



Executive Director, Investigative Reporters and Editors

Description:

Investigative Reporters and Editors seeks a dynamic individual to oversee a non-profit journalism organization of 4,500 members and 12 full-time staff members, and to serve as a faculty member at the Missouri School of Journalism.

IRE is considered the top organization in providing practical, hands-on training to journalists throughout the world — particularly in the use of new technological tools and techniques. IRE conducts more than 50 seminars a year and provides research and government databases to hundreds of news organizations.

Qualifications:

- Experience as a journalist of respected professional reputation and demonstrated achievement, with solid credentials in investigative reporting in print, broadcast, magazines, books, documentaries or multimedia.
- Managerial and supervisory experience.
- Experience in the nonprofit sector and in fund-raising will be considered significant pluses.
- An entrepreneurial and enterprising spirit, creativity to help the organization grow internationally and on the Web, and flexibility to work with a rapidly changing media industry. Experience in computer-assisted reporting will be considered a plus.
- Experience in teaching investigative journalism will be considered a plus. Evidence of potential teaching excellence is necessary. The executive director will be expected to teach an investigative reporting class each semester at the university.

Responsibilities:

- Oversee the maintenance and growth of IRE's renowned professional programs, publications and Web site. Also oversee the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, a joint program of IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism.
- Manage 12 full-time staffers and more than a dozen part-time workers and students.
- Plan and supervise financial matters, including IRE's \$1.4 million budget, the organization's annual and long-term fund-raising campaigns, and its \$3 million-plus endowment fund.
- Report to a 13-member elected board.
- Serve as a spokesperson for the organization.
- Hold a faculty appointment in the Missouri School of Journalism, pending approval by the dean and faculty. The post can range from a professional-track assistant professor to full professor, depending on qualifications and experience.

Compensation:

Salary to be negotiated, commensurate with experience and in the context of a medium-sized Midwestern college town. Compensation also includes a generous benefits package.

Application Deadline:

To ensure full consideration, applications must be received by Aug. 15, 2007. Screening of applicants will continue until the position is filled.

Minorities, women and other designated class members are encouraged to apply. IRE and the University of Missouri are committed to cultural diversity, and it is expected that the successful candidate will share this commitment. MU is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.

Appointment begins:

Jan. 1, 2008. To apply, see details at www.ire.org/execdir.

Search committee:

David Boardman, executive editor of *The Seattle Times*, was an IRE board member from 1997-2007.

Jan Colbert, who has served as IRE executive director, is an associate professor and chair of Magazine Journalism at the Missouri School of Journalism.

Renee Ferguson, an IRE board member, recently returned to WMAQ-Chicago after completing a Nieman fellowship at Harvard.

James Grimaldi, investigative reporter at *The Washington Post* and Ferris professor at Princeton University, has served on the IRE board since 2001 and is currently its president.

Chuck Lewis, an IRE member for 25 years and a former CBS 60 Minutes producer, has founded three nonprofit corporations, including the Center for Public Integrity, and is a professor at American University.

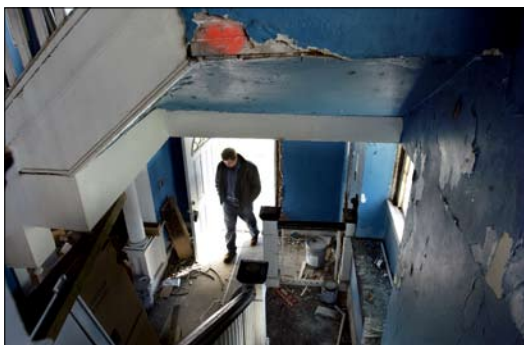
Shawn McIntosh, a former IRE board member, is director of culture and change at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, focusing on training, analysis and implementation of new standards at the newspaper.

Neal Shapiro is president and CEO of Education Broadcasting Corp., owner of Channel Thirteen/WNET-New York. Co-chair of IRE's endowment drive, Shapiro is a former president of NBC News and executive producer for Dateline NBC.

THE IRE JOURNAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS JULY/AUGUST 2007

- 4** Many thanks – but only leaving IRE job, not IRE
By Brant Houston, IRE
- 7** 2007 CONFERENCE
IRE membership meets in Phoenix to commemorate 30th anniversary
By Kate Rainey
The IRE Journal
- 10** AID FOR FAITH
Funding boosts Christian groups' influence abroad
By Kevin Baron
for *The Boston Globe*
- 13** CRIME FOCUS
Story reveals major drop in FBI pursuit of white collar crimes after terrorist attacks
By Daniel Lathrop and Paul Shukovsky
Seattle Post-Intelligencer



ABOUT THE COVER

CM Development's investors used refinancing deals to generate cash, while neglecting repairs and letting properties sit vacant.

Cover Story

Pages 14-26

Cover photo:

Delores Johnson,
The Virginian-Pilot

14 - 26 HOUSING WOES

- 15** URBAN BLIGHT
Investors buy, abandon properties as part of profit plan, data shows
By Meghan Hoyer and Matthew Jones
The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot
- 18** LANDFILL GAMBLE
Complex financial deal unravels to reveal public subsidy questions
By John Brennan and Jeff Pillets
The (Hackensack, N.J.) Record
- 21** PUBLIC SLUMLORD
Property seized under eminent domain never used for roads, abandoned by state
By Natalya Shulyakovskaya
The Orange County Register
- 24** HOUSING BUST
Minority home owners unable to meet subprime loan demands
By Ron Nixon and Vikas Bajaj
The New York Times
- 26** HOUSING RESOURCES
By *The IRE Journal*



HOUSING WOES

- 27** GUNSHINE STATE
Florida loophole allows criminals to obtain legal gun permits
By Megan O'Matz and John Maines
South Florida Sun-Sentinel
- 29** AT THE WHEEL
Undercover camera reveals lapses in drug screenings for DOT workers
By Jeff Baillon
KMSP-Minneapolis
- 30** FATAL OUTBREAK
CDC reports on food-borne illnesses provide state-by-state data
By Thomas Hargrove
Scripps Howard News Service
- 32** CASH FLOW
Explore consultants' influence in campaign finance reports
By John Perry
The Center for Public Integrity
- 34** Valuable journalistic advice arises from annual gathering of eminent writers
By Steve Weinberg
The IRE Journal

THE IRE JOURNAL

VOLUME 30 | NUMBER 4

MANAGING EDITOR
Anita Bruzzese

PUBLICATIONS COORDINATOR
Megan Means

ART DIRECTOR
Wendy Gray

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Steve Weinberg

CONTRIBUTING LEGAL EDITOR
David Smallman

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES
Kate Rainey, Shannon Burke

IRE

IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Brant Houston

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT

James V. Grimaldi, *The Washington Post*

VICE PRESIDENT

Cheryl Phillips, *The Seattle Times*

TREASURER

Dianna Hunt, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

SECRETARY

Stephen C. Miller, *The New York Times*

Wendell Cochran, American University

Renee Ferguson, WMAQ-Chicago

Manny Garcia, *The Miami Herald*

Mark Katches, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Lise Olsen, *Houston Chronicle*

Lea Thompson, ThomThom Media, LLC

Marilyn Thompson, *Los Angeles Times*

Duff Wilson, *The New York Times*

Alison Young, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

The IRE Journal (ISSN0164-7016) is published six times a year by Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. 138 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211, 573-882-2042. E-mail: journal@ire.org. U.S. subscriptions are \$70 for individuals, \$85 for libraries and \$125 for institutions/businesses. International subscriptions are \$90 for individuals and \$150 for all others. Periodical postage paid at Columbia, MO. Postmaster: Please send address changes to IRE. USPS #451-670

© 2007 Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.

FROM THE IRE OFFICES

Many thanks – but only leaving IRE job, not IRE



BRANT HOUSTON

During the past 13 years, many journalists have come and gone at the IRE offices. With the skills they pick up here, staffers and students leave for new, challenging opportunities in newsrooms in which they thrive. But they never leave IRE behind.

They continue to teach for IRE at training events, enlist members, raise money and passionately support investigative journalism.

It's now time for me to follow their lead.

As many of you know, I will take a post this fall at the University of Illinois, where I will be the Knight Chair in Investigative & Enterprise Reporting. I will continue as acting director at IRE in a consulting role through December while the IRE searches for my successor.

After December, I look forward to collaborating closely with IRE on developing curricula for workshops and training – not only for small-to-medium size newsrooms but also for international journalists and for those working in ethnic media newsrooms in the U.S. I look forward to supporting IRE in whatever other ways I can.

IRE is my professional home. I have been a member for 28 years and, like many other members, can't imagine it not being part of my professional life. I first heard of IRE when I read the Arizona Project in 1977, and I joined in 1979 when it held an annual conference in Boston.

I had been working for a small daily outside Boston for almost three years. The first speaker I heard was Seymour Hersh, and, as always, he was inspiring. Panels on tips and techniques followed. At lunch, a recent Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter took half an hour to give me guidance on how to do investigations at a small paper. Like many reporters after their first IRE conference, I left hooked forever.

In 1994 I came to the IRE offices as the managing director for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, a joint program of IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism. I thought it would be a good two-year break from the newsroom, and that I would teach and learn, and then go back to a daily paper refreshed.

It turned out to be a two-year plan that turned into another two-year plan and then another and so on. In 1997, I became executive director instead of returning to a newsroom. Several long-time mentors questioned my judgment, wondering why I would stay with a small organization that had just had a tumultuous period deciding whether to move to Maryland from Missouri.

But I believed in IRE and the great and beneficial impact that it could have on journalism if it settled down and concentrated on the things it does best – teaching, providing resources, helping investigative journalists network, and, most of all, inspiring us to do better journalism.

Ten years later, I look back in awe at all the seminars, conferences and workshops we have done and how we have helped each other and helped younger journalists develop. I look at the Database Library, the Resource Center, the publications and our Web site, and I see how IRE's reach has extended to encompass journalism around the world.

What is so impressive is how much time so many of you have volunteered in order to make this happen. Whether you served on the board, a committee or assisted on a particular seminar or project, you gave countless hours to IRE and then asked what more you could do. No executive director could have a better group to work with.

Thank you for all the support you have given IRE. Thank you for the help and advice you have given me. And thank you for allowing me the honor of leading IRE for these ten years.

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.

Data library fund honors Reeves

Greg Reeves of *The Kansas City Star* died on June 28, 2007, of complications from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). He was a pioneer in computer-assisted reporting and dedicated supporter of IRE.

Reeves' long-time *Star* colleague Mike McGraw and IRE Executive Director Brant Houston have created the Greg Reeves Fellowship Fund to permanently support a graduate student research assistantship in the IRE and NICAR Database Library at the Missouri School of Journalism.

"We will miss Greg's passion for the profession and also his great wit - none of which diminished in recent months," said Houston, a former investigative reporter and editor at the *Star*.

His data work touched many areas - particularly for the *Star's* Pulitzer Prize winning series on the U.S. Department of Agriculture. You can read more about Reeves and his accomplishments at the crime blog he started http://blogs.kansascity.com/crime_scene.

Reeves was a great volunteer teacher for IRE and NICAR over the past two decades, Houston said. Among his many talents, he was fluent in German and worked on IRE's behalf to establish a similar organization for journalists in Germany.

The Reeves Fellowship is part of IRE's endowment fund. Donations can be sent to IRE, 138 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia MO, 65211. Make checks payable to IRE and note that the gift is for the "Greg Reeves Fellowship."

Winners announced in membership drawing

IRE thanks everyone who participated in the recent membership drive, which helped raise nearly \$5,500 for the endowment fund.

Current members who referred new members by May 31 were entered in a drawing for IRE training opportunities, held at the IRE conference in Phoenix. Winners were:

- Ron Feemster, freelancer, who won free IRE conference registration and a \$500 travel stipend.
- Charley Preusser, Morris Newspapers, who won free CAR conference registration and a \$500 travel stipend.
- Fred Mamoun, KNBC-Los Angeles, who won the grand prize of a free CAR Boot Camp registration and a \$500 travel stipend.

In addition to membership referrals, journalism students at American University in Washington, D.C., created recruiting materials aimed at students and professors. The class project also helped promote the 2007 IRE Conference and the 30th anniversary of the Arizona Project.

Best in Business winners

IRE members (names in bold) won recognition in the Society of American Business Editors and Writers' Best in Business competition:

- Steve Harrison, Rick Rothacker, Andrew Shain, Mike Drummond, **Ames Alexander**, **Stella M. Hopkins**, Christopher Kirkpatrick and Tony Mecia, *The Charlotte* (N.C.) *Observer* for "Creditors, feds key to air takeover bid."
- Kurt Blumenau and **Sam Kennedy**, *The* (Allentown, Pa.) *Morning Call* for "Agere brought out."
- **Louis Uchitelle**, *The New York Times* for "Very rich are leaving the merely rich behind."
- **Binyamin Appelbaum**, *The Charlotte* (N.C.) *Observer* for "Suspicious Timing."
- Stephen Franklin and **Darnell Little**, *Chicago Tribune* for "Throwaway Workers."
- **Edmund L. Andrews**, *The New York Times* for "Leaky oil royalties."
- **Charles Forelle**, **James Bandler**, **Mark Maremont** and Steve Stecklow, *The Wall Street Journal* for "Perfect payday."
- **David Olinger**, Greg Griffin, Aldo Svaldi and **Jeffrey Roberts**, *The Denver Post* for "Foreclosing on the American dream."
- **Steve Everly**, *The Kansas City Star* for "It's hot fuel for you, cold cash for big oil."
- **Sam Stanton** and Marjie Lundstrom, *The Sacramento Bee* for "The price of access."
- **Stella M. Hopkins**, Mitch Weiss, **Binyamin Appelbaum**, Rick Rothacker, **Franco Ordonez**, **Liz Chandler**, Tim Funk and Peter St. Onge, *The Charlotte* (N.C.) *Observer* for "Hiding in plain sight."
- **Shannon Behnken**, *The Tampa Tribune* for "A rapid rise."
- Martin Z. Braun, **David Dietz**, William Selway, Christine Richard and Darrell Preston, Bloomberg News for "Duping Main Street."
- **Michael Smith** and David Voreacos, Bloomberg News for "Slaves in Amazon forced to make materials used in GM, Toyota cars."
- **Dan Voelpel**, *The* (Tacoma, Wash.) *News Tribune* for column work.

Sigma Delta Chi Awards

The Society of Professional Journalists' national Sigma Delta Chi Awards honor the best professional work in 49 categories. The following IRE members (names in bold) were winners in 2006:

- Investigative reporting in newspapers: **Debbie Cenziper** of *The Miami Herald* won for investigative reporting in newspapers with a circulation of 100,000 or greater for "House of Lies."
- **Ryan Gabrielson** of the *East Valley Tribune* in Mesa, Ariz., won for newspapers with a circulation of 100,000 or less for "District let years of misconduct slide."
- **Siobhan Gorman** of *The* (Baltimore) *Sun* won in the Washington, D.C. correspondence category for "NSA Coverage."

MEMBER NEWS

Gina Barton and **Dave Umhoefer** have joined the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* Watchdog Team. ■ **Chris Cobler** is the editor of the *Victoria* (Texas) *Advocate*. He was the editor of the *Greeley* (Colo.) *Daily Tribune* for 10 years. ■ **Ellen Gabler** has joined the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* Watchdog Team as an investigative reporter. ■ **Jason Kandel**, a reporter at the *Daily News* in Los Angeles for more than seven years, is now reporting for the newspaper's Web site, www.dailynews.com. ■ **Bryan Myers**, a producer for "NOW" at PBS, was awarded a Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in business journalism by Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. ■ **Chris Schnaars** is a senior writer in the CAR Lab at *The* (Hackensack, N.J.) *Record*. He was the CAR editor at *The* (Allentown, Pa.) *Morning Call*. ■ Missouri School of Journalism students **August Skamenca** and **Matt Wynn**, now data editor at the *Springfield* (Mo.) *News-Leader*, won a national Edward R. Murrow Award for their "Dead Voters" investigation, as well as an SPJ Mark of Excellence Award and a Kansas City Press Club Heart of America award. ■ **David Wren** of *The* (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) *Sun News* won the Taylor/Tomlin Award for Investigative Journalism from the University of South Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communications. Wren's series explored the misuse of funds by the Five Rivers Community Development Corp. ■ **Scott Zamost** and **Jeff Burnside** of WTVJ-Miami won Best of Show and Top Investigation in the Florida AP Broadcasters Association contest for "Citizenship for Sale." The duo also won a National Press Club award for "Puppy Heartbreak," a probe of one of America's largest puppy dealers.

Send Member News items to Megan Means at meganm@ire.org and include a phone number for verification.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

- **Michael Smith** and **David Voreacos** of *Bloomberg Markets* won in investigative reporting in magazines for “The Secret World of Modern Slavery.”
- **Jay Field** and Julia McEvoy of Chicago Public Radio won in radio feature reporting for “Rockford Truancy.”
- **Jeff Hirsh**, Eric Gerhardt and Dan Hurley of WKRC-Cincinnati won the investigative reporting category in television for “Sham Dunk.”
- **Bob Simon**, Michael Gavshon, Paul Bellinger and Anya Bour of CBS News “60 Minutes” took first place for feature reporting in the network/Top 25 market category for “The Shipbreakers.”
- **Hagit Limor**, Anthony Mirones and **Bob Morford** of WCPO-Cincinnati won in television feature reporting for “Journey for Justice.”
- **Mark Alesia** of *The Indianapolis Star* won in affiliated online investigative reporting for “Colleges Play, Public Pays.”
- **Andrew Donohue** of VoiceofSanDiego.org took first place in independent investigative reporting in the online category for “Affordable No More.”

Green Eyeshade Awards

Several IRE members won Green Eyeshade Awards, sponsored by the Society of Professional Journalists in 11 Southeastern states.

- **Kelly Cramer** of the Broward-Palm Beach *New Times* took top honors in non-deadline reporting in the print division for “Daddy’s Girl.”
- Freelancers **Sara Shipley Hiles** and **Marina Walker Guevara** won in print business reporting for “Lead Astray,” published in *Mother Jones* magazine.
- **Debbie Cenziper** of *The Miami Herald* won in investigative reporting in the print division for “House of Lies.”
- Jennifer Kraus, **Bryan Staples** and Kevin Wisniewski of WTVF-Nashville took first place in continuing coverage in the television division for “Tennessee State Veterans Home.”
- **Michele Gillen**, Abel Castillo, Marcia Izaquirre and Giovanni Benitez of WFOR-Miami won for investigative reporting in television for “The Forgotten Floor.”

Peter Lisagor Awards

The Chicago Headline Club recognized work by IRE members (names in bold) in its annual Peter Lisagor Awards.

- **Tim Novak** and **Art Golab** of the *Chicago Sun-Times* won for in-depth political and government reporting at a daily newspaper with circulation over 300,000 for “Clout’s Sick List.” The story also won the Chicago Headline Club’s Watchdog Award for Public Interest Reporting.
- **Dave Newbart** of the *Chicago Sun-Times* won for in-depth education reporting at a daily newspaper with a circulation of more than 300,000 for “Unoriginal Sin.”
- **Stephen Franklin** and **Darnell Little** of the *Chicago Tribune* won in business reporting at a daily newspaper for “Throwaway Workers.”
- **Frank Main** of the *Chicago Sun-Times* won in consumer reporting at a daily newspaper for “Your Cell Phone Records Are for Sale.”
- **Ray Hanania** of the *Southwest News-Herald* took first place in the news column or commentary category at a non-daily newspaper for “Thanksgiving Tabouli Wars Is Now Served,” “Graduates Who Defy Stereotypes” and “Reavis Reunion Creeps Up Like Receding Hair.”
- **Mark Tatge** and Miriam Gottfried of *Forbes* won in business reporting in a business magazine or newspaper for “Dirty Laundry.”
- **Kimbriell Kelly** and Angelica Herrera of *The Chicago Reporter* won in business reporting in a trade or specialty magazine or newspaper for “Sold in the USA.”
- **Steve Grzanich** of WBBM-Newsradio won in radio arts reporting and criticism for “WBBM Moving Day.”
- Suzanne Le Mignot and **Michele Youngerman** of WBBM-TV won for in-depth television reporting for “Tracking Your Security.”
- **John O’Connor** of The Associated Press took top honors for bureau or wire service in-depth reporting for “The Jobs Game.”

Sunshine State Awards

The Sunshine State Awards highlight the best work by Florida news organizations. IRE members (names in bold) who won awards include:

- **Debbie Cenziper** and Larry Lebowitz of *The Miami Herald* won the Gene Miller Award for Investigative Reporting and the James Batten Award for Public Service for “House of Lies.”
- **Thomas Lake** of *The (Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union* won for serious feature reporting in a newspaper or magazine for “A Soldier’s Final Journey.” Lake now works at the *St. Petersburg Times*.
- **Dan Christensen** and Patrick Danner of *The Miami Herald* won for civil law reporting in a newspaper or magazine for “Hidden Docket.”
- **Bea Garcia** of *The Miami Herald* took top honors for consumer reporting in a newspaper or magazine for “Property Insurance Crisis.”
- **Ronnie Greene** of *The Miami Herald* won for state and federal political or government reporting in a newspaper or magazine for “Deadly Express.”
- **Scott Hiaasen** and **Jack Dolan** of *The Miami Herald* won for local political or government reporting in a newspaper or magazine for “Fire Watch – Money to Burn.”
- **Jason Grotto** of *The Miami Herald* won for social policy reporting in a newspaper or magazine for “Predators Among Us.”
- **Shannon Behnken** of *The Tampa Tribune* won for real estate reporting in a newspaper or magazine for “A Rapid Rise.”
- **Jeff Burnside**, **Scott Zamost**, Pedro Cancio and Ed Garcia of WTVJ-Miami took first place in television investigative reporting for “Puppy Heartbreak.”
- **Tony Pipitone**, Darran Caudle, Tim Arnheim and Brent Singleton of WKMG-Orlando won for television criminal justice reporting for “Cheerleaders Betrayed.”
- **Mike Deeson** and Paul Thorson of WTSP-Tampa Bay won for television consumer reporting for “The Insurance Crisis: Five Solutions.”
- **Tony Pipitone**, Darran Caudle, Scott Noland and Tim Arnheim of WKMG-Orlando won for political or government reporting on television for “Toll Agency Troubles.”

WATCHDOG JOURNALISM TRAINING

These training programs for small to mid-sized newsrooms or bureaus of larger papers are made possible, in part, by generous grants from the Chicago Tribune Foundation, the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, and the Las Vegas Sun, Barbara J. Greenspun, publisher.

To learn more and register for upcoming events, visit www.ire.org/training/watchdogjournalism.

Unleashing the Watchdogs

(Primarily for editors)

These workshops, held in partnership with the American Society of Newspaper Editors, feature top editors and trainers sharing techniques, tips and years of experience on how to get watchdog journalism done.

- October 15-16 – Minneapolis, Minn. Hosted by University of Minnesota

Better Watchdog Workshops

(Primarily for reporters)

These workshops help journalists learn the investigative skills that keep government and business accountable and to produce enterprising and informative stories.

- October 15-16
– Minneapolis, Minn.
Hosted by University of Minnesota





Leading journalists shared their experiences during more than 80 panels. *The New Yorker's* Seymour Hersch drew a crowd on Friday.



More than 950 attended the four-day event.

2007 CONFERENCE

IRE membership meets in Phoenix to commemorate 30th anniversary

BY KATE RAINEY
THE IRE JOURNAL

PHOTOS
BY JACKIE KAZIL



Book sales, recruiters and exhibitors provided additional resources in Phoenix.

The 30th anniversary of the Arizona Project saw the 2007 IRE Conference return to Phoenix, where more than 950 journalists from 26 countries gathered to celebrate their craft. The conference, held at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa on June 7-10, featured more than 80 panels and workshops on a variety of topics.

The significance of IRE's return to Phoenix to commemorate the Arizona Project was not lost on anyone present. The conference offered several opportunities for visiting journalists to learn about *Arizona Republic* reporter Don Bolles, the car bomb that led to his death and the subsequent creation of the Arizona Project to finish his investigation of corruption.

"It is the most direct way to appreciate the impact the Project had and to reassert the solidarity of IRE members that the Project demonstrated," said Brant Houston, IRE's executive director, of the return to Phoenix.

The Project's impact on the world of investigative journalism also was made clear during the panels as speakers discussed other cooperative investigations it directly inspired. These included Project Klebnikov, the Manizales Project and the Phoenix Project, all of which were

established to honor journalists murdered because of their investigations and to continue their work.

"With these works, the message was sent: If the goal is to silence a journalist, his voice is multiplied," said Carlos Eduardo Huertas, a Colombian journalist who spoke about the Manizales Project during a panel discussion.

The conference schedule included specialized tracks on investigations that cross the U.S.-Mexico border, covering criminal justice, broadcast investigations and editing and writing great stories. The one-on-one mentoring program paired a record 65 young journalists with veterans in the field.

Dana Priest, an award-winning investigative reporter at *The Washington Post*, delivered the keynote address at the annual IRE Awards Luncheon. She spoke about her investigation of the conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the importance of asking critical questions when investigating





The crowd applauds the winners of the 2006 IRE Awards at the Saturday luncheon.



Outgoing Executive Director Brant Houston was honored for his 13 years of service, 10 as director.

Homeland Security issues.

“You are among the very few people in the U.S. with the skills to do that, and it is your responsibility,” Priest told the crowd.

The awards luncheon also allowed the assembled journalists to recognize long-standing service to IRE. Outgoing board members David Boardman of *The Seattle Times*, Duane Pohlman of WEWS-Cleveland and IRE’s pro bono legal counsel David Smallman received special IRE Medals for their contributions to the organization.

The board of directors also announced an addition to IRE’s endowment: the Brant Houston Fund for International Journalism.

“This is the best way to say thank you to one of the most important people in the history of the organization,” Boardman said at the awards luncheon.

Houston, who is leaving IRE after 10 years for a position as the Knight Chair in Investigative and Enterprise Reporting at the University of Illinois, attended his last conference as executive director.

“I don’t think I had any feelings of nostalgia,” he said. “Those will probably come next year. What I did

The board of directors also announced an addition to IRE’s endowment: the Brant Houston Fund for International Journalism.

“This is the best way to say thank you to one of the most important people in the history of the organization,” Boardman said at the awards luncheon.



New and returning board members after the 2007 elections: (back, left to right) Wendell Cochran of American University, Lea Thompson of ThomThom Media LLC, James Grimaldi of *The Washington Post*, Renee Ferguson of WMAQ-Chicago, new member Marilyn Thompson of the *Los Angeles Times*. (Front row, left to right) Dianna Hunt of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Stephen C. Miller of *The New York Times*, new member Lise Olsen of the *Houston Chronicle*, Duff Wilson of *The New York Times*, new member Alison Young of *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution* and Cheryl Phillips of *The Seattle Times*. Not pictured: Manny Garcia of *The Miami Herald* and Mark Katches of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

IRE would like to thank the host and sponsors of the 2007 IRE Conference. Each year IRE depends deeply on the generosity and support of media organizations to be able to conduct these important conferences that allow and encourage journalists to develop the skills necessary to survive and thrive in this changing industry.

Host:

The Arizona Republic

Primary Sponsors:

- Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication
- Bloomberg
- KNXV-Phoenix and Scripps Howard Foundation
- Sunbelt Communications Company and Jim and Beverly Rogers

Sponsors:

- American University School of Communication
- James Richard Bennett Scholarship Fund
- The Carter Center Mental Health Program
- Criminal Justice Journalists
- Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma
- Freedom Communications and the *East Valley Tribune* (Mesa, Ariz.)
- Philip L. Graham Fund
- Hearst Newspapers
- KNBC-Los Angeles
- KPHO-Phoenix and Meredith Corporation
- KSTP-St. Paul/Minneapolis
- Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin
- Jennifer Leonard Scholarship Fund
- Missouri School of Journalism
- Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism at ASU's Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication
- Godfrey Wells Stancill Fellowship Fund
- The University of Texas-El Paso
- Wollmuth Maher & Deutsch LLP



Gilbert Bailon of *Al Dia*, a Dallas paper, and Charles Lewis of the Fund for Independence in Journalism were among the speakers for the showcase panel, "Keeping investigative journalism thriving: Strategies for the future."

feel was a great pride in how far we have come in the last decade and how pleased I was to have the privilege of working with so many dedicated journalists."

On June 9, IRE members gathered for the annual membership meeting, during which elections were held for six of the 13 seats on the board of directors. The membership re-elected James Grimaldi of *The Washington Post*, Cheryl Phillips of *The Seattle Times* and Lea Thompson of ThomThom Media, LLC. The newly elected members of the board are Lise Olsen of the *Houston Chronicle*, Marilyn Thompson of the *Los Angeles Times* and Alison Young of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The board also re-elected Grimaldi as president, Phillips as vice president, Dianna Hunt of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* as treasurer and Stephen C. Miller of *The New York Times* as secretary. Lea Thompson was appointed to the board's executive committee.

David Heath of *The Seattle Times* and Mark Rochester of The Associated Press were elected to serve as judges for next year's IRE Awards. They will join several board members and a Missouri School of Journalism faculty member on the contest committee.

In another conference tradition, the annual Blues Bash, which featured Canned Heat, sold out and netted \$2,566 for the IRE Resource Center.

The endowment got another boost from the San Francisco-based Mountanos Brothers Coffee Company, which donated 100 bags of coffee. They were sold with a commemorative IRE label under the name "Muckraker Dark" and raised \$1,500.

Board member Mark Katches of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* arranged the coffee fundraiser. "If there's one thing journalists love and are passionate about, it's drinking coffee," Katches said. "And what better charitable contribution than one you can drink?"

Members can get tipsheets and audio recordings from the conference by visiting www.ire.org/training/phoenix07. For more information, contact the IRE Resource Center at rescntr@ire.org or by calling 573-882-3364.

The 2008 IRE Conference will be at the Inter-Continental Miami Hotel from June 5-8.



An investigation of U.S. funding for faith-based projects found that many projects combine humanitarian services with Christian proselytizing. Nida Youssaf, 12, lives in a mixed Christian and Muslim city in Pakistan and has religious pictures on her wall, she says, "because I love Jesus."

AID FOR FAITH

Funding boosts Christian groups' influence abroad

BY KEVIN BARON
 THE BOSTON GLOBE, WASHINGTON, D.C., BUREAU CORRESPONDENT

When I saw the new e-mail from my Washington bureau colleague Farah Stockman, I knew it would tell me the results of her June 2006 visit to a U.S.-funded Christian aid program in a remote Kenyan village.

In a way, a year's worth of work was riding on that e-mail. It was the first report I'd see describing how religious international aid groups were using U.S. funds to operate in the developing world.

In the village, Stockman wrote, the staff of an American evangelical group called Food for the Hungry openly talked about how they teach breastfeeding classes with religious messages, opening and closing sessions with a Christian prayer inside of the

village's first tin-roof hut, built with U.S. taxpayers' money.

Since the 1940s, missionaries in this area had little success reaching the nomadic people, but the recent addition of modern health care and U.S. funding seemed to make a difference. Food for the Hungry, a group based in Phoenix, had received \$10.9 million over the past five years for various projects in Kenya. Now, nearly everyone in the area who had attended infant nutrition classes had converted to Christianity.

"The first time that I changed my mind is when we were learning the health education, and our teacher was also talking about God," a tribal mother said.

"We used to go to the rivers and pour milk for the god who stays in the mountain. But I learned through our classes that that is a very tiresome god. Now we have known that you don't need to struggle to please God. Now I have learned through health education that God is everywhere."

Stockman's report eventually became the lead for our four-day series called "Exporting Faith," the sum of an 18-month investigation by *The Boston Globe's* Washington bureau into the foreign aid impact of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

With a budget of approximately \$8 billion each year, the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, is charged with providing humanitarian and economic development aid while promoting U.S. foreign policy abroad. An army of nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, such as Catholic Relief Services or the American Red Cross, bid for multimillion dollar contracts and grants to launch planeloads of relief supplies and long-term development programs such as training foreign public health officials.

Christian missionaries and relief organizations had long been in the business of saving the world, often with U.S. taxpayer funding. When Bush established the Center for Faith Based & Community Initiatives

at USAID in 2002, religious groups stood to receive a windfall of new contracts to run government aid programs. More than a dozen such offices opened since 2001 in various executive branch agencies to work with current and potential faith-based contractors and grantees. The Bush administration says it is only seeking to level the playing field for religious groups who have been wrongly discriminated against in contracting decisions. The initiative was created to “remove barriers” the administration alleges existed, such as confusion among USAID staff over the rules allowing religious groups to receive and spend U.S. funds.

I wanted to know who got the contracts and what were they preaching overseas. I had two basic questions. How much money does USAID spend on faith-based organizations and who are they? USAID’s reply: We don’t know.

I needed an accurate list of USAID’s faith-based contractors. With all of the hype surrounding the faith-based initiative, I assumed someone at USAID had the job of tracking all that government money. But I was wrong. A 2005 White House report published a total for such spending, but it was slim and incomplete. I would have to start from scratch.

I filed a FOIA request with USAID asking for a copy of their raw database of all prime awards (contracts, grants, cooperative agreements) from fiscal 2001 through the current date (mid-August) in fiscal 2005. I thought some simple Google searches would identify which contractors were faith-based and create a new database.

But the FOIA requests yielded spreadsheets containing more than 50,000 records, each showing a dollar amount awarded to a contractor or grantee between Oct. 1, 2000, and Aug. 15, 2005. With the help of Boston University journalism graduate student Rushmie Kalke and freelance researcher Laura Peterson, I spent the next three months going down the list from A-to-Z and identifying faith-based organizations one-by-one. We also identified a control group of secular NGOs.

In November 2005, Washington bureau chief Peter S. Canellos and I set out for Louisville, Ky., to attend a conference called “Global Medical Missionaries.” Hosted by an evangelical megachurch, the event drew 1,000 attendees and included some of the leading contractors emerging in my data. We settled in for a keynote speech by Richard Stearns, the president of World Vision, the faith-based contractor receiving the second highest amount of USAID funds.

“What is the U.N. or the government or Save the Children going to say to those on their death bed?” Stearns asked the audience.

He added: “Only we can promise eternal salvation.”

For two days, USAID contractors explained how their “missionaries” use modern medicine to cure the world’s sick and convert patients to Christianity. In one session, a USAID tuberculosis expert, who is a board member of a coalition of Christian medical organiza-

The percentage of faith-based awards within USAID’s annual spending on non-governmental organizations had doubled from 10 to 20 percent of the total. That’s one in five USAID dollars, spent on everything from malaria to mudslides, in fiscal year 2005.

tions, described how to use tuberculosis treatment and public health strategies – including withholding medicine from patients – as an evangelistic opportunity to build “a relationship that leads them to know Christ as their savior and their lord in their lives.”

As the fiscal year passed, I filed a second FOIA request to complete the remaining 2005 data, which arrived quickly. I identified 159 faith-based organizations receiving \$1.7 billion in USAID prime awards. The data showed that the previous White House report had significantly undercounted USAID’s faith-based spending.

The percentage of faith-based awards within USAID’s annual spending on non-governmental organizations had doubled from 10 to 20 percent of the total. That’s one in five USAID dollars, spent on everything from malaria to mudslides, in fiscal year 2005. In addition, I broke down the numbers by religion and determined that 98.3 percent of the faith-based dollars spent by USAID under President Bush had gone to Christian groups.

In early 2006, I summarized my findings, and Canellos assembled a project team of staff reporters to begin handing out assignments.

Senior reporter Michael Kranish covered the Washington insider angle and revealed the role of the religious right in pressuring USAID to change its policies and personnel. The effort was spearheaded by James Dobson, the evangelical leader of Focus

on the Family. Kranish exposed a secret briefing, held on Capitol Hill for more than 50 congressional staffers and led by Dobson’s deputy, accusing certain USAID officials of discriminating against religious conservatives.

The pressure appeared to pay off. The agency’s top global health official described how she was forced out under pressure from Dobson and replaced by an evangelical Christian leader with no health experience. Under similar pressure, the respected secular aid group CARE lost a multimillion dollar contract to distribute USAID funds. Kranish also revealed that a Jewish staffer sued USAID, claiming he was fired after complaining about the lack of outreach to non-Christian groups and displays of Christian symbols in his federal office.

Furthermore, Kranish chronicled how President Bush had quietly signed a series of executive orders relaxing federal regulations that once sought to protect church-state separations.

I had heard White House lawyers say that strict church-state separation rules meant that nobody would dare use government funds to pass out Bibles on street corners. But USAID was not monitoring or evaluating church-state compliance in the field abroad, and there were strong indications that contractors were engaging in religious proselytizing while overseeing government programs.

We had to get overseas to see for ourselves. Using

Dina Rudick | Globe Staff



The sanitation is poor at the Sehiwal District Hospital in Pakistan, which sees nearly one million patients a year, while the city’s modern new Christian hospital funded by USAID sees only 14,000.

the database, I pulled examples of USAID-funded activities around the globe.

In Kenya, Farah Stockman hopped on a bush plane to the remote northwestern village of Lakartinya. After winning the confidence of village elders by wearing bracelets made from the skin of a freshly-killed goat – she said they were wet and bloody when she put them on – and eating from a plate of cooked goat guts and flies, villagers shared their stories of Christian teachings occurring during U.S.-funded infant nutrition classes. In Mombasa, Stockman reported on allegations that a Christian group distributing U.S.-backed small business loans was discriminating against Muslims.

In August, Canellos and I traveled to Angola, a country still emerging from a devastating 30-year civil war. The capital city of Luanda was teeming with foreign oilmen driven by armed guards through a dense squalor of refugees living in mud-walled slums and crumbling apartments.

We reported freely but cautiously. Our target location was in the desert highlands city of Lubango, which rests in a picturesque valley beneath a giant statue of Jesus Christ, arms outstretched from high atop a landmine-filled plateau. With the help of nearly \$1 million in USAID grants, local preachers and North Carolina-based Samaritan's Purse were building a modern hospital where, we were told, nurses, doctors and clergy will preach to the mostly non-evangelical patients. The organization's leader, Rev. Franklin Graham, flew here in 2005 to lead a three-day "crusade" to dedicate the medical center. He stayed to convert 13,000 people.

Globe reporter Susan Milligan and staff photographer Dina Rudick traveled deep into Pakistan to visit a Christian hospital supported by recent USAID grants. Milligan reported that many locals avoided the hospital, primarily due to its high cost and association with unpopular U.S. foreign policy, rather than an aversion to Christianity. Despite growing public unrest over anti-American sentiment and threatening street riots, they brought the story home.

Finally, Washington staff reporter Rick Klein reported on the little-known world of Christian missionary healthcare workers. Klein chronicled the mindset of thousands of volunteers and professionals eager to help where help is needed but not averse to using U.S. government funds to further their Christian evangelistic missions.

The project resulted in the first complete review of President Bush's faith-based initiative in the context of foreign aid and international development. Since its publication, Democrats have expressed interest in activities of USAID's faith-based contractors. Two committee chairmen have said they will hold hearings later this year.

Kevin Baron is a freelance investigative reporter in Washington, D.C. He has conducted computer-assisted investigations at the Boston Globe's Washington bureau since 2004, and previously worked at the Center for Public Integrity.

Dina Rudick | Globe Staff



At Sehiwal District Hospital in Pakistan, a woman cries with grief after the death of her son. In this city of 200,000, a Christian hospital, funded by USAID, operates a gleaming new facility that's far below capacity, while the Pakistani government-run hospital struggles with overcrowding and lack of resources to meet basic needs.

The project resulted in the first complete review of President Bush's faith-based initiative in the context of foreign aid and international development.

CRIME FOCUS

Story reveals major drop in FBI pursuit of white collar crimes after terrorist attacks

BY DANIEL LATHROP AND PAUL SHUKOVSKY
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

It took a mix of data analysis and excellent sourcing for a Seattle newspaper to break a national story about the FBI abandoning traditional crime fighting in the wake of 9/11.

After the 9/11 attacks, Paul Shukovsky, who covers federal courts and investigative agencies, had noticed a marked reduction in certain kinds of cases coming through the U.S. Magistrate Court, a frequent stop on his beat. He began to ask agents and federal prosecutors what was going on. Several told him that the bureau had backed off not only on drug cases, but also on violent and white-collar crimes. Several traditional crime squads in the Seattle FBI office had seen big cutbacks in the number of agents assigned.

He and CAR specialist Daniel Lathrop then turned to data from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), the data and investigative reporting effort founded by longtime *New York Times* reporter David Burnham.

The U.S. Department of Justice data showed that the state of Washington had the lowest per-capita rate of FBI agents and that the state had seen large drops in criminal cases. Or so we thought, due to some initial confusion about the information.

It later proved to be untrue, and it was one of many data conundrums that led to progress, then reversals, in the course of reporting the story. But it was enough to get us interested.

What the data was lacking, shoe-leather and valuable beat contacts later filled in.

Shukovsky developed interviews with his deep network of sources within the FBI. We asked for, and received, data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics detailing the number of FBI agents in each state. We found that Washington was not the worst, but it was far from where it should have been, based on population.

We began trying to use data about federal criminal cases from TRAC's excellent subscription Web site (www.tracfed.syr.edu) to figure out if this was hurting the agents' abilities to fight crime locally. We began to see signs that the declines in cases were happening even in places that had higher staffing levels.

We needed to access the raw DOJ data to conduct our own analysis and it was not available through TRAC. Lathrop filed a Freedom of Information Act request for the database of the Executive Office of the U.S. Attorneys for all referrals made to federal prosecutors everywhere in the country.

We do not recommend it.

First, the data came on five DVDs and a CD, so there was a lot of it. Second, much of the data was split up by federal court district, requiring it to be stitched back together in order to generate and analyze nationwide numbers. Third, it took a lot of time and money to pry the data from the Justice Department, even though TRAC had already sued for it and won. When it finally did arrive, Lathrop had to clean up the files and put them into a more user-friendly format.

In the meantime, Shukovsky was reaching out to FBI and DOJ sources around the nation to get their impressions of what had happened to the FBI traditional crime programs after 9/11. Without exception, every source reported major cutbacks in enforcement of drugs, violent and white-collar crime.

At both U.S. Attorney and FBI offices around the country, white-collar squads of prosecutors and agents had been quietly slashed. Active and recently retired agents laid out how entire squads of agents had been discontinued and their personnel transferred to other duties, usually in counter terrorism or foreign counterintelligence.

Shukovsky's sources began to outline a fight within the highest levels of government after 9/11, a fight that ended up keeping the FBI from replacing the 2,500 FBI agents that had been redirected to counterterrorism and national security efforts. Our data would back this up.

When we thought we had tried everything and examined every contingency, we provided copies of our analysis to the FBI, the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys, the White House and the attorney general – and awaited their response.

Local courts reporter Tracy Johnson joined the project and began looking for stories of victims whose cases slipped through the cracks between the FBI and local law enforcement.

The Justice Department data showed that the cracks in the system were worst when it came to white collar crime, drugs and American Indian areas. So, because the Drug Enforcement Administration remains the main federal agency in the fight against drugs, we focused on double-digit declines in case-work involving white collar crime and American Indian-area crimes.

We found people like Margarita MacDonald, a 75-year-old widow with Parkinson's disease. She had more than \$1 million stolen from her, allegedly by a man who helped with household tasks. The case involved cross-border issues, making it virtually

impossible for local police to investigate. The FBI was not interested in the case.

Then there was Eric Drew, an identity-theft victim who was in the hospital awaiting a bone-marrow transplant. When the FBI wasn't interested in his case, he pursued it himself from his deathbed. The FBI didn't take the case until after a story on Drew aired on a Seattle television station.

A reliable source then told Shukovsky that one of our findings – dramatic drops in the investigation and enforcement of crimes against Native Americans – was wrong. The source said he was certain the dire numbers didn't reflect reality.

In fact, the Justice Department had stopped counting those crimes in one program category and had created another. The switch didn't happen overnight, so it looked like a rapid decline over several years.

It was not a good day for us. Shukovsky had just returned from an American Indian reservation after reporting on what we thought would be a key human element to the story, and Lathrop was upset to be bushwhacked by data so late in the game. It proved again that even when you think you understand data, if you don't understand every little wrinkle, you can get a nasty surprise.

Eventually local and national FBI officials did speak to us, as did the U.S. attorney. The Justice Department in Washington, D.C. however, refused to comment on our analysis and had no meaningful response to the story.

The final conclusion: Internal statistics from the FBI confirmed the existence of the major drop in the enforcement of white collar crime.

Some key findings:

- Overall, the number of criminal cases investigated by the FBI nationally has steadily declined. In 2005, the bureau brought slightly more than 20,000 cases to federal prosecutors, compared with about 31,000 in 2000 – a 34 percent drop.
- White-collar crime investigations by the bureau have plummeted in recent years. In 2005, the FBI sent prosecutors 3,500 cases – a fraction of the more than 10,000 cases assigned in 2000. In Western Washington, the drop has been even more dramatic. Records show that the FBI sent 28 white-collar cases to prosecutors in 2005, down 90 percent from five years earlier.
- Civil rights investigations, which include hate crimes and police abuse, have continued a steady decline since the late 1990s. FBI agents pursued 65 percent fewer cases in 2005 than they did in 2000.
- Already hit hard by the shift of agents to terrorism duties, Washington state's FBI offices suffer from staffing levels that are significantly below the national average.

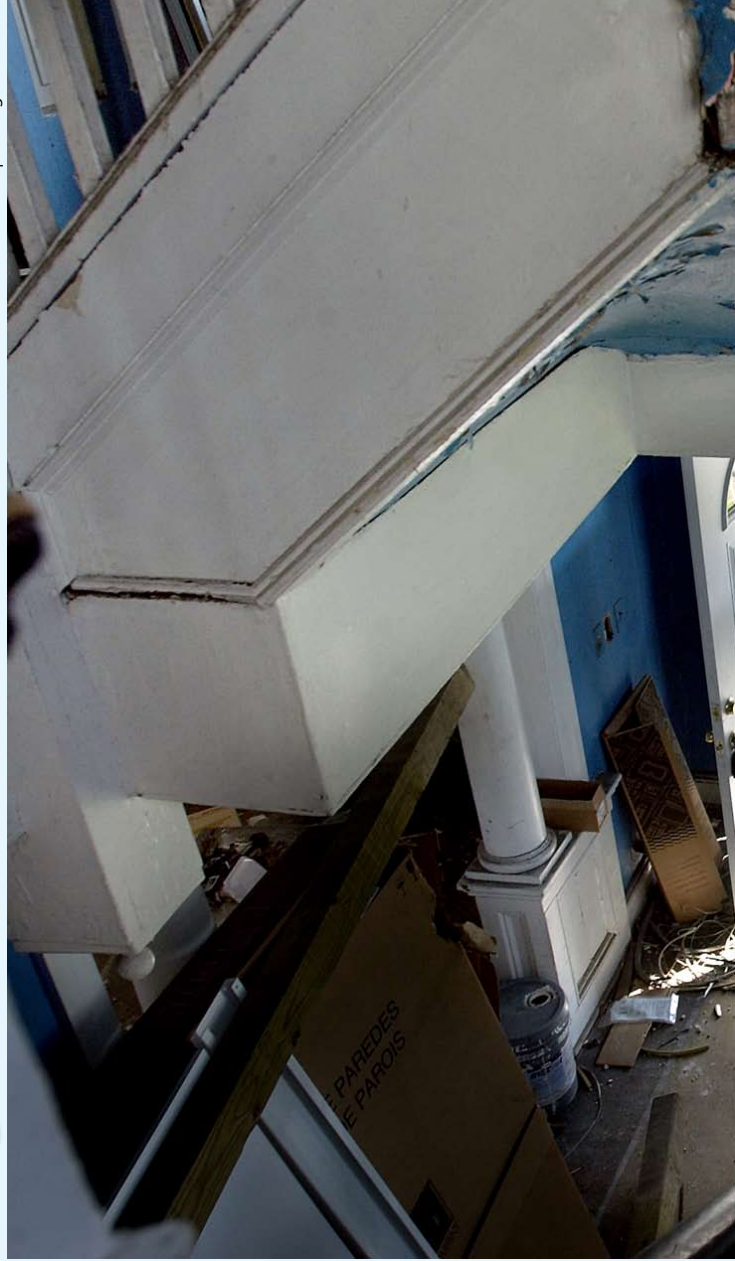
Daniel Lathrop joined the Seattle Post-Intelligencer in July 2006 as an investigative CAR reporter.

Paul Shukovsky currently covers federal courts and federal investigative agencies.

Delores Johnson | The Virginian-Pilot

The crash of the real estate market, subprime lending, urban blight, public officials' missteps and false promises from developers offer journalists a glut of investigative targets. It just takes data work, good sources, and door-to-door reporting to build a clear picture of

HOUSING WOES



CM Development's investors used refinancing deals to generate cash, while neglecting repairs and letting properties sit vacant.

Delores Johnson | The Virginian-Pilot



Reporters from *The Virginian-Pilot* spent hours driving around neighborhoods to check out vacant and run-down properties such as these duplexes.



QUICK LOOK

Name of the series or story and when it was published:
“Cashing in on Blight,” March 18-20.

How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc):
It started with a computer-assisted analysis of absentee landlords.

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

Major types of documents used and if FOI requests were needed:

We used FOI to obtain the following data from multiple cities: codes violations, police calls, building permits, Section 8 inspections, rental inspections and tax receivership. We also built databases from property deeds and loans recorded in circuit court clerks’ offices.

Major type of human sources used:

We interviewed more than 100 people, from national banking experts to neighborhood residents.

URBAN BLIGHT

Investors buy, abandon properties as part of profit plan, data shows

By Meghan Hoyer and Matthew Jones
The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot

We heard the same complaint again and again while covering our aging urban cities: Absentee landlords were killing low- and middle-class neighborhoods by sapping their lifeblood by allowing their rental properties to fall into disrepair.

So, we decided to see if this was really true. Were the worst houses in our cities – Norfolk and Portsmouth, Va. – owned by absentee landlords?

We wanted to avoid the typical “bad landlord” story in which we’d find some bad houses, interview outraged and weary tenants and neighbors, track down a defiant and/or oblivious landlord for a couple of quotes and then let an expert weigh in with generalities. We wanted to quantify the issue by using data to find the worst problems instead of the juicy anecdote.

We expected to find landlords who took advantage of tenants with substandard properties, but we found much more. One company was treating its properties like a cash machine and using a hot housing market to pull equity out of its houses by constantly refinancing. Meanwhile, many of the properties were sitting vacant and in various stages of disrepair, racking up back taxes and code violations.



Reporters discovered that players in CM Development had run a similar business which folded with massive debts in Michigan during the 1980s.

Tracking sales

In the beginning of our investigation, we found that CM Development, its investors and its president, Cary McEntee, owned many of the area's worst properties. (Jeff South, a former reporter who now teaches computer-assisted reporting at Virginia Commonwealth University, helped us analyze property, code enforcement and rental inspection data.)

Then an unexpected but valuable e-mail arrived.

A CM property manager had sent us an e-mail on an unrelated matter, but, lo and behold, he had copied several of his colleagues. Intrigued, we decided to find out exactly who these people were.

After checking the names through Google, LexisNexis, Accurint and our in-house archive, we found that most of them had quite an interesting history. They had been involved in another local venture in the 1990s that

had landed several of them in federal prison for housing fraud.

Furthermore, they also had been involved in a Lansing, Mich., operation in the 1980s that had dissolved in massive debt, leaving investors out millions of dollars. We found that the Michigan company's business model looked remarkably similar to McEntee's CM Development plan. They bought old houses with promises to rehabilitate blighted neighborhoods, but the improvements never materialized as the company burned through borrowed money.

On its Web site, CM Development claimed it owned more than 250 properties throughout the region. To do our story justice, we needed to investigate each one. So, we set out to the local courthouses.

We spent weeks in a half-dozen deed rooms, tracking each sale and subsequent loan to build our own database. Our initial impression turned out to be correct but much more complicated than we figured.

Many of the properties had changed hands numerous times among a small circle of people. Some investors entered the plan early, lending the group money for initial purchases. Others came in later, resulting in their names being part of a large loan and sharing ownership of the property with McEntee.

By this point, we'd expanded our public records search to request codes and inspection data for four other cities in our region. We also asked city officials for any building, electrical and plumbing permits to help explain the sales price increases we were seeing.

We knew we had to see each of the properties for ourselves to gauge their condition. This meant days roaming dozens of neighborhoods with one of us driving while the other typed on a laptop.

Neighborhood blight

The results were startling. The company, which purportedly made money renting its houses, had a vacancy rate around 50 percent. Documents from Section 8, the federal program that provides rent subsidies for low-income families, showed that even the houses that were rented weren't taking in enough income to cover the loans on them. At many of the buildings, expensive repairs, such as new windows, siding and roofs, had been started, but the work had never been completed.

Code officials in several cities told us they were aware of the company and vexed by all the work it made for code inspectors. Housing and mortgage experts, who examined excerpts of our sales database, helped us get a handle on the company's business model. Neighbors told us some of the company's houses had sat in disrepair, blighting their neighborhoods for years.

Armed with this background, we contacted McEntee. He was suspicious to the point of having his attorney call us to fish around, but eventually he

HOUSING WOES



Neighbors like Leola Sutton were frustrated with the CM Development's blighted homes. Officials from four cities acknowledged that the company's maintenance and code violation problems were well-known.

offered to give us a tour of some of the new homes his company was building. He sidestepped our questions about his renovation work and financing system.

We followed up with a request for a sit-down interview and agreed to send him a list of broadly worded questions. As we suspected he would, he cut things off, saying his lawyer had advised him not to reveal his business secrets.

So we started calling his investors to ask them how they got involved with McEntee and what they

hoped to ultimately gain. Within 24 hours, McEntee was e-mailing us, saying how interested he'd be in talking with us.

We had a lengthy interview soon after. McEntee and his colleague, John Porter, were congenial at first, but evasive. We cut to the chase, asking them pointed questions to let them know (a small amount) of how much we knew. We were armed with a laptop containing real estate databases and a box of documents from our FOI requests. Their defense was that they were well-intentioned but overextended.

We ended on good terms and later joined McEntee on tours of many of the company's worst properties, where homeless people were squatting and where thieves had stolen equipment and building supplies. He continued to say that his company planned to fix up the properties

soon, but over our months of reporting, we saw little progress.

Now we had to write the story. We decided that three days would be the best way to explain CM Development: one focusing on the company and its effect on neighborhoods, one on the past of many CM Development associates and the third on the cities' failures to adequately police these properties. A sidebar on the third day explained how the company took advantage of subprime loans to obtain mortgages. The series, "Cashing in on Blight," ran in mid-March, nearly nine months after we began our initial look at the absentee landlords.

Response to the series came quickly. Cities scrambled to crack down on the company and its investors. Several of the worst buildings were torn down. McEntee was brought into court in several cities, both on civil and criminal matters, and began selling off his houses en masse to cut his losses and avoid further punishment.

For the last four years, Meghan Hoyer has covered Portsmouth city government, redevelopment and planning for The Virginian-Pilot. Matthew Jones is a general assignment reporter in Norfolk, currently covering redevelopment.

Data work

When setting up our data, we made sure that address fields were formatted in the same way in each database. We did this by hiring the newspaper's direct-marketing staff, which used its software to clean up the data.

In the assessor's database, we created a flag for property owners who had different mailing addresses. Non-landlord-owned properties and commercial buildings were weeded out to create our initial pool of addresses.

We joined the databases in Microsoft Access to count the number of code violations, police calls, failed inspections and Section 8 inspections at each property. Finally, we queried landlords and counted their number of properties, their total violations, failed inspections and past-due taxes.



This former landfill is targeted for a \$470 million transformation, including two golf courses, nearly 2,500 housing units and a 350-room hotel.

LANDFILL GAMBLE

Complex financial deal unravels to reveal public subsidy questions

By John Brennan and Jeff Pillets
The (Hackensack, N.J.) Record

The New Jersey Meadowlands – that infamous icon of the Garden State and purported final resting place of Jimmy Hoffa – has long held allure for developers who look past the massive garbage mountains and fetid swamps and see only the Manhattan skyline just a few miles away.

The latest to hear the call of the cash register, a North Carolina-based private equity firm that specializes in developing contaminated sites, offered to transform decades-old landfills into a mini-city of 2,500 luxury residences and golf courses. It's a plan backed by a complex mix of public bonds, loans and

grants worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

How complex? A financial analyst for the project developer, called EnCap Golf Holdings, told members of a special Meadowlands reporting team assembled by *The Record* that he had worked on development deals totaling tens of billions of dollars over a span of 25 years and never before had he come across a maze of financing as intricate.

Neither apparently had New Jersey state and local officials – none of whom seemed to have fully grasped the consequences of the plan until a series of articles in *The Record*, beginning in December

2006, ultimately produced a wave of protest about the extent of public subsidies awarded to the company.

Quietly, over time, the developers had methodically amassed an unprecedented array of subsidized loans, tax grants and other support from various agencies at all levels of government in New Jersey. Notably, the company also convinced three small Meadowlands towns to turn over nearly half of the future tax revenues generated at the site.

Political firestorm

For this story, there really was no tip that got us going. We made the decision to look at the development that suddenly was popping up all over the place in the Meadowlands, and it became quickly apparent that the EnCap deal was a good, early focal point.

The newspaper used an unconventional – and ultimately effective – strategy in unraveling this complicated issue. Long before the story got hot, we had identified both its latent news value and its mind-numbing complexities. Then, we gave a team of reporters time to get a handle on it in advance.

That way, when the timing was right, we were able to provide readers with the insight needed to assess whether their interests were being served.

For the most part, we unraveled the financing issues ourselves and talked to several financial experts early on as we developed the story, and they helped us sort wheat from chaff in the bond documents and contracts. That way, we had sufficient knowledge to

form premises that only needed to be confirmed.

Final confirmation came when Brennan, Pillets and team leader Tim Nostrand, assistant managing editor for projects, met with an EnCap executive and an EnCap financial analyst in a marathon six-hour meeting in the company's Meadowlands office six days before the major story ran in late January.

Our ongoing coverage – combining breaking news stories with big-picture analysis – has produced numerous tangle results.

Within days of our first major article in December, Gov. Jon Corzine publicly expressed his concern that a key component of the financing – by which the developers would collect an upfront payment of \$366 million from future tax revenues – could “leave the public holding the bag.” A week later, state officials said they would delay consideration of the upfront payout indefinitely.

Our next big story, published in late January, offered an analysis of the entire financing plan and showed how the developers had secured \$20 in public support for every dollar they had at risk. Corzine told the state's inspector general to investigate the project. And if she found potential illegalities, Corzine said, she would report that evidence to the state attorney general.

In mid-February, we turned our sights on EnCap's proposed second phase. A dozen businesses were to be acquired via eminent domain in favor of 1,600 more residences. A few weeks later, a prominent state senator and former EnCap backer urged EnCap to “get the hell out” of that town entirely.

Those findings – and the political firestorm they've created – have called into question the entire fate of a project once hailed as “The Miracle in the Meadowlands.”

Unpopular project

Our reporting strategy had a lot to do with that. Late last year, an obscure state agency issued a memo questioning an element of the financial plan. By that time, our team was able to grasp its significance: EnCap was attempting to reap a payout of \$366 million even before environmental officials had deemed a single piece of the former landfill a safe place to build homes.

The Record soon published an exclusive package that featured a 45-inch main story analyzing the rejected financing plan, with extensive reaction from key local and state officials and a box that excerpted highlights from the key memo and from the company's response a week later.

Three follow-up stories and an editorial followed within less than a week of publication of the first story.

On Jan. 28, we then published our comprehensive analysis of the entire financing package – a 60-inch overview in which Brennan and Pillets found that EnCap was getting an unprecedented 20-for-1 taxpayer-backed windfall, both from state

agencies and from small towns that ceded 40 to 50 percent of their future tax revenues.

“You're bankrolling landfill gamble” was how our main headline put it.

That story, and others that followed in subsequent months, continued to put the spotlight on what was becoming an increasingly unpopular project. Elected officials in one of the towns declared in late March that their deal with EnCap was “dead.”

On April 9, we published a story showing how the developer had spread around thousands in campaign cash to politicians and millions in fees to politically connected law firms. One small-town mayor had received more than \$12,000 in campaign contributions from North Carolina-based EnCap officials and the local attorneys who were benefiting from the project.

That Sunday story, written by Brennan with a sidebar on local mayoral campaign donations by staffer Oshrat Carmiel, was enhanced by a list of top donors compiled by computer-assisted reporting specialist Dave Sheingold. The package was edited by Nostrand and assignment editor Rich Whitby.

It, too, had impact. A few days later, a mayor of one of the EnCap towns found out she'd have an opponent in the election this fall: an environmental law attorney whose chief cause will be his opposition to EnCap.

On May 6, Pillets landed a story detailing a damning list of problems at EnCap, including contractors who haven't been paid in months, more than \$5 million in bills rejected by the project's insurance company for poorly documented or inaccurate invoices and a multi-year pattern of cost overruns and demands for more state-backed financial support. Pillets reviewed thousands of e-mails and documents from various state agencies dating from 2004 to early this year. Such revelations prompted acting Gov. Richard Codey to question whether the state attorney general should intercede immediately.

Most recently, that documents review yielded a compelling investigative piece detailing how senior

QUICK LOOK

Name of the series or story and when it was published:

The series is titled “Meadowlands for Sale” and is ongoing. Major elements have been published from December 2006 – June 2007.

How the story got started:

We made the decision to look at the development that suddenly was popping up all over the place in the Meadowlands, and it became quickly apparent that the EnCap deal was a good, early focal point.

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

We started looking at this in mid- to late-2006 by carving some time out of the schedules of the reporters involved as they went about their normal beats. Jeff Pillets has been working more or less full time on the story since the late fall; Brennan continues to split his time between the story and his beat.

Major types of documents used:

We submitted at least six multi-part public information requests under New Jersey's Open Public Records Law. The regulatory and executive offices that responded to our requests provided: internal memoranda, e-mails, advisory letters, billing invoices and payment records, field data and analytic reports, engineering and financial studies, and notices of environmental violation.

Major type of human resources used:

We talked with hundreds of people in preparation for these stories. We've done interviews with everyone from local critics to the governor of the state, including other state and local officials, as well as EnCap representatives, past and present.

Project planning

How did *The Record's* team get to the bottom of such a complicated story while keeping up with their other responsibilities? Senior writers Jeff Pillets and John Brennan, as well as project leader Tim Nostrand, spent several days a week over a period of months poring over financial records and other documents detailing the roles of a multitude of government agencies, banks, and the developer. The team was assisted initially by former *Record* staffer Prashant Gopal.

Brennan continued to handle his longtime sports business beat throughout the six months, including breaking and developing news. Pillets, as a special assignment reporter with breaking news responsibilities, has spent most of this year working on the story, devoting more than a month to requesting, acquiring and reading thousands of documents related to the investigation.

At the same time, the EnCap story was a top priority of management since late last year, so a plan was in place to roll out the stories on a steady basis.

state officials had pushed forward with an unprecedented \$212-million financing package for the EnCap project even though their subordinates had warned of credit-worthiness and other problems. In the June 8 story, Pillets detailed how the documents showed that, time after time, the public interest has taken a back seat to the desires of the developer.

We've also done multimedia work on this story. Photographer Tom Franklin and Web site producer Sean Oates were brought to the EnCap site for a two-hour tour with officials last November. See complete coverage at www.northjersey.com/meadowlands.

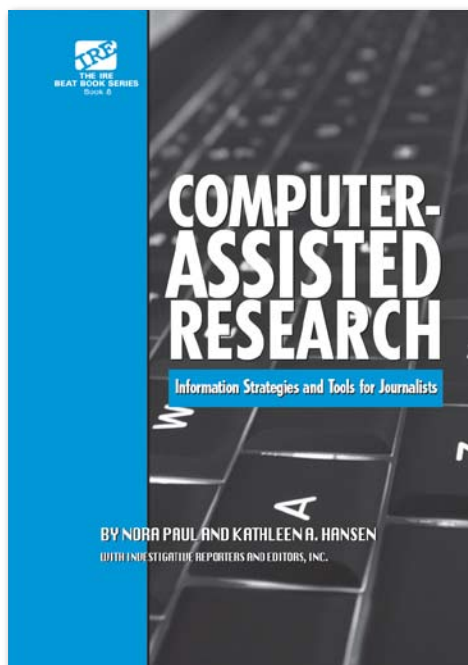
John Brennan has been a reporter at The Record for almost 25 years, including nearly 20 years in sports. He has covered sports business since 2002, with a focus on the evolving Meadowlands Sports Complex. Jeff Pillets, a 14-year veteran of The Record, has won numerous prizes, including the Daniel Pearl Award for Investigative Reporting and the Minority Issues Award, both from the Deadline Club of New York City.

Chris Pedota | The Record



Garbage mounds are visible at the EnCap site along the NJT rail line.

A MUST-HAVE IRE BEAT BOOK, AVAILABLE IN AUGUST



COMPUTER-ASSISTED RESEARCH: INFORMATION STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR JOURNALISTS By Nora Paul and Kathleen A. Hansen

The IRE beat book series brings you an all-new edition of the essential guide for journalists navigating Internet resources. It's updated to reflect the increasingly dynamic and sophisticated options in wikis, blogs, smarter search engines, commercial data providers, and more. Learn the best strategies for online "reconnaissance," plus best practices for efficient, accurate and ethical use of these tools.

Order this and other IRE Beat Books from the Resource Center.

Call us to place an order:

573-882-3364

PUBLIC SLUMLORD

Property seized under eminent domain never used for roads, abandoned by state

By Natalya Shulyakovskaya
The Orange County Register

Annette Henderson, a 61-year-old grandmother, lived near the Garden Grove Freeway for 30 years. In September 2002, she found a booklet in her mailbox explaining that the California Department of Transportation was invoking eminent domain laws to raze her house. As a part of its highway-widening project, Caltrans wanted to reconfigure a pedestrian overpass, and Henderson's house was in its path.

Henderson turned to her state senator. After two months of vicious fighting, Caltrans redrew its plans in a way that spared the house.

The battle over the family home that pitted the woman against the nation's largest highway builder was documented in a series of daily stories by *Orange County Register* investigative reporter Kimberly Kindy.

Kindy wondered if there was a bigger story in the way the department identified and amassed property for its construction projects.

The next round of research showed that Caltrans had been criticized over the years for poor tracking of its property holdings. Property owners complained that Caltrans' slow acquisitions and attempts at low-ball offers left residents and businesses in limbo for years. Audit reports and interviews also indicated that the department held onto properties it did not need for road construction for decades, letting homes and structures deteriorate.

Kindy wrote a proposal to investigations editor Mark Katches, who has since joined the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Katches, the newspaper's editor Ken Brusich and deputy editor Jeff Light thought that

David Paul Morris | The Orange County Register



Homeowners moved out of their homes in haste, only to watch the properties deteriorate as Caltrans delayed or scrapped highway projects.

QUICK LOOK

Name of the story and when it was published:

"Caltrans: Road to Nowhere," October 2006
Follow-up stories published
October-November 2006
(www.ocregister.com/ocregister/sections/news/investigations/caltrans2006)

How the story got started:

A series of daily stories about one homeowner's battle to keep her house from being razed for road expansion.

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

Two reporters worked on the story on and off for two years; both were dedicated for the last nine months.

Major types of documents:

We used California Department of Transportation, acquisition property management, excess land and accounting data; manuals outlining right-of-way procedures; right-of-way maps; property transaction documents; acquisition files for properties; property maintenance records; tenants' own files on interactions with Caltrans; police call logs; law suits and legal files accumulated at law offices of attorneys representing property owners; California Board of Equalization annual reports on property tax; and assessor's records.

Major types of human sources:

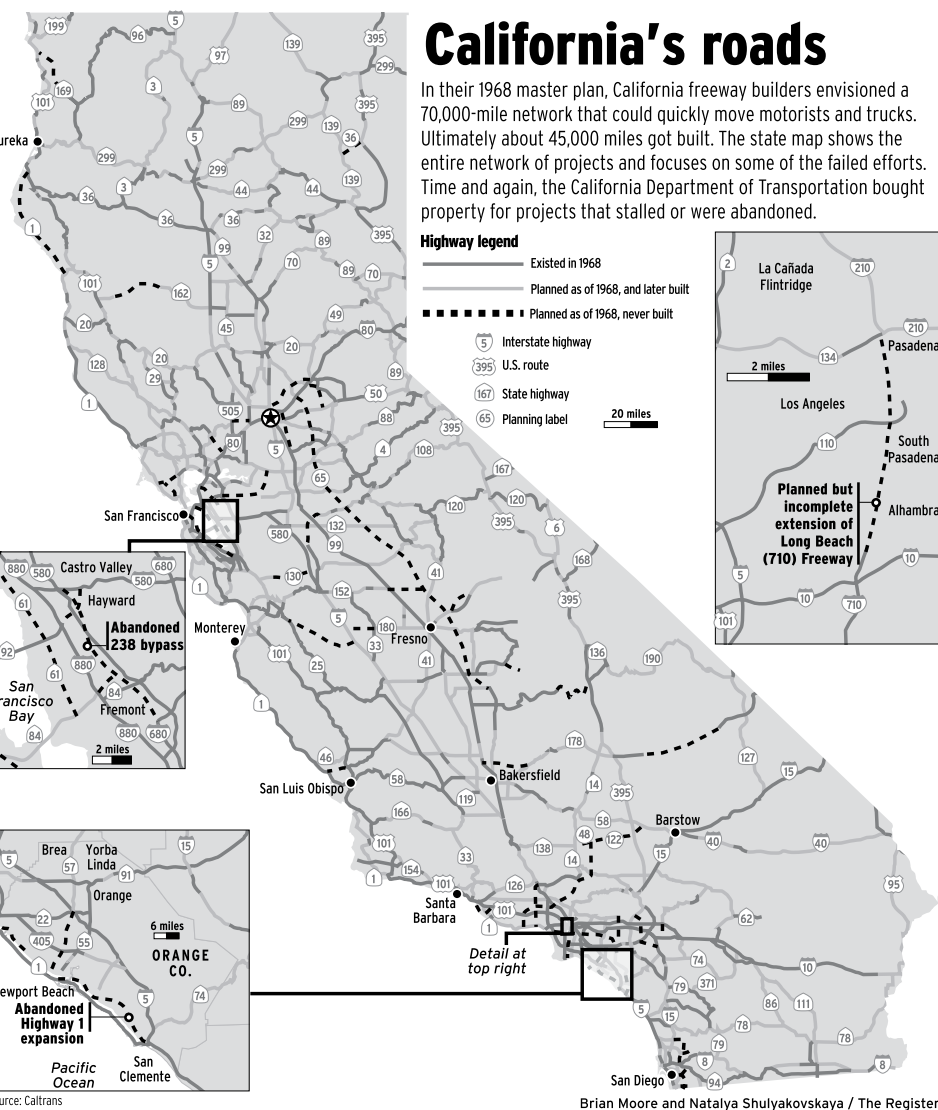
Original property owners, Caltrans officials and experts, local officials, California elected officials, eminent domain attorneys, Caltrans renters, neighbors living next to Caltrans properties, police, transportation data experts and county assessors

Property owners complained that Caltrans' slow acquisitions and attempts at lowball offers left residents and businesses in limbo for years. Audit reports and interviews also indicated that the department held onto properties it did not need for road construction for decades, letting homes and structures deteriorate.

David Paul Morris | The Orange County Register



The Register's stories prompted leaders, including Director of Public Transportation for the State of California (right), to review Caltrans property holdings and eminent domain policies.



the story would require a lot of data analysis muscle, so I joined the project.

Most Californians and Americans look at highway construction – and the loss of homes and businesses where highways expand – as necessary. There is a sense that the loss, while painful for individuals, is unavoidable for the greater good of moving thousands from point A to point B.

Our investigation, published in October 2006, showed that Caltrans has repeatedly displaced property owners for highway projects that were never built – from the abandoned widening of the Pacific Coast Highway through Orange County to Hayward's failed freeway loop near the San Francisco Bay.

After analysis of the department's databases, thousands of pages of documents and interviews with hundreds of people, we found:

- The department has become one of California's worst slumlords and property managers, owning hundreds of abandoned homes and businesses that served as temporary drug dens, crash pads for teenage vandals, community dumps and homeless encampments.
- Caltrans doesn't have to obey local laws that apply to slumlords, allowing the department to neglect its land holdings and get away with it. No local authority has been able to force the department to clean up its land or repair its homes.
- Under the most conservative estimates, the department's large portfolio of unused land has deprived counties of at least \$78 million in lost property tax revenues. Money that could have gone toward schools or hiring police has vanished. The actual loss may be closer to \$300 million when you factor in the strength of California's real estate market.
- When Caltrans does part with unused land, it has fared poorly. Almost half the time, the department sold properties for less than the state paid for them – on average 60 percent less.

Data documentation

Kindy and I had worked on stories about Caltrans in the past. We knew that the department took weeks to respond to the most mundane requests for documents and information. Still, we did not suspect that it would take us months to gather and dissect Caltrans documents and data.

We wanted to be methodical and thorough, so we started outlining major subjects or themes we wanted to focus on. As I look at our early memos, I count six major subjects we wanted to nail down. For each subject, we outlined major sources and documents we needed to get.

In early 2004, we filed our first public records requests with the department. We asked for manuals, record layouts and other documentation describing three main databases the department used to acquire and manage land it deemed necessary to build roads: Integrated Property Management System, Property Management System and Excess Lands System.

We spent almost an entire year negotiating for

Brian Moore and Natalya Shulyakovskaya / The Register

the electronic records, fighting off inflated cost estimates and arguing over which fields should be public.

As I focused on data, Kindy interviewed attorneys, knocked on doors and read law suits that owners filed against Caltrans in an effort to stop acquisitions or get higher payments for their land and homes. We visited sites where Caltrans bought homes to build highways, but it either changed its plans or put projects on hold while neighborhoods deteriorated. We came up with initial lists of places to visit by looking at the agency's excess land lists and right-of-way maps that marked parcels the agency identified as necessary for road construction. We also looked at assessor's records to identify lots that belonged to Caltrans.

There were residential streets cut in half with one side reduced to empty patches of dry dirt. There were leftover empty lots that Caltrans promised to turn over to local municipalities for parks but left vacant for years. Then there were residents in balmy Pasadena and Hayward who had to move out of their family homes in haste to allow for road construction, only to see their properties sit boarded up while road construction stalled.

Kindy was stunned by how easy it was to spot Caltrans-owned homes when she drove and walked through neighborhoods where the department bought land for road projects it never built. The homes were charred by fire, filled with broken glass and sitting open and vacant. Dozens of other homes and buildings were boarded up, covered with graffiti and abandoned. Some homes sat in disrepair for years.

As we waited for the data, we created lists of reporting questions and combed layouts and manuals to see if the data could give us the answers. Data documentation showed that Caltrans built overwhelmingly complex databases mostly designed to reflect its multi-step acquisition process. The system was not set up for seamless tracking of properties through their entire life cycle in Caltrans' ownership. One system logged parcels as they were acquired. Another system picked them up if they were left over after construction ended; yet a third system came into play if land was declared excess and the department decided to sell it off.

When databases arrived, there were problems with parts of the data. The department refused to allow us to discuss these technical problems with the programmers directly, so we spent weeks trading e-mails and pressing Caltrans for a new data run.

Other parts of the databases had to be restructured to allow for meaningful analysis. All three database systems had incomplete sets of records, and some records that existed in the property management system weren't logged in the acquisitions system. The excess land system contained properties that never surfaced in either acquisitions or property management records. Caltrans' recordkeeping presented an additional challenge: Its computer systems were so complex that each regional district came up with its own ways to cope with data entry hassles. Some fields

in the database were abandoned, and some were filled only half of the time.

As I worked my way through the mine field of Caltrans data analysis, I kept a log of questions I tackled. Most of the data analysis issues and solutions ended up summarized in our "How The Analysis Was Done" story that accompanied the main series.

As we identified counties most affected by land acquisitions that took land off tax rolls but never resulted in built roads, Kindy started interviewing local assessors and mayors. Some places, such as Oakland, were so outraged by Caltrans' handling of the land that they sued the agency. Some, such as the city of Hayward, had so much property in Caltrans' hands that they declined to discuss their relationships with the department.

Records and interviews showed that Caltrans rented out a large number of properties it had not used for road construction. When Kindy interviewed Caltrans tenants, their stories of leaking roofs, rat infestation and bureaucrats' indifference compounded to create a picture of a department that was not set up to handle rented property. Both renters and municipalities called Caltrans a slumlord, but they could not force the department to fix up its homes. Local code enforcement officials had no legal power to regulate state-owned property.

Cleaning up

The "Road to Nowhere" investigation prompted results before a word was published. After questions from *The Register*, Caltrans began making repairs to some of its most neglected properties.

State workers began to haul away broken-down appliances, furniture and trash from vacant parcels. Goats were brought into one Bay Area neighborhood to eat three-foot-high weeds.

Both renters and municipalities called Caltrans a slumlord, but they could not force the department to fix up its homes. Local code enforcement officials had no legal power to regulate state-owned property.

After the story was published in October, local governments began organizing a coalition to demand Caltrans clean up its properties.

In November, at a public hearing prompted by the investigation, the Caltrans director announced that, starting in 2007, he would allow local code enforcement officers onto state-owned properties. In January, Caltrans opened its properties and started fixing health and safety violations.

The department also vowed to sell 1,140 unused parcels – some acquired more than 30 years ago but never used for highway projects.

Natalya Shulyakovskaya is an investigative reporter specializing in data analysis at The Orange County Register. Kimberly Kindy is now an investigative reporter for The San Jose Mercury News.

The main story can be found at: www.ocregister.com/ocregister/news/investigations/caltrans2006/article_1311897.php

How the analysis was done can be found at: www.ocregister.com/ocregister/news/investigations/caltrans2006/registeranalysis/article_1312074.php

Hoyen Tsang | The Orange County Register



A Caltrans tenant in Pasadena shows the window where he must change towels several times daily to curb the flow of water leaking into his bedroom.

HOUSING BUST

Minority home owners unable to meet subprime loan demands

By Ron Nixon and Vikas Bajaj
The New York Times

Our stories about subprime mortgages – loans made to people with weak or little credit history – started more than a year ago with a simple question: Were the gains in homeownership rates, particularly those among minorities, sustainable?

We knew from work that had already been done by academics and other journalists, including Ron Nixon, who worked on subprime lending at another newspaper, that minorities were far more likely to receive subprime mortgages than prime-rate loans. (We later came to learn that this was true for minorities in higher income brackets as well as those who earned less.) We also knew that more blacks and Hispanics lived in homes that they owned than at any other point in history.

As we dug into the question by talking to academics and reading research reports and news stories on the subject, it became evident that the sustainability of minority homeownership had not been thoroughly examined. There was far greater focus on the problems associated with adjustable rate mortgages that reset from low teaser rates to higher interest rates

after a few years, which continues to be of great importance. But stories on that subject seemed to only glance at the issue of minority homeownership rates and subprime lending.

From the research of several academics, chief among them William Apgar at Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies, we started to focus on concentrations of foreclosures in city centers in places such as Cleveland, Chicago and Atlanta. The evidence showed that areas where subprime lending was most concentrated also had a rising number of foreclosures.

With housing still booming in many parts of the country, these patterns were not yet visible in many places and there had only been a handful of studies to point out these concentrations. Many of the cities said to be experiencing these problems were in the Midwest where the loss of manufacturing jobs had created the ideal conditions for rising foreclosures. The highly segregated nature of these cities also made it easier to detect patterns of foreclosure and lending that might not be visible in, say, Western cities where neighborhoods tend to be more diverse.

The research drew upon several sources of data: the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act filings made by mortgage companies and banks and local foreclosure filings in the areas studied. The HMDA data is widely available (including through the IRE and NICAR Database Library), and many reporters have used it to look into mortgage lending patterns.

The same cannot be said for foreclosure data. We had a hard time obtaining useful data on foreclosures for the cities we wanted to examine. The information is often only kept at the local courthouses and often in paper filings that cannot be easily transferred to an electronic format. A lot of the information that is available is aggregated and does not lend itself to deeper analysis.

We found useful foreclosure data from Cleveland State University, where housing researchers had been collecting foreclosure information by neighborhood for many years. We could now track foreclosure patterns and understand how they related to the demographics of specific neighborhoods, by overlaying the CSU data with census and HMDA data. We could now corroborate what we were hearing from people on the ground. The conclusion, perhaps unsurprising, was that the pattern of foreclosure was strongly correlated to the high incidence of sub-prime lending.

Source of shame

In our second story together, we used data from the marketing firm LoanPerformance, which has one of the industry's largest databases of mortgage loans. The firm's data showed how many of the loans being made nationally in 2006 were for adjustable-rate and interest-only mortgages, which makes up a substantial portion of the subprime market. LoanPerformance provided the data for free.

The U.S. Census Bureau's Housing Vacancies and Homeownership data was another extremely useful dataset. It allowed us to track homeownership trends by race over more than three decades. The staff was friendly and pointed out flaws in the data and things that we should watch out for.

Vikas Bajaj did the on-the-ground reporting from Cleveland and Chicago for the mortgage stories. In New York, Nixon worked on analyzing the various data sets acquired during our research. We then checked our findings from our on-the-ground reporting and data analysis with local researchers, advocates and industry officials.

Obtaining the real-world stories from people in these communities was in many ways more difficult than obtaining the data. People are very reluctant to talk about the loss of their homes, even if they feel they were cheated in some way. A foreclosure, which is often accompanied with a personal bankruptcy, is a source of deep shame.

We tried to overcome the challenge of getting people to open up to us by working through housing counselors. In Cleveland, the critical break came from a housing court judge who was alarmed at the soaring number of code violation and tax

Past issues of Uplink offer more examples of computer-assisted reporting in housing and development stories:

- **"Mapping It Out: Uncovering an age-old scam,"** Ron Hurtibise, *Daytona Beach (Fla.) News-Journal*. An investigation by the *News-Journal* used mapping to show that people were being tricked into buying useless tracts of Florida wetlands. Most of the buyers made their purchases online and were misled about the condition of the property. (March/April 2005)
- **"Spotlight: Real estate finding faults in new homes,"** Katy Miller, *Orlando Sentinel*. An examination of housing construction quality in central Florida revealed thousands of problems with new homes. Miller created a housing inspection database using residential inspection data, and mapping software showed how little time was spent on home inspections because of travel time. (July/Aug. 2004)
- **"Spotlight: Real estate calculating unfair tax assessments,"** Gordon Russell, *The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune*. The reporter analyzed property assessments and home sales figures to establish the degree of under-assessment and the ensuing loss of tax revenues. The analysis also showed that people who purchased a home in 2003 paid 70 percent over the assessed value. (July/Aug. 2004)
- **"Spotlight: Real estate housing prices on the rise,"** Matthew Waite, *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*. Waite's analyzed the Tampa Bay housing market using sales and parcel data, and showed how the skyrocketing price of homes is affecting neighborhoods. (July/Aug. 2004)

To see the latest housing investigations, check out Extra! Extra! at www.ire.org/extraextra.

delinquency cases he was seeing. (Homeowners who cannot make their mortgage payments often do not have the means to keep their properties in decent condition.)

Bajaj sat through a morning of routine hearings in the court, where he met a young woman, Catrina Roberts, who would become the central anecdote in our first story.

Roberts had gone from living in a federally subsidized Section 8 apartment to owning a home, having made a down payment of just \$2,000. She fell behind when she had to foot the bill for home repairs and her daughter gave birth to two children.

In Chicago, we found Shirley Byrd through the help of the National Information and Training Center, a housing advocacy group that works with neighborhood housing counseling services. Byrd had fallen behind on her mortgage payments because she was supporting several ill family members. The interest rate on her adjustable rate mortgage also had been increasing, increasing the financial strain.

In working with housing groups, we were always cognizant that we were dealing with advocates and that they were pursuing a specific policy agenda. In reporting on the plight of individuals in these stories, we tried to present an even representation of their situation, pointing out both the flaws with the mortgages made to them, as well as the problems homeowners encountered and the mistakes they made along the way.

Reporting on the individual cases was made difficult by the unwillingness of many lenders to cooperate. They often cited privacy policies, even when the homeowner had obviously consented to having their stories publicized. To corroborate the stories, we used mortgage documents provided by the subjects. We also consulted bankruptcy court filings and filings from the foreclosure proceedings.

Mortgage companies have become increasingly reluctant to talk to reporters, especially in light of the recent demise of several high-profile lenders, such as New Century Financial. We believe that will continue to present a challenge to reporters trying to accurately represent all sides of this story.

To the industry's credit the Mortgage Bankers Association has been very forthright and forthcoming. In our dealings with the association, their officials responded in a timely fashion and readily provided data on loan delinquencies and originations. Douglas Duncan, the association's chief economist, and other officials have been very professional and helpful.

Lending restrictions

In our second story we also turned to mortgage brokers in California who helped us understand how borrowers with adjustable rate mortgages were often refinancing by taking out other adjustable rate mortgages. Adjustable-rate loans were widely used by borrowers on the West Coast in response to the rapid appreciation of home prices there in recent years.

Economists at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the two quasi-governmental lending institutions, also were helpful in providing aggregate data and analysis on the performance of subprime loans.

The data analysis and interviews allowed us to report that the distress we were seeing in low income and minority communities could become much more widespread as the housing market cooled. With the help of our data analysis and on-the-ground reporting we were able to make that case before the current meltdown among lenders in the subprime market began in earnest at the start of the year.

As defaults have risen and several large subprime mortgage companies have gone out of business, lawmakers and regulators have taken a heightened interest in this story. There have been a number of hearings in Washington and state capitals in the last several months. Although several bills have been introduced, there has been little movement on them in Congress.

Some states, such as Minnesota, Illinois and Massachusetts, have been more active in passing legislation restricting certain types of lending. The Federal Reserve and other banking regulators, which have been attacked in Congress for doing little to police the market, have also moved toward tightening lending standards and are now hinting that they will go further.

Meanwhile, the lending industry and its financial backers on Wall Street have been tightening lending standards to do away with some of the riskiest mortgages written in the last few years. They have made it harder, for instance, for borrowers with weak credit to take loans without making a down payment – a booming portion of the business in the last few years. The use of stated income loans, in which lenders did not verify the accuracy of information such as how much borrowers earned, has been scaled back somewhat. Some policy makers and officials worry that the tightening of standards could go too far and make it harder and more expensive for some borrowers to buy homes or refinance an existing mortgage.

If the past is any indication, the subprime mortgage story is far from over. Unlike the stock market, the market for housing adjusts slowly. Foreclosure rates have only recently started rising and most experts believe that many more homeowners will express financial duress before the current crisis runs its course. More than \$1 trillion in adjustable-rate mortgages are expected to reset to higher interest rates in the next year and a half. There will undoubtedly be scores of interesting stories to be told in neighborhoods across the country.

Vikas Bajaj covers finance and housing at The New York Times, where he has been a reporter since June 2005. Ron Nixon is a projects reporter and editor on The New York Times computer-assisted reporting team, assigned to the business desk and the Washington, D.C. bureau. Nixon is a former IRE training director.

Name of the series or story and when it was published:

"Subprime Loans Going From Boon To Housing Bane; Minority Buyers Especially Hurt As Interest Rates Adjust Higher," Dec. 6, 2006
"Variable Loans Help to Put Off Mortgage Pain," July 23, 2006
"For Minorities, Signs of Trouble in Foreclosures," Feb. 22, 2006

How the story got started (tip, assignment, etc):
Our reporting on subprime lending started more than a year ago with a simple question:

Were the gains in homeownership rates, particularly those among minorities, sustainable? This question was prompted by a study on minority homeownership from the National Association of Realtors and an article in *Realty Times*.

Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story(s):
The stories were done over a period of a year and in between other projects and daily stories.

Major types of documents used and if FOI requests were needed:
We used numerous studies by academics at Harvard University; the Center for Responsible Lending; Cleveland State University; Reinvestment Fund in Philadelphia and the National Training and Information Center, an advocacy group in Chicago. We also used Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data, data on adjustable rate mortgages and interest only mortgages from LoanPerformance, a marketing firm in San Francisco. We used foreclosure data from Cleveland State University and housing data from the Census Bureau. The Mortgage Bankers Association of America provided information on national loan default rates. All of the data was provided free of charge. We did not have to file a FOIA request to get any of the documents or data.

Major types of human sources used:
The major human sources used were homeowners with subprime loans, academic and government researchers, public interest groups, local housing officials, and bankers and trade groups such as the Mortgage Bankers Association. Researchers at LoanPerformance, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and Mark Zandi, an economist at Moody's Economy.com, were also helpful.

HOUSING RESOURCES

By *The IRE Journal*

Whether you're curious about city-wide property development or privately owned homes, there are numerous stories and tipsheets available through the IRE Resource Center (www.ire.org/resourcecenter):

Stories

- **Story No. 23121:** Investors in Baltimore are seizing homes and extracting fees from property owners based on an arcane city law concerning ground rents. Winner of a 2006 IRE Award, the series showed how minor debts became major debts during lawsuits, some of which were filed against deceased property owners. Fred Schulte, June Arney, *The (Baltimore) Sun* (2006)
- **Story No. 22596:** The Save Our Homes tax amendment in Florida led to unintended inequities in the state's property tax system, ultimately costing the state millions of dollars in property tax revenue. The discrepancies are such that in some cases multimillion dollar homes require fewer taxes than modest housing. Maurice Tamman, Michael Braga, *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (2005)
- **Story No. 22587:** An investigation of housing prices and affordability in Brevard County, Fla., revealed that families earning the median income had far less ability to purchase a median priced home than they did in 2000. John McCarthy, (Melbourne) *Florida Today* (2005)
- **Story No. 22471:** Kansas City provides a variety of tax breaks for housing developers, but incentives that saved historic buildings or provided affordable apartments were applied to luxury condominiums, even though taxes had fallen 73 percent in recent years. David Martin, (Kansas City, Mo.) *The Pitch* (2005)
- **Story No. 22331:** The reporters investigated the Chicago Housing Authority and the demographic changes that followed the destruction of public housing, using statistics dating back to 1995. An analysis of residential property transactions and home mortgage lending and Census data revealed significant racial and economic shifts. Kimbriell Kelly, Amy Rainey, Whitney Woodward, *The Chicago Reporter* (2005)
- **Story No. 22261:** San Diego's records of city-owned property were in such disarray that they included property that didn't belong to the city and excluded land that San Diego did own, and they didn't always reflect how the land was being used. Brooke Williams, Danielle Cervantes, Jeff McDonald, David Hasemyer, Kelly Thornton, *The San Diego Union-Tribune* (2005)

- **Story No. 22532:** The reporters examined the sale of apartments that the builder had no right to sell. In addition, buyers were guaranteed a view that would in fact be obstructed by future buildings. Lisa Fletcher, Vanessa Weber, Beau Beyerle, Juan Robles, Jay Reynolds, Vivek Narayan, *KNXV-Phoenix* (2005)

Tipsheets

- **No. 2759:** "Using Property Tax/Appraisal Records in Stories: Avoiding Pitfalls," Paula Lavigne, *The Dallas Morning News*. This tipsheet offers both general and specific advice for employing property and tax records in investigative stories, including a list of frequently overlooked records and tips on how to deal with challenges and irregularities.
- **No. 2638:** "Property, Mortgages and Foreclosures," John McCormick, David Jackson, *Chicago Tribune*. The authors explain how paper and electronic records from property transactions can provide crucial information for reporters, referring back to their own experience mining these records.
- **No. 2626:** "Foreclosing on the American Dream," Ted Mellnik, *The Charlotte Observer*. This tipsheet details various ways to identify foreclosures, such as county and court records, as well as the factors that may affect them. The author also discusses how mapping techniques can be used to visualize foreclosures.
- **No. 2530:** "Hidden Disparities," Rob Gebeloff, *The (Newark, N.J.) Star-Ledger*. This tipsheet explains a study done on property tax discrepancies along racial lines. The project used database and GIS analysis, and showed that property taxes should be accurately reassessed more often.
- **No. 2447:** "Investigating Property Scams," Peter Panepento, *Erie (Pa.) Times-News*. This tipsheet discusses important documents for property tax investigations, including tax filings, mortgage records and liens. The author also lists helpful Web sites and potential red flags to watch for in the data.
- **No. 2444:** "Reporting on Property and Housing Issues," Michael Mansur, *The Kansas City Star*. This tipsheet is a guide to using property and housing documents in investigative stories. The author

discusses what information is found in various documents, including deeds of trust and delinquent property records.

Past issues of *The IRE Journal* have published stories detailing investigations of housing and property. They include:

- "Housing Scam,," Debbie Cenziper, *The Miami Herald*. Pulitzer-winning series revealed that the Miami-Dade Housing Agency paid developers millions for affordable housing units that were never built. The stories led to arrests and an investigation by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development. (Nov./Dec. 2006)
- "Mortgage Mania: Aggressive lending has long term impact as neighborhoods suffer from foreclosures," Geoff Dutton, Jill Riepenhoff, *The Columbus Dispatch*. The authors' four-day series, "Brokered Dreams," investigated the high rate of mortgage foreclosures in Ohio. One company had a particularly high rate of foreclosure because it often gave loans to buyers with poor credit and little savings. (March/April 2006)
- "Predatory Loans: Mortgage fraud concentrated in poorest areas, gangs net millions from white collar crime," David Jackson, *Chicago Tribune*. Using Census records and the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, he worked to determine how far the problem spread and its negative consequences on the city. (March/April 2006)
- "Back Taxes: Delinquent property tax bills serve as cheap business loans," Lee Davidson, *The (Salt Lake City) Deseret Morning News*. Davidson details a tax investigation in which he discovered that it is not uncommon for Salt Lake City businesses to put off paying property taxes and use tax money for business. (Sept./Oct. 2005)

There are also a variety of Web sites and databases from NICAR that offer assistance and information for property investigations.

- HUD User (www.huduser.org): This Web site acts as a research service for the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, offering comprehensive housing and research information. More than 1,000 publications and data sets are available as free downloads, and print copies of the records are available for a nominal fee.
- Regulatory Barriers Clearinghouse (www.huduser.org/rbc): HUD User's sister site, also operated by the Office of Policy Development and Research at HUD, provides a searchable database of state and local reform strategies that support affordable housing.
- Home Mortgage Disclosure Act database: Information on both requestors and financial institutions on mortgage loan requests. Available from the IRE and NICAR Database Library (www.ire.org/datalibrary), or the HMDA Web site, www.ffiec.gov/hmda.

GUNSHINE STATE

Criminals licensed by state to carry guns legally due to legal loophole

BY MEGAN O'MATZ AND JOHN MAINES
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL

Day after day, headlines in South Florida tell of people being shot. There are drive-bys, children caught in crossfire, women slain by angry spouses, store clerks robbed and left for dead, and even shootings in a mall.

Many of the attacks are harrowing. Others are simply absurd, such as the man in Fort Lauderdale who allegedly killed his roommate for moving out and taking too many light bulbs.

The carnage became so great in one city the local sheriff started a program called Operation Cease Fire. Much of the concern rightly focused on gangs, drug dealers and illegal guns. But the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, in looking at Florida's gun laws, discovered a disturbing pattern.

Over the years, Florida had licensed thousands of criminals to carry guns legally. The findings bolstered Florida's nickname: The Gunshine State.

Major loophole

Obtaining records of gun owners in Florida is not easy. The legislature made sure of it by imposing a \$5 million fine on anyone who dares keep a registry of firearm owners, including the police. Last summer, at least one list still existed in Florida: The holders of concealed weapon licenses were kept, oddly enough, by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

In March 2006, we got a database containing the name, address, gender, race, date of birth of the license holder and the license number. We matched the list to a database of felons from the Florida Department

of Corrections. Frankly, we weren't expecting much. Under state law, convicted felons are prohibited in Florida from possessing guns or gun licenses, and the state requires that the applicants go through criminal background checks.

To our surprise, the exercise turned up nearly 5,800 people with felony records. We compared the middle initials where possible, bringing the total matches down to 2,600.

We then started pulling court records and mug shots, finding records of assaults, burglaries, drug offenses, child abuse, sex crimes and even manslaughter.

Why would the state let these people legally carry guns?

Upon closer inspection we found that the cases had similarities. The offenders pleaded guilty or no contest and served probation. In these cases, however, the court gave them a break and "withheld" formal convictions, sometimes repeatedly. It turned out the gun law included a major loophole: People who had convictions withheld qualified to carry weapons three years after the completion of their sentences.

The database also listed some licenses as "subject to review," but when we questioned program administrators about the meaning of that phrase, we received different explanations.

Seeking some answers, we asked for the department's full electronic database, rather than the truncated version we'd been given. That set off three months of negotiations, discussions about Oracle software, cost estimates of \$10,000 to \$12,000 and angry letters from our lawyers.

Adding to the pressure, the legislature passed a law shutting off the concealed weapon database to the public, effective July 1, 2006. The move was in response to an Orlando TV station's publication on its Web site of the names of local licensees, which raised privacy concerns. Also, in a House hearing, an Agriculture Department official told lawmakers that the *Sun-Sentinel* had requested the licensing system's "database design."

"We don't know what purpose someone would have...to know how we design our database..." the official warned.

Swift reaction

Finally, in late June, after the threat of a lawsuit, the state gave us the full database containing about 400,000 names. More than 700,000 names had been

Jim Rassol | Sun-Sentinel



Barbara Petersen, president of the First Amendment Foundation, tried unsuccessfully to stop the legislature from sealing the records of people licensed to carry guns in Florida.

We determined that 1,400 had valid concealed weapon licenses despite having pleaded guilty or no contest to felonies. That included a man who shot his girlfriend in the head as she cooked breakfast.

eliminated under a law requiring that inactive records be purged after two years.

We matched the available names with the state's felons database; open warrants kept by the state and three sheriffs' offices; domestic violence restraining orders kept by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement; local jail bookings; and registered sex offenders.

We determined that 1,400 had valid concealed weapon licenses despite having pleaded guilty or no contest to felonies. That included a man who shot his girlfriend in the head as she cooked breakfast.

Six were registered sex offenders. Another 216 had outstanding warrants, including a Tampa pizza deliveryman wanted since 2002 for fatally shooting a 15-year-old boy over a stolen order of chicken wings.

Still another 128 had active domestic violence injunctions against them.

One licensee had been arrested 22 times and had



The *Sun-Sentinel* won access to concealed weapons permit data just before the state legislature passed a measure to close the records. At least seven other states bar access to such information.



Jim Rassol | Sun-Sentinel

Office staff processes gun permit applications at The Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Division of Licensing, which Florida law forbids anyone, even law enforcement officials, from keeping a database of firearms owners



Michael Laughlin | Sun-Sentinel

Victor Carrera had his permit suspended again after he allegedly told his brother: "I am going to blow up a bus full of people and it will be a blood bath."

We did some calculations that showed thousands of people repeatedly had their licenses suspended or revoked and then reinstated.

pleaded guilty or no contest to felonies four times: for trafficking 10,000 pounds of marijuana, for firing into an unoccupied building and twice for aggravated assaults. Courts withheld convictions each time.

We did some calculations that showed thousands of people repeatedly had their licenses suspended or revoked and then reinstated. Two had their licenses reinstated five times.

Clearly, Florida was not licensing "law-abiding" citizens, as legislators promised they would 20 years ago when they eased restrictions on gun-carry permits.

The resulting four-part series, "License to Carry," (www.sun-sentinel.com/guns) garnered swift reaction from the public. Many praised the investigation, but others were vociferous in their criticism. We were said to be anti-gun. We were called "whiny, piney liberals." We were rebuked for not showing how armed citizens save lives.

"The person who wrote this article ought to be shot," someone commented in a posting on our Web site.

Some lawmakers expressed surprise and outrage at the findings. Others said they could not take away the Second Amendment rights of people who were not formally convicted, even if they pleaded guilty or no contest and served probation.

Few expressed support for reopening the records to the public to allow for future evaluations of the program.

Getting access

Reporters who want to examine concealed weapon licenses in other states also might find their records closed. Gun-rights advocates have succeeded in shutting off access in Wyoming, Washington, North Dakota,

Many praised the investigation, but others were vociferous in their criticism. We were said to be anti-gun. We were called "whiny, piney liberals." We were rebuked for not showing how armed citizens save lives.

South Dakota, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Arizona. More are likely to disappear from public view.

Statistics still should be available. We found dramatic increases in the number of people getting concealed weapon licenses. In South Florida's Broward County, the numbers rose over two decades from 25 to 35,884, thanks to the relaxed rules.

Examine your state's record keeping. Florida regularly boasted that only 158 licensees in 20 years had used a gun in the commission of a crime. That seemed very low. When asked, the state could not back up the number. Program administrators could give us only 48 names and said other records were destroyed. Then they said four of the 48 should not have been on the list because they did not meet the state's narrow definition of having been convicted of firing a gun and actually hitting someone.

Learn the rules for obtaining licenses. Do some things not make sense? Given the privacy of health records, how do administrators learn whether someone has a mental illness and is therefore ineligible for licensure?

Consider mentioning whether someone had a concealed weapon license in routine stories about crime. Throughout the project, we took names from the headlines and plugged them into the database and regularly got matches. The man who shot and killed a fellow congregant outside a Boca Raton synagogue on Rosh Hashana? He had a valid license to carry a gun. He didn't have a criminal past, but voices in the story said he had a hot temper and had become abusive towards a former girlfriend.

In many states, sheriffs, local police or judges issue the licenses. How well are they doing their jobs?

In Florida, bureaucrats in Tallahassee issue the licenses to people they never meet. How well do local courts and cops communicate with the state? How do they know when someone gets into trouble? Oftentimes, they don't.

Florida inmate Arthur W. White, serving 35 years for sexual battery on a child, had a license to carry a gun from the day he entered prison in 2002 until May 2006, when the license expired.

Megan O'Matz is an investigative reporter and John Maines is the computer-assisted reporting editor for the Sun-Sentinel. They were IRE Award winners and Pulitzer Prize finalists in 2006 for uncovering millions of dollars in waste and fraud in FEMA aid.

AT THE WHEEL

Undercover camera reveals lapses in drug screenings for DOT workers

BY JEFF BAILLON
KMSP-MINNEAPOLIS

For nearly 17 years, federal law has required people with safety-sensitive jobs in the transportation industry to be tested for drugs and alcohol. The law applies to nearly 12 million workers: pilots, train engineers, ferry boat captains, bus drivers, truckers and many more. They're supposed to be screened before being hired and randomly tested once they're on the job.

The reliability of the testing system depends on getting a good urine sample to begin with – one that hasn't been altered in some way to fool the lab. But, our undercover investigation found lapses big enough to drive a truck through.

Acting on a tip, we sent producer John Michael to a testing clinic for a standard Department of Transportation pre-employment drug screening. He was accompanied by photojournalist Brad Swagger, who was wearing a hidden camera and microphone.

Not only did the clinic staff fail to have Michael take off his coat and remove his hat, which could have been used to help alter a sample, but they gave him the key to a public restroom that no one had inspected to make sure another person was not present. In fact, another member of our staff, photojournalist Ben West, entered the room with a video camera. No one from the clinic noticed. Further, the bathroom had hot and cold running water, providing another potential means to cheat.

There are thousands of businesses nationwide that offer urine collection services to assist companies with their drug testing programs. Our tipster said that a medical clinic serving as a collection site for some Minnesota trucking and busing firms was lax when it came to ensuring the integrity of the drivers' urine samples.

Required tests

The DOT has a strict protocol for collection sites to follow. The rules include making sure the test subjects empty their pockets and remove outer clothing and hats to prevent them from smuggling in products that can be added to urine to evade a positive test result. Also, there is to be no access to water in the room where the sample is given. The room is supposed to be inspected for hidden contraband, such as a clean urine specimen.

Our tipster was right: There was no attention paid to protocol at this particular clinic. Were other collection sites just as bad? To find out, we checked the Internet to get a list of other businesses in the

Twin Cities that offer urine collection services for drug testing programs, and specifically for DOT-required tests.

We chose four at random and set off to repeat our undercover experiment. Only one of the four sites followed all of the federal rules. We found significant problems at the other three; it would be easy to alter or substitute a urine specimen and cheat the test.

The most challenging part of this project was figuring out a way to get into each of the collection sites. You need official paperwork to schedule an appointment. We found a source in the testing industry who supplied us with the appropriate documents. You can check with the Drug & Alcohol Testing Industry Association, to see if they have a representative in your community who might offer assistance online at www.datia.org

Driving anyway

The story quickly got the attention of Minnesota Rep. James Oberstar, chair of the House Transportation Committee. Oberstar helped pass the original legislation that requires drug and alcohol testing of transportation workers. He was outraged at what our investigation found.

"We ought to have a very rigorous random sampling of the entire process of collection," he said.

Oberstar's committee has since requested an investigation by the Government Accountability Office to see if the problems we uncovered are widespread. That inquiry is currently under way. Oberstar says the Transportation Committee will hold hearings once the GAO completes its investigation.

This spring we continued our coverage of the drug testing issue by requesting enforcement data from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the agency charged with making sure companies are following federal safety requirements.

We analyzed five years of data involving enforcement actions taken against transportation companies in Minnesota and Wisconsin. We paid \$130 to get the data, provided as an Excel spreadsheet. It proved to be a gold mine.

Our analysis showed that 456 companies were fined by FMSCA because they didn't even have a drug and alcohol testing program for their drivers. That requirement has been the law for nearly 17 years. Another 413 firms paid penalties for not screening new hires for drugs. One of the largest fines, \$47,000, was paid by a large Twin Cities

Our analysis showed that 456 companies were fined by FMSCA because they didn't even have a drug and alcohol testing program for their drivers. That requirement has been the law for nearly 17 years. Another 413 firms paid penalties for not screening new hires for drugs.

school bus company. Feds cited 130 firms for not doing random testing of drivers, which is a critical component of any testing program.

But the most startling statistic we found was that 23 companies were fined because they had allowed a driver who flunked a drug test to drive anyway.

When you look at those numbers and the results from our undercover investigation of urine collection sites, you can see the system is ripe for abuse. Start looking in your community. Your travel safety depends on it.

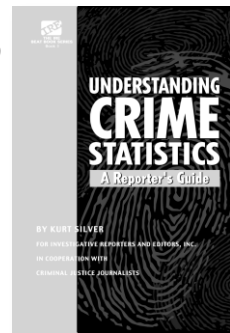
Jeff Baillon is an investigative reporter with KMSP-Minneapolis. His areas of interest include transportation, the environment, government waste and consumer issues.

REQUIRED READING For Your Newsroom

Understanding Crime Statistics

A Reporter's Guide, by Kurt Silver

Know the data and reports available to add perspective and authority to your crime reporting. Learn how to use the data and avoid common pitfalls while writing responsible crime statistics stories.



ORDER TODAY!

Call 573-882-3364 with your VISA or MasterCard

-OR-
Visit our Web site at www.ire.org/store for online ordering or order form downloads

IRE MEMBERS: \$15 each • NONMEMBERS: \$25 each

FATAL OUTBREAK

CDC reports on food-borne illnesses provide treasure trove of state data

BY THOMAS HARGROVE
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

Sometimes it's really smarter to be lucky than lucky to be smart.

Editors at the E.W. Scripps Co. wanted to experiment with a partnership between the firm's television and newspapers to determine if a combined multimedia investigation could produce quality journalism. As a database analyst and national reporter at Scripps Howard News Service in Washington, D.C., I was assigned to identify a research project that could produce news stories that could be localized.

The nationwide *E. coli* outbreak caused by infected raw spinach was still months in the future, and we did not yet know that our findings would be highly relevant to the headline-grabbing story.

At the beginning of the project, however, editors and producers readily accepted a suggestion to focus on food-borne illness outbreak reports collected annually by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A food-borne illness outbreak is defined as an incident in which two or more people get sick or die after eating the same food. The CDC's little-known annual reports detail how many Americans are sickened or even die from food illnesses such as Hepatitis A, salmonella, norovirus or clostridium.

The decision was simple enough: Everyone eats, so concern about food safety is universal. Because no other news organization had used these particular CDC files, we could break new ground.

The first step was to turn written annual reports into a computer database. Using Adobe Acrobat software, Scripps Howard reporters were able to extract raw information the CDC had posted on its Internet site. (I've posted all five years' worth of outbreak reports at my FTP site at: <ftp://shnsclients.scripps.com/data/FatalFood>. Reporters can also see

A few weeks before publication, the *E. coli*-infected raw spinach story broke. More than 200 people got sick and at least three died. The infections were detected in only 24 states, even though the California-grown spinach was shipped nationwide.

the reports at the CDC Web site: www.cdc.gov/food-borneoutbreaks/outbreak#data.htm)

It took about a week to extract and clean 6,374 records of food poisoning outbreaks that harmed 127,055 people, as reported during the five-year period from Jan. 1, 2000, through Dec. 31, 2004.

A real struggle

The immediate finding was disturbing. In 64 percent of all food-related outbreaks, state and local health departments failed to isolate the specific bacteria or virus responsible; the cause was officially listed as unknown. Health investigators tend to do a better job with really large outbreaks that infect hundreds of people. But more than 50,000 Americans got sick or died in outbreaks in which the causes were undetermined.

Next, we aggregated the data by state. We calculated the total number of people reported sickened by contaminated food, as well as the percentage of cases that went unsolved. We also estimated the rate at which food-borne illness is detected by calculating how many people were reported sick per 100,000 population.

The variance by state was enormous. The Alabama Department of Public Health diagnosed the cause of only 5 percent of its cases. In fact, the state had not isolated the cause of any food illness outbreaks in the most recent 2 1/2 years. Florida and New Jersey were not doing much better.

"It's a real struggle. We've never identified a virus at the state level. We've always had to send viral specimens to the CDC for testing," said Alabama State Epidemiologist John Lofgren.

He said many key jobs in his department have been vacant for years because of low salaries.

New Jersey officials said they, too, were hampered by a lack of local health investigators to chase the causes of food poisoning outbreaks.

"It comes down to a matter of resources," said Eddy Bresnitz, New Jersey's deputy health commissioner.

But, some states, including Wisconsin, Minnesota and Hawaii, were performing very well. The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services diagnosed the causes of food illness 90 percent of the time, the best rate in the nation.

"This is not a magic trick. It has to do with our total system," said Helene Nelson, Wisconsin's health secretary. "We have local public health departments, we have clinicians (doctors and nurses) who

are first encountering the diseases, we have a state public health division that coordinates and communicates and helps analyze with the epidemiologists, and we have really good state lab facilities. It is all those parts working together."

Detecting illness

Even more disturbing, however, is the varying rate at which food illnesses are detected at all. Some states are virtually blind to this serious public health problem. Kentucky, for example, reported just four outbreaks that sickened only 35 people in the five-year period. That means the Bluegrass State is detecting less than one victim of food poisoning for every 100,000 population. Other states were detecting these illnesses at a rate 100 times higher.

"We had more people than that get sick just at my wedding," said Lindsey Ronay of Louisville, Ky. Doctors told her wedding guests that they were the victim of the campylobacter bacteria. More than 30 people were put on antibiotics, and two were hospitalized.

Kentucky health officials began an investigation after we contacted them.

"What we are reporting is just what we can document and substantiate from within our files," said William Hacker, Kentucky's state health officer. "I suspect we are underreporting what we deal with on a regular basis, just from my own experience."

Public and private laboratory technicians make most of the contagious-disease reports in Kentucky. But lab techs usually are not told if the blood, urine or stool samples they have been asked to test are part of an outbreak.

A month after we contacted Kentucky medical officials about the state's low reporting rates, authorities announced they are "enhancing" the state's Electronic Disease Surveillance Module to require people who report a communicable disease to check "yes" or "no" to questions of whether it could be part of a food- or water-related outbreak.

"We really hadn't been categorizing food- and water-borne outbreaks," said Kraig Humbaugh, a Kentucky epidemiologist. "This will help us with our reporting system. It should increase the number of food outbreaks that CDC sees from us."

A few weeks before publication, the *E. coli*-infected raw spinach story broke. More than 200 people got sick and at least three died. The infections were detected in only 24 states, even though the California-grown spinach was shipped nationwide.

We found a general correlation between states that performed well in our study of CDC files and states that detected *E. coli* cases last year. Nearly a quarter of all *E. coli* infections were reported in Wisconsin, the state with the best rate of diagnoses in our study.

Thomas Hargrove is database analyst and national reporter for Scripps Howard News Service in Washington, D.C.

**Call
for
Entries**

Philip Meyer Journalism Award

Sponsored by



National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

a joint program of IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism

and



John S. and James L.

Knight Foundation

the Knight Chair in Journalism

at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Arizona State University

**The contest recognizes the best journalism done
using social science research methods.**

All entries are placed
in IRE's Resource Center story
library so IRE members can learn
from others' triumphs and troubles.

For more information and entry forms
visit: www.ire.org/meyeraward

POSTMARK DEADLINE: October 31, 2007

CASH FLOW

Project aims to track influence of consultants on politicians

BY JOHN PERRY
THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

Consultants are the unknown “X factor” of modern politics.

Each successive campaign cycle sees more pressure on candidates to raise ever-increasing piles of money. A good portion of that money ends up in the pockets of campaign consultants, and that makes campaign consulting a growing industry at least every two years.

Although consultants are the topic of much discussion and speculation, their influence on elections and on the politicians they serve has so far escaped comprehensive scrutiny, by both journalists and political scientists. How much money actually goes to consultants and what effects they have on the political system are largely unanswered questions.

Consultants also are one of the many stories lying buried in the frequently overlooked expenditure side of campaign finance disclosure data.

These were some of our thoughts when The Center for Public Integrity first proposed our “Price of Democracy” project to The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

The Center’s research showed that the sector drew \$1.85 billion in the 2003-04 election cycle alone, and it raised further questions about consultants to be explored in future campaign finance stories.

Consultants also are a nomadic lot, forming partnerships, splitting apart and forming new partnerships. They frequently move their offices and change their names. Many of the vendors listed in expense reports no longer existed when we began our research.

Tracking expenditures

The first step was modifying our grand ambitions to match a reasonable project budget. We decided to focus on the most recent complete campaign cycle: the 2003-2004 congressional and presidential elections. We further limited our universe to House and Senate candidates who made it to the general election; presidential candidates spending more than \$20 million during the cycle; party committees; and about 90 nonprofit “527” political organizations that were active in federal elections.

Then came the arduous task of parsing the consultant payments from almost a million expenditures reported in Federal Election Commission and U.S. Internal Revenue Service disclosure reports. Expenditures by House or presidential candidates and by party committees are available in the FEC electronic filing data (see breakout on p. 33).

Senate candidates’ expenditures were more difficult to find because they are not required to file campaign finance reports electronically. Images of the paper documents are available in PDF on the FEC Web site. Using a Perl script, we downloaded all the PDFs from the election cycle – a process that took several weeks – and sent them off to a data-entry service.

Among the many problems we experienced in this process, the most troubling was the tendency for the digits 5,6,8 and 9 to all look very similar in PDFs – often fuzzy copies of hand-written documents.

Once the data was collected and entered, we had to sort out which payments were for consulting services. The reports often contained vague expenditure descriptions that had more to do with categories available in the committee’s internal accounting system than detailing the expenditure’s actual purpose.

Consultants also are a nomadic lot, forming partnerships, splitting apart and forming new partnerships. They frequently move their offices and change their names. Many of the vendors listed in expense reports no longer existed when we began our research.

Also, some consulting firms have offices in multiple cities and states, and there are completely different firms in different states with the same name.

And there was a more fundamental question:

What is a consultant? Many vendors make money off elections, for example, by providing computer software, mailing services, yard signs and Web site design. But, when is a direct mailer just a commercial mail house and when is it a political consultant?

The definition we arrived at was “a person or organization providing non-salaried services with political content (creative, strategic or otherwise) to a campaign that was either substantial in dollar terms or substantial as a proportion of the consultant’s revenues. People or companies providing simple goods or politically neutral services may be consultants but are not political consultants. Salaried employees of campaigns are not considered consultants.”

The distinction was still fuzzy near the boundary, but we tried to err on the side of inclusion.

Cash flows

To verify our list of consultants, we used a variety of sources. A firm’s Web site, when we could find one, described its primary business and listed office locations. It often provided a client list and a history of the firm and its principals. Business directories, such as Hoovers, and states’ secretary of state Web sites also were useful.

The *Campaigns and Elections* magazine Web site (www.campaignline.com) provided several features that were invaluable in identifying many of the consultants on our list. At the end of each election cycle, the magazine publishes a “Winners and Losers List” of how the clients of various consultants fared in an election.

The list is self-reported, so it’s not complete. But it was a confidence boost when our list matched theirs.

C&E also publishes monthly lists of consultant signups, which it archives on its Web site. And it featured a directory of consultants listed by specialty, called the “Political Pages Directory,” available at www.campaignsandelections.com/consultantlinks/index.cfm.

The result, after three months of data-parsing, Web searching and telephone calls, was a list of more than 600 consultants who received more than \$1.85 billion during the 2003-2004 campaign cycle.

The largest part of that, \$1.2 billion, went to media consultants. Most of that money was passed through to pay for those television, radio and newspaper ads that we were all so tired of seeing by November 2004. Media consultants, unfortunately, don’t have to report how much of that amount they kept as their fee. But consultants we interviewed reported fees ranging from 7 percent to 15 percent.

A controversial example was Joe Trippi, who managed Howard Dean’s Web-centric campaign. He volunteered his time as campaign manager until he was replaced after losses in Iowa and New

Get the data

You can search for electronic filings on the FEC Web site at www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/efile_search.shtml, if you're looking for a handful of candidates. You can also download the raw electronic filings at <ftp://ftp.fec.gov/FEC/electronic>. IRE and NICAR's database library offer current and archived FEC data. Monthly updates of the most recent FEC cycle data are available through a subscription service.

You can search for 527 disclosure reports (form 872) at the IRS Web site, <http://forms.irs.gov/politicalOrgsSearch/search/basicSearch.jsp?ck>. You can also download the reports in XML format at <http://forms.irs.gov/politicalOrgsSearch/search/datadownload.jsp>.

Hampshire. But in an interview, Trippi said his firm, Trippi McMahon Squier, received a 7 percent commission on the \$7 million in media they booked for the Dean campaign.

One question to ask is what a candidate's consultants did in the off-season. To even out their cash flow between campaign seasons, many consultants are taking on corporate clients, running image campaigns and grassroots lobbying campaigns. That raises questions about conflicts of interests for consultants who may be advising a candidate about issue stances.

A more worrying trend we found was for consultants, who often develop deep – and confidential – relationships with their candidate clients, to leverage that connection by lobbying for corporate clients in the off-season. At a conference of the American Association of Political Consultants, the Center's project manager Sandy Bergo heard Democratic consultant John Whitehurst recommend just such a "lucrative business model" to a room full of fellow consultants.

We found 22 consulting firms with clients in House and Senate races that were registered to lobby members of Congress for private clients, and the practice may be more frequent at the state level. The disclosure form of Rotterman & Associates, for example, listed former campaign client Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.) as a target of their lobbying.

But this is a practice that even consultants question. Several consultants we interviewed said they turned down requests to lobby, saying that it could raise questions of loyalty to their campaign clients.

The entire series is online at www.publicintegrity.org/consultants.

John Perry joined The Center for Public Integrity as the database team's senior fellow in January 2006. For the previous 18 years he worked at The Oklahoman.



UPCOMING TRAINING EVENTS

Aug. 3, 2007 – Miami, Fla. CAR Training at AAJA

IRE will conduct training in computer-assisted reporting at the 2007 AAJA National Convention in Miami on Friday, August 3, 2:15-3:45 p.m. Interested in similar training for your newsroom? Please e-mail training@ire.org. (Still Open)



Aug. 5-10, 2007 – Columbia, Mo., at the Missouri School of Journalism

Computer-Assisted Reporting Boot Camp
These unique seminars train journalists to acquire electronic information, use spreadsheets and databases to analyze the information and translate that information into high-impact stories. In addition, the institute then provides follow-up help when participants return to their news organizations. (Still Open)

Aug. 17-19, 2007 – Columbia, Mo. Mapping Data for News Stories Boot Camp

Participants will learn how to uncover interesting news stories by mapping data with geographic information system (GIS) software during this intensive, hands-on mini-boot camp. (Still Open)

Sept. 3-5, 2007 – Johannesburg, South Africa Power Reporting Workshop at University of the Witwatersrand

IRE Training Director David Donald will conduct sessions in investigative reporting techniques and computer-assisted reporting at this annual workshop. (Still Open)

Sept. 8, 2007 – Grahamstown, South Africa Workshop at Rhodes University

IRE Training Director David Donald will conduct a workshop in computer-assisted reporting. (Still Open)

Sept. 10, 2007 – Stellenbosch, South Africa

Workshop at University of Stellenbosch

IRE Training Director David Donald will conduct a workshop in computer-assisted reporting. (Still Open)

October 15-16, 2007 – Minneapolis, Minn.

Better Watchdog Workshop

Better Watchdog Workshops focus on helping journalists at small- to medium-sized newsrooms - and those in bureaus of larger organizations - to learn the skills that allow them to produce investigative and enterprise stories while covering a beat or doing daily stories. Hosted by University of Minnesota (Open Soon)

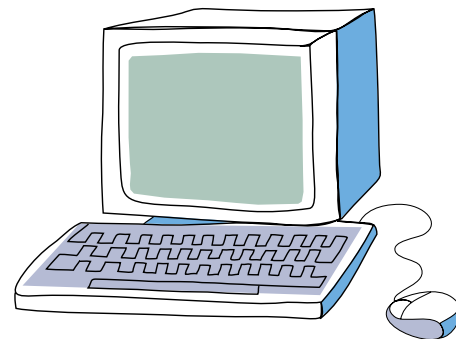
October 15-16, 2007 – Minneapolis, Minn.

Unleashing the Watchdogs workshop

IRE and the American Society of Newspaper Editors are offering this seminar for midlevel editors on how to conceive of, manage and produce watchdog journalism on a daily, beat and long-term basis. Hosted by University of Minnesota (Open Soon)

Dec. 10-14, 2007 – Miami, Fla. Computer-Assisted Reporting Boot Camp

Please join IRE, NICAR and Florida International University for this unique seminar that will show you how to acquire electronic information, use spreadsheets and databases to analyze the information and translate that information into high-impact stories. In addition, the institute then provides follow-up help when participants return to their news organizations. (Still Open)



Valuable journalistic advice arises from annual gathering of eminent writers

BY STEVE WEINBERG
THE IRE JOURNAL

“Telling True Stories” probably will be classified as a “writing” book on the store shelves, but it is actually something more. Any book about high-quality nonfiction writing must also include in-depth discussions about two other elements: information gathering (sometimes known by the less precise term “reporting”) and thinking.

Specifically, it’s about how reporters and editors consider the appropriateness of the story concept; where to gather information along the documents trail and the people trail; how to organize the most relevant information into a compelling narrative with a beginning, middle and end; the arc that builds tension; and the resolution of that tension.

Tips spill from every chapter of the book, the result of an annual meeting of journalists at Harvard University. Those gathered discuss the process of producing compelling narrative nonfiction in magazines, newspapers, radio, cinema and books.

Putting all that wonderful information into book form is Mark Kramer, a practitioner of narrative nonfiction and organizer of the Harvard conference. Kramer, assisted by Wendy Call, a Seattle writer, distilled the wisdom from 51 conference speakers into a coherent primer (after reducing 600,000 transcribed words by about 80 percent).

Every page – and I mean *every page* – contains important wisdom for every journalist. “Telling True Stories” is the relatively rare guide that offers value to veteran journalists, to novices, to investigative journalists and to beat reporters.

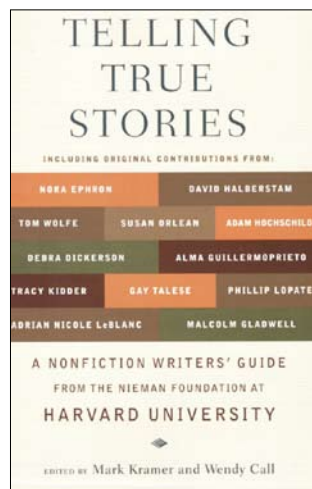
Some of the contributors are famous journalists by any measure: Gay Talese, Susan Orlean, Nora Ephron, Tom Wolfe, Tracy Kidder, Malcolm Gladwell and the recently deceased David Halberstam.

Many other contributors are mostly well known within the journalism realm or within a geographic section of the nation, if not by the general public. They include Katherine Boo, Roy Peter Clark, Jack Hart, Jacqui Banaszynski, Jon Franklin, Walt Harrington, Isabel Wilkerson, Jan Winburn, Adam Hochschild, Ted Conover, Anne Hull, Louise Kiernan, Cynthia Gorney, Melissa Fay Greene, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Debra Dickerson, Nick Lemann, Bruce DeSilva, Tom French, Alma Guillermoprieto, Sonia Nazario, Lisa Pollak, Tom Hallman and Samantha Power.

The book is divided into nine parts. One of those parts features narrative writing within specific genres – investigative, historical, first-person

accounts, essays, columns, travel and profiles. For the most part, though, the techniques included are generic and can be adapted to any genre.

The section of the book devoted to further reading yields a first-rate bibliography, divided into already published titles on basic skills; the craft of writing; the art of writing; narrative nonfiction anthologies; full-length narrative nonfiction books; memoirs; personal essays; fiction and poetry.



TELLING TRUE STORIES: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide From the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University
Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, editors
Plume/Penguin Books

Highlights of the book include:

- Katherine Boo, former *Washington Post* staff writer who now freelances, offering ways to improve what she calls “narrative investigative writing.”

First, she says, “Remember that your story’s villains are your guides as much as the story’s victims.” Boo’s advice to cultivate the apparent villains early, rather than doing only a “closeout interview six hours before your story runs,” goes against the grain of traditional investigative reporting, but is extremely important. The villains need to be presented in the same skillful, three-dimensional manner as the victims.

Second, Boo says, “Admit when you don’t know. Admit the troubling things you do know.” She elaborates: “Acknowledge that the heroic mother of your story is goldbricking at work. Don’t omit that the grieving mother of the retarded man who died hadn’t visited her son in 10 years. If you give your readers characters who are as complex and flawed as they truly are, your readers are more likely to trust you on matters more important than character – the true policy issue that your narrative elucidates.”

- Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, freelance writer, discussing persistence in relation to her book “Random Family.”

After reading a clip in *Newsday* about a young heroin dealer going to trial, LeBlanc obtained an assignment from *Rolling Stone* magazine to write about the case. She spent about three months at the courthouse during the trial, which ended in a conviction. LeBlanc wanted to know more information than the trial yielded, but the defendant would not consider talking until after a ruling on his appeal. *Rolling Stone’s* editors would not wait, but LeBlanc remained in contact with the defendant and those around him.

“During my reporting, I had gotten to know the mothers and girlfriends of some of the co-defendants. I followed them. It was the beginning of a very long journey that culminated in my book,” she says.

In that context, LeBlanc offers an anecdote worth remembering. As LeBlanc interviewed one of the drug dealer’s girlfriends, the young woman said she had accepted that she was one of many, but fancied herself the main one. The girlfriend said that she would take care of her guy’s needs even when her man was out with another woman. LeBlanc listened as the girlfriend described ironing his T-shirts and polishing his sneakers.

“Oh, my God,” LeBlanc said. “That must have been so difficult for you.” She spoke those words, she said, because “I had interpreted it as a moment of subjugation.”

Later, while interviewing another girlfriend of the same guy, LeBlanc mentioned the tennis shoe polisher. Girlfriend number two replied, “Oh, yes, I bet she told you she used to take care of him. I was the one who washed his clothes and took care of his food.”

LeBlanc realized her mistake, too late. “It dawned on me that by polishing his sneakers, that

first young woman had been asserting her territory. I had read the situation completely wrong. Only through fact-checking did I come to understand that the two girls were in competition. By responding as I had in that long-ago conversation, I had shut up the first girl. How could she explain it to me, given how far off-track I was? That experience taught me to stay quiet... I had to learn to listen, to surrender my place in the moment.”

- Lane DeGregory of the *St. Petersburg* (Fla.) *Times* looking for unfolding action to drive a narrative. If she finds it, then she starts negotiating access with sources and subjects. When the access looks promising, DeGregory then asks herself seven questions:

– Can I go along for a ride or take a walk or be at a meeting, a trial or a funeral? DeGregory understands that if she is present at important junctures, she will be able to draw sharper word pictures for her readers.

– Is something going to happen?

– Is the place important, the action important, or is the person important?

– Will there be interaction between my character [the subject of the story] and others?

– Do I want to tell the story around one scene or five minutes or a whole day, or perhaps follow someone over a period of time?

– Do the characters experience an epiphany?

– What’s the big idea?

- Nora Ephron contributes a chapter titled “What Narrative Writers Can Learn From Screenwriters.”

While not a typical topic for a journalism textbook, every sentence is worth absorbing. In order to keep a narrative moving, Ephron offers her advice in the context of the screenplay she wrote for a movie about Karen Silkwood, a whistleblower.

Specifically, Silkwood was slowly becoming a politicized woman, something potentially boring to convey because of its incremental nature. “How could we show this process without turning off the audience?” Ephron wondered.

“The answer was to make the movie very domestic, about three people in a house. Martin Scorsese says the dream movie scene is three people in a room. We had that—Karen, her roommate and her boyfriend... These three people, all going in different directions, gave us a huge amount of material to play against the story we wanted to tell, a young woman becomes political.”

Screenwriters, and journalists, Ephron says wisely, “create stories by imposing narrative on the events that happen around us.”

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

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@ire.org, 573-884-2360

UPLINK – Electronic newsletter by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. Published six times a year. *Uplink* stories are written after reporters have had particular success using data to investigate stories. The columns include valuable information on advanced database techniques as well as success stories written by newly trained CAR reporters.

Contact: David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-884-7711

REPORTER.ORG – A collection of Web-based resources for journalists, journalism educators and others. Discounted Web hosting and services such as mailing list management and site development are provided to other nonprofit journalism organizations.

Contact: Brant Houston, brant@ire.org, 573-882-2042

For information on:

ADVERTISING – Megan Means, meganm@ire.org, 573-884-2360

MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – John Green, jgreen@ire.org, 573-882-2772

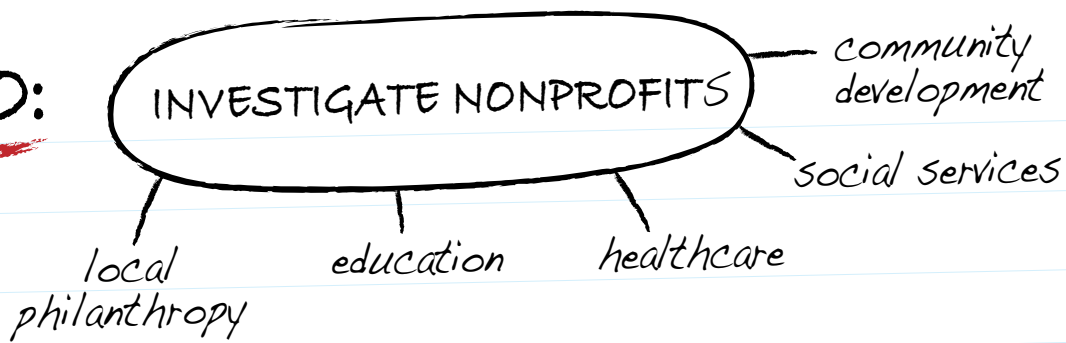
CONFERENCES AND BOOT CAMPS – info@ire.org, 573-882-2042

LISTSERVS – Amy Johnston, amy@ire.org, 573-884-1444

Mailing Address:

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

TO DO:



- * Read The IRE Journal
- * Load mp3 player with IRE conference audio sessions
- * Download tipsheets from the IRE Resource Center

GET GUIDESTAR PREMIUM!

- * IRE professional members save up to \$800

GUIDESTAR PREMIUM

- Offers current and past IRS Form 990, board of directors listings, and financial records.
- Information for 1.5 million nonprofit organizations
- Advanced searching and sorting, including MSA and income level.
- Online data ready for breaking news

HOW TO ORDER:

See information and IRE discount codes at

www.ire.org/membership/guidestar

Use the codes to order a subscription from GuideStar,

www.guidestar.org, 1-800-784-9378.



* IRE will verify professional membership status for GuideStar customer service representatives. The \$800 savings estimate for IRE professional members is based on the IRE discount for small news organizations and full subscription price of GuideStar Premium. GuideStar discounts for IRE members follow the same sliding-scale categories used for IRE Database Library sales.

