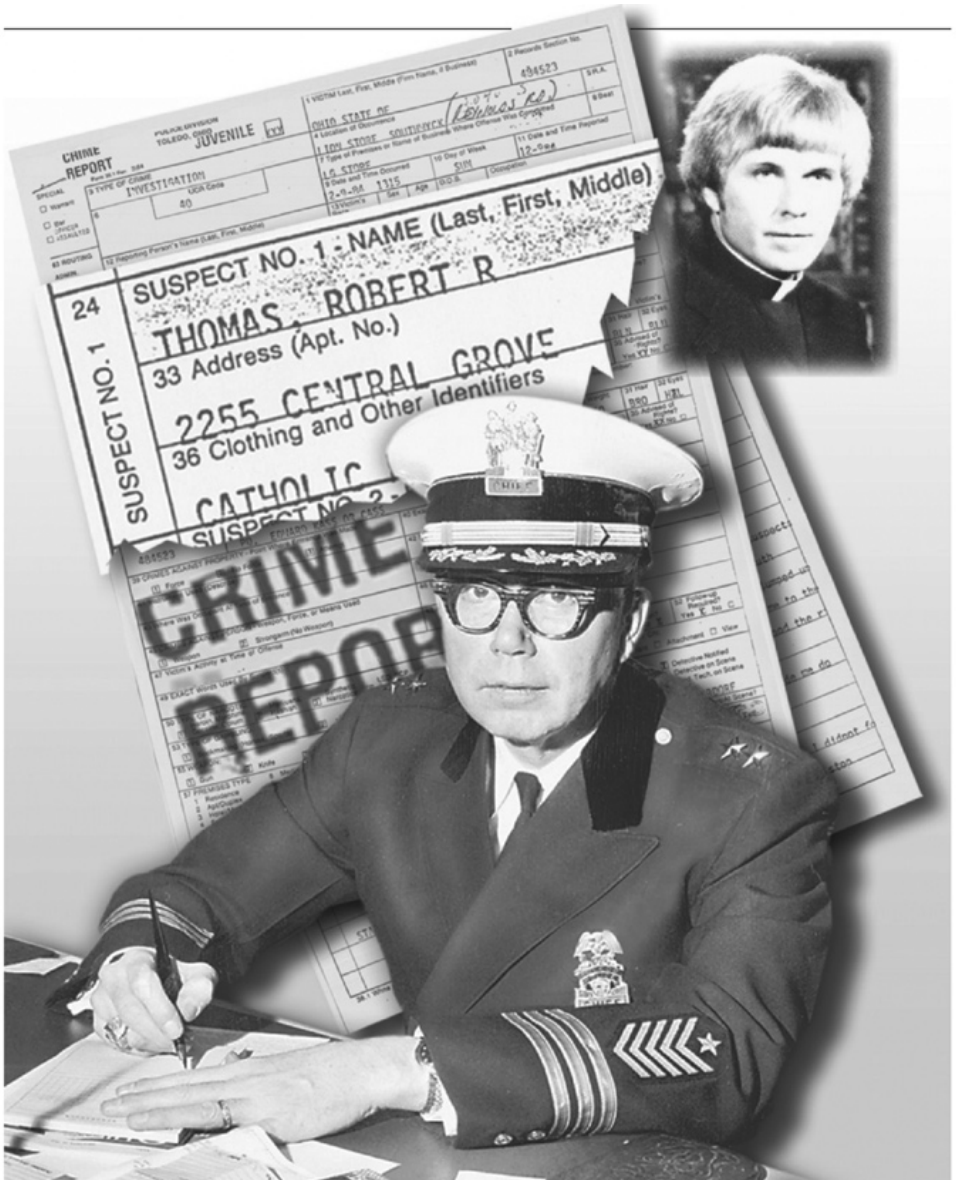
What followed were harassing phone calls from officers, angry the detective would arrest a priest.

But Thomas caught a break in the courts. The cleric not only avoided jail time but a judge agreed to seal the record of his arrest and charges. "Everyone forgot about the victim," Gray said.

After the story was published, the reporters received more than 200 e-mails and phone calls, mostly positive – including several from former Toledo cops who praised the story.

"I've been living with the guilt for years," one officer wrote. "Thank you for finally telling the truth. We all knew it was wrong."

Blade Photo Illustration



Former Toledo police officers say Police Chief Anthony Bosch, foreground, pressured officers not to arrest priests during his tenure from 1956 to 1970. No priests were arrested for sexually abusing children until 1984 when the Rev. Robert Thomas, above right, was caught engaging in a sex act with a 16-year-old boy. The officer who made the arrest said he was harassed by peers on the force after filing the accompanying report. Thomas avoided jail time, with the court sealing records related to the case.

Michael D. Sallah and Mitch Weiss have won numerous national and state awards, including the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting, the IRE Medal, and a Sigma Delta Chi award/investigative reporting for their series, "Buried Secrets, Brutal Truths." Sallah is now investigations editor for The Miami Herald and Weiss is an editor for The Charlotte Observer.

Journalism honors

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

- **Elizabeth Guth** of *TheBelleview-Summerfield Free Press* won in crime news (community newspapers with circulation under 40,000).
- **Anthony Cormier** of *The* (Panama City, Fla.) *News Herald* won in Freedom of Information (circulation under 40,000).
- **Sally Kestin, Megan O'Matz** and **John Maines** of the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* won in public service (circulation over 90,000).
- **George McGinn** of the *North Port Sun*, won in public service (circulation under 40,000).

Associated Press Managing Editors Association's Award for Public Service

- **Sally Kestin, Megan O'Matz** and **John Maines** of the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* won the Award for Public Service (circulation over 100,000) for "Cashing In on Disaster," about fraud and waste in FEMA aid after Florida's hurricanes last year.
- **Eric Eyre** of *The Charleston Gazette* won the Award for Public Service (40,000-100,000 circulation) for his series documenting a West Virginia state legislator's alleged unethical conduct.

The Fund for American Studies Awards

- **M.L. Elrick** and **Jim Schaefer** of the *Detroit Free Press* won the Mollenhoff Award for Investigative Reporting for their series exposing scandals in Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's administration.

National Emmy Awards

- The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather won in outstanding investigative journalism in a regularly scheduled newscast for **"**The Enron Tapes." IRE members on the team were **Jim Murphy**, **Barbara Pierce** and **Vince Gonzales.**
- CBS News 60 Minutes won in outstanding continuing coverage of a news story in a news magazine for *The Murder of Emmett Till*. IRE members on the team included **Jeff Fager**, **Michael Radutzky** and **Ed Bradley.**
- CBS News 60 Minutes II won in outstanding feature story in a news magazine for *Garden of Eden*. IRE member **Jeff Fager** was the project's executive producer.
- NBC Dateline's *Children for Sale* won in outstanding investigative journalism in a news magazine and in best report in a news magazine. IRE members on the team were **Allan Maraynes**, **Richard Greenberg** and **Chris Hansen.**
- WCAU-Philadelphia won in outstanding regional news story: investigative reporting for *Dirty Little Secret*. IRE member **LuAnn Cahn** was the reporter on the project.
- *The New York Times*/PBS Frontline co-production, "The Secret History of the Credit Card," won in outstanding investigative journalism, long form. IRE members on the team included **David Rummel** and **Marlena Telvick.**

Member news

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

■ **Nick Pappas** is now editor in chief of the *The* (Nashua, N.H.) *Telegraph*. He was previously the paper's managing editor. ■ **Aron Pilhofer** has joined the computer-assisted reporting team at *The New York Times*. Prior to that, he was database editor at the Center for Public Integrity in Washington, D.C. He also was director of IRE's Campaign Finance Information Center. ■ **Kelly Rice** has left WQAD-Quad Cities, Ill., to become an investigative field producer at WNDU-South Bend, Ind. ■ **Hank Shaw**, capitol bureau chief of *The* (Stockton, Calif.) *Record*, is a vice president of the Association of Capitol Reporters & Editors. ■ **David B. Smallman** has joined Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz PC, a leading media, entertainment, intellectual property, and commercial litigation law firm in New York. He is a partner at the firm and a member of its litigation, intellectual property, and publishing groups. Smallman, *The IRE Journal's* contributing legal editor, was formerly a partner with DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary. ■ **Christopher Twarowski,** senior reporter/editor at the *Long Island Press*, won five Folio Awards from the Fair Media Council for his investigative reporting. He also has won four awards from the Press Club of Long Island's Society of Professional Journalists. ■ **Holly Whisenhunt Stephen** is the new executive producer of special projects and investigations at WTHR-Indianapolis. Previously she was an investigative producer at WOAI-San Antonio. ■ **Jodi Upton** is database editor for sports at *USA Today*, where she does investigative work and oversees most of the department's indexes, ratings and other statistics. Upton was previously an investigative reporter at *The Detroit News.* ■ **Matt Weiser** is the water and natural resources reporter at *The Sacramento Bee*. He was an environment reporter at *The Bakersfield Californian*. ■ **Steven Weiss** has left the Center for Responsive Politics to become the American Cancer Society's senior director of communications and media advocacy. ■ **Alan Scher Zagier** has joined The Associated Press as a roving Missouri correspondent based in Columbia. He worked previously as a Knight editor in residence at the Missouri School of Journalism.

Immersion reporting unmasks young offenders

By Steve Weinberg
The IRE Journal

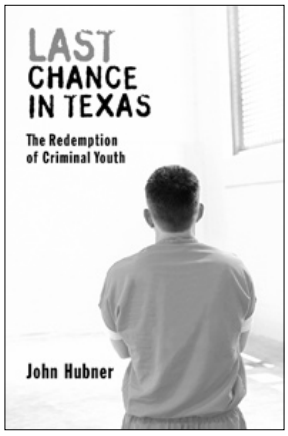
When John Hubner of the *San Jose Mercury News* began studying the rehabilitation possibilities for juvenile felons, he faced obstacles. After all, the conventional wisdom had become simple: Teenage murderers and rapists should be charged as adults, are not worth rehabilitating, and, even if they were, rehabilitation programs would probably cost a lot of money before failing.

Hubner had every reason to feel cynical when he began looking into the incarceration of juvenile criminals. Before entering journalism, Hubner brought two types of personal experience to the topic: His adolescent years spent as a juvenile delinquent, including breaking-and-entering offenses; and his first job after college, as a probation officer in Cook County (Ill.) Juvenile Court. Rehabilitation was never a watchword.

After becoming a reporter, Hubner examined the juvenile justice system up close during the early 1990s while writing the book "Somebody Else's Children: The Courts, the Kids and the Struggle to Save America's Troubled Families" with journalist wife Jill Wolfson. Later, at the *News*, Hubner reported and edited stories showing the dark side of the California Youth Authority.

From time to time, he would hear about an unusual, and allegedly effective, rehabilitation for teenaged felons in Texas. So, Hubner decided to visit the Giddings State School. Giddings gets "the worst of the worst," Hubner heard, "the 400 most heinous youthful offenders in Texas."

Hubner's new book, "Last Chance in Texas," is valuable not only because it questions the conventional wisdom, but also because so much of the research is grounded in direct observation. By immersing himself in the lives of the juvenile felons and their counselors, Hubner became part of the everyday scenery. As a result, he could observe closely without changing the dynamic of what he was observing.



Last Chance in Texas: The Redemption of Criminal Youth, John Hubner, Random House, 277 pages, $25.95

Facing themselves

"It's important for editors to make the dependency and delinquent courts regular beats," Hubner said in an interview. "You get to know the system, you form relationships, systemic problems emerge. So when you select a project to immerse yourself in, you will be making an informed choice that will have the backing of the people you're reporting about."

Putting juveniles in prison is the easy path, for the state – and for the offenders. They sit in their cells day after day, feeling sorry for themselves, convincing themselves they have been wronged, often picking up skills that will enhance their odds of getting away with criminal activity if released into society. Prison does not achieve the type of socialization noncriminals tend to acquire through family, through relationships with parents and siblings. As Hubner learned, most juvenile felons, including those at Giddings, "come from families where the adults were drunk, high, street criminals or in prison. In their families, 'socialization' too often meant getting together to shoot hard drugs." Every one of the females at Giddings had been sexually abused before committing a crime.

Giddings is not trying to re-create a family for its offenders. "That never works, in institutions, group homes or foster homes," Hubner says, sharing one of many revelations gained from his reporting. "Kids instinctively rebel: This is bullshit! You're not my real dad!"

At Giddings, in lieu of mending families, the offenders are forced to face themselves. That occurs in small groups of fellow criminals, with trained, empathetic psychologists and social workers in the same room. Three steps are involved. In step one, the offender must describe her or his life story, a tortuous process that takes two sessions, a total of seven hours or more. In step two, the offender must describe over a day or two the crime itself, including its impact on the victim. In step three, the offender must watch as peers role play to re-enact the crime and its consequences. Throughout the steps, the offender must surrender what the Giddings staff calls "thinking errors" that lead to unwarranted excuses. The inmates must memorize the nine types of thinking errors – deceiving, downplaying, avoiding, blaming, making excuses, jumping to conclusions, acting helpless, overreacting, feeling special – then practice avoiding them.

Completion of the steps often means early release, paroled into society to act empathetically toward others. Failure to complete often means transfer to prison, where the juvenile offender will end up in a cellblock with adults to serve the remainder of the sentence originally handed down by the judge.

Amazed at what he seemed to be viewing at first glance, Hubner asked Giddings superintendent Stan DeGerolami for permission to practice immersion journalism, to hang out day after day. DeGerolami asked agency officials in Austin, who said they would not stand in the way as long as Hubner agreed to refer to the juveniles by made-up first names and to alter the locales where the crimes occurred.

By the time Hubner arranged what became a nine-month immersion, Butch Held was serving as superintendent. Eager to show Hubner that Giddings hired therapists who understand the inmates are not mere thugs without the capacity to change and that the staff has developed techniques for successful rehabilitation, Held handed the journalist a badge allowing him to explore the detention center "almost at will."

What Hubner saw inside the mirrored room and outside the building can serve as a touchstone for journalists looking into claims of rehabilitation. The prison for youthful offenders did not try to depress.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42 ➢

SOURCES

Selected sources used by Hubner in his book:

- Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, various reports, including the annual "Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics"
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice
- The Sentencing Project, Washington, D.C., including the report "Processing Juveniles in Adult Court; an Assessment of Trends and Consequences"
- The Coalition for Juvenile Justice, Washington, D.C.
- The National Council on Juvenile Delinquency, Pittsburgh
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, including the report "Resources for Juvenile Detention Reform"
- The Texas Youth Commission, Austin, with an emphasis on its Web site and assistance from its director of research
- Studies by university-based researchers, with an emphasis on law review articles by law professors

Books

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41

"Giddings looks like the Southwest version of a prep school – 58 acres of grass and oak trees, buildings with limestone facades and copper roofs. The cottages are clean and house no more than 25 students."

Hubner's research taught him the importance of small living units if rehabilitation is the goal. "Prison-like facilities where 75 kids live in dorms are breeding grounds for gangs. The units are too big to control, so kids don't feel safe. They join a gang for protection."

Hubner focuses on one treatment group of nine young men and another of seven young women. Within each of those groups, the spotlight shines most of the time on a single individual, Ronnie among the males and Elena among the females.

"These were kids who had performed hideous crimes and whose pasts were full of drama," Hubner said during the interview. "I chose Ronnie and Elena because they were representative of the population, and that, I think, is part of the power of immersion journalism. You can tell representative stories in such depth, and they have the power of fiction. I don't mean making things up. I mean being there long enough to get telling details, capture scenes that reflect major themes, persuade the reader to start pulling for these kids. I'd hope that at some point a reader would say, 'geez, these kids did terrible things and yet here I am, rooting for them' or 'these kids aren't monsters, they're not the other, they could be me, I could be them if I'd grown up in those circumstances.'"

Desperate need to talk

The narratives of the youthful felons presented in the book are based primarily on what they said while Hubner observed. Hubner places the reader in the observation room with him; the proximity can seem scary and enthralling simultaneously. Hubner checked the spoken narratives of the juvenile offenders against police reports, trial transcripts, interviews with crime victims and psychologists' reports, hoping to guard against disseminating exaggerations or outright lies. For the most part, Hubner believed the narratives. Sure, he says, juvenile offenders lie to the police about committing a crime. But they tend to tell the truth about their lives around peers.

"Put teenagers in a safe setting and they will relish revealing what happened to them," Hubner says. "They have an almost desperate need to talk about themselves, and that is understandable, because no one has ever listened to them."

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

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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.

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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: Pia Christensen, pia@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.
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The Newspaper Guild-CWA announces its

2005 Heywood Broun Award

This annual competition is intended to encourage and recognize individual journalistic achievement by members of the working media, particularly if it helps right a wrong or correct an injustice. First consideration will be given to entries on behalf of individuals or teams of no more than two. This, too, is in the spirit of Broun.

- **Deadline:** *Entries must be postmarked no later than Jan. 27, 2006, and must have a clearly legible return address on the package. Entries posted after Jan. 27 will be discarded. Faxed and e-mailed entries will not be accepted.*

- **Award:** *$5,000, plus two awards of $1,000 for entries of substantial distinction. One of the awards of substantial distinction will be for a broadcast (television or radio) entry. Entries published exclusively on the internet will be judged as print submissions.*

- **Publication Dates:** *The award will be given for work published or broadcast between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2005.*

- **Eligibility:** *Journalists working on behalf of newspapers, news services, web sites, magazines and radio and TV stations in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico are eligible, whether Guild members or not. Publishers and other employers, or entries on behalf of an entire staff of a publication or employer, are not eligible; neither are entries written or reported by managers. Entries may be submitted by applicants for themselves or by others; however, entrants should note that the judges frown on obviously mass-produced contest entries.*

- *All entries become property of the award committee.*

Heywood Broun was a crusading columnist for The Tribune and The World in New York from 1912 until his death in 1939. He also wrote frequently for The Nation and The New Republic, as well as Harper's, Bookman, American Mercury and Collier's. **He founded the American Newspaper Guild in 1933 and served as its first president.**

Although his first love was sports, Broun is best remembered for his **reporting on social issues and his passionate championing of the underdog and the disadvantaged.** "When a man has a conviction, great or small, about eggs or eternity, he must wear it always in plain sight, pulled down tight upon his forehead," he once wrote. "I see no wisdom in saving up punches for a rainy day."

Broun maintained a steadfast belief that **journalists could help right wrongs, especially social ills.** "I am a little sick and tired of being classed as soft, bourgeois and sentimental if I say that human brotherhood could solve overnight the problems concerning which men shake their heads and say 'It's too bad but insurmountable'," he wrote in 1933. And in 1939, just a month before his death, he wrote: "I would like to see some columnists do the side streets and the suburbs and **chronicle the joys and tragedies of the ordinary run of people.**"

David B. Fallis of the Washington Post, winner of the 2004 Broun Award.

- **Requirements:** *There is no official entry form, nor is there an entry fee. Each newspaper or magazine entry must be submitted in triplicate, one copy of which must be an original tearsheet. Internet entries should be submitted as print-outs, also in triplicate. Broadcast entries shall consist of one copy of an audio or video tape (VHS) and three copies of a final script or summary.*

  All entries must include:
  1. A one-page summary of the work.
  2. A description of the circumstances under which the work was done and its results.
  3. Name, phone and e-mail address of those to be contacted with winning results.

  Entries that do not conform to these requirements will not be judged.

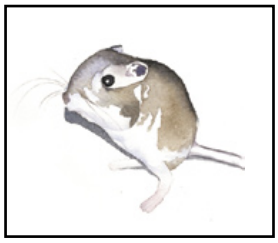
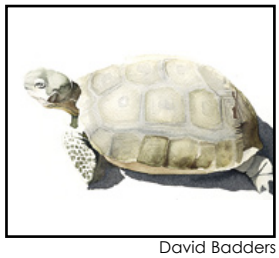
- **Address:**
  Broun Award Committee
  The Newspaper Guild-CWA
  501 Third Street, N.W.
  Washington, DC 20001-2797

- **Phone:** *202-434-7177*

- *Entries will be acknowledged via postcard. Winners will be notified personally and will be announced in the March, 2006 issue of The Guild Reporter. The Guild Reporter may be read online at the TNG-CWA website, www.newsguild.org.*

- *Awards will be presented at a banquet May 3, 2006.*



David Badders

Jean Krejca, co-owner of Zara Environmental, studying rare creatures in Tooth Cave near Austin, Texas.

Gilbert W. Arias

Reporters had to dig deep to uncover plans threatening endangered species.




From left: Lisa Stiffler, Environmental Reporter | Robert McClure, Environmental Reporter | Gilbert W. Arias, Photographer | David Badders, Graphic Artist

Would a federal "habitat conservation plan" for Washington state protect endangered species or destroy them? Seattle Post-Intelligencer reporters Robert McClure and Lisa Stiffler, and editor Bill Miller, tackled this complex story that affects the Seattle area as well as the rest of the country.

The P-I three-part series "A License to Kill" was based on national field research as well as an in-depth review of documents secured through the Freedom of Information Act. The reporters evaluated all 98 of the nation's largest and most recently approved conservation plans. It was the first time that anyone – in the government or in journalism – has taken on this massive task. The full series is online. Go to seattlepi.nwsource.com/specials/licensetokill

The P-I team discovered that the government "conservation" strategy protected private real estate investors at the expense of endangered species. The Washington state habitat plan is still under consideration, but readers have made it clear that they want more accountability. Helping communities better understand the environment is one more way Hearst Newspapers deliver excellence every day.


M'S SO-SO START DOESN'T THRILL – OR DISAPPOINT

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

FAVORITE SHOWS IN TROUBLE

GOP wins key issue, keeps alive vote suit

A license to kill

FLAWS IN HABITAT CONSERVATION PLANS THREATEN THE SURVIVAL OF SCORES OF SPECIES

Hearst Newspapers