THE IRE JOURNAL
July/August 2006
Volume 29 Number 4

On the Job

FATAL PLAY
Overweight NFL athletes dying at alarming rate

JUSTICE DENIED
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LIGHTS OUT
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Service journalism vs. corporate profits

BRANT HOUSTON

Donald Barlett and James Steele have been the longest-running and most esteemed investigative duo in U.S. journalism.

They have set a standard for thoroughness, depth and use of documents that many IRE members have aspired to.

They have generously shared their techniques and knowledge at IRE conferences and workshops and in one-on-one conversations.

As with all superb investigative journalists, they haven't avoided going after tough stories, willing to deal with any resulting controversy or criticism. They have persevered, daring to delve into a wide and complex range of topics including health care, border issues and retirement.

But, as of the writing of this column, they are between jobs.

"They're very good, but very expensive, and I couldn't get anyone to take them on their budget," John Huey, editor-in-chief of Time Inc., told *The New York Times* in May.

Well, at least Huey said what some newsroom managers hate to say these days but what everyone in the newsrooms knows: When it comes to quality public service journalism or profits at a corporation, profits come first.

"How low will the death spiral go? What does it say about the state of journalism in America today when the most respected investigative reporting duo in history is no longer worth it to the owners?" asked Charles Lewis, who founded the nonprofit Center for Public Integrity. The Center has consistently done top-notch investigative stories.

"This ought to be a soul-searching moment for us all, that it is past time for some exciting new publishing approaches and, frankly, some new owners who actually share our editorial values," Lewis said. Lewis left the Center in January 2005 and has been studying the state of investigative journalism.

Our IRE members certainly are joining Lewis in the soul-searching.

A recent survey of members by Arizona State University (ASU) students found that our members think newspapers care about investigative stories but "frequently don't back that up with resources that reporters say they need to do in-depth work."

The survey, conducted as part of a student project on IRE's Arizona Project, found that members at the 100 largest newspapers are seeing resources diminish for investigative reporting as corporations slash budgets to maintain or increase profits. In the survey, reporters and editors agree that the desire to do investigative journalism is there, but that money for staff and training often isn't.

Indeed, at the April conference of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the theme was watchdog journalism. Yet there were many editors who couldn't attend because of newsroom cutbacks.

David Boardman, managing editor of *The Seattle Times* and past president of IRE's board of directors, voiced a common worry in a follow-up interview to the ASU survey.

"There is more quality work done today than at most times in the past, but I wonder if it's peaked," he said. "I'm very concerned about that, because there are fewer jobs. Newsrooms all over America are cutting back."

The "death spiral" Lewis and others refer to is the lack of re-investment by many corporate owners in "the product." In any industry, the lack of re-investment – that is, spending money on sufficient staff and resources and comprehensive staff training in the latest technologies – ensures its eventual failure.

But perhaps there is hope as the spiral starts to near the bottom. New and innovative owners – or current ones at some corporations – will pick up the pieces, reconstruct them and envision a future in which investigative journalism truly is the "franchise," and they will push those out of market who continue to offer a disintegrating "product."

Perhaps, we will soon see the emergence of entrepreneurs who know the value of investigative journalism can't be measured in a simple spreadsheet – entrepreneurs eager to invest in the new work of Barlett and Steele and all the journalists they have inspired.

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

IRE members honored

This year, various organizations saluted the work of IRE members. Winners are spotlighted here. Members' names are in bold:

Society of Professional Journalists 2005 Sigma Delta Chi Awards

- Newspapers with circulation of 100,000 or less: Mark Flatten, **Emily Gersema** and Craig Anderson of the *East Valley Tribune* (Scottsdale, Ariz.), for "The Speculators." **Phoebe Zerwick** of the *Winston-Salem* (N.C.) *Journal*, took the investigative reporting award in this category for "Crime and Science: The Weight of the Evidence."
- **Chris Adams** and **Alison Young** of Knight Ridder's Washington, D.C., Bureau won for "Discharged and Dishonored," in the Washington correspondence category. Young now works for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*
- Linda Paul, **Cate Cahan** and Sonari Glinton of WBEZ-Chicago Public Radio, won the investigative reporting category in radio for "Juvenile Detention Center Conditions Through the Eyes of Youth."
- Susannah Frame, Eric Olson and **Kellie Cheadle** of KING-Seattle placed first in investigative reporting in the network/Top 25 market category with "Trouble on the Tarmac."
- Seattletimes.com was honored in online investigative reporting for "Selling Drug Secrets" by **Luke Timmerman, David Heath**, Tracy Cutchlow and Ping Yeh.
- WKRC-Cincinnati's **Jeff Hirsh**, Jeff Barnhill, Eric Gerhardt and Dan Hurley won the investigative reporting category for television, under Top 25 markets, for their work on "Charter School Investigations," a series of reports on financial, academic and oversight problems in local charter schools.
- **Scott R. Maier** of the University of Oregon and **Philip Meyer** of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill won the research prize for "Accuracy Matters, a study of accuracy in stories from 22 U.S. newspapers."

SPJ Sunshine State Awards

- The Gene Miller Award for Investigative Reporting in large newspapers or magazines went to **Debbie Cenziper** of *The Miami Herald* for the series "Blind Eye," a report on critical shortcomings in technology and resources used to forecast hurricanes.
- First place in television political/government reporting went to Josh Wilson and **Jeff Harwood,** WFTV-Orlando.
- **Sylvia Lim**, The *Bradenton* (Fla.) *Herald*, won best deadline reporting in small newspapers or magazines. Lim and **Duane Marsteller** won the criminal law reporting award.
- *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* reporters **Sally Kestin**, **Megan O'Matz**, **John Maines** and **Jon Burstein** placed first in best hurricane/disaster reporting with "FEMA: A Legacy of Waste."
- WUSF-Tampa's **Bobbie O'Brien** won best radio feature with "Looking for Angola."
- **Samuel P. Nitze** and Beth Reinhard of *The Miami Herald* placed first in state and federal government/political reporting in newspapers.
- **Tony Pipitone**, Darran Caudle, Scott Noland and Eileen Gilmer, WKMG-Orlando, placed first for criminal justice reporting, television category with "Search for Justice."
- *The Palm Beach Post* team of John Lantigua, Christine Evans and **Christine Stapleton** won the James Batten Award for Public Service with "A Cloud Over Florida: Hidden Pesticide Problems."
- **Travis Sherwin**, **Stephen Stock**, Shannon Fitz-Patrick and Marc Rice of WESH-Orlando placed first in television consumer reporting for "Ford Fires."

The Chicago Headline Club

A chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists presented its Peter Lisagor Awards for exemplary journalism.

- In-depth reporting awards went to **John O'Connor**, state capitol reporter for the Associated Press in Illinois for "Cleaning Contracts;" **Cam Simpson** of the *Chicago Tribune*'s Washington bureau for "Pipeline to Peril;" **David Jackson** of the *Chicago Tribune* for "The New Street Hustle;" Jeremy Manier, **Patricia Callahan** and Delroy Alexander of the *Chicago Tribune* for "The Oreo, Obesity and Us;" **Jeff Kelly Lowenstein** of the *South Shore Community News* for "Sex Offenders in the City;" and WBBM-Chicago Radio's **Steve Miller** for "Chicago's Vanishing Neighborhood Bars."
- Feature story honors went to WBEZ-Chicago Public Radio's Linda Paul, **Cate Cahan**, and Jason Reblando for "Follow the Money."
- Business reporting awards went to Ryan Keith and **Maura Kelly Lannan** for the Associated Press story "Gambling on Casinos;" **Kimbriell Kelly** of the *Chicago Reporter* for "Final Frontier;" Janet Rausa Fuller and **Art Golab** of the *Chicago Sun-Times* for "The New Math of Dining Out;" WBBM-Chicago's **Pam Zekman**, Simone Thiessen and Carolyn Broquet for "Bidder Beware."
- An award for media collaboration on "Good Gifts Gone Bad" went to WBBM-Chicago's **Dave Savini** and Michele Youngerman and **Kathy Cichon** of *The Naperville Sun.*

MEMBER NEWS

Heather Allen joined the *Sarasota* (Fla.) *Herald-Tribune* as a general assignment reporter; she worked on the investigative team at *The Boston Globe.* ■ **Patricia Andreu**, **Scott Zamost**, Felix Castro and **Danielle Dubetz** of WTVJ-Miami won first place in television general news reporting in the SPJ Green Eyeshade Awards for "Picture of Deception," an inside look at a police investigation of identity theft. Dubetz now works for WRIC-Richmond, Va. ■ *Rolling Stone* magazine won the National Magazine Award for reporting for **James Bamford**'s "The Man Who Sold the War," an article about a secret public relations campaign with ties to the CIA and the Pentagon that was designed to manipulate media coverage to support the invasion of Iraq. ■ "Feet to the Fire: The Media After 9/11, Top Journalists Speak Out" (Prometheus Books), edited by **Kristina Borjesson**, won the Independent Publishers Award for best book in the current events category. ■ **Russell Carollo** and Larry Kaplow, *Dayton* (Ohio) *Daily News,* won the best investigative reporting award from the Associated Press of Ohio for their work on "Iraq Crimes." ■ **Robert Cribb** of *The Toronto Star*, **David McKie** of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Dean Jobb of University of Kings College and **Fred Vallance-Jones** of *The Hamilton* (Ont.) *Spectator* co-authored "Digging Deeper, A Canadian Reporters Research Guide" (Oxford University Press). The SPJ Green Eyeshade Award for investigative reporting in a daily newspaper went to **Aimee Edmondson**, Karen Pulfer Focht and **Mickie Anderson** of *The* (Memphis, Tenn.) *Commercial Appeal* for "Born to Die." ■ **Kurt Eichenwald** of *The New York Times* won an individual Payne Award for Ethics in Journalism at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. ■ The *Lexington* (Ky.) *Herald-Leader* team of **Bill Estep**, John Stamper and Linda Blackford, won first place in the SPJ Green Eyeshade Awards for business reporting in a daily newspaper with "Win, Lose or Draw." ■ **John Estus** of *The Daily O'Collegian* at Oklahoma State University won a Mark of Excellence Award in general news

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ➢

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DRUG SCANDAL

Major League Baseball and 'juicing' of athletes the subject of three books

By Steve Weinberg
The IRE Journal

By carefully reading "Game of Shadows," by *San Francisco Chronicle* journalists Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, you might draw a few conclusions, such as:

- Barry Bonds is a liar.
- Current – and past – Major League Baseball players are liars.
- Some team trainers, coaches, managers and owners are liars.
- Major League Baseball executives are liars.
- A number of the lies told by those mentioned above while under oath may constitute perjury, and some of the actions being lied about may be felonies.

This book-length exposé has received so much coverage that some readers of this review might think they know enough. The news coverage, however, does not begin to capture the breadth and depth of the documentation provided by Fainaru-Wada and Williams about drug cheating in Major League Baseball. The documentation includes statements made to federal law enforcement agents, testimony under oath in secret grand jury proceedings, business documents showing shipping and payments for certain performance-enhancing substances, private e-mails, direct observation of changes in the behaviors and physiques of athletes, and interviews by the authors of more than 200 sources and subjects.

Fainaru-Wada and Williams are not newcomers to investigative reporting. One of Fainaru-Wada's past stories was on the influence of sports agents and shady operators who dangle athletes as bait to attract investors to phony businesses. Williams has published stories about the cocaine industry and political power brokers.

The steroids exposé began with a raid by federal agents – propelled by an Internal Revenue Service investigator – of a nutritional supplements company, the Bay Area Laboratory Co-operative (BALCO), founded by Victor Conte. Since investigators refused to reveal the purpose of the raid, the *San Francisco Chronicle* editors asked Fainaru-Wada to investigate.

It should have been relatively easy. Five government agencies, which usually have turf battles, cooperated in the BALCO bust. The files turned up a bounty of athletes' names. Many of those athletes hired lawyers, talked to spouses, significant others, relatives, agents, teammates and team owners. Federal prosecutors convened a grand jury, which meant witnesses parading in and out of a courthouse.

Some early stories could be extracted from Conte's self-promotion. Proud of BALCO, self-involved and loquacious, his Internet advertising about "scientific nutrition for advanced conditioning (SNAC)" pointed attentive journalists in the right direction.

"Names make news, and Conte's SNAC Internet site was a who's who of elite athletes who were somehow involved with an enterprise that had been targeted by federal law enforcement," say Fainaru-Wada and Williams. "The site named 65 individual sports stars and the entire rosters of several professional teams, all said to be using BALCO's 'nutritional consultation and supplements.' As proof of Conte's sports connections, the site was decorated with bold color prints of the stars. There was Conte … grinning, standing over Barry Bonds and Greg Anderson, the trainer whose door had been kicked in by federal agents."

Part of Conte's magic transcended self-promotion; he reportedly preached cheating to athletes, then played a role in marketing performance-enhancing substances extremely difficult to detect by those who policed professional and amateur sports.

Despite Conte's high profile, "the big BALCO story proved tough to get," say Fainaru-Wada and Williams. "And so began a cycle that repeated itself throughout the case. A reporter would pry loose a piece of new information, and break it as a BALCO exclusive. Then the hundreds of media outlets that were interested in BALCO … would report and comment on the scoop. Eventually, the media barrage would grow to such a level of intensity that it would force an official reaction or even a promise for reform. And then the story would quiet down for a while, until the cycle cranked up all over again."

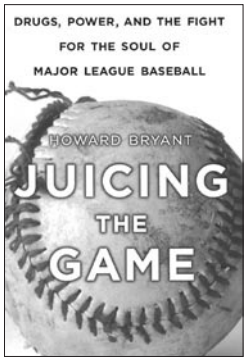
The *San Francisco Chronicle* duo produced three scoops in succession: the grand jury formation, the subpoena issued to Bonds and the fact that agents had seized steroids in the raid. But Fainaru-Wada and Williams still could not provide names of offending athletes in print because of reasonable doubts. When the attorney general of the United States announced indictments of Conte and Anderson, names of specific athletes appeared nowhere in public papers. Eventually, the *Chronicle* named seven implicated athletes, based on information provided to BALCO investigators.

When the *Chronicle* published information based on leaked grand jury transcripts, the U.S. attorney in charge of the investigation asked the newspaper to return the documents and reveal the leaker.

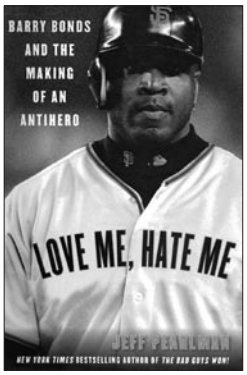
"The *Chronicle* refused to comply, but its legal position was tenuous," say Fainaru-Wada and Williams. "Under federal law, reporters had no protection against being subpoenaed to identify their confidential sources."

Besides sealed documents related to the grand jury, the reporters relied on search warrant affidavits and other public information in the courthouse file.

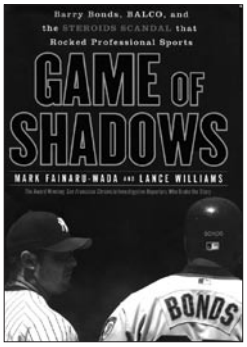
Of the athletes named, Bond is the primary character. In his defense on professional grounds (rather than legal grounds), before he hooked up with Conte, Bonds had achieved baseball stardom. Almost anyone else who used the same performance-enhancing drugs as allegedly used by Bonds still would find it impossible to hit a 95-mile-an-hour fastball, make a diving line-drive catch or throw a baseball hard enough to prevent a run scoring at home plate.



JUICING THE GAME: Drugs, Power, and the Fight for the Soul of Major League Baseball
By Howard Bryant
Viking, 439 pages, $24.95



LOVE ME, HATE ME: Barry Bonds and the Making of an Antihero
By Jeff Pearlman
HarperCollins, 371 pages, $25.95



GAME OF SHADOWS: Barry Bonds, BALCO and the Steroids Scandal That Rocked Professional Sports
By Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams
Gotham Books, 332 pages, $26

Other related books:

There are other books available on athletes and drug use. Included:

- "Juiced: Wild Times, Rampant 'Roids, Smash Hits and How Baseball Got Big" (Regan Books; paperback edition, 2006), a memoir by Major League Baseball player Jose Canseco.
- "Dunks, Doubles, Doping: How Steroids Are Killing American Athletics," by Nathan Jendrick (The Lyons Press)
- "Muscles, Speed and Lies: What the Sport Supplement Industry Does Not Want Athletes or Consumers to Know," by David Lightsey (The Lyons Press)

The athlete prodigy

In Jeff Pearlman's biography of Bonds, "Love Me, Hate Me: Barry Bonds and the Making of an Antihero," Pearlman relies almost entirely on previous press coverage and his original interviews. A former staff member at *Sports Illustrated* and *Newsday*, Pearlman demonstrates the value of talking to lots and lots of sources from a person's past and present.

Looking into the past, Pearlman quotes Bonds' Cub Scout troop leader and one of his college baseball teammates. The Cub Scout leader reveals the sense of privilege the troubled, spoiled, sour Bonds felt even at age 8. The college teammate reveals how Bonds uses people for selfish ends, then denies knowing them. On the other hand, Pearlman quotes a Hutchinson, Kan., woman who housed Bonds during a summer league while Bonds was still a collegiate athlete. The woman cites Bonds' friendly behavior that summer, as well as his generosity to her son then, and years later. Pearlman notes the upbeat report "is yet another layer to the Bonds enigma."

The biography focuses legitimately on Barry Bonds' father, Bobby, a Major League Baseball star who loved his son, the athletic prodigy, but frequently demonstrated that love in counterproductive ways.

Pearlman reports that Bobby Bonds reportedly became an alcoholic before turning professional, and sometimes stepped onto the baseball field drunk. Growing up as the child of an alcoholic is never easy; it marked Barry Bonds forever, according to Pearlman.

As for Pearlman's steroids coverage, it is interesting but not groundbreaking. Refreshingly, he does something too few journalists do – he gives generous credit to the reporting of competitors.

Growing stronger

Howard Bryant's book, "Juicing the Game: Drugs, Power, and the Fight for the Soul of Major League Baseball," was published in 2005, but comes from a Boston sportswriter with superb access to human sources. Bryant has an impressive knowledge of documents, and – most important of all in the context of this review – an understanding of context. The context used to report on Bonds and other athletes using performance-enhancing drugs is of a dual nature: historical and broad.

It is broad in the sense that Bryant includes every viewpoint imaginable – those of current players, former players, managers, coaches, team trainers, personal trainers, beat journalists, club owners, union representatives, fans, high school teachers, statisticians, legislators, government regulators, medical researchers and more.

It is historical in the sense that Bryant examines cases going back decades. An especially telling case involves the 1996 season of Brady Anderson, an outfielder for the Baltimore Orioles. By that year, everybody around baseball, including beat journalists, knew that many players were legally ingesting creatine, described by Bryant as "a dietary supplement that had been on the market for years but had been relegated to the fringes of power sports such as weightlifting and football. A chemical produced naturally in small amounts by the body, creatine – which could also be found in foods such as red meat and some fish – helped the muscles recover faster … [it] also enabled an athlete to extend his workout, sometimes by as much as 40 percent beyond his natural limits, and because it allowed a player to work out harder and longer, it also enabled that player to grow stronger."

Before beginning his creatine-fueled workouts, Anderson hit 10 home runs total during his first four seasons as a Major League Baseball player. In 1996, he hit 50 home runs. Previously muscular but thin, Anderson took on the appearance of a professional football player. As Bryant makes clear, lots of baseball players began to transform their bodies. Bonds became the most prominent.

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

NO ACCESS

Judges balk at unsealing records, readers support media court battle

By Ken Armstrong
The Seattle Times

In Seattle, lots of court records get sealed, making a trip to the King County courthouse like a trip to the casino. You go to the clerk's office and punch some case number into the computer. You might get documents – or you might get a pop-up box that denies access to the whole file unless you have a password. Or you might get something in between – some documents will open up, while others will be marked with an "S," the clerk's shorthand for sealed.

Reporters regularly confront these password demands and "S" marks when doing research on hospitals, businesses, churches, politicians, police officers, CEOs and public agencies.

Some examples of lawsuits that have been sealed include:

- The rape of a 13-year-old blamed on Washington's state social services agency.
- An unsafe medical device that allegedly caused a woman to go into a coma.
- A judge accused of legal malpractice for a case he handled just before joining the bench.

The Washington constitution says that "justice in all cases shall be administered openly," and Washingtons Supreme Court has upheld that statement by adopting rules that restrict the sealing of court documents to rare circumstances.

We were curious, then, why so many documents were being sealed. We decided to investigate, but knew there were some obvious obstacles, such as how you can write about something that is deliberately being hidden from public view.

At the same time, we had a couple of things going for us: the newspaper's commitment to principle, and Justin Mayo. *The Seattle Times* has a long history of fighting for open records, waging expensive legal battles in state and federal courts. And Mayo, one of the country's top database specialists, has proved masterful at extracting meaning and patterns from electronic data.

Mayo asked the administrative office to run half a dozen searches of electronic dockets, looking for telltale signs of sealed records. These searches focused on certain docket codes, such as ORSD for "order sealing document," and on each docket's text, looking for the words "sealed" or "confidential." We used truncated search terms – "seal" and "confid" – to make sure that we would capture such variations as "sealing."

These searches produced a list of about 10,000 civil cases in King County Superior Court. Mayo culled about 7,000 cases by evaluating the dockets. I then punched, one by one, the case numbers for the remaining 3,000 into the computer at the clerk's office to see how many were sealed in whole or in part. We also supplemented the electronic search by examining older files kept on paper. I walked the rows of shelves at the clerk's office, looking for yellow folders used to designate sealed files that are locked in a separate room.

Secrecy desired

After months of research, we found that at least 420 civil cases have been completely sealed in King County Superior Court since 1990. (At least a thousand others have been sealed in part.) It's important to understand that the 420 cases apply only to civil cases (not divorce, probate, criminal or other case types) that were sealed in their entirety in just one court – King County Superior.

Still, this was only the beginning of our investigation. Once we had a list of sealed cases, we ran the names of the parties through a mix of databases to determine the litigants involved, such as lawyers, doctors, teachers or police officers. These databases included everything from the state bar's directory of attorneys to data repositories on retired teachers, government employees and health-care providers.

We learned what we could about the sealed cases through other means – for example, by filing public-disclosure requests for tort-claim information in cases where a public agency was being sued.

We also collected the sealing orders in hundreds of cases, to see which judge sealed which file, for what reason, and whether the judge followed the law.

The Seattle Times

At least 420 civil cases have been completely sealed in King County Superior Court since 1990. At least a thousand others have been sealed in part.

Finally, we plugged all our research into our own database, which helped kick out these kinds of numbers:

- The King County courts have sealed at least 46 civil suits in which a public institution is a party. Local school districts, the University of Washington, the state's Department of Social and Health Services – all have had files about them sealed.
- Judges and court commissioners have sealed at least 58 cases in which a fellow lawyer is a party, usually as a defendant. The attorneys in these cases have been accused of everything from sexual harassment to legal malpractice.
- The King County judges have proved ignorant of, or indifferent to, the legal requirements for sealing court records. They have routinely sealed files while offering little or no explanation; applying the wrong legal standard; and failing to acknowledge the public interest in open court proceedings.
- At least 97 percent of the court's sealing orders have disregarded rules set down by the Washington Supreme Court in the 1980s.

The judges have, in effect, allowed the parties to hijack the system. If the parties have asked for documents or files to be sealed, the judges have typically gone along. And the parties have their own reasons for wanting secrecy. For defendants, sealing records can spare them from embarrassment or worse. For plaintiffs, agreeing to secrecy can provide leverage in settlement negotiations.

Filing motions

Based upon our findings, the King County judges already have moved to fix some problems – throwing out sealing forms that misstate the law; providing judges with extensive training on sealing restrictions; and taking the power to seal away from substitute court commissioners.

The court's top judges also agreed to a plan for the court to open many, if not most, of the sealed cases with minimal delay. But the other judges rebelled, voting 21-9 to require *The Seattle Times* to file unsealing motions on a case-by-case basis.

So, that's what we're doing. We've filed motions in about two-dozen cases so far, and plan to file more. We're writing stories as we go, instead of loading up for one long series. Reporters Steve Miletich and Cheryl Phillips have helped investigate individual cases or themes, while researcher David Turim has helped with background research on various litigants.

We've received hundreds of e-mails and phone calls voicing support from readers who understand the importance of the information that's being kept from them. Our Web site, www.seattletimes.com/yourcourts, tells readers about different cases as they become unsealed.

Ken Armstrong is an investigative reporter at The Seattle Times. He previously worked at the Chicago Tribune, where his work, with reporter Steve Mills, helped prompt the Illinois governor to declare a moratorium on executions and to empty Death Row.

HIGH INTEREST

Schools borrow more than approved, costing taxpayers millions of dollars

By Jeffrey Gaunt
(Arlington Heights, Ill.) *Daily Herald*

Illinois educators may preach the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. But when it comes to education funding, two and two rarely equal four.

That was clear one night in the spring of 2005, while I was covering a small, but fast-growing suburban school district 45 minutes northwest of Chicago.

To address the district's burgeoning student population, school board members were considering a proposal to build an $11 million addition to their new middle school. To fund the project, administrators said, the school district would use leftover money from an $80 million loan voters approved in 2002.

The whole discussion seemed reasonable enough – until administrators noted the district had already spent all but $2 million of the loan.

As I later learned, district officials had taken advantage of a commonly used – but often unarticulated practice – that allowed them to borrow more money than the residents in 2002 had ostensibly authorized.

Technically, voters had said the district could take out an $80 million loan. But by agreeing to pay high interest rates on that loan, the school district was awarded an additional sum of money, called a premium. These premiums, which we referred to as cash bonuses in our series, could be used to fund other construction projects.

For the most part, residents have no idea the premiums exist, in large part because school officials don't take out the loans and nail down the interest rates until after voters say yes. Yet, residents will be paying back the money – with the premiums – at high interest rates for roughly 20 years.

I teamed up with editor Timothy Sheil and fellow schools reporter Emily Krone to see whether other suburban Chicago school districts were taking advantage of the loophole in state law – to the detriment of their taxpayers.

Understanding numbers

The biggest hurdle was finding out how many loans were issued, and how many premiums were awarded without contacting each of the 81 school districts in our coverage area.

Illinois law gives wide latitude to local school officials when it comes to financing construction projects. For the most part, school districts police themselves – with help from attorneys, underwriters and paid financial consultants.

We could find no regulatory agency tracking the details of each school loan and didn't yet want to talk to the school districts. But we discovered two Web sites that, when used together, provided much of what we needed.

Each school loan has a series of identifying numbers that we located online through Moody's Investors Services, which specializes in the credit ratings used to determine interest rates on loans. Using those identifying numbers, we were then able to find the official statements for the loans through The Bond Market Association's Web site.

In all, we tracked down the official statements for 206 school loans issued since 2000 by the 81 suburban school districts in our coverage area.

Still, we knew we had to find a way to compare the loans. After a lot of research on loans in general, and school loans in particular, as well as countless discussions about the time value of money and other financial nonsense, we settled on a simple ratio.

If a school district borrowed, say, $10 million, we wanted to know how much taxpayers would be required to pay back over the life of the loan.

To that end, we turned to the official statements, which contain the loan repayment schedules. The repayment schedules show the portion of the loan taxpayers will pay back each year, as well as the annual interest rate at which they'll pay it back.

With a pretty basic Excel spreadsheet, we used the repayment schedules to calculate the total amount taxpayers would cough up over the life of the loans.

We then calculated a simple ratio – the amount borrowed versus the amount paid back. This was the building block of our series.

On some loans, taxpayers might pay back as little as $1.30 or less for every dollar borrowed. On others, taxpayers might be out more than $2.50 on the dollar.

By going back and looking at the practices used with each loan – for instance, accepting premiums in exchange for high interest rates – we were able to show how taxpayers in some school districts weren't getting the same bang for their buck as those in other, more fiscally responsible districts.

Repayment schedules

We already had earned somewhat of a reputation among school administrators for a series of stories we wrote on school districts' use of taxpayer money. As a result, we received a rather icy reception from officials in the first district we contacted.

The district had collected a $13 million premium, without telling voters, and had used the money to put air conditioners in some school buildings, and to build a preschool school for at-risk and developmentally challenged kids.

We were told that sometimes the obligation to serve their kids trumps their responsibility to taxpayers. After we left, the district's chief financial officer sent out an e-mail to every school business official in the state warning them that we were working on the series.

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No such thing as a free lunch

Build 4 new schools	Rehab 11 grade schools	Fix 5 middle schools	Expand 3 high schools	Computers and furniture	deLacey Center
					
$28.5 million	$17.1 million	$10.8 million	$15.1 million	$16.3 million	Price-less

In 2000, Community Unit District 300 voters approved a bond issue of $88 million to fund a list of specific projects. The district issued the bonds — and agreed to interest rates so high it earned a $13 million bonus, called a premium. District 300 paid $88 million for the projects voters approved. With its bonus, District 300 built the $8 million deLacey preschool center. Voters were not asked about the money or the preschool — but taxpayers will pay, to the tune of $178.5 million for their initial OK.

POLITICAL TITHES

Easily overlooked political donations reveal churches making campaign contributions

By John Fritze
The (Baltimore) *Sun*

Between industry executives, partnerships and political action committees, campaign finance reporters have their hands full making connections between the rich and the powerful. But sometimes stories lurk below the four-digit donations, waiting to be teased out of the oddest corners of a campaign.

For *The* (Baltimore) *Sun*, one of those odd places this year turned out to be the collection plate.

In a series of stories that relied on uncomplicated database work, the paper showed that more than 100 churches in Maryland were making campaign contributions – an act prohibited by federal tax law because the congregations are nonprofits. Though the donations were small, and easily overlooked, they added up to big money for a handful of candidates.

Some churches, including a Southern Baptist congregation in East Baltimore, had given at least a dozen times, pouring thousands into local and state races. Others, such as a Catholic church near the Delaware state line, had made a single contribution – in the form of a winning raffle ticket – that wound up, to the clergy's surprise, in the candidate's re-election account.

In all, Maryland churches gave $33,000 since 2000 – not a lot of money by any stretch. But with the law governing nonprofit political activity so clear, the stories drew an incredible response, forced most of the politicians to return the church donations and prompted a tip that led to an equally damning story about contributions made by public schools.

Big money

Like many good stories, this one started with a tip – made years ago to another reporter, but never thoroughly vetted. The rumor was that some politically active churches in Baltimore were cutting checks to state candidates, either because their members didn't understand the law or because they were ignoring it.

Checking it out took less than 30 seconds, thanks to the proliferation of campaign finance material online. Maryland, like many states, has a database available on its Board of Elections site that users can search by contributor name. City editor Howard Libit and I ran a wildcard search for the word "church," which instantly returned more than 300 records.

In Maryland, those results can be downloaded into a comma-delimited file, easily opened in Excel and Access. But ending the hunt there would have been a mistake. State election officials revealed that the full database – the one squirreled away on their server – carried fields not posted online, including street addresses. The data cost $100, but was invaluable for this story, and many since.

Cleaning up the data was a challenge. The "church" search – which we later expanded to include "cathedral," "synagogue," "temple," and "mosque," among others – returned many Churchill's and Churchville's, for instance. St. Mary's, meanwhile, would show up as "St. Mary's" in one candidate's report, "Saint Mary's" in another and "St. Mary's Catholic Church" in a third.

Some discrepancies were cleaned up with Excel's find-and-replace feature (we replaced a bunch of errant periods with no value, for example, and replaced all occurrences of "Saint" in favor of "St"). In Microsoft Access, a count query on the contributor's name and ZIP code (sorted by name) was a quick way to hunt down further problems. Churches whose names appeared consistently many times (high counts) could be ignored while those that showed up once or twice needed more scrutiny. Because the database was fairly small, it was easy to fix individual records by hand.

With contributor names "normalized," generating summary tables took only two queries and less than five minutes. In one, we grouped the data by contributor name and ZIP code and totaled the contributions. That showed top-giving churches. The other query grouped data by candidate and totaled contributions. That gave us top-receiving candidates. Those two tables were enough to get graphics started on a box of top givers and receivers. It also directed us toward the most egregious examples for the story.

In the original spreadsheet, a quick sort showed donations ranged from $5 to $2,000, with an average of $170. But the new queries showed that those small amounts added up to big money for some candidates. One state legislator from Baltimore County – a pastor – racked up more than $16,000 in church contributions.

A little faith, it turned out, could go a long way.

With data in hand, it was time to nail down the law. To this point, we assumed the contributions were illegal, but we needed to know for sure. The Internal Revenue Service would not talk on the record – not even in general terms – but the agency's press office provided a nonprofits expert on background and a brochure focused on nonprofit political activity that laid out the rules for churches.

The answer was clear: While nothing in federal or Maryland law prohibits candidates from *taking* money from congregations, churches are banned from giving. Most churches automatically receive tax-exempt status without applying and are covered under the same law that covers other 501(c)(3) organizations.

Those who break the rules face revocation of tax-exempt status or a 10 percent excise fee on the contributions.

Once the background material was collected, it was time to call churches and candidates. We put an initial round of calls out to 15 churches, mostly top givers, and later expanded that to 20 after many clergy did not return the calls. We kept trying, but the lack of church response was one of the only disappointing components of the story. Those who did talk insisted they had never made a political contribution, despite what the disclosure reports showed.

A pastor at a West Baltimore church, which turned up on disclosure reports seven times, said he bought tickets to events with church money, but didn't realize those events were fundraisers. Others echoed that argument, saying the dinners and breakfasts had been billed as events to honor members of the community, not raise campaign cash.

A range of officials – from both parties and all sectors of the state – offered an equally diverse set of explanations for taking the money. Some claimed not to review every check sent to their campaign. Others said they assumed clergy would pay their own way, which is legal. Most acknowledged that when they called to invite pastors to fundraisers, they rarely informed them of the law.

Do the right thing

In the days leading up to publication, we thoroughly reviewed every church and candidate that would be named in the story. The effort included cross-checking addresses and pulling corporation papers from the Secretary of State's office. We also visited every church in the story (and graphic) that had not returned our calls. On those visits, church officials received a packet that included, among other paperwork, an itemized list of all their reported contributions.

The story ran on a Sunday in late February and the paper ran an editorial two days later. For a while, not much happened. We got a tip from a reader suggesting we look into public school contributions – which became another good story. But, after publication, many churches still were not talking and some of the candidates closed down as well.

That all changed a few days later when the first state legislator, a delegate from Baltimore County, called to say she intended to "do the right thing" and return the church money, lest the contributions risk her church's nonprofit status. A short story that ran the next day on her actions pushed everyone else into line. By the end of the week, 75 percent of the money had been returned.

John Fritze has covered City Hall and campaign finance for The(Baltimore) Sun since last year. Before that, he was a government reporter for The Indianapolis Star.

LIGHTS OUT

Power authority questioned on expenditures, operation

By Michelle Breidenbach
The (Syracuse, N.Y.) *Post-Standard*

When Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the New York Power Authority (NYPA) into existence, he told radio listeners that he intended for the state's new hydropower to bring "more and cheaper electricity into the homes of the state, into the small shops and small industries, into the farms and into the flats."

It was 1931. He didn't say anything about one day generating enough profits for NYPA's executives to make charitable contributions to their favorite symphonies, jazz festivals and ski mountains. There was no mention of setting aside almost $1 million a year to dip into for pet projects like the one we uncovered: a fantasy winter Olympic camp for a New York congressman and his family and friends.

We exposed the slush fund and Rep. John Sweeney's ski camp in a two-day series at the end of March. Gov. George Pataki immediately called for his appointees at NYPA to re-examine their policies and make sure they are fair and open to all New Yorkers. The Assembly Energy Committee is collecting paperwork for public hearings.

Every year, the state establishes authorities to build public projects such as parking garages and stadiums. We looked into NYPA because the paper has made a commitment to pay more attention to the 700 public authorities the state has created since the days of FDR.

Playing hockey

We started our investigation with the information NYPA makes public, such as its proud sponsorship of jazz festivals, food drives and holiday parties. We wondered what any of that had to do with making electricity, so I asked for a full list of recipients from NYPA's community giving account for the past two years as well as written guidelines for choosing those recipients.

I drove to neighboring Rochester when NYPA held a special meeting in the hometown of one of their trustees. They bragged to their hosts about the authority's investment in 31 projects at 78 facilities in the Rochester area, resulting in more than $2.6 million in annual energy savings for taxpayers. They were putting in new heating, air conditioning and lights at City Hall and other Rochester-area buildings. Naturally, I asked for a list of projects in our area.

The authority provided a list that included only three current projects in Syracuse. The list stretched as far back as 1987, showing past involvement in Syracuse, a city that had sent no one to serve on the NYPA board in a dozen years.

I expanded my request, asking for an electronic version of a statewide list of energy efficiency projects. The authority's public records officer said it was policy not to release electronic data. I changed her mind with FOI opinions from the state's Committee on Open Government.

After receiving a spreadsheet that we could easily sort and summarize, I started calling the grant recipients.

On a hunch, I called a theater in Peekskill to ask how they got $89,615 in lighting, courtesy of NYPA. The Paramount Center for the Arts was a pet project of Gov. Pataki when he was the mayor of Peekskill. Many NYPA executives hail from that city. The theater director said they got four chandeliers and other lighting because one of their board members was a top lawyer at NYPA.

Next, I called the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA), another state public authority that runs Whiteface Mountain in Lake Placid and the other venues used in the 1980 Winter Olympics. Online county assessment records showed NYPA's President Eugene Zeltmann owns a home in Lake Placid. ORDA's spokesman said the state's $1.5 million invesment in new snow-making machines came from Zeltmann, a frequent guest.

NYPA also gave ORDA $25,000 to spend on a promotional event called the Congressional Winter Challenge. It is intended to bring members of Congress and their staffs to experience the venues first hand in the hopes that they will fight for federal money.

A Freedom of Information request for ORDA records produced an itinerary that showed guests reported to curling, hockey and speed skating within an hour of arrival. The weekend included cocktails, dinners and a torch lighting. Everyone won a medal. Other ORDA records showed the names of the team members and how they scored in various events.

The U.S. Olympic Committee, a nonprofit organization that rents space at ORDA, helped organize the weekend. They gave me a guest list that included the names of about a dozen Washington lobbyists and only one other member of Congress, Texas Rep. Pete Sessions, and his wife.

A Lake Placid photographer had pictures from previous years of Zeltmann riding a toboggan, playing hockey and posing with his arm around a former Olympian.

Corporate policies

Now, I cover state government, not electricity. I needed to put this in perspective. I wrote the definition of a kilowatt hour on a Post-It note, stuck it by the phone and started calling industry experts for an education. My editor, John Lammers, guided me with simple questions: Would an ordinary state agency give money to charity? Would the state transportation department give another agency public money to host a ski weekend for a congressman? How is NYPA

Todd Bissonette

NYPA President Eugene Zeltmann, second from left, on a sled at the Olympic Winter Challenge. The event is intended to have members of Congress and their staffs experience the venues first hand in the hopes that they will fight for federal money.

Todd Bissonette

NYPA President Eugene Zeltmann, left, is shown with his arm around Jim Craig, the 1980 Miracle on Ice goalie and gold medal winner. NYPA proudly publicizes its sponsorship of jazz festivals, food drives and holiday parties.

different from the agencies that report more directly to the governor and the legislature?

Our artist, Peter Allen, asked questions about the bigger picture: What is the New York Power Authority supposed to be doing? What was the state's original intent?

Donating profits to charity seemed more like the behavior of a private business than a state-run utility. We noticed the employees called it "the company" and they have "corporate policies." In what other ways had NYPA strayed from its government mission? I dIved into more of the records we had requested: the payroll, airplane trip records, an accounting of the hundreds of electric and hybrid-electric vehicles they had helped put on the street.

A quick sort of electronic payroll records showed 15 people make more than the governor's $179,000 annual salary. Almost 200 employees make more than $100,000 a year. NYPA has 21 vice presidents, 53 people with "director" in the title and 88 managers. A janitor makes $85,488 a year.

The airplane manifests showed executives flying between New York City, the suburb of White Plains and Albany. Other state employees take the train between those cities for a government rate of $94 round trip.

NYPA's procurement report showed payments to chartered airlines. The authority has spent $625,500 on video conferencing equipment, but they said they prefer to meet face to face. The organization produced a spreadsheet of chartered flights with destinations and reasons.

The procurement report showed expenses for consultants and outside attorneys. The authority has 21 lawyers on staff, but paid $2.9 million to outside attorneys in 2004. They spent about $600,000 on lobbyists to help them in Washington, D.C., and New York City.

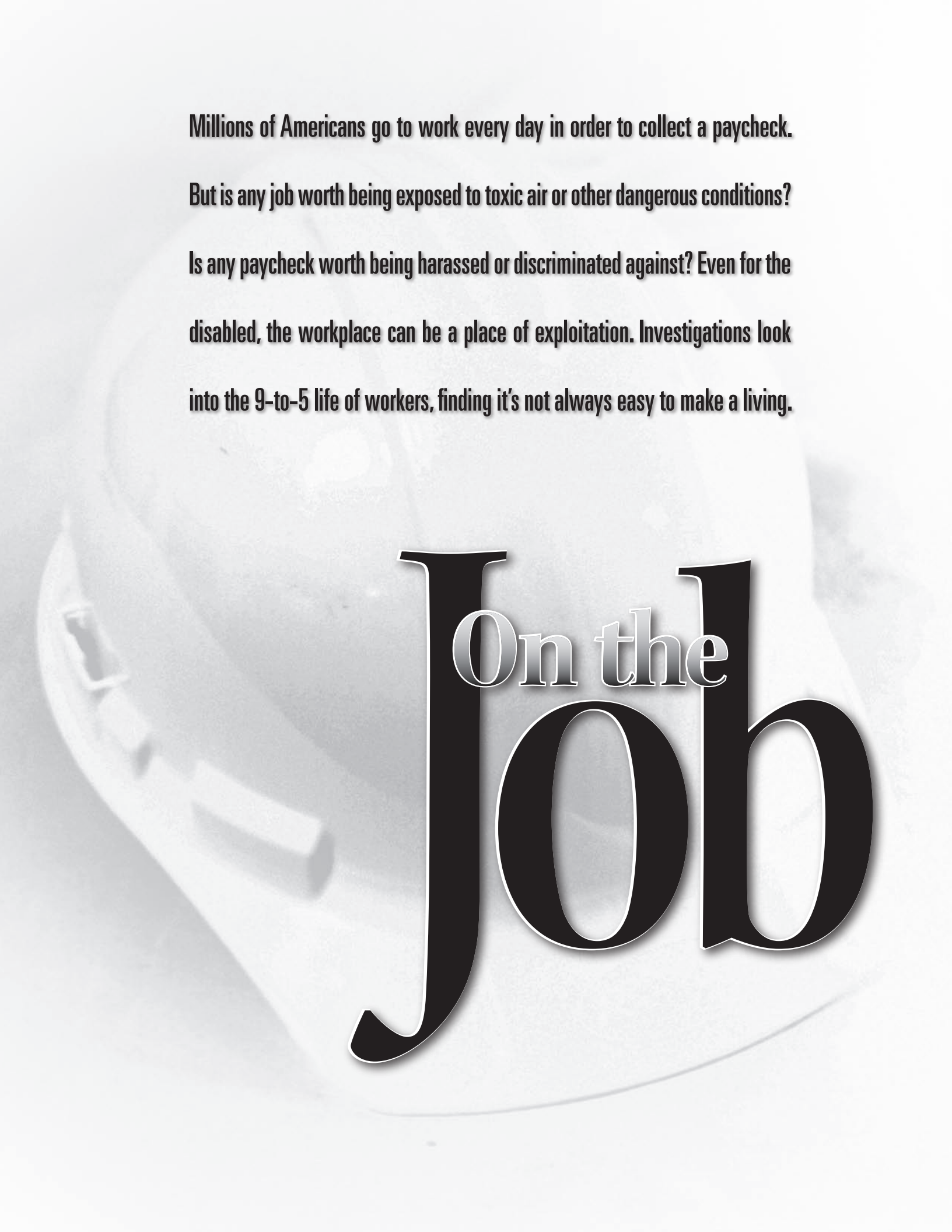
This reporting resulted in a two-day series that began March 26 with a story about the charitable giving, and a sidebar about the Olympic fantasy camp. The next day, we ran a portrait of today's NYPA. It began with FDR's original mission, using a radio transcript from his presidential library.

The New York Power Authority said it is proud of its programs, including its charitable giving.

To read the stories, responses and blog entries, visit www.syracuse.com/specialreports.

Michelle Breidenbach covers state government for The Post-Standard in Syracuse.

Millions of Americans go to work every day in order to collect a paycheck. But is any job worth being exposed to toxic air or other dangerous conditions? Is any paycheck worth being harassed or discriminated against? Even for the disabled, the workplace can be a place of exploitation. Investigations look into the 9-to-5 life of workers, finding it's not always easy to make a living.



On the Job

John Sleezer | The Kansas City Star

QUICK LOOK

Name of the story and when it was published:
"Discounted Lives," Dec. 11, 2005

How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc.)
I've had a long-time interest in worker's safety.

Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story:
Four months

Major types of documents used and if FOI requests were needed:
OSHA database, OSHA inspection records, lawsuits, worker's compensation records, police records, medical examiner records. I used the FOI numerous times to get federal and state records.

Major type of human sources used:
Families of victims, OSHA officials, former OSHA directors, union officials, safety experts, immigrant advocates, workers' compensation lawyers, business leaders and workers.

FATAL WORK

Employers net small fines from OSHA when workers injured, killed on the job

By Mike Casey
The Kansas City Star

In July 2000, Les James started his first day on a window-cleaning crew – and he was dead before lunchtime. The 25-year-old father of three was working on a window-washing rig that fell off the roof of a Kansas City hospital.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigated his death and cited his employer with serious safety violations. Eventually, James' employer paid the fine: $2,700.

The fine wasn't unusual. Low fines for workplace deaths or injuries are common even when OSHA cites employers for a serious violation, *The Kansas City Star* found in an examination of the agency's inspection database. We found that in 80 such fatal and injury accidents, half of the fines Kansas City area employers paid were $3,000 or less.

The Star's "Discounted Lives" also found that:

- OSHA greatly reduced penalties and downgraded its most serious charges in accidents that killed area workers.
- Workers died on the job because their employers failed to train them, give them the necessary equipment and establish sound safety practices.
- Hispanic immigrants – among the most vulnerable workers – were dying more frequently on the job and OSHA didn't appear to be doing nearly enough to protect them.

Any reporter could find similar stories in their hometown. It's a topic newspapers rarely write about, but the coverage will get a great deal of reader reaction. In just two weeks, we got more than 100 phone calls, e-mails and letters – the vast majority overwhelmingly positive. In reaction to the stories,

Congressional Republicans and Democrats said the agency had to improve.

A computer analysis was the framework for "Discounted Lives." This is how the project started: NICAR Database Library offers the OSHA database that summarizes some 3.3 million inspections from 1972 to the present. The database identifies companies, their violations, fines OSHA proposed, fines the companies paid, names of accident victims and much more. We obtained the data for Missouri and Kansas and then split off data for *The Star*'s circulation area, or nearly 30,000 computer records.

We focused on a 10-year span from 1994 to 2004 because the older records pertained to some companies that were no longer in business. I used Access and Excel in my analysis. I had worked with the OSHA database in the past, but sought the help of the agency's computer operations director who helped me structure my queries. (Those queries are available on the NICAR Web site at www.nicar.org/downloads.)

I concentrated on workplace fatalities and serious injury accidents and discovered the fines were low in workers' deaths. I also looked at how OSHA had downgraded its most serious violation – a willful one – to something called "unclassified."

About 15 years ago, OSHA started reclassifying willful violations with the idea of getting companies to pay nearly all of the proposed fines and fix hazards more quickly. However, in three Kansas City area accidents, OSHA not only removed the willful violation classification, it also dramatically lowered fines.

The computer findings started a hunt to find records. The key OSHA records are the OSHA citations, inspectors' narrative of the accident and the settlement of the case. In settlements, companies often get fine reductions. In addition to OSHA records, I used lawsuits, police records, fire department records, workers' compensation records and coroner's office records. The records led me to family members who recounted stories about their loved ones.

One victim was the father of two. In 1996, he was on a beam about 10 feet above the floor as he cleaned part of a steel mill. He fell, became entangled in a rope and died of asphyxia. His employer was cited for failing to provide fall protection such as a safety harness system.

OSHA proposed a $1,500 fine. When it didn't receive payment, OSHA turned the debt over to the Treasury Department, but it couldn't locate the company and the government gave up trying to collect. I found the company president through an Internet telephone directory.

In addition to the Internet, I used obituaries and LexisNexis public records searches to track down victims' family members. Sometimes the process was convoluted and time consuming. I found a victim's daughter in Kansas City by talking to her great-aunt who lived in Florida and knew the daughter's married name.

As I was checking the OSHA database that names victims, it became apparent that more Hispanics were dying on the job in Kansas City. Bureau of Labor Statistics records showed that the problem is a national one. Often these immigrant workers die without anyone really knowing who they are. In one case, OSHA only knew the victim to be "Claudio" – the only name the employer had for him.

Claudio died from a fall in 1999. I contacted Hispanic groups, police and others to find out Claudio's real name, but without luck. Finally, a funeral home in Kansas City that handled the bodies of several dead Hispanic workers was able to identify him fully: Claudio Felix Garcia-Medina. His body was taken to Oaxaca, Mexico, for burial.

If you're interested in doing a similar project, get started by:

- Getting a copy of OSHA's guide on conducting investigations. Visit www.osha.gov, which has a lot of information about the organization. The Web site allows you to check on past inspections if you know the employer. Click on the Search element on the right-hand side of the home page.
- Talking to your local OSHA inspectors.
- Checking with workers' compensation lawyers and safety professionals for various companies to give you some insight and leads.
- Checking out the AFL-CIO Web site (www.aflcio.com), which has good information on worker safety. Individual unions also have safety experts who can help you understand the issues.
- Contacting NICAR (www.nicar.org), which sells the OSHA database and has a copy of my queries that would work in any newsroom. Likewise, NICAR has the documents to help you understand the database. I want to mention that in the database, some companies are referred to by several names. For example, a Ford plant can be called Ford, Ford Motor or Ford Motor Co. By checking addresses, you can make sure you get all of the records for one company. The database also groups companies by their standard industrial classification – SIC – number. With this, you can find the industry with the most fatal accidents.

Mike Casey is a projects reporter for The Kansas City Star. He was previously at the Dayton Daily News, where he helped write a series of stories on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that won an IRE Award.

Stories from the IRE Resource Center

If you are interested in other stories on worker safety and OSHA, check out these stories available from IRE's Resource Center (www.ire.org/resourcecenter).

- **Story No. 20850:** An investigation of companies where workers died as a result of the alleged negligence of their employers. Many of the companies did not adhere to the safety regulations set up by OSHA. The reporters describe OSHA as "a toothless tiger" that does not always take these companies to task. David Barstow, Lowell Bergman, *The New York Times* (2003).
- **Story No. 21243:** A lawsuit involving the electrocution of a crane worker prompted this investigation that uncovered a loophole in safety law enforcement. While Texas law requires an electrical insulation device be used when cranes work near power lines, the state relies on OSHA to regulate and enforce workplace safety. So, the Texas law wasn't enforced. A spot check by reporters of numerous crane operators in the area showed they were not using the insulation device as required by law. The story prompted changes at OSHA and at the county level. Robert Arnold, Mark Muller and Joe Campos, KPRC-Houston (2003).
- **Story No. 2196:** Mexican-born workers are killed in heavy industry four times as often as American employees. Reporters found many of these deaths are because Mexicans did not speak English or did not receive medical treatment when injured because they were in the country illegally. Justin Pritchard, The Associated Press (2004).
- **Story No. 21525:** Workers in California's dairy industry are "modern-day slaves" who live in poor working conditions, fearful of losing their jobs. Those who aren't working at a "satisfactory" pace are beaten and those who complain to authorities are threatened. Rose Arrieta, *Dollars and Sense* magazine (2004).
- **Story No. 21558:** This series, which sought to identify the most dangerous jobs in Washington state, investigates preventable deaths among construction workers in the state. It looks at national and state laws, which do very little to punish those responsible with any serious fines. Barbara Clements, David Wickert, *The* (Tacoma, Wash.) *News Tribune* (2004).

IRE offers an extensive list of resources for investigating workplace safety, including data, tipsheets, more stories and Web links at www.ire.org/inthenews_archive/workplace_safety.html.

BAD AIR

Workers battle respiratory ailments after OSHA fails to establish regs

By Randy Ludlow
The Columbus Dispatch

They shuffled in with a loved one or a spouse, the bitterly cold evening literally stealing the breath from their damaged lungs.

Gathered around tables at the Southside Diner in Mount Vernon, Ohio, they each waited patiently to tell a personal story about how they were affected by bad air at the local TRW Automotive plant. David Ferguson's father spoke of his son's failed health and suicide. Robin Forster talked of her empty lungs and equally empty bank account. Bob Boughton recalled slicing a padlock off an exhaust-fan switchbox so that he could reach the switch to turn it on and remove some of the bad air that was clogging his lungs. Management had locked the switchbox to keep the fan off and save energy.

I had hoped to get a half-dozen interviews after prevailing upon a former employee at the TRW brake plant to serve as an intermediary, so I was astonished when more than 20 people showed up. In assembly line fashion, I spent more than three hours asking questions and scribbling furiously.

The workers' tales of lost wages and lost health – how they futilely fought for clean air in the workplace – were the heart of our front-page centerpiece, "Gasping For Help."

We discovered dozens of TRW employees remain disabled and out of work nearly five years after contracting respiratory ailments in the largest occupational outbreak of its type in U.S. history.

At least 107 of 400 workers at TRW's Mount Vernon plant fell ill beginning in late 2000. A virile bacteria hitchhiking on the bluish airborne mist of metalworking fluid was the suspected cause.

Puzzlingly, the outbreak received little media attention at the time. *The Dispatch* set out to correct that oversight when state editor Paul Souhrada discovered a message board discussing the plight of the sick workers.

No regulations

I never had undertaken an in-depth investigation of an occupational health issue, so I started from scratch, calling experts, physicians and others for tips and guidance. The crash course ultimately paid off.

After weeks of Web surfing, reviewing thousands of pages of records and conducting dozens of interviews, our research produced a story of warnings reportedly not heeded by TRW and the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Quick Look

Name of series or stories and when it was published:
"Gasping for help," Jan. 8

How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc.):
We began digging into the story after noticing a discussion on an online message board serving Mount Vernon, Ohio.

Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story:
Gathered information for two-plus months, hit it hard (nearly full-time) for six weeks.

Major type of documents used and if FOI requests were needed:
Ohio public records requests to Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation, Ohio Industrial Commission for workplace inspection reports, workers' claims, etc. Freedom of Information Act requests to Occupational Safety and Health Administration for workplace violation and inspection reports and information on metalworking fluids, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health for workplace health hazard evaluations and other reports. Court records examined relative to workers' claims for workers' compensation benefits and damages, depositions, etc.

Major type of human sources used:
Human sources include current and former TRW workers, union officials, occupational health experts, physicians, lawyers for TRW and ill workers, etc.

Mike Munden | The Columbus Dispatch

Craig Chadwick holds a reverse-airflow helmet that TRW offers to workers. He worked at TRW for only one year, but he says his breathing and strength have been greatly diminished. He says he was told by the employer that the equipment was available on the job, but it was not mandatory.

Mike Munden | The Columbus Dispatch

Craig Chadwick takes an armful of firewood from his wife Candy. As a result of his health problems, Candy does all the heavy lifting, while Craig has to breathe through a handkerchief because the cold air and smells bother him.

For its part, TRW argues that it values the health of its workers and that it never violated OSHA standards regulating the airborne levels of metalworking fluids.

And, actually, the $10 billion international conglomerate couldn't have violated OSHA standards – because they don't exist. Despite recommendations from its own advisory committee and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), OSHA has declined for years to regulate workers' exposure to metalworking fluid mist.

NIOSH has warned since 1998 that excessive levels of metalworking fluid, particularly when contaminated with bacteria, can damage workers' lungs. So, while OSHA acknowledges substantial evidence of serious health effects, it has refused to adopt standards for the substance commonly used throughout the auto industry. More dangerous workplace substances take priority, the agency says.

Still, airborne levels of metalworking fluid at TRW's Mount Vernon plant regularly exceeded the amounts NIOSH considers safe and on one occasion, were pegged at four times the recommended limit.

With exhaust fans turned off to save on energy bills and exterior doors chained shut, the plant's workers began to fall ill in increasing numbers in late 2000 and early 2001.

By the time NIOSH was called in to investigate the outbreak and TRW began to improve ventilation to clear the air, more than a fourth of the plant's workers had contracted occupational lung ailments of assorted severity. Workers filed a little-noticed lawsuit against TRW, and began to fight for workers' compensation benefits to pay medical bills and replace lost wages.

Mike Munden | The Columbus Dispatch

This TRW plant is near Mount Vernon, Ohio. Despite recommendations from its own advisory committee and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, OSHA has declined for years to regulate worker exposure to metalworking fluid mist.

Doing an investigation

Journalists seeking to investigate workplace hazards and worker health issues can tap a variety of resources to produce stories:

- State workers' compensation systems can provide employers' claim histories. Examining these records for patterns of occupational illnesses and injuries can document ongoing problems. We obtained a database of all claims filed by workers against TRW for the past 20 years from the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation. Software such as Excel or Access makes it easy to sort the information and identify trends by illness, injury and date while also providing worker names and addresses.
- OSHA's online database (www.osha.gov) can provide limited information about employer histories of violations and fines, but provides no details. Filing a Freedom of Information Act request with your local or regional OSHA office will produce the detailed reports documenting violations.
- State agencies also conduct workplace inspections and produce reports on safety and health issues. In Ohio, this duty falls to the Industrial Commission. A state public records request produced reams of documents on the TRW plant, including a report on an inspection only weeks before the first sick workers began to be hospitalized. The report revealed that 19 of 22 air samples exceeded NIOSH's recommended limit for airborne metalworking fluid.
- NIOSH, the occupational arm of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, investigates outbreaks of work-related illnesses, often producing detailed reports called health hazard evaluations. These reports analyze workplace conditions, examine worker health complaints and reach conclusions on the likely cause of illnesses such as those that afflicted the TRW workers. Some reports can be located online (www.cdc.gov/niosh), while others must be requested. NIOSH also offers an online library of excellent information about hazardous workplace chemicals, exposure recommendations and related diseases.
- Court records, as expected, produce a wealth of information, particularly in cases involving complex litigation and when workers and their employers fight awards or denials of workers' compensation benefits.

We reviewed dozens of lawsuits detailing worker health complaints, with many cases including depositions that were useful in locating workers with compelling stories and providing color on the conditions inside the plant.

The workers' lawsuit against TRW, alleging the company knowingly exposed its employees to hazardous conditions, helped provide a map to sources of information used in the story.

Randy Ludlow has been a state desk reporter for The Columbus Dispatch since 2002. He previously worked 19 years for The Cincinnati Post, including a decade as its statehouse bureau chief.

Faith Carthcart | The Oregonian

Megan Brixey, 27, has Down syndrome and has worked at a nonprofit's sawmill for four years. The charity's executive director has been trying to land a contract under the federal Javits-Wagner-O'Day program to bring in more money for workers.

CHARITY WORK

Nonprofit executives benefiting from industry for the disabled

By Tom Detzel
The (Portland) *Oregonian*

One day in late 2003, as *Oregonian* reporter Jeff Kosseff finished the annual purge of paper files towering from his desk, Managing Editor Steve Engelberg tossed a new stack of documents at him.

It was an IRS 990 – the tax form filed annually by every public charity. This 990 was for the Portland branch of Goodwill Industries, the national network of charities dedicated to helping the disabled. Engelberg wanted to know why Goodwill's CEO earned more than a half-million dollars in compensation and benefits.

Two-and-a-half years later, Kosseff and colleagues Bryan Denson and Les Zaitz have reviewed several thousand pages of 990s and spent hundreds of hours analyzing them. They have used complex financial data to show how nonprofits meant to help the disabled have grown into a multibillion-dollar industry that, to a large degree, benefits nonprofit executives.

In March, the newspaper's two-part series exposed abuses and weak oversight in the federal Javits-Wagner-O'Day program, which sets aside more than $2 billion a year in government contracts for charities that employ the blind and severely disabled.

The CEO of the program's biggest charity in El Paso resigned on the day we reported that he had paid his management firm $14 million in recent years while steering millions more of the charity's money into for-profit businesses in which he had a stake.

Regulators handed the charity more than $800 million in federal business over the years despite repeated findings that it couldn't adequately document its workers' disabilities.

The story took reporters outside Oregon to explore charities in neighboring Washington as well as Tennessee, New York, Michigan, Ohio, Maryland and Texas. They drew from more than 100 Freedom of Information Act requests to the Pentagon, the Department of Labor and the tiny federal agency that oversees the Javits-Wagner-O'Day program in Washington, D.C.

Setting priorities

When Kosseff received the Goodwill assignment in 2003, no one expected it to spawn a multiyear project. The Goodwill story appeared straightforward: How could a charity CEO make so much money? But the initial story raised questions about the fairness of a complex system in which charities benefited while paying disabled workers less than the minimum wage.

Quick Look

Name of the stories, and when they were published:
"Charity leaders prosper as 'disabled' is redefined," March 5; "Texas charity a launch pad for entrepreneur's empire," March 6

How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc.):
After writing about high executive salaries at the Portland-based Goodwill charity, reporters explored tips that charities employing the disabled are exploiting federal subsidies and not helping the most needy. Reporters focused on the Javits-Wagner-O'Day program, which sets aside more than $2 billion in federal contracts a year for the charities.

Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story:
10 months

Major types of documents used and if FOI requests were needed:
More than 100 FOIA requests to the Pentagon, Department of Labor, General Services Administration, and the tiny agency that oversees the Javits-Wagner-O'Day program. Documents included wage records, sales information and inspection reports.

Major type of human sources used:
Reporters spoke with hundreds of sources, including charity executives, disabled employees, federal regulators, former charity executives, policymakers, members of Congress and disability researchers.

On the Job

Faith Carthcart | The Oregonian

Former Marine Charles Wallace, left, works on military vehicles with Mike Davis at a fleet maintenance facility at Fort Lewis, Wash. Wallace, who is not disabled, owes his job to the same federal jobs program as Davis, a disabled Army veteran.

Because severely disabled workers have limited productivity, federal law allows employers to pay them a "special minimum wage" – sometimes only pennies an hour.

Kosseff further explored the disparity between executives and disabled employees in a 2005 story about an Oregon program that sets aside tens of millions of dollars a year in state and municipal contracts for nonprofits that employ the disabled.

Readers responded, urging Kosseff to investigate the much bigger Javits-Wagner-O'Day program that had doubled in sales since 2000. Critics said CEOs were cashing in on six-figure salaries at the expense of workers.

If true, the story had explosive implications. Javits-Wagner-O'Day is the government's most ambitious program to find jobs for people with severe disabilities – a class of Americans who are chronically underemployed. Kosseff, who by then had moved to *The Oregonian*'s Washington, D.C., bureau, initially teamed with Denson, an investigative reporter in Portland.

Javits-Wagner-O'Day is overseen by an obscure 15-member committee of presidential appointees. The panel has the power to remove any product or service purchased by the government from competitive bidding, then award that work to more than 600 nonprofits in the program. Contracts come with one key proviso: At least 75 percent of the labor at those charities must be performed by the blind or severely disabled.

FOIA became a key tool, with some negotiating. The Javits-Wagner-O'Day committee is an independent agency, staffed with 29 government employees. Unfortunately, the committee only has one part-time FOIA officer, and the agency had never before received heavy media scrutiny.

Staffers initially were overwhelmed by the newspaper's near-daily requests. They said that fulfilling the FOIAs probably would take months. To speed things up, the newspaper agreed to narrow the scope of some requests and set priorities for others.

The most important information to emerge was a database of annual financial and workforce information from the program's 627 nonprofits**.** These data showed a rapidly growing industry in which the majority of the government money went to the 50 largest nonprofits.

To determine what was going on with executive compensation and worker pay, we created our own database after buying the charities' IRS 990 forms from Guidestar. Denson took on the massive task of punching data from the 50 largest nonprofits into Microsoft Access.

Queries revealed that between 2000 and 2004, average pay for CEOs rose 57 percent, while pay for severely disabled workers increased 16 percent. The CEOs averaged $248,287 in pay and benefits in 2004, up from $158,400 in 2000.

By comparison, certificates filed with the Labor Department revealed that 1,644 workers at eight of the largest charities earned a median wage of $1.93 an hour.

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day committee relies on two nonprofit trade associations to regulate the program. Kosseff found that the trade groups receive up to 4 percent of the contract revenues as a commission, creating a fundamental conflict of interest.

The largest of those trade groups represents nonprofits that principally cater to sighted workers with severe disabilities. We found that it seldom did site visits to document workers' disabilities and only rarely challenged what its members reported.

Denson, Kosseff and photographer Faith Cathcart visited more than a dozen nonprofits. Among them was the program's biggest, the National Center for the Employment of the Disabled. The El Paso nonprofit makes military chemical suits, combat uniforms and other products.

The charity, known as NCED, took in $275 million from Javits-Wagner-O'Day in 2005. But NCED also stood out for another reason: the charity paid to a management company, founded by CEO Robert E. Jones, a total of $8.5 million in 2003 and 2004.

Jones, a former electrical contractor, took the helm of NCED when it was in bankruptcy in 1995, and built it up mainly with Javits-Wagner-O'Day

contracts. He was both revered and feared in El Paso, where his philanthropy won awards and his tough-minded business practices inspired respect. "I'm a hard-core business person," he told Kosseff, "not a born-again do-gooder."

Kosseff and Cathcart toured NCED's complex of factories. Many of the employees spoke only Spanish. With Cathcart interpreting, Kosseff interviewed a handful of employees chosen randomly on the sprawling factory floor. Oddly, none claimed to be disabled.

Through FOIA, we soon discovered that regulators had in fact questioned whether NCED was using enough disabled labor. Only a month earlier, it turned out, government investigators found that NCED had been counting "disadvantaged" employees toward the 75 percent labor requirement. But federal law is clear: the employees must be blind or "severely disabled" to be counted.

Files obtained by *The Oregonian* revealed that NCED had trouble documenting the disabilities of its workers for years. Yet its federal sales had surged, with Jones' management firm taking a cut. We decided to dig deeper on NCED and Jones' business interests.

Zaitz, a veteran investigative reporter, spent weeks in El Paso, Houston and Austin scouring business and court records. He found that Jones had run an electrical contracting firm into bankruptcy, had yet to pay a $500,000 judgment to the Department of Labor and had steered millions from NCED into businesses in which he held an interest, including a jet charter company.

Much of the business was conducted through Jones's family trust, Zaitz found. By this time, NCED and Jones had stopped answering questions. Jones never granted another interview.

Strong weapon

The Oregonian published the stories on March 5 and 6, 2006. The first-day story documented the steep rise in executive salaries and how charities increasingly hired employees with modest disabilities, not the severely disabled workers who Javits-Wagner-O'Day was designed to serve.

Day two focused on how NCED and Jones had prospered amid lax oversight. We reprinted an NCED internal document showing executives were aware they did not have enough disabled laborers. We also reprinted a $1.5 million check Jones signed from NCED to his management firm for a loan. More documents and two slide shows were posted on our Web site.

Jones resigned the day that story was published.

Three days later, the program's biggest trade group recommended that the government disbar NCED. The trade group, citing its own report, said that less than 8 percent of the charity's work had been performed by people with true disabilities.

The stories required reporters to cultivate strong relationships with insiders and former insiders at the charities and the government. The stories also required the newspaper to stop, from time to time, and challenge its own assumptions.

Perhaps most important, the stories underscored how a little nagging and negotiation can break loose stalled FOIA requests. At a time when other press freedoms are being challenged, the Freedom of Information Act remains a strong weapon to get to the truth.

The stories are available at www.oregonlive.com/special/disability.

Tom Detzel is The Oregonian's investigations editor.

Faith Carthcart | The Oregonian

Chong Franklin sews military pants at the National Center for Employment of the Disabled in El Paso. Federal regulators have questioned whether the operation has been using enough disabled labor to comply with the law.

HOSTILE ACTS

Firefighters claim sexual harassment, discrimination still exist on the job

By Jason Kandel
(Los Angeles) *Daily News*

Last year I got an anonymous letter that outlined instances of workplace hazing and harassment against women and minorities in the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD). Such incidents were not unknown to the LAFD. In the 1990s a videotape dubbed the "female follies" showed women fumbling through firefighters' boot camp. In recent years, an African American firefighter unknowingly had dog food put into his spaghetti, and a woman was severely injured during a drill dubbed "the humiliator," which involved lifting a 299-pound, 35-foot ladder.

I found that the fire department, which spent the past decade trying to put an end to such discrimination and harassment, was scrambling to investigate new offenses, dole out discipline and contain the fallout.

So, I wrote several articles exposing recent harassment inside the LAFD. Those stories prompted the city to order a departmental audit.

Still, calls from firefighters urged me to stay on the story and to keep investigating. Both female and male firefighters began hiring lawyers and threatening to file lawsuits related to sexual harassment and discrimination on the job.

My colleague, Dan Laidman, and I decided to dig into the status of recent cases and see what action had been taken by LAFD. We filed a public records request with the City Attorney's office for claims and lawsuits involving workplace hazing, harassment and other bad behavior at the LAFD. Within a week, we had numbers and more than a dozen interviews with firefighters, city officials and lawyers that gave us the framework for a story called "LAFD Suits on the Rise."

We found the number of cases has ebbed and flowed over the years, but jumped to 13 in 2004-05. We found that, even though less than 3 percent of the 3,562-member department is female, women accounted for more than half of the plaintiffs in lawsuits filed against the department between 1996 and 2005.

Through the city attorney's data, we found liability payouts had topped $1 million in the past five fiscal years. With more lawsuits on the horizon, it was clear the city would face more costs in the next few years.

The story, along with the results of the city's audit, highlighted that the LAFD is perceived by nearly a quarter of the 1,811 minorities in the department as being a hostile place to work, where employees are too afraid to report incidents of hazing and harassment for fear of retaliation.

Accused speak out

In our investigation, we interviewed firefighters, their attorneys, city officials and LAFD Chief William Bamattre. Lawyers e-mailed me court documents, providing details about pending cases. In one suit, a woman claimed a male supervisor sexually harassed her. She complained internally, but alleged that no investigation was done and the supervisor she accused of harassing her retired before he was even questioned about the issue.

Another case revealed that a male firefighter, who said he was heterosexual, filed a claim against the department alleging sexual harassment and discrimination. He said his male supervisor made sexually suggestive gestures towards him, inappropriate remarks about his wife, and threatened to fire him if he complained.

One female captain expressed the frustration of many firefighters, lamenting that the department had not changed much since the female follies videotape, a case that prompted complaints to the federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and resulted in public criticism from city officials.

Our story was further bolstered when the L.A. City Controller released an 86-page audit that blamed weak management and a poor disciplinary system for rampant discrimination and retaliation in the LAFD.

Still, I knew the accused needed to have their story told as well. I searched voter registration records and phone books to find the home phone numbers of the accused firefighters, and used the California Bar Association Web site to find the attorneys representing them. We did find a captain accused of harassing a female firefighter who was threatening to sue the department. He claimed that he and others accused were the department's scapegoats.

Stationhouse tradition

This is a story that can be replicated across the country. Many fire departments are struggling to recruit more women and minorities. Chief Bamattre said many firefighters hold on to an old stationhouse tradition in which horseplay is viewed as part of the fraternity, but that it is not acceptable in today's workforce.

Reporters in other cities should cultivate sources in firefighters' unions to find out what's happening on the job. For example, the LAFD has a union, but it also has unions that represent the black, Latino and female firefighters.

The civilian Fire Commission monitors the LAFD, and is developing an action plan for the mayor on how to change the department. If your city has a fire commission, follow the agendas closely to see what the department is doing about recruiting.

When I first started following this story, I wrote an article about how the department was tapping its female veterans to go out to military bases, construction sites and even truck stops to recruit more women. That gave me an introduction to some of the women in the department who have been great sources for information and steered me to other contacts.

I would suggest other reporters follow the disciplinary process. When a LAFD firefighter is accused of wrongdoing and faces discipline, he or she can fight it in a process known as a board of rights hearing. In Los Angeles, these hearings are similar to military courts-martial with a panel of fire chiefs and union representatives for the accused. Another designated firefighter acts as a prosecutor and case details are laid out similar to court hearings.

Jason Kandel has been a staff writer at the Los Angeles Daily News for six years.

Quick Look

Name of story, and when it was published:
"LAFD Suits on the Rise," March 12

How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc.)
Tip

Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story
One week

Major types of documents used and if FOI requests were needed:
FOI requests to the Los Angeles City Attorney, court records and a city audit of the Los Angeles Fire Department

Major type of human sources used:
Firefighters, lawyers, the fire chief, city officials

RELATED RESOURCES

By Megan Means
The IRE Journal

The following sources can help reporters dig in to labor issues locally or globally, whether you're interested in workplace safety, urban or rural concerns, fair labor standards or downsized workforces and pension plans.

Tipsheets

Check out the best advice from other IRE members in tipsheets compiled from past conference panels and available through the IRE Resource Center. Search the story and tipsheet databases at www.ire.org/resourcecenter. Call 573-882-3364 or e-mail rescntr@nicar.org to order copies.

- "Exposing Workers Perils," offers advice about using Bureau of Labor Statistics data and suggestions for reporting, cultivating sources and writing a readable story. (No. 2062)
- Advice on focusing an investigation based on OSHA data, along with a list of people to contact and other data sources. (No. 2458)
- "Death on the Job," is about the challenges of using common labor data to track deaths among undocumented workers. It also recommends alternative sources such as the Center for Immigration Studies or police/coroner records. (No. 1862)
- "Investigating Agriculture: Digging down on the farm," suggests questions to ask about labor violations among agricultural workers, how to track down regulatory agencies and how to locate data on migrant farm workers. (No. 2086)
- Information on state worker compensation claims, insurance industry contacts, workers' advocacy groups and industry analysts. (No. 1758)
- Web resources on sweatshops, child labor, slavery and international companies that use exploitive labor practices. (No. 1601)

Web

- The U.S. Department of Labor's Web site (www.dol.gov) is a starting point for understanding the bureaucracy that monitors American workers; it links to a wealth of labor force and economic data. The home page links to sub-offices devoted to specific regulatory issues, including:
- The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (www.osha.gov), which offers regulatory information, reports and statistics. Search workplace inspection and accident data at www.osha.gov/oshstats.
- The Mine Safety and Health Administration (www.msha.gov)
- The Administrative Review Board, the Workers Compensation Appeals Board and the Office of Administrative Law judges, which handle hearings for the labor department (www.dol.gov/ejudication).
- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), is part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The medical background on workplace hazards and the latest research about exposure or best practices for safety is available (www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html). The site offers searchable and downloadable surveillance data on adult lead poisoning, mine safety, illnesses and accidents, pesticide illnesses, respiratory illnesses and occupational fatalities.
- The CDC's Work-RISQS (www2a.cdc.gov/risq) system collects data on occupational injuries treated in emergency rooms and uses it to generate national risk estimates and estimated non-fatal injury rates.
- Occupational health experts and academic sources are available at the 16 U.S. educational institutions designated as NIOSH Education Resource Centers. Leading education and training programs for occupational health professionals, employers, workers, policy makers and the public are available (www.niosh-erc.org/ERClocate/locator.htm).
- A collection of international Web resources called OSHweb (www.oshweb.com) is sponsored by the International Social Security Association based in Brussels, Belgium (www.issa.int). Set up like an index, it has an online resource list set up by category and topic.
- The International Labor Organization, a United Nations agency devoted to human rights and labor issues, offers news, research and policy papers. It serves as a clearinghouse of global labor laws, resources and workforce data on its multilingual Web site (www.ilo.org).

Data

- The U.S. Department of Labor keeps several data sets that allow journalists to track labor violations in the workplace and monitor federal programs designed to protect workers. Several can be obtained from IRE and NICAR's Database Library. (See more information and free data samples at www.ire.org/datalibrary or call 573-884-7711 for assistance.)
- The Workplace Safety database from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offers a look at workplace inspections violations since 1972. It contains key information on routine OSHA inspections, assessed violations and fines, accident summaries and incidents involving hazardous substances. Case numbers in the database, which lists only closed cases, provide a starting point for requesting paper files. See inspection reports and searchable data online at www.osha.gov/oshstats. This data is available from the Database Library.
- The Wage and Hour Violations database comes from the office responsible for monitoring key labor laws, including rules governing overtime, minimum wage, family and medical leave, and migrant agricultural workers. The main table lists case details, such as the number of affected employees and any assessed back wages or other compensation. The violations table details include which federal labor laws were broken, the violation dates and whether an injury, time-loss or accident resulted. This data is available from the NICAR Database Library.
- Find out which companies have sought federal benefits for workers hurt by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or applied for assistance under Trade Act programs for jobs lost to overseas competition. The labor department records details from aid applications in its NAFTA-TAA database, showing companies, government agencies or trade unions that apply, the number of workers affected and petition approval/denial status. The NAFTA data lists the goods the petitioner produced and the agency's decision code listing the justification for assistance. The Trade Act data has a determination code and categorizes each petitioner by standard industry classification codes. This data is available from the NICAR Database Library.
- Certain pension and benefit plans covered by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 must file an IRS Form 5500, Annual Return/Report of Employee Benefit Plan, and related documents, some of which must be made available to the public. See the IRS Web site for a summary of what's on the form and who files (www.irs.gov/instructions/i5500). Raw data (ASCIII text) from Form 5500 can be requested by sending a FOIA request to Sharon Watson, Employee Benefits and Security Administration, 200 Constitution Ave. NW, Rm. N-5623, Washington, D.C., 20216. Free and fee-based Form 5500 searches are available at www.freeERSA.com.

ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Knight Chair in Investigative & Enterprise Journalism, Department of Journalism, University of Illinois

Position/Academic Rank:
Associate or Full Professor, tenured.

Qualifications:
Significant professional experience and exceptional credentials in the area of investigative and enterprise journalism, with a record of distinguished achievement; bachelor's degree required, advanced degree preferred.

Salary: To be negotiated.

Description: The Department of Journalism at the University of Illinois seeks distinguished applicants for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Chair in Investigative and Enterprise Journalism. Our Department is a professionally oriented program within a major Research I university. We have a proud tradition in public affairs journalism education. The Knight Chair holder will be a journalist of the highest national professional reputation and demonstrated achievement, with exemplary credentials and deep experience in the area of investigative/enterprise reporting in print, broadcast, magazines, books, documentaries, and/or multi-media. An accomplished teaching record in journalism and/or investigative and enterprise reporting will be considered a plus. Evidence of potential teaching excellence in necessary. Experience in computer-assisted reporting and or multi-media will also be an asset. The successful candidate will teach a variety of journalism courses to highly motivated and selective print and broadcast students at one of America's top public universities. The Chair Holder will conduct programs in educational outreach in investigative/enterprise reporting to professional journalists through workshops and seminars and through the maintenance of a Chair website. The Chair Holder will also be expected to continue selective investigative/enterprise endeavors of national significance, and will contribute to the body of knowledge in the field through the work. Minorities, women and other designated class members are encouraged to apply.

Deadline: To ensure full consideration, applications must be received by Oct. 1, 2006. Appointment Begins: August 16, 2007. Nature of Appointment: Academic year, full-time.

To Apply: Send full details on qualifications. Applicants must include a current curriculum vitae; a letter outlining employment history and achievements in the world of professional journalism, including relevant print, broadcast or multi-media samples that demonstrate work in investigative/enterprise reporting; and names and phone number of three references. Send to Prof. Rich Martin; Chair, Knight Search Committee; University of Illinois; Department of Journalism; 810 S. Wright St.;119 Gregory Hall; Urbana, IL 61801.The University of Illinois is an Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity Employer.

More than 800 journalists attend IRE Conference

By *The IRE Journal* Staff

More than 800 journalists from 15 countries attended IRE's 30th Annual Conference with more than 100 panels and workshops to choose from over four days.

Bill Marimow, vice president of news for National Public Radio and a longtime IRE member, delivered the keynote address at the IRE Awards Luncheon. A showcase panel about legal assaults on the investigative press featured top lawyers and journalists, including author James Bamford; Jonathan Donnellan, senior counsel for Hearst Corporation; Mark Feldstein, George Washington University; Richard Goehler, Frost Brown Todd LLC; Joseph R. Larsen, Ogden, Gibson, White, Broocks & Longoria LLP; and David Smallman, Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz PC.

The conference included a bilingual track on investigating issues in the Latino community in the United States and in Latin America and panels on nearly every topic with speakers who have won major awards in investigative reporting during the past year.

Members can get tipsheets and recordings from the conference by visiting www.ire.org/training/dallasfortworth06. For more information, contact IRE at rescntr@ire.org or 573-882-3364.

The IRE membership held its annual meeting and board elections for seven of the 13 seats. James Grimaldi of *The Washington Post* was elected president of IRE's board of directors and said he looks forward to increased international and diversity efforts and completing IRE's $5 million endowment drive.

"I am lucky to be elected president of such a passionate and talented board, and I'm doubly proud that it is probably the most diverse in IRE history," Grimaldi said.

"Every member brings special talents and a dedication to our priorities of ensuring IRE's long-term survival and expanding our teaching to all walks of journalism life."

The 2007 IRE Conference will be at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Spa in Phoenix. Get more information about the conference at www.ire.org/training/phoenix07.

Board elections

The IRE membership elected board members for seven of the 13 seats on the board at the membership meeting at its annual conference in Fort Worth on June 17.

They are:

- New member Wendell Cochran, American University
- New member Renee Ferguson, WMAQ-Chicago
- New member Manny Garcia, *The Miami Herald*
- Incumbent Dianna Hunt, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*
- Incumbent Mark Katches, *The Orange County Register*
- Incumbent Stephen Miller, *The New York Times*
- New member Duff Wilson, *The New York Times*

The other members are David Boardman, *The Seattle Times*; Cheryl Philips, *The Seattle Times*; James Grimaldi, *The Washington Post*; Duane Pohlman, WEWS-Cleveland; Deborah Sherman, KUSA-Denver; and Nancy Stancill, *The Charlotte Observer*.

Marilyn W. Thompson of the *Lexington Herald-Leader* and Lise Olsen of the *Houston Chronicle* were elected to be IRE Awards judges. They will join several board members and a Missouri School of Journalism faculty member on the contest committee.

The board elected Grimaldi as president, Phillips as vice president, Hunt as treasurer and Miller as secretary. The board elected Stancill as a member of the executive committee, which is composed of the officers and one other board member.

Bob Haynes | Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Dylan Rivera of *The Oregonian* talks with Lance Williams at a book signing for Game of Shadows: Barry Bonds, BALCO, and the Steroids Scandal that Rocked Professional Sports, by Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada.

TOWING WOES

Vehicles donated to charity wind up in hands of crooks

By Dave Savini and Michele Youngerman
WBBM-Chicago

Tracy Kaczynski thought she could help. She had an older car she no longer needed and decided to donate it to the Alzheimer's Association of Greater Illinois.

"It was stupid at the time, but I thought maybe donating this car could find a cure," says Kaczynski, who lost her mother to the disease.

But Kaczynski discovered after our investigation that she is one of thousands of people who donated cars to charities, only to have those vehicles, or the proceeds from them, diverted.

Specifically, our five-month undercover investigation with the *Naperville* (Ill.) *Sun* revealed what could be one of the largest car donation schemes in history. At least 4,238 donated cars, and a few boats, with an estimated value of more than $2 million never made it to the charities. Instead, they allegedly ended up padding the pockets of convicted felons in Illinois.

The Alzheimer's Association of Greater Illinois might have been cheated from receiving proceeds from 189 vehicles, include Kaczynski's. Law enforcement officers believe there may be more than 200 charities victimized nationwide.

Deceptive practices

Towing companies act as middlemen for charities. In some cases, charities directly hire tow operators. In other cases, when a charity receives a call that someone wants to donate a car, it passes that information to an organization that handles car donation programs. That company in turn hires towing companies to pick up the car and either sell or scrap it. A portion of the proceeds are supposed to go to the charity. But officials say that was not always the case with two towing operators: O'Hare Kars and Royal Auto and Towing.

Kaczynski's car was towed by Royal Auto and Towing. Dwayne Ronczkowski of Royal Auto and Towing refused to comment, but our investigation shows he has numerous criminal convictions involving car titles, theft, deceptive practices and fraud. He is being sued for not sending payment to multiple charities involving 3,834 donated cars.

O'Hare Kars is run by convicted felon William Zuccaro and his son Joseph. William Zuccaro has a felony record that includes vehicle title fraud, stolen vehicles, theft, assaults and an illegal possession of firearm. We found he was operating an illegal car dealership without a valid business license. So far, our probe has linked at least 500 missing donated cars, worth an estimated $250,000, to the Zuccaros.

One of those cars belonged to the original tipsters on this story, Janet and Frank Irion. The couple donated their car to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Janet Irion, who has diabetes, says she was told the car was being sold for scrap and the proceeds would go to the charity. But she says a year later the car was found on a Chicago street loaded with drugs.

O'Hare Kars has been shut down by the Illinois Secretary of State's police force and is under investigation by several other state and federal government agencies. Joseph Zuccaro has been charged with operating as an unlicensed auto recycler.

Fred Serpe, an attorney for the Zuccaros, says his clients intend on making good on any monies outstanding to charities. He could not say when the Zuccaros would make payment.

Donation middlemen

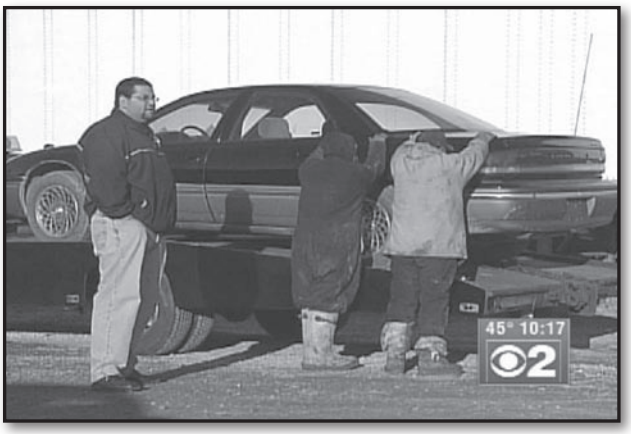
Officials from the charities involved have stated they had no idea they were stiffed on payments until they learned of our investigation. In fact, we found at least 187 charities unknowingly using companies without valid business licenses run by convicted felons. These charities fired the tow operators involved and launched internal investigations into how car donation programs were being handled.

Police from the Secretary of State and the Illinois

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31 ➢

WBBM-Chicago

Tracy Kaczynski discovered after an investigation that she was one of thousands of people who donated cars to charities, only to have those vehicles, or the proceeds from them, diverted to middlemen for profit.



Police raid O'Hare Kars, which was accused of towing donated cars and not turning the proceeds over to the charities.

Surveillance and background checks

After we got the tip from the Irions, we started by conducting surveillance and background checks on the company that towed their car, O'Hare Kars. We searched for business licenses and police reports and conducted criminal and civil background checks on its owners.

We spent months watching vehicles being brought in and taken out of their tow lots, collecting vehicle identification numbers (VIN) and license plate numbers at night when the business was closed. Next, we ran these identifiers through an Illinois Secretary of State database and found the original owners/donors of the cars. We created our own database of donor names, VIN numbers, makes and models.

When we contacted these donors, we found out which charities were supposed to receive their cars, then called each charity. That's when we discovered neither the vehicles nor the proceeds ever made it to the organizations.

During this time, our civil litigation search helped us identify Royal Auto and Towing. We continued to build our database to determine how much money and how many vehicles were diverted from each charity.

We also checked Illinois charitable laws and found no one regulating these middlemen in Illinois and most other states.

The Star-Ledger

Essex County has been called New Jersey's murder capital, with one in three of the state's killings occurring in Newark and surrounding towns. But police and prosecutors have struggled to put murderers behind bars.

JUSTICE DENIED

Unraveling conviction rate shows system broken, numerous problems highlighted in investigation

By Jonathan Schuppe
The (Newark, N.J.) *Star-Ledger*

Over the years, the Essex County, N.J., justice system has become infamous for its embarrassing mistakes in murder cases, such as the time a crime scene investigator admitted he didn't dust for fingerprints in a ransacked house where two people were shot to death.

Even Senate President Richard Codey joked that if you wanted to commit a murder without getting caught, "just drag the body into Essex County."

It was clear to our editor, Jim Willse, that it was time to start finding some answers. He gathered reporters and editors in his office last summer and ordered an investigation into the county's homicides and why the conviction rate was so dismal. In January, we published a three-day series with this opening line: "Kill someone in Essex County and chances are you'll get away with it."

Our statistical analysis revealed that fewer than half of the murders in Essex County resulted in a conviction of murder or any other crime. The reasons for the mess included: police and prosecutors unable to protect witnesses from being intimidated or killed; cases built around a single unreliable eyewitness; a county crime scene unit so undermanned and disorganized that evidence was missed; and overworked homicide investigators who rushed to arrest or ignored leads that pointed to other suspects.

After the series ran, the politicians reacted. Essex County Prosecutor Paula Dow and Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo got the state to free up forfeiture accounts to pay for improvements. Dow invited the state police to conduct an exhaustive review of the Crime Scene Unit, and announced she would have a new headquarters built. Newark Police Director Anthony Ambrose expanded his homicide squad, put detectives on a new night shift, promised better training and created a cold-case unit.

Privately, investigators thanked us for forcing officials to act after years of broken promises.

System failure

We approached this project methodically. Our first step was to analyze all the county's homicides over a certain period. We decided on the years 1998-2003, which allowed enough time for the cases to move through the courts. Computer-assisted reporting specialist Rob Gebeloff came up with a list of fields needed to analyze all 637 cases. The Essex County Prosecutor's Office gave courthouse reporter Bill Kleinknecht a spreadsheet of victims and defendants. Then he went to work in a first-floor courthouse office, where he ran each defendant's name through Promis/Gavel, the state's criminal court computer tracking system.

At the same time, I was submitting public records requests to county and local police departments seeking documents that would explain what policies guided their homicide investigations, and how much they spent. Those requests dragged on for weeks as police and prosecutors resisted giving up many of the documents, or said they didn't keep information in the format we needed.

By mid-summer we had a clean and dependable database with which we could start analyzing all 637 homicides. Gebeloff found just 395 cases in which someone was charged with murder or manslaughter. In those cases, there were 555 defendants, but only 236 who were convicted or pleaded guilty to murder or first-degree manslaughter. In the end, only 93 people got the 30-year sentence required by state law for anyone convicted of murder.

Armed with Gebeloff's analysis, Kleinknecht and I set out building a body of case studies from court documents, trial transcripts, police reports and interviews. From our database, we knew which cases failed and the names of the defense lawyers involved. We began by asking lawyers to walk us through the cases and give their impressions of how the system failed.

From there, we moved on to prosecutors, investigators, detectives, retired officials and experts.

As our interviews progressed, we compiled a list of key failures we wanted to feature in our stories. We also made a file in which we catalogued the cases that best illustrated those failures. In a third file, we summarized our interviews and key quotes. All of this proved indispensable once we started writing months later.

Naturally, our lists kept changing. Some of our early theories about why homicide cases failed were debunked. New ones popped up.

One of the most disturbing discoveries was the pathetic condition of the Crime Scene Unit, housed in an old parking garage with spotty electricity and ventilation. It became clear the CSU deserved a story of its own.

We also noticed that three of our most illustrative cases had the same gang leader as a defendant. We turned his extraordinary record into a story about how one man beat the system.

It won't come as a surprise that it was difficult getting prosecutors, investigators and detectives to talk candidly, let alone on the record. No one

The Star-Ledger

A statistical analysis revealed that fewer than half of the murders in Essex County resulted in a conviction. Part of the problem is a county crime scene unit so undermanned and disorganized that evidence is missed, and overworked homicide investigators.

in any of the local law enforcement agencies was allowed to speak to the press without authorization. Even the retirees were too scared to come out publicly, or didn't want to embarrass their former colleagues.

It took weeks of cold calls, secret lunches and many beers to get people to warm up. But we eventually had a good number of people feeding us information and steering internal documents our way.

Raising awareness

When reporting a project like this, it often feels as if there is another nugget of news just out of your reach, and all you need is a little time to keep burrowing. But our regular beats beckoned, so by the end of the year we stopped digging and started to write.

Members of the photo and art departments had been included in progress meetings throughout the process, so when the time came to get the project ready for publication, everyone had a clear idea on how to present it. Project graphics editor Andrew Garcia Phillips designed a color-coded flow chart to illustrate the statistical analysis. Photographer Scott Lituchy had snapped some evocative pictures of homicide scenes.

Throughout the reporting process, Kleinknecht and I kept reminding our colleagues that we couldn't ignore the human side of this project – namely, the victims' families. We debated for months how to best portray their side of the story. On the first day of the series, we published a set of cold cases called "Justice Denied" in which we revisited some of these families. On the third day, we told our main story – about the unraveling of a seemingly airtight case – from the perspective of the victim's relatives.

On the series' final day, I got an e-mail from one mother of a young man whose 2004 murder we profiled. She said she was outraged and was going to contact other mothers to see if there was anything they could do to raise awareness of their plight. Other families thanked us for showing that their loved ones were not forgotten.

Jonathan Schuppe is a staff writer at the Star-Ledger in Newark, N.J., where he covers police and criminal justice issues.

Bruce Kellman | The News Tribune

Defensive end Grant Wistrom, left, and tackle Floyd "Pork Chop" Womack. Womack is the biggest man on the Seattle Seahawks line at 6-foot-4 and 333 pounds. However, there are 44 defensive and offensive linesmen in the NFL who weigh more.

FATAL PLAY

NFL athletes dying at alarming rate, weight-related problems at issue

By Thomas Hargrove
Scripps Howard News Service

When my editors at Scripps Howard News Service gather at the morning meetings in our Washington, D.C., office on Vermont Avenue, they frequently like to "tsk-tsk" at breaking news of disturbing trends in America.

In late August last year, the "tsk-tsking" was over the sudden death of San Francisco 49ers' guard Thomas Herrion, 23, who collapsed and died during an exhibition game with Denver. The 6-foot-3, 315-pound Herrion's NFL career ended before it had begun. (An autopsy would later reveal he had a scarred and oversized heart. A medical examiner concluded death was from coronary disease.)

"Isn't this happening a lot these days?" a female editor asked. The men in the circle started citing the list of football greats and not-so-greats who died suspiciously young. The conversation quickly focused on weight. These amazing guys in the NFL have become behemoths, often surpassing 350 pounds.

"Let's see if Hargrove can do something on this," someone said.

Let the record reflect that I know almost nothing about football, and darn little about most other sports. But I am the computer-assisted research advisor for E.W. Scripps' 21 daily newspapers and co-founder of the Scripps Survey Research Center at Ohio University. It sounded like a numbers story, so I got it. To this day, however, I don't see much of a difference between fullbacks and halfbacks, tackles and guards.

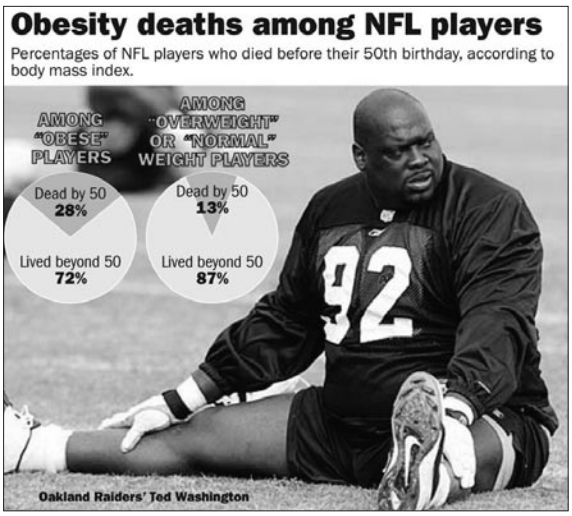
Total football

The start of any CAR project, like the scientific method itself, is to state a premise and determine if it can be proved or disproved. Are defensive and offensive linesmen dying young because they have gotten heavy?

That they have gotten much more massive was simple to prove. By assembling team roster data from NFL Web sites and old media guides the sports department keeps on dusty shelves, it became obvious the average player has grown 10 percent in body weight from 1985 to 2005. The league average last year was 248 pounds. The heaviest position, offensive tackle, has grown from an average of 281 pounds two decades ago to 318 pounds in 2005.

By using the "body mass index" created by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute – the player's weight in pounds divided by the square of his height in inches and then multiplied by the constant value 703 – it was a simple matter to calculate who in the NFL is medically considered to be normal, overweight and obese. The index calculation (using Microsoft Excel) showed that 56 percent of last year's roster was obese, up from about 44 percent in 1985.

That part was easy. But is the increasing weight causing death and other health problems? A call to the NFL headquarters drew a frosty response. I was reminded by their spokesmen that the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health had studied



George Sterling | SHNS

the matter in 1994, and concluded professional players were not dying younger than average. And no, the NFL does not keep mortality data, they said.

The NFL Players' Association was a little more sympathetic. They are working with the Sports Medicine Research Laboratory at the University of North Carolina, where research into the health of retired NFL players will continue for many years. But their pension records are private, they said.

The primary keeper of statistics for the NFL is the Elias Sports Bureau in New York City. The bureau is the source for just about every stat used by television announcers during the games. They refused to provide data, even for a fee. (People in the football industry warned me that football data is carefully guarded, especially from guys like me who want to assemble a complete record.) A call to the Professional Football Hall of Fame also came up blank.

"But there's a guy you should talk to in New York who is a source for a lot of football data," a flak said.

A call to football statistician David Neft, a retired pollster and former vice president for research at Gannett, quickly gave me hope. He tracks the weight and other biographical details of NFL players by hand, using thousands of pages of handwritten notes he has assembled from several decades for football encyclopedias like "Total Football" and "Total Football II."

After a three-hour train to New York City, I bought Neft lunch at a Chinese restaurant in Manhattan, the only payment he ever received. "Yes, they are dying younger than they should. They're getting too big," he said. He gave me photocopies of hundreds of pages of his handwritten notes.

The task of turning notes into a database began with my laptop on the train back to Washington. Once back at the office, my editors agreed to hire a professional keypuncher. It took three weeks to key in the names of 3,850 dead players as well as their date of birth, date of death, playing position, weight, height and years of experience. These records were transferred into SPSS statistical analysis software for heavy crunching.

Here's what we found:

- Obese players are more than twice as likely to have died early than their teammates. Twenty-eight percent of all pro-football players born in the last century who qualified as obese (using the body mass index) died before their 50th birthday, compared with 13 percent who were not obese.
- Only 10 percent of deceased players born from 1905 through 1914 were obese while active. But more than 50 percent of the most recently deceased players were obese while they were active. The rise in obesity was steady throughout the age cohorts.
- Some 130 players born since 1955 are dead, or one in every 69 players born in the past 50 years.

As alarming as these statistics sound, they are not proof of early death. In fact, based only on these data, a statistician would conclude (as did NIOSH in 1994) that football players are healthier than the general public. Part of the reason, of course, is the self-selection problem when studying a group of adult athletes. None of them died as infants. (In 2002, nearly 1 percent of Americans died before their first birthday.) Players in the NFL don't suffer from congenital heart defects or other maladies that the rest of the population sometimes suffers.

So, who do we compare the NFL to? We needed a control group. For a modest fee, we purchased data on Major League Baseball players, accounting for the lifespan of 2,403 players. We found professional football players were only slightly less long lived than baseball players throughout most of the age groups. But it was a different story among athletes born in 1955 or later. Football players are more than twice as likely to have died before their 50th birthday as baseball players.

Frightening picture

The hardest part of the study was still to come. We had to find out what killed 130 football players born in the past 50 years. We contacted coroners, begged for cooperation from family members, interviewed police officers and talked to friends. In five cases, we could not accurately determine cause of death.

Here's what we did find:

- Twenty-two percent of these NFL players died of heart diseases; 19 percent died from homicides or suicides.
- Seventy-seven percent of those who died of heart diseases qualified as obese, even during their playing days. Obese players were 2-1/2 times more likely to die of coronaries than their trimmer teammates.
- Most baseball players who died young died of accidents, homicides or other external causes. Most football players died because their much heavier bodies failed in some way.

We distributed our findings for comments. The NFL was bitter. "The issue of obesity in our society transcends sports and must be dealt with in a comprehensive, responsible way. This media survey contributes nothing," said NFL vice president Greg Aiello.

But the medical experts were considerably kinder. "This comparison [between baseball and football players] is very interesting," said Dr. Sherry Baron, who conducted the first NIOSH study. "It presents a frightening picture in terms of what we might expect 20 years from now."

Baron said she will conduct a new NFL mortality study soon and plans to use the Scripps Howard study as justification for the need. "These men have become much, much heavier," she said.

Thomas Hargrove is a national reporter for the Scripps Howard News Service in Washington, D.C., a database consultant for E.W. Scripps newspapers and co-founder of the Scripps Survey Research Center at Ohio University.

Stories from the IRE Resource Center

Looking for other stories about athletes' health? Here are some stories available from the IRE Resource Center. IRE members can order copies by calling 573-882-3364 or e-mailing rescntr@ire.org.

- **Story No. 19307:** An examination of heart-related athlete deaths and youths dying on high school football fields. Sal Ruibal, *USA Today* (2000)
- **Story No. 18403:** A look at the chronic diseases of retired NFL players, and the game's grim legacy of a lifetime of disability and pain. The story points to studies showing that the majority of former football players suffer orthopedic traumas until the end of their lives. Among 870 former players responding to a survey, 65 percent had suffered an injury that either required surgery or forced them to miss at least eight games. The article profiles several former football stars who complain about the severity of their current condition. William Nack, Lester Munson, *Sports Illustrated* (2001)
- **Story No. 21480:** This report looks at the lives of NFL football players and the effect that massive amounts of injuries have on their personal and financial lives. The report finds that in the 2000-03 seasons, NFL players had more than 6,500 injuries – including serious head traumas. The article also looks at "how the financial structure of the league might affect the high injury rates." Carl Prine, (Pittsburgh) *Tribune-Review* (2005)

Member news

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

reporting for SPJ Region 8 for his story "City spending of federal funds prompts audit." ■ The Indiana Chapter of SPJ awarded freelance writer **Dan Ferber** first place for best medical/science reporting for his article "Re-engineering Your Body," which appeared in *Reader's Digest*. His *Popular Science* article "Will Artificial Turf Make You Stronger?" won first place for best print feature in magazines, special interest publications or periodicals. ■ **David Heath**, **Sharon Pian Chan**, Tracy Cutchlow and Todd Coglon of *The Seattle Times* won the Best of the West online enterprise reporting prize for "Dot-con Job," a series of stories about how InfoSpace deceived investors. ■ **Brian Joseph** has joined the Sacramento bureau of *The Orange County Register* to cover the California state legislature. He previously was a general assignment reporter for *The Sacramento Bee*. ■ *The Sacramento Bee* series "Pineros: Men of the Pines" has earned acclaim for its look at migrant laborers performing forestry work in hazardous conditions. **Tom Knudson** and Hector Amezcua received the 2006 Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers, awarded by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard. The Overseas Press Club honored Knudson, Amezcua and Seth Vanbooven for Web coverage of international affairs. ■ Freelance medical investigative reporter **Jeanne Lenzer** was named a Knight Science Journalism Fellow and will participate in program activities at MIT. ■ The WJW-Cleveland team of Tom Merriman, **Mark DeMarino**, Dave Hollis, Matt Rafferty, Chuck Rigdon, Greg Easterly and Mike Renda won an Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Broadcast News Award for "School Bus Bloat," detailing fraud in Cleveland's school bus system. ■ Mike Mason, **Matt McGlashen,** Randy Wright and **Aaron Wische** of WFTS-Tampa won an Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Broadcast News Award for a series detailing engineering flaws on a $360 million highway project. McGlashen, Wische and freelancer **Robin Guess** won the SPJ Green Eyeshade award for best television feature reporting for "FEMA, Fair?" Wische is now executive producer for special projects at WTTG-Washington, D.C. ■ The WISH-Indianapolis team of **Loni Smith McKown**, **Doug Garrison**, Karen Hensel, **Rick Dawson**, **Pam Elliot**, David Hodge and Sergio Camacho won first place in the Indiana SPJ Chapter's best television investigative reporting in the Indianapolis market with "Highway Robbery." McKown, Hensel and Marcus Collins also won first place in television social justice reporting for "Unsafe at Work." Dawson and Hodge's "Politicians on the Payroll" won the television category for best government reporting. ■ The *Boston Herald*'s **Maggie Mulvihill** moved to WBZ-Boston as an investigative producer for the CBS affiliate. ■ Dominic Gates, **Alicia Mundy** and **Luke Timmerman** of *The Seattle Times* won the business and financial reporting category in the Best of the West awards for "Boeing Faces CEO Dilemma." ■ **Deborah Nelson is** leaving the *Los Angeles Times* to join the faculty of the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism and will co-teach the new Carnegie Seminar program. Nelson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter and editor, is a past president of the IRE board of directors. ■ In the Florida Associated Press Broadcasters awards, **Bobbie O'Brien** of WUSF-Tampa placed first in investigative reporting and individual achievement in the large market radio category. O'Brien and Steve Newborn also won the ongoing coverage award. ■ **Lise Olsen** of the *Houston Chronicle* was named Star Reporter of the Year by the Texas Headliners Association. Olsen also was named top reporter of 2005 among large papers by the Texas Associated Press Managing Editors' Association. ■ **Tony Pipitone,** WKMG-Orlando, won his sixth regional Edward R. Murrow award for investigative reporting and received the Florida Associated Press first-place Individual Achievement honor. ■ **Dana Priest**, *The Washington Post*, won the Overseas Press Club Award for best newspaper or wire service interpretation of international affairs, for "The CIA's Secret War." ■ **Jim Schachter** is deputy editor of *The New York Times Magazine* for magazine development. He previously was deputy culture editor, and before that, deputy business editor. ■ **Carisa Scott, Kevin Hartfield** and **Rick Sallinger** of KCNC-Denver won a Peabody award for a story on U.S. Army recruiters stretching eligibility guidelines. Their entry also placed first in television investigative reporting in the Best in the West awards. ■ The SPJ Green Eyeshade award for television business reporting went to **Travis Sherwin**, **Stephen Stock,** Shannon FitzPatrick and Marc Rice of WESH-Orlando for "Ford Fires," which revealed a fire risk caused by a faulty cruise-control switch, prompting recalls by Ford Motor Co. Stock, Sherwin, Rice and Jason Morrow won the Green Eyeshade Award for television investigative reporting with "Doing Time, Stealing Your Money." ■ The *Palm Beach Post*'s John Lantigua, Christine Evans and **Christine Stapleton** won the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, domestic newspaper category, for "A Cloud Over Florida: Hidden Pesticide Problems." ■ **Cam Simpson** of the *Chicago Tribune* won multiple honors for "Pipeline of Peril," exploring allegations that U.S. military subcontractors used coercion and deception to force unskilled foreign laborers to work in Iraq. The series won the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Journalism Award for international print reporting, the Madeline Dane Ross Award from the Overseas Press Club, the Sidney Hillman Award and a Peter Lisagor Award from the Chicago Press Club. ■ The White House Correspondents Association awarded the Edgar A. Poe award to **Marcus Stern** and Jerry Kammer of Copley News Service for exposing California Congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham's bribery scandal. The piece also won the Best of the West award for newspaper investigative reporting. ■ **Dan Stockman** of *The* (Fort Wayne) *Journal Gazette* won first prize in the Indiana SPJ Chapter's investigative reporting award for daily newspapers of 40,000 circulation or more for "Betrayal of Trust." ■ **Neil Weinberg** and Kiyoe Minami of Forbes Asia won the Overseas Press Club Award for best business reporting from abroad in magazines, for "The Front Line: Japan Sheds Pacifism." ■ The Best in the West first-place award for environment and natural resources reporting went to **Matt Weiser**, **Deb Kollars** and **Carrie Peyton Dahlberg** of *The Sacramento Bee* for the series "Tempting Fate," which showed the region's vulnerability to catastrophic flooding. ■ The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Award for domestic radio reporting honored **Daniel Zwerdling,** Ellen Weiss, **Bill Marimow** and Anne Hawk of National Public Radio for the story "Immigrant Detainees Allege Abuse."

Loans

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

After that, many officials wouldn't return phone calls. One district stood us up when we arrived for a meeting. And still others sent out pre-emptive e-mails to their teachers, residents or other members of the media in order to make our job more difficult.

Still, district officials that hadn't taken advantage of some of the practices we brought to light were receptive, and often complimentary. For them, acting responsibly had meant missing out on the hundreds of millions of dollars other school districts were reaping.

Since publication, school districts in our area have already begun giving taxpayers more information before voting on school construction loans. They now discuss the type of loans, for instance, or explain how quickly they plan to repay the money.

One district even revised their repayment schedule, saving their taxpayers about $34 million over the next 20 years.

Jeffrey Gaunt has covered suburban school districts for the Daily Herald since 2003. Emily Krone joined the paper's business desk in 2005, before becoming an education reporter. Timothy Sheil came to the paper in 1998, working first as an assistant news editor, and later as an assistant city editor.

Towing woes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Commerce Commission, as well as the Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force, have launched criminal and civil investigations. The evidence we collected, including our database, was presented to the Illinois House Judiciary Committee.

Further, Car Program LLC, which had hired both Royal Auto and Towing and O'Hare Kars for their Midwest vehicle donation collections, has filed a lawsuit against Royal Auto and Towing. After our investigation, they also have taken legal action against the Zuccaros for nonpayment on hundreds of donated cars dating to the beginning of 2005. Car Program officials would not comment on camera about why they did not inform the charities of the missing car donation proceeds.

Finally, this investigation led to a new law, signed by Illinios Gov. Rod Blagojevich on May 9. The law bans felons and anyone convicted of financial crime in the past five years from acting as vehicle donation middlemen and would require middlemen to be registered and file annual reports with the state.

Investigative reporter Dave Savini and investigative producer Michele Youngerman joined WBBM in 2004. "Good Gifts Gone Bad" has won a Peter Lisagor Award and the Chicago Bar Association's 2005 Herman Kogan Award.

IRE SERVICES

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

Programs and Services:

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

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

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

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

Publications

THE IRE JOURNAL – Published six times a year. Contains journalist profiles, how-to stories, reviews, investigative ideas and backgrounding tips. *The Journal* also provides members with the latest news on upcoming events and training opportunities from IRE and NICAR.
Contact: Megan Means, meganm@nicar.org, 573-884-2360

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

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

For information on:

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MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – John Green, jgreen@ire.org, 573-882-2772
CONFERENCES AND BOOT CAMPS – Ev Ruch-Graham, ev@ire.org, 573-882-8969
LISTSERVS – Amy Johnston, amy@ire.org, 573-884-1444

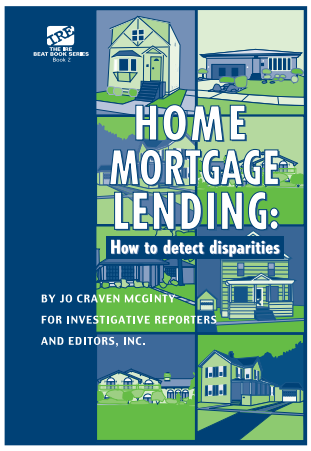
Mailing Address:

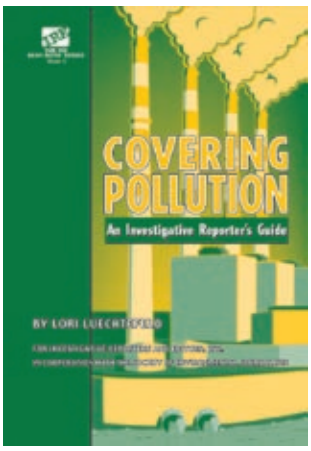
IRE, 138 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211

REQUIRED READING FOR YOUR NEWSROOM

HOME MORTGAGE LENDING:
How to Detect Disparities

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jo Craven McGinty guides reporters through understanding and using Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data. Included are specific story ideas and lists of tipsheets and stories available through IRE.





COVERING POLLUTION:
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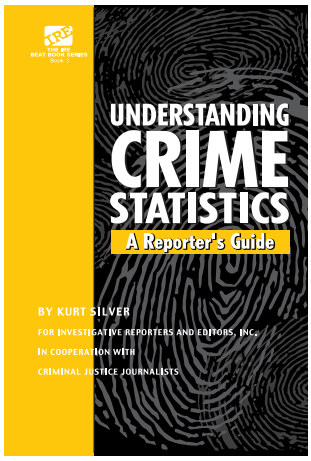

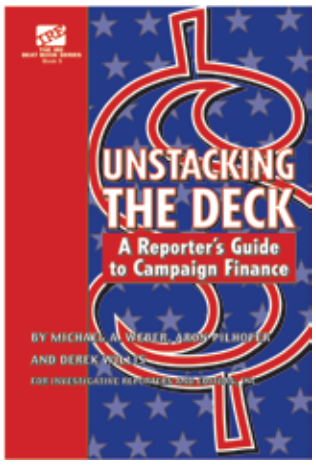

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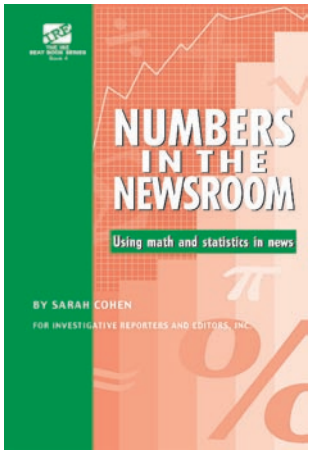

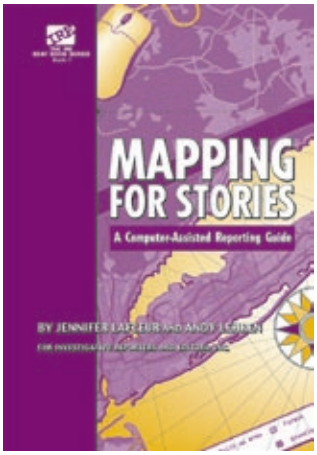

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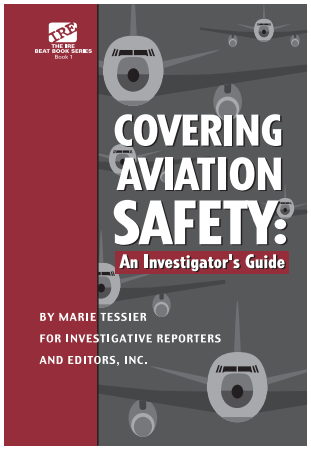

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