Save the Date!

The annual IRE Conference is coming to Baltimore June 11-14.

A stellar group of investigative reporters is lining up to speak at the annual IRE conference, June 11-14, in Baltimore.

Jon Klein, president of CNN-U.S., will deliver the keynote address. Other speakers participating in conference panels include Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post*, Jill Abramson and Dean Baquet of *The New York Times*, Brian Ross of ABC News, Armen Keteyian of CBS News, Don Barlett and James Steele of Vanity Fair and David Simon, a veteran Baltimore journalist and television producer.

To see the latest speakers list, visit the conference Web site, www.ire.org/training/conference/baltimore09.

The 2009 annual conference, June 11-14, will deliver what you've come to expect from an IRE conference, and more. We'll present dozens of panels offering tips and techniques from reporters, producers, editors and news directors. You'll not only leave with story ideas, but with roadmaps detailing how to get those stories. You'll be able to take all of the practical advice you learn and apply it to everything from breaking news stories to enterprise pieces. And this year we'll be offering an expanded lineup of Web-focused panels to help you present that work to your online audience.

You'll have a chance to take hands-on training in computer-assisted reporting skills. And you'll have plenty of chances to network with the best in the business.

THE IRE JOURNAL

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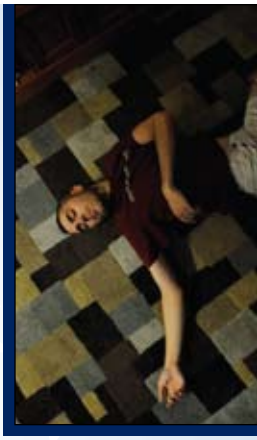

LOSING GROUND
Facing Homefront Battles

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MANAGING EDITOR
Doug Haddix

ART DIRECTOR
Wendy Gray

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Steve Weinberg

CONTRIBUTING LEGAL EDITOR
David Smallman

STORY EDITOR
Joanna Imm

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE
Tori Moss

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Adapting to changing times

BY MARK HORVIT
IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In these challenging economic times, IRE is focused on keeping our services affordable.

Our annual conferences are among the least expensive in the industry. Membership fees are low. And our hands-on, computer-assisted reporting training remains a bargain.

We don't do this alone. We keep conference registration costs down, for example, thanks to the generosity of media organizations, foundations and all of the donors who believe in the importance of our mission.

And we keep our training fees low thanks to our members, who volunteer their time and considerable expertise to making our panels and sessions the best in the business.

It's no secret that times are tough for many of our traditional supporters. So it's incumbent on our organization to be as careful as we can with the resources those supporters provide.

That's why the IRE Board of Directors has decided to begin printing *The IRE Journal* quarterly, instead of six times a year, beginning in 2009.

While we will publish fewer issues, we will build on the high quality of reporting and writing for which the Journal has always been known. The quarterly *IRE Journals* will be packed with stories and resources that help you strengthen your investigative skills. Each issue will continue to provide an examination of compelling and thought-provoking investigative work.

Plans are under way to provide additional Journal content on our Web site, www.ire.org. Over the next few months, you will see the Web site working in sync with the Journal, including more timely posting of our popular Member News feature, and some Web-only content.

As always, we welcome your suggestions for story ideas and your feedback on how we're doing with the Journal. It's your publication, so we want to make sure that it meets your needs in a rapidly changing news environment. For any ideas or story suggestions, you can e-mail me (mhorvit@ire.org) or editor Doug Haddix (doug@ire.org).

. . .

The coming year is shaping up as a strong one for both of our annual conferences.

An impressive group of speakers and trainers already is on board for the computer-assisted reporting conference in Indianapolis March 19-22, and more are signing on every week. The conference will be one of the most dynamic yet. You'll leave armed with skills and knowledge that will help you do better, faster in-depth work in print, on air and online.

And a number of great speakers already have committed to the annual IRE conference in Baltimore (June 11-14). The keynote address will be delivered by CNN-U.S. president Jon Klein, who will be joined by many of the biggest names in investigative journalism.

To see who's coming to both conferences – and to register – go to our Web site, www.ire.org.

The new year also brings new opportunities for IRE and its members.

Our existing programs remain vibrant. Our popular Watchdog Workshop series has been drawing larger numbers of participants than it did a year ago. We'll be launching the next round of our Ethnic Media Workshops this spring, and our in-newsroom training program has been in high demand this winter. (For more information on all of these programs, visit our Web site or call Jaimi Dowdell at 314-402-3281 or Doug Haddix at 614-205-5420).

The coming year will also bring training specific to bloggers and online journalists, and a bilingual Watchdog Workshop on the U.S.-Mexico border.

While IRE faces many of the same challenges as your news organizations, the training and support this organization offer are more important than ever. As our industry adapts and evolves, IRE will fulfill the same crucial role for our members that we have for the past three decades.

Mark Horvit is executive director of IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. He can be reached at mhorvit@ire.org or 573-882-2042.

In memory of producer Holly Whisenhunt Stephen

IRE is creating a scholarship to honor the memory of member Holly Whisenhunt Stephen.

Stephen, an award-winning journalist, died Nov. 28 after a long battle with cancer. She was 38.

Stephen spent much of her career in Texas, working for TV newsrooms in Stephenville, Waco, Austin, Houston and San Antonio, before moving to WTHR in Indianapolis. While in Indianapolis for the past three years, Stephen helped lead WTHR's 13 Investigates unit to national recognition, including an IRE Award, a Peabody award, a National Headliner, a Scripps Howard Award for excellence in broadcast journalism, and SPJ's national Sigma Delta Chi Award for public service in journalism, among many other honors.

Stephen's husband, Josh Stephen, is an award-winning photojournalist at WTHR.

Bob Segall, who worked with Holly Stephen at WTHR, describes her as "the best executive producer an investigative reporter could ever ask for." Her passion, he said, was investigative reporting, especially computer-assisted reporting. Stephen was a regular attendee and frequent speaker at IRE and NICAR conferences.

Segall and WTHR contacted IRE about creating a scholarship fund in Stephen's memory to help connect other journalists to the hands-on IRE training that fueled Stephen's passion. The scholarship being created in Stephen's name will help send broadcast journalists to IRE's computer-assisted reporting boot camps.

To donate to the scholarship being created in Stephen's name, checks may be mailed to the below address, and please be sure to specify that the donation is in Stephen's honor. WTHR and Dispatch Broadcast Group is matching donations for the fund up to $5,000:

Investigative Reporters and Editors
Attention: Heather Henry, Fiscal Officer
141 Neff Annex
Missouri School of Journalism
Columbia, MO 65211

You can also donate online at www.ire.org/endowment/contribution.html

Holly Whisenhunt Stephen

IRE Board statement on the death of Armando Rodríguez

The members of the Board of Directors of Investigative Reporters and Editors would like to express our regret and indignation over the murder of veteran crime reporter Armando Rodríguez. His complete coverage of more than 1,300 murders in Ciudad Juarez this year provided key information to all of us about the changing nature of the violent attacks launched by drug traffickers in Mexico.

We recognize that it has become increasingly difficult for newspapers to cover what is happening on the border, especially since civilians and journalists are now frequent targets of these attacks. Because of this alarming trend, it is more important than ever that journalists band together to support continued coverage.

El Diario has long been a leader in investigative reporting in Mexico and has set an example for border coverage. For years, its editors and owners have been strong supporters of investigative reporting and investigative reporting training initiatives.

IRE's own relationship with *El Diario* stretches back more than a decade.

Both Armando Rodríguez and his editor, Rocio Gallegos, were members of IRE's Mexico project, which lasted from 1996-98. The newspaper was the principal sponsor of IRE Mexico's first border conference in 1997. In recent years, the newspaper funded a master's degree program in investigative reporting for its employees at the University of Texas at El Paso. Gallegos also spoke at the 2007 IRE Conference in Phoenix on Mexico's open records laws.

We honor that work and that commitment. We sincerely hope that *El Diario* will continue its longstanding practice of thoroughly reporting on criminal incidents and of supporting investigative reporting despite this tragedy.

We also support the newspaper's efforts and those of both The Inter-American Press Association/Sociedad Interamericana de la Prensa and the Committee to Protect Journalists to push for justice in this case. The problem of impunity in border crimes deeply concerns IRE. We are conscious of the fact that both U.S. and Mexican journalists have lost their lives over the last decade in murders that regrettably remain unsolved.

(See article, page 6)

Armando Rodríguez

MEMBER NEWS

Anas Aremeyaw Anas of *The Crusading Guide Newspaper* in Ghana was recognized at the seventh annual Kurt Schork Awards in International Journalism for his undercover investigation of a cross-border human trafficking syndicate. ■ **Helena Bengtsson**, **Kevin Bogardus**, **Anupama Narayanswamy**, **Joaquin Sapien** and **Ben Welsh** were members of The Center for Public Integrity's reporting team that received the Society of Environmental Journalists award in outstanding online reporting for "Wasting Away: Superfund's Toxic Legacy." ■ **Karen Lange**, as part of a team of *National Geographic* journalists, received the award for Outstanding Explanatory Reporting in Print by the Society of Environmental Journalists for "Changing Planet: Where Energy and Climate Collide." ■ **Brady McCombs**, a reporter with the *Arizona Daily Star*, was named the 2008 Journalist of the Year by the Arizona Newspapers Association for the second consecutive year. He also was named the Virg Hill Arizona Journalist of the Year by the Arizona Press Club. ■ **Deborah Nelson** has written "The War Behind Me: Vietnam Veterans Confront the Truth about U.S. War Crimes." She is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist and a Carnegie Visiting Professor at the University of Maryland College of Journalism. ■ **Tim Nostrand** and three others from *The Record* in Bergen County, N.J., received the Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting in Print by the Society of Environmental Journalists for the series "Meadowlands for Sale." ■ **Gavin Off** received the Outstanding Student Reporting award by the Society of Environmental Journalists for "Lessons in Leniency" which appeared in the *Columbia Daily Tribune*. ■ **Joe Rigert**, a former IRE president and chairman, is the author of a new book, "An Irish Tragedy: How Sex Abuse by Irish Priests Helped Cripple the Catholic Church." ■ **Jeff Taylor** of the *Detroit Free Press* has been promoted to senior managing editor. He now oversees all news operations.

E-mail Member News items to Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org. Please include contact information for verification.

Blanca Martínez raises the photograph of her husband, Armando Rodríguez, while reporters and employees of *El Diario* pay their last respects to their murdered colleague. She is accompanied by Martin Ortiz, left, and Rocio Gallegos.

BLOODBATH ON THE BORDER

Drug violence claims journalists along the U.S.-Mexico boundary

By Lise Olsen
Houston Chronicle

Ciudad Juárez has long been known for gutsy and seasoned newspaper reporters who never shrink from a grisly crime scene in that city, just across the border from El Paso, Texas.

I sat with a group of them at a reception for investigative journalists organized by IRE-Mexico in Ciudad Juárez years ago when one editor's portable police radio crackled: A man had fallen dead in his plate of sushi at a luxury restaurant in an apparent organized crime hit. Everyone rushed out.

Despite disturbing spates of violence and the serial killings of women, law-abiding residents in Ciudad Juárez until recently experienced a murder rate generally below that of large U.S. cities, such as Houston, based on official crime and census statistics in both countries.

That changed with this year's murder boom, which has claimed an astounding 1,300 victims. The crime scene and victim at a Nov. 13 slaying were appallingly familiar. *El Diario*'s veteran crime reporter, Armando Rodríguez, was shot dead in a company car in front of his own home as he prepared to drive his daughter to school.

He apparently was killed for doing a job vitally important to us all.

Rodríguez was the only reporter in Juárez to keep a complete count of victims during the city's 2008 bloodbath. In 10 months, he'd written 901 stories for the family-owned newspaper, which has considerable clout and respect in Mexico. Some of his last were about corruption within the Attorney General's Office of Chihuahua – one of the agencies now investigating his murder.

A veteran crime reporter who'd worked for *El Diario* for more than a decade, Rodríguez was part of a small but vitally important network of border truth-tellers. Together, these brave journalists collect first-person witnesses' accounts of murders and provide reliable information on developments in the ongoing war between drug cartels and the Mexican military.

Molly Molloy, an IRE member and New Mexico State University librarian who runs a leading border Web site and mailing list, was among those who relied on his accurate tally and consistent coverage

to draw attention to the alarming wave of homicides in Juárez, just a few miles from her home.

The Center for Journalism and Public Ethics in Mexico City – a sister group to IRE – has condemned the murder and related crimes as "attacks against society because they damage the right to be informed."

Elsewhere on the border, several key Mexican journalists already had fallen victim to the violence that they documented and investigated so carefully.

In 2004 alone, the top editors of two major border newspapers were executed: Francisco Ortiz Franco, of the influential weekly *Zeta* in Tijuana, and Roberto Mora, of *El Mañana*, Nuevo Laredo's most powerful newspaper.

Alfredo Jimenez Mota disappeared in April 2005 while investigating drug trafficking and organized crime. He was the primary crime reporter for *El Imparcial*, part of a chain of prominent family-owned newspapers in Sonora and Baja California.

The three murders in 2004 and 2005 silenced voices at some of the newspapers that had dared to speak loudest about – and against – border violence.

Officials at all three newspapers believe that organized crime was behind those killings. Their conclusions have been backed by nonprofit groups that later investigated the slayings.

The Committee to Protect Journalists has determined that Ortiz Franco's murder likely was carried out by members of the Arellano Felix Cartel. Ortiz Franco frequently investigated the cartel and had published two critical stories in the weeks before his death. One revealed connections between the cartel and a high-level prosecutor's murder, and another showed photos of a fake police ID used by cartel members that had been released at an FBI news conference in California.

Another group of nonprofits, including Reporters Without Borders, has denounced Tamaulipas authorities for being too determined to rule out Mora's newspaper work as a motive in his murder. They said that investigators too quickly made a dubious case against two of his neighbors, including an American later killed by an inmate in a Nuevo Laredo prison.

In the Jimenez case in Sonora, there never was any real doubt that the reporter's disappearance was related to an ongoing investigation of drug traffickers. He vanished on his way to meet a source for that story, and his body has not been found. His disappearance has become the subject of a long-term investigation by U.S. journalist and IRE member Michael Marizco of BorderReporter.com.

The publications that employed the slain journalists have long been among the most professional and persistent in covering drug trafficking and related violence in northern Mexico along with others, such as *El Diario* and *Norte* in Ciudad Juárez and *El Debate* in Sinaloa, which in November had a grenade lobbed into its offices.

Federal police officers photograph journalists covering the slaying of Armando Rodríguez.

Officials at *El Mañana*, *Zeta* and *El Imparcial* all denounced killings that they believed were meant to silence them. They pushed authorities to seek justice. But *El Imparcial* then announced it no longer would investigate organized crime. *El Mañana* eventually abandoned coverage of many murders and took bylines off crime stories after its newspaper office was attacked in February 2006. Two hooded men carrying automatic weapons set off a hand grenade inside and shot journalist Jaime Orozco Tey.

Even *Zeta*, a Tijuana weekly famous for its sometimes controversial mix of investigation and advocacy, became less aggressive after the murder of Ortiz Franco and the subsequent death from cancer of founder Jesus Blancornelas in November 2006.

Blancornelas, a legendary border editor who had survived an attack on his life in 1997 that killed his bodyguard, had spent decades denouncing violence and corruption. Blancornelas was an incredible public speaker who twice addressed IRE conferences and believed passionately in the power and importance of investigative work.

For years, he'd lived under guard in a virtual fortress in California yet continued to aggressively cover those he believed had slain *Zeta*'s co-founder in 1988 and his editor, Ortiz Franco, in 2004.

By comparison, journalists in Ciudad Juárez had reason to feel somewhat more secure.

Until 2008.

This year alone, at least two reporters have fled from death threats into El Paso, including Carlos Huerta, a reporter for *Norte de Ciudad de Juárez*. His newspaper subsequently told readers that it would report about "dead bodies and not investigations."

Earlier this year, another Juárez journalist facing threats, Emilio Gutierrez Soto of *El Diario*, sought asylum in the United States. He's waiting for approval.

Editors at *El Diario* tried to take steps to help reduce risks to its reporters yet keep on covering murders. City editor Rocio Gallegos, who's spoken at IRE conferences, asked Rodríguez to consider a different beat after he got a threat via text message. He refused, according to a CPJ report.

Yet in a disturbing story that *El Diario* published in November – with a byline of "Staff" – the newspaper reported that many other Juárez journalists have changed jobs, abandoned beats or left their homes because of the violence.

The editor of the media Web site Lapolaka.com left after he was told he would be next, according to stories in *El Diario* and on BorderReporter.com.

El Diario also reported that narcos had been using the official municipal police radio frequencies this year to warn newspaper photographers away from crime scenes "because the same thing could happen to them." CEPET, the journalism advocacy group, has reported that traffickers also have taken to posing as state prosecutors and investigators.

It seems clear both from what's happening in Juárez and what has happened in other border cities in the past four years that drug traffickers want to kill with impunity and stop even the best and bravest newspapers in Mexico from covering their crimes.

They seem to be getting closer to achieving that goal.

Monitoring the border

Here are key Web sites for news along the border and recent attacks on journalists:

- Border Reporter: http://borderreporter.com
- Center to Protect Journalists: www.cpj.org
- Centro de Periodismo y Ethica Publica: http://cepet.org (Spanish) press freedom organization in Mexico that is IRE's sister organization. CPET offers training and runs a listserv with more than 200 Mexican journalists.
- Inter-American Press Association/ Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa (bilingual): www.sipiapa.org
- Molly Molloy's border links (bilingual): http://lib.nmsu.edu/subject/bord/laguia. Or e-mail her to sign up for her border mailing list: mollymolloy@gmail.com.
- Narco News Bulletin: www.narconews.com

Here are leading Mexican newspapers (all in Spanish):

- El Diario de Juárez (Chihuahua): www.diario.com.mx
- El Imparcial of Hermosillo (Sonora): www.elimparcial.com
- El Mañana of Nuevo Laredo (Tamaulipas): www.elMañana.com.mx
- Norte de Juárez (Chihuahua): www.nortedeciudadJuárez.com
- Zeta of Tijuana (Baja California): www.zetatijuana.com/html/EdicionActual/ZETAIntroPage.html

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The body of Armando Rodríguez is taken to a morgue after the forensic team finishes its job at the crime scene.

Rodríguez's murder happened almost a week after criminals left a human head in the city's Plaza of the Journalist.

Since 2000, 24 journalists have been killed in Mexico, at least seven directly because of their reporting on crime, according to CPJ. Seven others have disappeared.

Rodríguez's death has left a heavy burden on his colleagues.

Yet it should not fall to reporters in the Mexican press alone to cover the carnage. This systematic silencing of journalists by threats and violence has become an ominously effective tool that may have the power to erase coverage of the ongoing border war.

Without journalists such as Rodríguez to collect firsthand accounts and describe crime scenes, little can be learned about murders in Mexico based on inadequate police investigations and shoddy or nonexistent forensic evidence. Often, official records and evidence from murder scenes simply disappear. (According to a recent article in *The New Yorker*, bloodied blankets collected as evidence from murder scenes recently turned up at an art exhibit in Sinaloa.)

In some cases, border journalists say cartel hit men have been able to boldly return to remove bodies from murder scenes or abduct surviving witnesses.

For years, many of the best U.S. newspapers heavily relied on coverage by these leading Mexican border newspapers – and on valuable information anonymously supplied by their veteran reporters – to learn what was really happening on the border. Sometimes, Mexican reporters shared information with U.S. colleagues that they could not publish for fear of reprisals. And sometimes, U.S. journalists helped Mexican reporters get court documents that helped them unlock secrets back home.

That quiet tradition of sharing information and mutually publishing the toughest stories has helped everyone do a better job covering the U.S.-Mexico border and its crime. The deaths tend to happen on the Mexican side, but the guns tend to come from the U.S. side. And the thugs move back and forth freely. Some hit men are U.S. citizens who can easily flee to our side of the border after their crimes.

Unfortunately, throughout the years, many major U.S. newspapers have reduced the numbers of what had been a small but relatively effective and well-informed network of border correspondents. In the past decade, the *San Antonio Express-News*, *Houston Chronicle*, *The Arizona Republic* and *The Dallas Morning News* have cut border reporting jobs. In some cases, U.S. reporters have refused to cross the border to visit Mexican crime scenes because of the danger. At times, U.S. newspapers have forbidden their reporters to visit certain border towns in response to threats.

The death of Armando Rodríguez puts us all in a terrible position. Who is to continue his work? Who will speak for the dead? Who will pressure for justice in his case and in so many others that remain unsolved?

And who will allow the wave of violence on the very doorstep of the United States to be ignored?

A shorter version of this article appeared in the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News.

Lise Olsen is a special projects reporter at the Houston Chronicle. From 1996-1998, she served as founding director of the two-year project IRE-Mexico, which later became an independent nonprofit. That group helped inspire other nonprofits with similar goals in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico.

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Shawn Dowd | *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*

Food services worker Hilary Dank serves chicken tenders to a long line of hungry students at the Jefferson Avenue Elementary School in Fairport, a suburb of Rochester, N.Y. The Fairport School District is one of three in Monroe County whose cafeterias have consistently received satisfactory health inspections during the past two years.

FOOD FIGHT

Schools resist mandate of two annual cafeteria inspections

By David Andreatta
Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

The federal government estimates that half of the nation's 60 million public school students eat at least one of their daily meals in a school cafeteria. So it was perhaps with good intentions that Congress in 2004 doubled the number of required annual health inspections to two for cafeterias in schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program. After all, it stands to reason that more frequent inspections should ensure safer conditions and healthier food for children.

But three years after the mandate took effect, a third of schools nationwide are not receiving the required number of inspections.

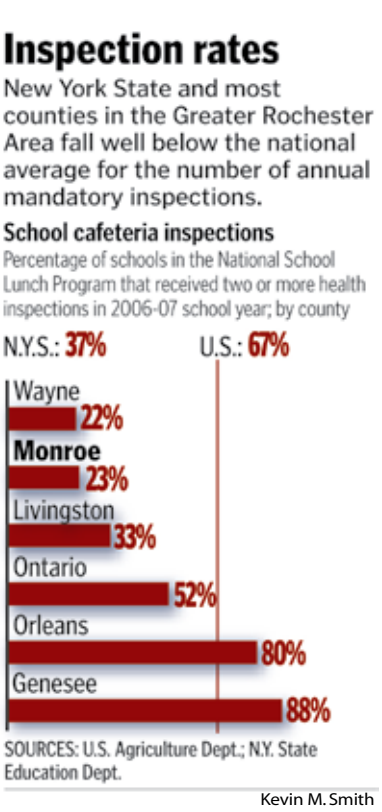
I stumbled upon this fact while preparing a story about the safety and cleanliness of public school cafeterias in 18 school districts in Monroe County in western New York. While the story had taken some digging, including using the state's Freedom of Information Law to obtain copies of two years worth of inspection reports from the county Health Department, it was shaping up to be a run-of-the-mill, back-to-school news feature.

That changed when I noticed that every school in two small, affluent districts had each been examined twice annually by health inspectors while nearly every other school in the county had been inspected only once. It should be noted that the second inspection of these wealthy schools were not "re-inspections" prompted by poor initial findings. (About one in five schools in the county required re-inspections.) These second inspection reports were labeled "routine." For the most part, the schools had been given glowing reviews.

At first, I suspected this was yet another example of special attention being given to the haves at the expense of the have-nots. Curious about the extra attention being given to these wealthy school districts, I interviewed their food service agents and asked them why their schools were inspected twice each year. Their answers astounded me: "It's the law."

They went on to explain that they formally request two inspections every year and that the Health Department had never let them down. One informed me that the New York State Department of Education regularly sends school food managers reminders of the new law and agreed to pass along a copy of a recent memo to me. It cited the specific section of the law pertaining to inspections. Nothing had surfaced about the mandate in my previous conversations with county health officials and school district food service agents.

The law stated that state education depart-



Shawn Dowd | *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*

Linda Northrup, director of Food Services for the Fairport School District, heads toward an oven with a tray of chicken tenders as she and her staff prepare lunch at the Jefferson Avenue Elementary School.

ments were responsible for collecting data on health inspections from every school in every school district in their state and reporting it to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Child Nutrition Act and the National School Lunch Program.

Having been an education reporter in New York State for four years, I had a decent working relationship with the state Education Department. Still, I anticipated it would take weeks or months for the agency to turn over data on its school cafeteria inspections to me. For one thing, government agencies are notoriously slow to respond to non-breaking news requests. Second, if the pattern of non-compliance with the federal law I had noticed in Monroe County mirrored the rest of the state, I suspected the Education Department would pull out all the stops to stall as long as it could. I was bracing myself for a drawn-out process.

To my amazement, the state was eager to confront the issue.

Within 24 hours of my first call on the topic, the state Education Department had turned over data detailing health inspections in 5,507 schools. The statistics followed the trend in Monroe county, revealing that across the state 2,053 schools, or about 37 percent, received the required number of health inspections in the 2006-07 school year, the last year for which data was available. Nearly one in five schools went uninspected.

In two interviews, the department's child nutrition coordinator called the law "an unfunded mandate" that was overly burdensome to schools and health agencies around the country. She complained that the law provided no funding for health departments to double their workload, and that its language was vague. Indeed, while the law states that schools participating in the lunch program shall "obtain a food safety inspection" conducted by a governmental health agency "at least twice during each school year," it offers no additional funding.

The law also offers no guidance on how to address schools without cafeteria kitchens. In failing to do so, lawmakers apparently neglected to consider the infrastructure of large urban school districts and a nationwide movement toward smaller schools. As such, many cities have multiple schools in a single building that contains a lone cafeteria.

For example, in Rochester, the largest urban center in Monroe County with 33,000 public school students, the school district contains 63 schools that participate in the lunch program but only 55 cafeteria kitchens.

The disparity can ultimately leave state education departments, which are required to account for every school, reporting an artificially high number of schools with no inspections. In Rochester, eight schools were reported to have received no inspections because the cafeterias they use were listed by health inspectors as belonging to another school in the same building. As one indignant health official explained the situation, "We don't inspect schools. We inspect cafeterias. If a school doesn't have a cafeteria, what's to inspect?"

Regardless of that oversight, state data clearly showed that the majority of school cafeterias were not inspected twice. Federal Department of Agriculture data revealed that other states reflected the trend in New York. While a dozen states reported a 90 percent compliance rate, an equal number reported a compliance rate of less than half. Maine was the lowest, with just 3 percent of its 666 schools in compliance.

A Department of Agriculture official acknowledged that the complaints aired by New York State were similar to those from education departments across the country.

The reporting yielded two separate stories (available online at www.democratandchronicle.com/article/20080914/NEWS01/809140356). The main piece highlighted the lack of compliance with the law locally and around the country. A sidebar examined cafeteria inspection results in Monroe County, where nearly one in five schools failed the initial inspection.

Reaction to the stories was mixed. None of the federal, state or local public agencies involved disputed anything in the reports, although neither did they pledge stricter compliance with the law. Even the Agriculture Department, which could strip schools of their lunch program funding for failing to comply, acknowledged that it had levied no penalties against any school and had no plans to do so. A department spokeswoman said the agency would prefer to work with schools to help them comply but offered no specifics.

If the stories failed to nudge the government, they were not lost on readers. After publication in mid-September, I received numerous phone calls from parents and school board members in various districts who were eager to know how their schools fared and who promised to push for more oversight.

David Andreatta covers education issues for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Dale Brazao | *Toronto Star*

Four Filipino welders who say they were trafficked and sold to an unscrupulous employer in Canada now work in Saskatoon. Before they fled for freedom, they say they were forced to do menial labor for two months for little pay. From left are Zaldy de Guzman, Norly Bastatas, Ronald Galang and Edwin Canilang.

FOR SALE: WORKERS

By Dale Brazao
Toronto Star

The elusive code that broke open an international human trafficking story was AXAF-963.

But finding it took months of bad leads, stale coffee, meetings with scallywags and stakeouts in three provinces. I ended up spending three days in a little house on the Canadian prairie interviewing Filipino workers who claimed to have been bought and sold. I was out of questions, but I still couldn't identify those involved.

Then, almost as an afterthought, one of the workers handed me a license plate number he had written on a napkin and later entered into his cell phone. "This might be of use to you," he said. "AXAF-963."

A used-vehicle search with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation costing $21 linked the plate to a black Porsche Cayenne Turbo. A personal lien search showed the $120,000 car was leased to Imtazur Nasser Rahman.

Everything else cascaded from there.

After months of searching Toronto, Edmonton and Saskatoon for houses where trafficked new arrivals were allegedly stashed, we were finally able to put the story together.

This particular situation: Duping 11 skilled Filipino works into thinking they had good-paying jobs lined up in Canada earning $23 an hour as welders and plumbers, only to be sold to a labor boss who worked them mercilessly for six weeks for miserly pay. The affidavits that the men provided after their rescue by Filipino consular staff from an isolated farmhouse referred to the buyer and the seller only as "Bob 1" and "Bob 2."

"We overheard the conversation between the two 'Bobs,'" they wrote. "We heard Bob 2 saying he paid Bob 1 $4,000 for the eight workers." That worked out to $500 for each man.

In my 32 years as a reporter-photographer at the *Toronto Star*, the past 15 on the investigative team, I have reported extensively on immigration scams. In my early days, I even posed as a love-starved illegal immigrant in search of a marriage of convenience in order to stay in Canada. (I did not find one.)

From time to time, *The Star* would kick around the idea of tackling human trafficking. Each time the project bogged down on two fronts: finding victims, and more importantly, getting their stories on the record. Fear almost always silences victims who have little to gain from this kind of exposure – fear of recrimination from those who smuggled or trafficked them into Canada and fear of deportation by the authorities.

Then came the Elmvale 11.

The mainstream media missed this incredible story, which had been making its rounds in the Filipino community for months. As soon as I heard it, I went after it.

Added impetus came from the U.S. State Department's "Trafficking in Persons Report." It ranked Canada as a Tier 2 nation, on par with Cambodia and Malaysia, in failing to fully comply with the U.S.'s minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking but exhibiting some improvements. The report urged Canada to be more aggressive in investigating, prosecuting and convicting human traffickers.

Numbers are hard to find, but the Royal Canadian Mounted Police estimates that about 800 people a year – mainly women and children – are trafficked into Canada for the sex trade and forced labor. Another 1,200 are believed to be trafficked into the United States from Canada every year.

In the three years since Canada introduced tough anti-trafficking laws calling for maximum fines of $1 million and life in prison, only a handful of charges have been filed. Only one has resulted in a conviction.

The Elmvale 11, as the men were dubbed after the small rural Ontario town where they were taken to work, appeared to meet the criterion for human trafficking. Canada's Criminal Code states that anyone who "recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds or harbours a person" for the purpose of exploitation has engaged in trafficking.

My first stop was the Filipino consulate in Toronto. A highly placed source confirmed the basic story. Toronto police and other regional police forces said they were not aware of the case. The Mounties referred me to media relations, which did not return my calls.

After nearly overdosing on chicken dinners with the consulate source, I was guided west to Saskatoon and someone who knew where five of the men were now working.

This is what happened to them after their arrival in Toronto: Met at the airport by a woman claiming to represent their Canadian employer, the men were immediately taken to a safe house in a Toronto suburb where they were held incommunicado for a week. The woman also took their passports and work permits.

Our investigation identified her as Susan Teng, a Taiwanese woman working for the Philippines recruitment agency that had charged each man $12,000 in placement fees to find them jobs in Canada. Telling them that their original employer had backed out, Teng said she'd found them other work but it required them to relocate to a small farming community 100 miles north of Toronto.

She introduced them to her partner, Bob, who said he was a lawyer. He helped her truck the men north to an abandoned farmhouse, where they were turned over to their new labor boss, the man known as Bob 2. He put these skilled welders and plumbers to work in menial jobs, including digging ditches, bottling water and cleaning the horse stables on his large rural estate.

Their ordeal ended one month later after one of the workers, Eric Martinez, fed up with squalid living conditions, long hours and no pay, bolted while on a work detail. Days later, he alerted the Filipino embassy.

Worried that others might do the same, Bob 1

drove to the farm in the Porsche Cayenne to warn the rest that they faced certain deportation if they fled. It was during this visit that one worker wrote down the license plate of the Porsche on a napkin.

Back in Toronto after getting a hit on the license plate, I began to focus on Imtazur Nasser Rahman, 44, a Bangladeshi Canadian. I leaned heavily on the researchers in the *Star* library whom I pressed into labor with an avalanche of requests for personal property, liens, divorce, Quick Law, Lexis-Nexis, bankruptcy and other records.

The federal bankruptcy database revealed that he had declared bankruptcy twice, sticking creditors with $41,000 the first time and $114,000 the second. This was in stark contrast to property records, which showed him living in an upscale home, and liens records, which put him behind the wheel of a Mercedes, a Lexus and a Porsche.

A Google search found the Web site for his company, Human Link International Inc., on which he boasted of a global labor recruitment business and a law degree. The address led me to the offices of an immigration lawyer, from whom Rahman had rented space for several years. As luck would have it, landlord and tenant had recently parted with heated words after the lawyer discovered Rahman had been passing himself off as a partner in her firm.

Strewn about his office were dozens of abandoned contracts, canceled checks, client lists and photographs. They showed Rahman charging clients $20,000 for obtaining a work permit and $30,000 for landed status as a permanent resident. Flyers promised Canadian citizenship for $70,000. On the wall was the bogus law degree that Rahman had purchased from a diploma mill on the Web.

The discarded papers linked him to Teng and the labor boss, Bob De Rosa. The most incriminating was a fax from a recruitment agency in Manila promising Rahman $2,000 for each worker he placed in Canada.

A "demand letter" from De Rosa asked Rahman to find him 191 foreign workers for a housing project he was developing in Elmvale. Record searches turned up little on De Rosa, but our news archives contained stories of police dismantling the largest marijuana-growing cooperative in the country, a $120-million-a-year operation housed in a building owned by De Rosa's family.

Seven people eventually were convicted in that scheme but De Rosa was not charged. He told police the building was leased to others at the time, and he knew nothing about what went on inside.

The *Star* investigation ran as two parts, under the banner of "People For Sale" (www.thestar.com/News/Canada/article/488074). The first told the story of the Elmvale 11 and the second profiled Rahman as a human trafficker. In an interview, Rahman said he helped workers get jobs "from the goodness of my heart so they could make some money." He said he was unaware of the warrant for his arrest in the Philippines for illegal recruiting and fraud.

Numerous tips spawned a third story into how a nanny brought to Canada to care for an 8-year-old boy was put to work as an underpaid servant at a bed and breakfast.

Dale Brazao | *Toronto Star*

This attic in an Elmvale farmhouse became home for 11 Filipino immigrants, who say they were forced to work for little pay before officials from the Filipino Embassy intervened.

Dale Brazao | *Toronto Star*

Ronald Galang, from left, Narciso Nicdao and Romero Bonete leave an abandoned farmhouse in Elmvale, Canada, after their rescue by Filipino embassy officials. The men say they came to Canada because they were promised good jobs but were kept incommunicado and forced to do menial labor for little pay. At least 800 workers are trafficked into Canada yearly, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The series provoked hundreds of phone calls and e-mails from readers expressing outrage that human trafficking could happen in Canada. Most demanded to know why none of the principals were in jail.

To this day, the Mounted Police have yet to interview Rahman, even though the Filipino worker who gave me the license plate he'd written on a napkin also had given it to the Mounties. After several months, the Mounties and Canada Border Services Agency shelved their investigations without filing a single charge.

A reporter at the Toronto Star since 1976, Dale Brazao has won two National Newspaper Awards in Canada. He and colleague Robert Cribb were finalists for IRE's FOIA Award for "Dirty Little Secrets," a 2007 investigation of abuse in day-care centers in Ontario.

Andy Cross | The Denver Post

The widow of Staff Sgt. Chad Barrett visits the fallen-soldiers memorial at Fort Carson Army base in Colorado Springs for the first time. After being cleared for his third combat tour – despite a recent suicide attempt, crushing headaches and a mental illness treated with medication – her husband killed himself in Iraq.

LOSING GROUND

Facing Homefront Battles

Collateral damage

Military prescribes drugs at record rate to combat mental and physical injuries

By David Olinger
The Denver Post

Reporter Erin Emery was on the phone from our Colorado Springs bureau.

"Are you sitting down?" she asked. "We got the drug data."

Moments later, an e-mail with an attachment arrived. It contained reams of data on Defense Department prescription drug purchases since the start of the Iraq war, including one 4,000-line summary table listing the yearly number of purchased prescriptions for every shape, bottle size and strength of three dozen antidepressants, sleeping pills, painkillers and anti-anxiety and anti-psychotic medicines.

We had flooded the Army with requests for information about the drugs being prescribed to troops and spent months getting nowhere. Suddenly, here it was: yearly data from the Defense Supply Center in Philadelphia on Pentagon purchases of everything from Ambien to Zoloft.

There were limitations to the data we received. The center provides prescription drugs to retirees and family members as well as service members, and Army spokesmen insisted there was no way to track how many of these medicines were being used in Iraq or Afghanistan. The spreadsheet contained information only on the specific drugs we had listed in the requests.

Even so, the data revealed several interesting trends. The budget for Topamax – an anti-epilepsy medicine now being used for migraines, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries – had quadrupled in four years. The budget for Ambien sleeping pills had doubled. So had the budget for Seroquel, an anti-psychotic medicine used to treat stress disorders. Spending for painkillers Oxycodone and Percocet also had grown remarkably, and the budget for antidepressants dwarfed everything else.

The numbers underlined what soldiers already were telling us: After six years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan and multiple tours of duty for an all-volunteer force, the Defense Department was relying on drugs to deploy some mentally and physically maimed soldiers and to patch up those returning home with concussive brain injuries, depression and combat stress.

After six years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan and multiple tours of duty for an all-volunteer force, the Defense Department was relying on drugs to deploy some mentally and physically maimed soldiers and to patch up those returning home with concussive brain injuries, depression and combat stress.

Andy Cross | The Denver Post

An urn containing the ashes of Chad Oligschlaeger sits next to his mother, Julie, at her home in Glendale, Ariz. Her son, a Marine, was found dead in his room at the Twentynine Palms base in southern California. He had been prescribed an assortment of medicines, including a sleeping pill, a sedative, an antidepressant and an antipsychotic drug.

Those soldiers included one man who was pulled from a mental health treatment ward and deployed despite "some paranoia and possible homicidal tendencies," according to another leaked e-mail.

In our series, "The Battle Within," we reported that Defense Department records obtained by *The Denver Post* through a Freedom of Information Act request show that spending for some pain medication, antidepressants, sleeping pills and even an epilepsy medicine used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder and brain injuries has grown dramatically since the Iraq war began. Spending increases ranged from 62 percent to 400 percent for various drugs.

Those records are bolstered by military mental-health surveys indicating that nearly 20,000 soldiers – more than 12 percent of the fighting force in Iraq and Afghanistan last year – have taken antidepressants or prescription sleeping pills in the war zones.

You don't have to be in Washington, D.C., or the Middle East to cover the war in Iraq. There are a growing number of war stories here at home, especially if your news organization is near an military base or a VA hospital.

Our series grew out of Emery's beat reporting at Fort Carson, an Army base near Colorado Springs.

In January, she reported that the surgeon for Fort Carson's 3rd Brigade Combat Team admitted in an e-mail: "We have been having issues reaching deployable strength, and thus have been taking along some borderline soldiers who we would otherwise have left behind for continued treatment."

Those soldiers included one man who was pulled from a mental health treatment ward and deployed despite "some paranoia and possible homicidal tendencies," according to another leaked e-mail.

Two weeks later, a soldier sent for a third combat tour in Iraq killed himself by swallowing an unknown number of pills. He had been deployed despite a recent suicide attempt, crushing headaches, and a mental illness requiring medicines for anxiety and depression.

In March, the *Post* asked me to join Emery in a broader investigation of the deployment of unfit soldiers.

We published a three-day series in August. The first day was devoted to soldiers deployed with injuries, the second to misuses of pharmaceuticals and the third to the Army's rising suicide rate.

LOSING GROUND
Facing Homefront Battles

Some key findings:

- In a single deployment from Fort Carson, at least 25 soldiers were suffering from serious and unresolved medical problems when they were ordered to Iraq. They included a soldier with headaches so severe he couldn't wear a helmet, a soldier taking daily morphine for nerve damage to his groin, a soldier recovering from his eighth knee surgery and a soldier placed on a suicide watch when he arrived in Kuwait for his third war tour.
- Although more than 200,000 soldiers had been sent to Afghanistan or Iraq at least twice, 174,241 active-duty soldiers had never deployed overseas as of Feb. 29.
- Some soldiers survived the war only to die from the pills they took to recover from it. One was Staff Sgt. Mark Waltz, who was prescribed 23 different medicines in the last six months of his life to relieve the pains of war. The last two medications, morphine and methadone, killed him. To date, six soldiers in the Army's new Warrior Transition Units – created to help them heal from the physical and psychological wounds of war – have died from lethal combined drug toxicity.

In response to a FOIA request, the Army provided the names of 123 soldiers who killed themselves in Iraq or Afghanistan from 2003 to early 2008. We used that information to report that Army suicides in Iraq tripled from 2004 to 2007. Also we found that 59 soldiers deployed from a single base – Fort Hood in Texas – had committed suicide in Iraq during 2006 and 2007, and that 14 soldiers who killed themselves were 19 years old. Before shooting herself, 19-year-old Amy Duerksen left her diary open to a page that described how she was raped in training. Travis Virgadamo, a 19-year-old suffering from depression, killed himself the day the Army gave his gun back, his grandmother said.

Writing about military health issues is a challenge. The Defense Department is secretive by nature, and health records are confidential.

But it's not impossible. From the outset, soldiers and spouses, upset that the Army was sending injured troops back to combat, helped us research the story. Before going to war, each soldier goes to an SRP – soldier readiness processing – site for a physical evaluation. Two sources gave us separate lists showing that more than 130 soldiers from Fort Carson's 3rd Brigade Combat Team were classified with medical limitations just before deployment.

One source also helped us get correct e-mail addresses for each of those soldiers. That enabled us to send e-mail queries to Iraq. (A tip: If you don't know an Army soldier's e-mail address, you can try firstname.lastname@us.army.mil. This sometimes works for soldiers with unusual names, but not for the Bob Smiths and Bill Johnsons.)

We also called on our library researchers to help us find phone numbers for close relatives. Many soldiers did not respond. Some said their problems were not serious or none of our business. But 25 soldiers, or relatives speaking for them, confirmed that they had been sent to combat with serious injuries or medical conditions, and some complained of constant pain and no therapy aside from painkillers.

Some Fort Carson soldiers bravely responded directly to our questions. In other cases spouses answered instead of soldiers, who feared retribution. Some families also provided a valuable piece of corroboration: the "physical profile" form filled out before deployment, which shows whether a doctor believes the soldier is able to carry and fire a weapon, carry a 48-pound fighting load at least two miles, wear a protective mask and sprint under fire.

Medication profiles, showing the history of medicines prescribed to a soldier, also proved useful. In Waltz's case, the profile was at the county coroner's office. Robey Covel, an injured soldier who was prescribed 1,100 Percocet pills while waiting eight months to see a doctor, gave us his medication profile to document his treatment.

From the outset, we met hostility from some Army officials who questioned why we had focused on such a negative topic. One circulated an e-mail accusing us of harassing soldiers by sending them as many as nine messages inquiring about their physical health.

Another responded to a request to interview the Fort Carson brigade's commanding general in Iraq by asking if *The Denver Post* ever planned to write any positive stories about soldiers. "You do a disservice to those serving in uniform," he wrote. "You do not truly portray us, you don't know us, and you have no clue about what we do."

FOIA requests were another challenge. Once submitted, our inquiries were doled out to various offices within the Department of Defense, and for a while we wondered if we would ever get a response. Ultimately, we did receive an inspector-general report on the deployment of unfit soldiers from Fort Carson, pharmaceutical sales records from the Defense Supply Center in Philadelphia and a list that named soldiers who committed suicide in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Sometimes sheer persistence pays off. Several people, including a reporter who had written extensively about suicides in Iraq, said the Army

Quick Look

Name of the story, and when it was published:
"The Battle Within," Aug. 25 - 27, 2008

How the story got started:
The series grew out of Erin Emery's beat reporting, primarily from leaked e-mails about soldiers with serious injuries and mental health problems who had been deployed to Iraq because a Fort Carson brigade was short of the numbers it needed.

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

Major types of documents used:
Those obtained through FOIA included records of Defense Department purchases of selected painkillers, sleeping pills and antipsychotic, anti-anxiety and antidepressant drugs since 2003; a list of suicides in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003; a Fort Carson inspector general's report on soldiers deployed with medical issues; coroners' reports; Army memoranda on soldiers deployed with medical issues; medical records provided by soldiers, including histories of prescribed drugs and physical profiles; a GAO report on deployments of soldiers with physical limitations; the Army's yearly suicide reports and its mental health advisory team reports; and Army data on the numbers of soldiers never deployed, deployed once, twice or three times or more.

Major types of human sources used:
Soldiers, their spouses and their family members; sources within the Army; the commanding general at Fort Carson; Col. Elspeth Ritchie, a top Army psychiatrist; county coroners' offices; and a college professor whose expertise is prescription drugs.

Andy Cross | The Denver Post

Army Sgt. Chuck Clamon gets help stretching his badly injured body from his wife, Sandra, on their living room floor in Colorado Springs. After being injured in a roadside bomb blast in Iraq, he now takes more than 20 pills a day for anxiety, severe headaches and pain.

I complained that the initial list of names I received failed to answer my specific request for deaths classified as suicides, and a list showed up in my mailbox. When I tried to ask follow-up questions, an Army spokeswoman responded, "Frankly, I wasn't aware that we released this information, even under FOIA."

never identifies which "non-hostile" deaths are self-inflicted. I complained that the initial list of names I received failed to answer my specific request for deaths classified as suicides, and a list showed up in my mailbox. When I tried to ask follow-up questions, an Army spokeswoman responded, "Frankly, I wasn't aware that we released this information, even under FOIA."

To date, the series has not had the impact we hoped. Timing may have been a factor. It was published during the Democratic National Convention in Denver, when the national media and party leaders were in town. But that week, the *Post* featured a wrap-around special section each day, which put the usual front page beneath all the convention coverage.

Many people did call or write to thank us. Some veterans groups and peace activists have posted the series on their Web sites, and parts of the series have been reprinted in other newspapers.

The most heartening messages came from military men and women and their families.

"What a wonderful series of articles on the effects of war on military and their families," wrote a retired colonel who opposed the war in Iraq.

"Thank you for your concern and for your help," wrote the mother of a soldier who killed herself in Iraq.

"I do indeed find the burden being shouldered by today's soldiers and Marines to be unprecedented," wrote a retired 37-year veteran.

David Olinger has worked for The Denver Post since 1997 and is a member of its investigative projects team. He won the 2002 Sidney Hillman Prize for a series about investors who prey on homeowners facing foreclosure, was a Loeb finalist in 2007 for stories on the growing foreclosure crisis and won a 2008 Best of the West award for a series on the weaknesses of Colorado's witness protection program. Erin Emery covered Colorado Springs and southern Colorado for The Post for nearly 11 years. She and Olinger were part of the team of Post reporters who won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Columbine High School massacre.

LOSING GROUND
Facing Homefront Battles

"Shh!"… Suicide, secrets and veterans

CBS uncovers suicide rates that the government tried to hide

By Armen Keteyian and Pia Malbran
"CBS Evening News"

Imagine being handed an internal e-mail in which a top government official from the agency you're investigating writes the word "Shh!" and then admits that he has life-or-death information that he's publicly denied ever having.

Investigative reporters dream of such a smoking gun.

With correspondent Armen Keteyian and producer Pia Malbran and backed by senior producer Keith Summa (along with associate producer Ariel Bashi and a team of CBS interns), the "CBS Evening News with Katie Couric" spent nearly 10 months investigating and reporting on the now hot-button issue of veteran suicides.

In a series of reports that aired between November 2007 and April 2008, we uncovered vital information that some government officials were trying to keep quiet. Our reporting led to at least three congressional hearings.

CBS News

In a CBS News interview, the VA's director of mental health, Dr. Ira Katz, downplayed the risk of suicide among veterans, only to reveal later in internal e-mails that there are record numbers of suicides and attempted suicides among veterans.

Quick Look

Name of the story, and when it was published:
"Veteran Suicides Series,""CBS Evening News," November 2007 to April 2008

How the story got started:
Our initial investigation started out of simple curiosity. We wanted to know how many suicides were occurring annually nationwide by those who had served in the military. No federal agency could provide us with the answer, so we decided to gather the data ourselves.

Length of time taken to report, write and edit the story:
Our first story took five months of full-time work. We then spent an additional five months reporting follow-up stories. We continue to keep an eye on the topic and report on related issues.

Major types of documents used:
Ten years of data showing all official suicides in the United States, broken down by state and other variables; population data from the U.S. Census, states and Veterans Affairs broken down by several variables; private e-mails of government officials; internal government documents; and a massive amount of data obtained through the Freedom of Information Act from the VA and Defense Department.

Major types of human sources used:
We consulted with several leading epidemiologists and biostatisticians from the Centers for Disease Control, the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Violent Death Reporting System, Harvard University, the University of Illinois, Columbia University, the University of Georgia, Emory University and the University of Miami. We also consulted with several experts from the National Institute of Mental Health, the American Association of Suicidology, the National Statistician Association, Suicide Prevention Action Network and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. We spoke with nearly every veterans and military rights and advocacy group, a slew of former and current Defense and VA insiders, military families and dozens of active-duty and former military personnel.

With the war in Iraq entering its fifth year, we simply wondered: How many veterans were killing themselves, and how did those numbers compare to non-veteran suicides?

At the time, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury were all the buzz in the media. Hardly anyone was focused on military suicides. Anecdotal stories were here and there, but no media outlet was reporting the big picture or had answered an even bigger question: How many veterans were committing suicide nationwide every year?

Searching for data

Initially, we assumed that to get current veteran suicide numbers, all we had to do was ask the right federal authorities. We were wrong.

Officials at the Department of Defense told us they had suicide data only for active-duty military personnel and had no idea what the figures were for veterans. The National Center for Health Statistics, which maintains the nation's death data, does not track the military status of those who die, regardless of the cause. And, representatives at the Department of Veterans Affairs, who we thought surely had to know how many vets were committing suicide, told us they had no records whatsoever.

The fact that no one, allegedly, was keeping track of these deaths sparked our reporting. So, we set off to gather the data ourselves and get answers.

The fact that no one, allegedly, was keeping track of these deaths sparked our reporting. So, we set off to gather the data ourselves and get answers.

For our first story, we compiled a massive database with the counts of all suicides for a 10-year period broken down by age, sex, race, date of death, manner of death, military status and state. We collected the data by contacting each state. Gathering, managing and analyzing the data was no easy task. It took five months, lots of patience and unbelievable organization. When all was said and done, 45 states provided us with detailed information culled from their death records.

The data revealed something that had never been made public before and that, frankly, stunned us: In 2005, a total of 6,256 individuals who had served in the military had committed suicide nationwide. Those most at risk were not elderly World War II or Vietnam-era males as we had been told, but rather men between the ages of 20 and 24, whose suicide rate was an estimated rate two to four times higher than civilians the same age. Our revelations made headlines from coast to coast.

For a follow-up story, we filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the VA, asking for all data listing how many veterans (under their care)

LOSING GROUND
Facing Homefront Battles

CBS News

CBS News talked with the families of several young veterans who all served in Iraq and killed themselves after they returned home.

Katz then wrote: "Shh! Our suicide prevention coordinators are identifying about 1,000 suicide attempts per month among veterans we see in our medical facilities." He then asked, "Is this something we should (carefully) address ourselves in some sort of release before someone stumbles on it?"

had tried to kill themselves. Several months later, the VA provided us with numbers that showed 790 attempted suicides in 2007. We soon learned that this figure was not even close to the truth.

Mining the e-mails

Little did we know at the time, but all the while, high-ranking VA officials were discussing our reporting in a series of internal e-mails. Ultimately, we were able to access the exchanges thanks to a federal court case in California focused on veterans' rights.

After our first story aired, the VA publicly rejected our findings, going so far during one congressional hearing as to question our patriotism. But behind closed doors, it was a different story. In an internal e-mail, a VA staff member tasked with examining our report told officials, "There was no flaw in the way [CBS News] calculated their data" and the "methodology appears to be correct."

Dr. Ira Katz, the VA's head of mental health, whom Keteyian had intensely questioned on camera in our first report, was asked by his boss in one e-mail about accurate suicide numbers. Katz admitted "there are about 18 suicides per day among America's 25 million veterans" which, he said, "is supported by the CBS numbers." In an interview with Keteyian a few weeks before this e-mail exchange, the doctor never mentioned this information.

In another e-mail, a VA media adviser told staffers, "I don't want to give CBS any more numbers on veteran suicides or attempts than they already have – it will only lead to more questions."

In a separate exchange, Katz privately sent the same media adviser an e-mail entitled "Not for the CBS News Interview Request." (We had requested a second on-camera interview with the VA but the agency rejected it.) Katz then wrote: "Shh! Our suicide prevention coordinators are identifying about 1,000 suicide attempts per month among veterans we see in our medical facilities." He then asked, "Is this something we should (carefully) address ourselves in some sort of release before someone stumbles on it?"

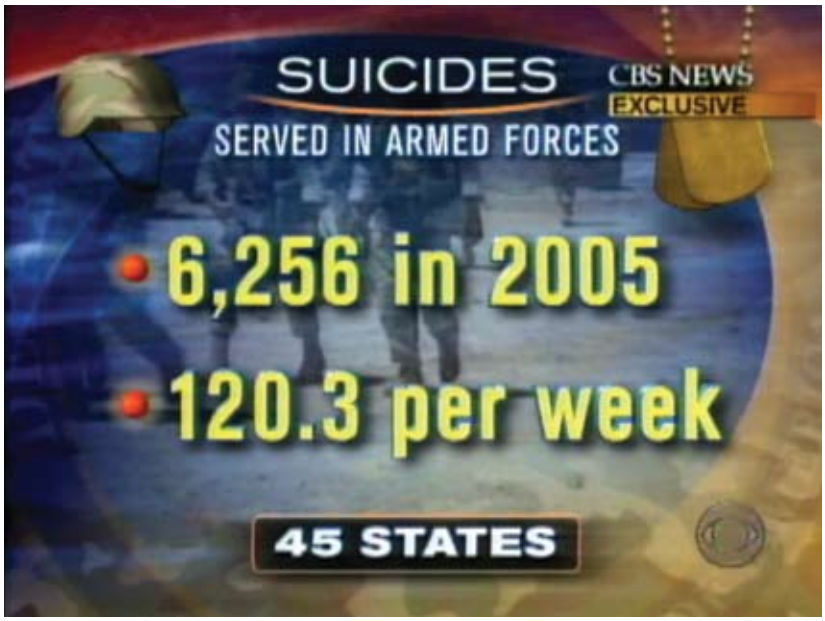
To say the least, this was a shocking admission by Katz, the front man on the VA's consistent denial of any suicide "epidemic." Now it appeared that Katz not only knew the true scope of the problem but was also taking steps to bury it. Furthermore, other internal e-mails showed how Katz played an instrumental role in limiting the amount of data that the VA provided to us.

Several members of Congress called for Katz's resignation, but he still has his job. He apologized to a congressional panel, saying his e-mails were

CBS News

Vietnam veteran Harold Pendergrass says he has attempted suicide several times and often sat with a gun in his mouth.

CBS News



The analysis by CBS News found that a shocking number of veterans are taking their own lives.

"poorly worded" but insisted he was not trying to hide anything.

As a result of our reporting, the VA is now taking steps to better address the issue of suicide in a much more honest and enlightened manner. They formed a working group to study veteran suicides, beefed up their suicide prevention hotline, added more counselors and launched a national prevention campaign.

Learning key lessons

Not surprisingly, persistence (with a capital P) was key. Our first story opened up the floodgates. But beyond the natural follow-ups, such as hearings on Capitol Hill, was the need to start digging in areas that now seemed like natural extensions of our original story, such as attempted suicides. Time and time again, we returned to our data for comparison, to push the story in new directions and to refute charges. This required vast amounts of time and organization.

Our story also exposed some flaws in the FOIA process. Government officials can easily withhold information without your knowledge, despite the law. They also can take their sweet time completing a request with no real ramifications. Furthermore, we learned that any time you file a FOIA request with either the VA or the Defense Department, that request likely will be widely circulated internally, for all to see.

The subject matter also posed challenges. Reporting on a suicide is difficult enough but reporting on a military suicide is an even greater balancing act. Loved ones, who were once extremely proud and patriotic, can struggle with a certain kind of guilt, shame, embarrassment and anger that only a military family can understand. This kind of reporting requires a lot of compassion.

We recognized the importance of what we were doing right away. We never forgot that the massive numbers we were working with were actually lost lives. The stories were sad – a highly decorated former sergeant was dead for weeks before his

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Facing Homefront Battles

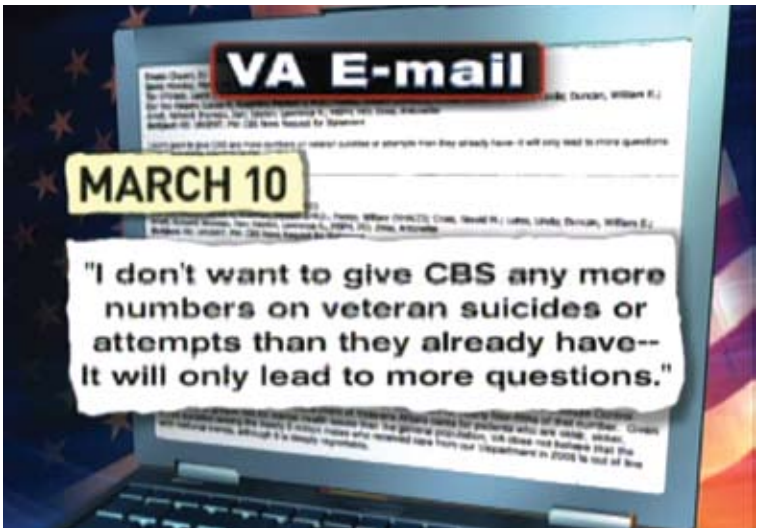
decaying body was found; a national guardsman returned from Iraq, then shot himself in front of his new wife; another vet hung himself and left a note instructing his father not to look and "just call the police."

Thinking about the pain and desperation these veterans endured helped push our reporting forward.

Our continued reporting on this issue is fueled by the desire to honor all those who have served in the military and who, as we said in our first story, lost their lives fighting an emotional enemy "they could not conquer."

Armen Keteyian is the chief investigative correspondent for CBS News. Pia Malbran is one of his producers, based in Miami.

CBS News



In one internal e-mail, a Veterans Affairs public relations director tells staffers that he does not want to provide CBS News with any more information because it would only lead to more questions.

Scott Eklund | *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

John Jack stands in a field in Marysville, Wash., where 141 homes for military families should have been built. He was hired in 2005 to oversee a major project run by American Eagle Communities of Dallas. In 2006, he blew the whistle on the company, saying it caused cost overruns and delays.

Military maneuvers

Private housing contracts rife with cost overruns and delays

By Eric Nalder
Seattle Post-Intelligencer

John Jack called me in mid-June, breaking nearly two years of silence required by a federal gag order that barred him from discussing what he knew, even with close friends.

Jack, a 37-year-old western Washington contractor, told me how the Navy had given his company control of 3,000 military homes in the Pacific Northwest, free of charge, and had invested nearly $16 million in a partnership with his employer while requiring his firm to invest only $5.5 million.

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"There was a tremendous amount of fraud," he told me during the first few minutes of our conversation. "I was the director. I oversaw this whole thing."

The deal was worth at least a billion dollars. Jack's employer, American Eagle Communities of Dallas, had signed a series of contracts under which it would co-own the homes with the Navy and collect rents for 50 years. Taxpayers would provide the rent money to American Eagle in the form of military housing allowances. Using $225 million borrowed on the promise of rental income, American Eagle would build hundreds of new homes and renovate old ones. Also, the company would sell surplus military homes, including mansions worth millions, and apply those proceeds to the construction of more new homes.

Shortly after he was hired in May 2005, Jack began to worry about the project. He said he witnessed the systematic undermining and plundering of the contract and the mission. It was made easier by Navy inattention, he said. His company was substituting inferior products on homes – such as 30-year roofs for the promised 50-year roofs – and hiding cost overruns, he said. When Jack objected, his bosses in Dallas cut him out of discussions and undercut his authority.

Jack believed in the mission and trusted his Navy overseers. On a cold February day in 2006, he met with the Navy's regional real estate office to detail his findings. In the days that followed, he turned over tens of thousands of pages of documents. When the Navy asked pointed questions of his employer, Jack's whistle-blowing activities became obvious. He was fired.

What happened next encouraged and then deeply disappointed him. He filed a False Claims Act lawsuit in federal court that would empower him to recover money for the taxpayers if he won his case. He estimated $40 million in losses. If he won in court, then he would by law also get a share of the money recovered.

The U.S. Justice Department and Navy criminal investigators spent a year and a half examining his charges. During that time he was barred by law from telling anyone but his lawyers what he knew. The evidence against American Eagle grew, and the case looked solid. Then suddenly in May, federal prosecutors informed him that they weren't going ahead with the probe and weren't going to join him in his lawsuit.

Navy bureaucrats had forgiven a huge portion of American Eagle's sins by approving a sweeping change order in August 2007. Because of that, Justice attorneys felt they no longer had a case. Jack smelled a cover-up. He had been silenced too long and now was free to talk.

Jack's initial phone call caught me on deadline, finishing another project. Though I was busy, I obeyed my own rule: Listen to all tipsters long enough to gauge whether their information is new, meaningful and relevant to our readers, and whether it could be focused into a story. Additionally, I personally listen for allegations involving misconduct and a certain degree of reporting difficulty.

Jack's tip met every qualification.

That call opened the door to a story we would publish six weeks later called "Demoted to Private"

Dan DeLong | *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

These old military houses in Oak Harbor, north of Seattle, are scheduled to be demolished and replaced by new homes nearby. Builders blame delays on rain and the proximity of eagle nests.

QUICK LOOK

Name of the story, and when it was published:
"Demoted to Private," Aug. 7 - 8, 2008

How the story got started:
A call from a whistle-blower

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

Major types of documents used:
Documents from the Navy, the Air Force, local real estate filings, local regulatory agencies, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Weather Service, private companies, federal court, bankruptcy court, Orange County (Calif.) Superior Court records, the city of Marysville (Wash.) planning office, a variety of e-mails and approximately 20,000 pages of records and documents from American Eagle. FOI requests are pending. The Pentagon excuses the delay by citing a long backlog.

Major types of human sources used:
The civilian chief of housing privatization for the Pentagon; the civilian chiefs of the Navy, Air Force and Army privatization programs; the deputy head of the Army program; former American Eagle officials; U.S. Sen. Mark Pryor, (D.-Ark.); congressional staff; the Forest City vice president and local project chief; the chief investigator for the U.S. Labor Department's Seattle office; various officials with other companies involved in privatizations; the commander of the Everett Navy base; attorneys involved in Qui Tam lawsuits; a variety of officials at The Shaw Group, Carabetta Enterprises and the three military services; lobbyists; the U.S. Justice Department; and residents at houses on military bases.

Navy bureaucrats had forgiven a huge portion of American Eagle's sins by approving a sweeping change order in August 2007. Because of that, Justice attorneys felt they no longer had a case.

(available online at http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/specials/militaryhousing).

Jack's company, American Eagle, had hired an influential former Air Force general – the former chief of staff – to get its first contract at an Air Force base in Florida. The company's managing director, Kathryn Thompson, also had numerous political connections, up to the White House. And she had a troubling financial history. When she won six housing privatization contracts from all three services, she was undergoing a messy bankruptcy and owed millions in overdue federal income taxes. Both she and American Eagle's managing partner, Carabetta Enterprises, also had botched public housing projects in their backgrounds. Carabetta had been suspended at one time from HUD projects, and a company owned by Thompson had defaulted on an affordable housing loan from Orange County, Calif.

The Air Force, Army and Navy had ignored these troubles when they partnered with American Eagle for privatized housing projects in six states. The other American Eagle partner – The Shaw Group – was a massive government-contracting firm whose lobbyists had close connections to President George W. Bush and key members of Congress.

All six American Eagle projects ended in cost overruns and disaster. Hundreds of houses haven't been built.

Moreover, I discovered that in just a decade the Pentagon had given away 178,000 military homes to around two dozen private companies, two of them foreign, with little oversight.

Jack told me that the stories I was reading about contracting fraud in Iraq were occurring in my own Puget Sound neighborhood. As he talked, I realized he was also blowing the whistle on what has become a major political priority in America – the privatization of government programs. Privatization of military housing was sold to Congress as a way to assure that new houses would be built. The rest of what he said was enough for me to set aside my deadline project and focus my attention on military public-private partnerships.

Dan DeLong | *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

Homes are under construction in the Crescent Harbor area at Naval Air Station Whidbey in Oak Harbor. Contractor Forest City is speeding up the work after taking over from the previous builder, American Eagle.

Jack was a good caller. I have dealt with whistleblowers for 37 years, and I understand the patterns. The best among them are loaded with detail and documents, but they never have the full story. Their outrage and their knowledge compete with each other, which produces a mixture of accusation and accuracy. Jack meticulously supported each accusation he made with documentation. Though he didn't have the full story, he had the full measure of the story he told.

My job was to get the rest.

Military investigations are no different than examinations of police departments, Wall Street bankers, oil companies or any other subject I've tackled. The players are different, and the documents have different names. However, the process is the same – find the players and ask key questions:

Who is in charge?

Who are the regulators?

What are the rules?

How are things done?

Where are the mistakes written down?

Where is the spending recorded?

Who knows the story?

First, I had to background Jack and his associates and drain them of everything they knew. That meant organizing their cluttered memories by asking the right questions. Our first meeting at Jack's house included his two lawyers, Jeffrey Needle and Susan Mindenberg. Needle was especially nervous about violating legal canon by talking to me but Jack was more interested in exposing wrongdoing.

Prior to the interview, I had gotten more information through preliminary research. That alone reassured them of my intent to dig deeply. Needle's reluctance became an advantage. Once reassured, he and Mindenberg made sure I understood the nuances of the case. Jack made sure I left that meeting with a computer full of notes and a CD containing 20,000 pages of documents.

Assistant managing editor Rita Hibbard and managing editor David McCumber instantly recognized the high priority of this story, especially in wartime and in a state where the military is one of the largest employers. We also faced deadline pressure. Jack's complaint had been sealed from public view for a year and a half in U.S. District Court in Seattle, but now it was there for anyone to see, including our competitors.

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Facing Homefront Battles

Navigating Pentagon contracts

"Demoted to Private" required the examination of Pentagon contracts and private business practices. Here are a few examples of resources on the military's contracting system, its privatization offices and its interactions with private companies in a program in which the military gave two dozen companies the keys to 178,000 family homes.

Documents

The Navy, Air Force and Army each handled privatization differently, but here are some revealing business documents that might be used to glean information about public-private partnerships in general:

Bond memorandum: This is a multiparty agreement that authorizes the funding. It details how many houses were quit-claimed to the private company or companies, how much development money was borrowed based on the rental income from those houses, the ratings on the bonds, what will be done with the money, payment terms, maturity dates for the bonds, who in the project has what approval power and who will oversee the project.

Design-build agreement: This is an agreement between the military branch, the bondholders and the private companies involved in the project. It is much more detailed than the bond memorandum and describes who will build, demolish and remodel the houses. It describes what will be done, how much it will cost, when it will be done and what the consequences are if it isn't done.

Operating agreement: This is an agreement between a military branch and a private company outlining how they will operate together. It details who will spend what money, who is responsible for cost overruns, who has what power, how money will be handled and what is supposed to happen if something goes wrong.

Guaranty of completion and contribution: This is an agreement among all the parties, particularly the private companies, regarding the guaranteed maximum price of the project and final completion date.

Real estate ground lease and conveyance of facilities: This document conveys the housing and land for 50 years, free of charge, to the private company or companies and details what they are supposed to do with it. Without this agreement, the bondholders would not have lent money for construction because the land is owned by the military.

Pro forma: This is an internal business database that details where every dollar will be spent, the schedule for the work and the funding.

Online sources

The following military Web sites were helpful in our investigation:

Federal Procurement Data System **(https://www.fpds.gov):** You can search this database for federal contracts by name of company. (You need to sign in and create a password.) The contract number will be needed when you file a FOIA request with the Defense Department for contract documents.

Database for Department of Defense housing allowances and other reimbursement rates **(http://perdiem.hqda.pentagon.mil/perdiem/bah.html):** You can search this database for the amounts of housing allowances provided to military personnel by ZIP code. The housing allowances are based on rank. If you search for the amount allowed an E-5 rank, which is a three-stripe sergeant in the Army, you'll get approximately the average housing allowance for all ranks.

Pentagon privatization office database **(www.acq.osd.mil/housing/index.htm):** This site has a database of privatization projects. It's useful but not necessarily up to date, and some key information you may need must be reported from other sources.

Air Force Center for Engineering and Development Web site **(www.afcee.af.mil/resources/housingprivatization/index.asp):** This Air Force privatization site is rich in document detail.

Army privatization Web site **(www.rci.army.mil/index.html):** The Army's privatization site is not as rich with documentation as the Air Force site.

Navy privatization Web site **(www.housing.navy.mil):** Privatization in the Navy is handled by the Office of Special Venture Acquisition.

– Eric Nalder, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

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Even though we aren't a huge newspaper, the *Post-Intelligencer* had another advantage. Investigative reporters from the five largest Hearst papers – Albany, Houston, San Antonio, San Francisco and Seattle – were starting to work together. We had been informally consulting with each other since the IRE conferences in Fort Worth and Phoenix. Hearst Corp. editor-at-large Phil Bronstein formalized our cooperation under his leadership. From one of our regular phone conferences a few days after my initial call from Jack came a vigorous brainstorming session, plus a tentative agreement that all of the papers would run a version of the story if it panned out, perhaps with localized sidebars.

The cooperation paid off before we published. Former American Eagle managing director Thompson hadn't responded to calls I made to her, her brother, her husband and her friends. So *San Antonio Express-News* reporter Guillermo Contreras visited her Dallas home and handed her husband and mother a card with my name on it. She called me a half hour later.

Although Jack provided a thoroughly documented picture of one corner of American Eagle's operations, it was only a corner, given the fact that the company was involved in privatized military housing projects in six states. Also, Jack never had access to the Pentagon officials responsible for the program to ask them what happened.

There is a caveat when dealing with the military. The Defense Department is big. Anything that happens in one corner of the operation has likely been repeated again and again. When dealing with the Pentagon, find a relevant string and pull it.

Being in a hurry, I couldn't count on Freedom of Information Act requests. The Defense Department maintains a healthy backlog of requests, probably on purpose. Its record-keepers may sound friendly on the phone but aren't helpful. In a recent reply, the Navy stated that military contracts couldn't be located by company name in their files – only by contract number. However, I found that the numbers are searchable by company name online using the federal government's own procurement databases.

News clippings and Pentagon Web sites provided a cursory picture of the privatization program. But I needed to get inside, so I made my first foray. I called a Pentagon phone number on an American Eagle phone list that Jack had provided. Wrong person, but that person provided three other names and numbers. With each call, I got more names and numbers.

Once I talked with one of the top officials – in this case, Joe Sikes, the head of the Pentagon housing privatization program – it was easier to convince the others to talk or to perhaps shame them into talking. The top Army bureaucrat answered his own phone on a cold call, which gave me quick access. The Navy and Air Force chiefs negotiated interviews through public relations people. Throughout the many on-the-record interviews I obtained at the Pentagon and in private industry, I kept careful records on each call, coding my notes with searchable keywords and building dossiers on each additional person I needed to call.

When doing a story on the Pentagon, call scores of people. Assume everyone will talk. Be well prepared and speak in a tone that reeks of confidence. Ask each person to suggest others.

Interview preparation was key. I spent a day and a half prior to each of two interviews with the Navy's privatization leader rereading material, organizing it into accessible databases and Word files and checking on his personal life, including a satellite "visit" to his house using Google Earth. During two interviews with him, which lasted more than six hours, he provided key information that Jack didn't have, though, given the nature of that information, he had clearly not wanted to do so. Jack's former boss at American Eagle, now a private contractor, also broke halfway through the interview and revealed his own battles with American Eagle over mismanagement.

I asked everyone I talked to for helpful Web sites. Though you can find helpful sites and pointers through Google, Yahoo, Factiva and Newsbank, they are limited by their own blindness. An Air Force privatization site didn't turn up on my initial Web search, but after a public relations official pointed me in that direction, I discovered it was rich with documentation. Each Web site provided a piece of the bigger picture, but only a smidgen given the size of my undertaking. To capture the whole picture, I built numerous Excel spreadsheets of my own, using more than a dozen resources to fill in information. Doing that, I discovered, for example, that only two dozen companies were sharing in the bounty, and the biggest ones were foreign.

Late one night while I was writing my final drafts, I urged myself to take one more step and check the contents of every federal lawsuit filed against Carabetta Enterprises. I scanned over a complaint filed in a U.S. District Court in Connecticut by McPeak and Associates against Carabetta. A few lines in, the complaint revealed that the plaintiff was, in fact, retired four-star general Merrill McPeak – chief of staff of the Air Force during the Gulf War – who was seeking payment of $200,000 promised to him if American Eagle got its first privatization project "by reason of the services" rendered by the general.

"Holy –" I muttered under my breath.

Couldn't sleep after that. Couldn't wait to call him.

Eric Nalder is chief investigative reporter at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. He is the recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes – for national reporting in 1990 and investigative reporting in 1997 – and was a public service finalist in 1992. His two IRE Awards include a book award for "Tankers Full of Trouble."

Resources

By Tori Moss
The IRE Journal

Stories

- **Story No. 17911:** Karen Lee Scrivo, *National Journal*. "Battling for Benefits" addressed the challenges that women veterans have faced in receiving adequate and gender-specific health care services, including the Women Veterans Health Program Act of 1983 and legislation that provides benefits for ill children whose mothers served in the Vietnam War. (2000)
- **Story No. 19571:** Paul Rubin, *Phoenix New Times*. The story outlined the life of Brian Callan, a mentally ill Marine Corp veteran who committed suicide after confronting a used car salesman with a gun. The decorated ex-Marine chief warrant officer was not properly treated for his post-traumatic stress disorder and peacekeeper's traumatic stress disorder. (2002)
- **Story No. 21512:** Anne-Marie Cusac, *The Progressive*. "An Army of Debt" shared stories of families of National Guard and Reserve soldiers who are struggling financially due to extended deployments and looks at the nationwide trend. It also examined the misleading lenders who cater to those military families. (2004)
- **Story No. 21580:** Mark Benjamin, United Press International. The reporter's stories examined the increase in psychological health problems among Iraq soldiers, including the increase in suicides, the mental health problems associated with an anti-malaria drug and the increase of Iraq veterans with mental health problems at homeless shelters throughout the country. (2004)
- **Story No. 21614:** David Zeman, *Detroit Free Press*. Thousands of World War II military personnel took part in secret poison-gas testing without being told of the possible health risks. In "Duty, Honor, Betrayal," the reporter found men who were battling cancers and diseases linked to the experiments and were seeking benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2004)
- **Story No. 22132:** Chris Adams, Alison Young, Knight Ridder Washington Bureau. The series highlighted the problems with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' system of compensating veterans with disabilities. The reporters found veterans who had waited decades to have their claims correctly handled. (2005)
- **Story No. 23555:** Anne Hull, Dana Priest, *The Washington Post*. The investigation behind "The Other Walter Reed" and "Beyond Walter Reed" found that many wounded Iraq veterans were given inferior housing and inadequate health care while patients at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. (2007)

Tipsheets

- **No. 1840:** "Data for the Military Beat," Frank Bass, The Associated Press. Bass details the veteran information that can be found in Census data, the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration databases, The Associated Press' casualty database and the Military Personnel Registry maintained by the National Archives and Records Administration's National Personnel Records Center.
- **No. 2642:** "Military Data: Contracts & Casualties," Michael Fabey, *Defense News*. Fabey provides suggestions for gathering intelligence on the military. Topics include the plentiful amounts of records the military keeps, tools reporters need to cover the military and the necessity of people in computer-assisted reporting stories.
- **No. 3085:** "How to Pursue a Veterans' Scandal," Joshua Kors, *The Nation*. Kors outlines the 20 tips that helped him investigate how military doctors were intentionally misdiagnosing more than 22,500 soldiers who were wounded in Iraq.
- **No. 3100:** "Digging in the Defense Department medical data mines," Kelly Kennedy, *Army Times*. Kennedy lists 15 suggestions for reporting and writing investigative pieces about military health care, including the benefits of speaking with a patient's sergeant and becoming an expert on policy and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The IRE Journal

- "FOI Battle: VA attempts to stonewall benefits probe; shoddy veteran treatment found in records," Chris Adams, Alison Young, Knight Ridder Washington Bureau. The reporters describe their legal battle with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to release information about pending veterans' disability claims and appeals. After analyzing the data, it became clear to the authors that the VA is riddled with problems and that veterans across the country are being mistreated. (Sept./Oct. 2005)
- "Veterans Care: Records detail nation's treatment, oversight gaps," Joan Mazzolini, *The* (Cleveland) *Plain Dealer*. The five-day series examined the care that men and women received from hospitals operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Mazzolini details the findings of the investigation and the information gathered through FOIA requests. (Jan./Feb. 2003)

Extra! Extra!

- "Alcohol abuse on rise among soldiers returning from war," Lizette Alvarez, *The New York Times*. The story analyzed the alcohol and other substance abuse prevalent among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and the military's response to the trend. Alvarez found that alcohol abuse is increasing among those who faced combat, and experts said the abuse is most prevalent in veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. (Health, Military: July 8, 2008)
- "The battle within," Erin Emery, David Olinger, *The Denver Post*. The special report showed that soldiers battling both physical and mental ailments are being sent back to Afghanistan and Iraq. Defense Department spending on medication, such as narcotics and antidepressants, is soaring. Yet soldiers say they are being medicated enough to be sent back into war while their illnesses are being ignored. Meanwhile, the suicide rate among soldiers is at a record high. (Government, Military: August 3, 2008)
- "War veterans used in controversial drug testing," Audrey Hudson, *The Washington Times*, ABC News. The investigation found that distressed soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan were being targeted by the government for drug testing. The drugs included some with severe side effects, including psychosis and suicidal behavior. In the case of one study, it took the Veterans Administration more than three months to contact patients about the debilitating and potentially dangerous mental side effects. (Government, Health, Military: June 18, 2008)

Uplink

- "Databases show vets get uneven treatment," Chris Adams, McClatchy Washington Bureau. The investigation found that veterans across the country did not receive the same services, treatments or monthly disability checks. Adams says a key part of the series was the analysis of millions of records in VA databases, many that were only obtained from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs after legal action. (Sept./Oct. 2006)
- "Military Maneuvers: Diagnosing troop mental-health ills," Matthew Kauffman, *The Hartford Courant*. Kauffman details his battle with the military to get information from the Defense Medical Surveillance System about the mental health screening and treatment for troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. (Sept./Oct. 2006)

Online

- National Personnel Records Center (www.archives.gov/st-louis/). The NPRC is an operation of the National Archives and Records Administration. It provides military personnel-related records of discharged and deceased veterans.
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (www.va.gov/oig/). The site provides contact information, procedures to request information under FOIA and PDFs of reports created by OIG offices, including the Offices of Investigations, Audit and Healthcare Inspections.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office (www.gao.gov/docsearch/topic.php) The site allows users to search for GAO reports and testimonies by date, agency or topic, including military. Results can also be limited by dates.

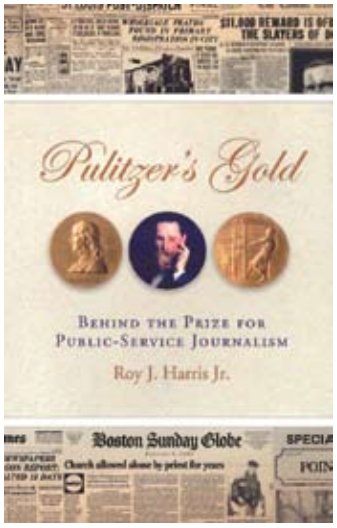
Mining for Pulitzer gold: What it takes to win

By Steve Weinberg
The IRE Journal

Behind "Pulitzer's Gold," an interesting and instructive new book chronicling nearly 100 years of high-quality, in-depth journalism, lies a touching family story.

The book's author is Roy J. Harris Jr., whose newspaper career includes staff jobs at *The Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Currently, Harris is an editor at *CFO*, a magazine about corporate finance. Harris began researching the history of the Pulitzer Prize public service journalism category to honor his father. Roy J. Harris Sr., now deceased, played a role as a reporter in the *Post-Dispatch* winning five public service Pulitzer Prizes from 1937 to 1952.

In the book, Harris presents detailed studies of a dozen investigations that won the public service medal. The remaining 80 winners are also explicated in shorter format. Harris notes that "the style of journalism represented by winners of the Public Service Prize varies widely. Behind some Gold Medals lies a multi-part team writing project," like *The New York Times*' publication and analysis of the Pentagon Papers in 1972 and the *New York World*'s 23-part examination of the Ku Klux Klan in 1922. Other medals "have recognized newspapers' incremental coverage of events," such as *The Washington Post*'s coverage of the Watergate cover-up during the early 1970s and *The Boston Post*'s coverage of financial scams run by Charles Ponzi during the early 1920s. Still other winners have used "hybrids of incremental and project-style reporting," Harris says, including *The Boston Globe* when examining pedophile priests and their protection by the Catholic Church hierarchy earlier this decade.



"Pulitzer's Gold: Behind the Prize for Public-Service Journalism"
By Roy J. Harris Jr.
University of Missouri Press, 473 pgs

The legacy of the prize is a reminder of how important it is for newsrooms to carry on the tradition.

The remainder of this write-up, though, will not emphasize either nostalgia or preaching to the supposedly intelligent contemporary publishers who foolishly believe the way to improve their bottom lines is to reduce the amount of high-quality, in-depth journalism.

Instead, it will offer a couple of craft lessons based on the superb reporting and editing mentioned in every chapter of Harris' book. Countless additional craft lessons can be gleaned by readers of the book according to their interests and needs.

THE NEW YORK TIMES EXPOSÉ ON WORKPLACE HAZARDS, 2004 winner

Many, probably most, workplaces harbor safety hazards. Employees frequently are afraid to speak out, and management often adopts the attitude that safety is too expensive to practice prevention. Unfortunately, lots of reporters and editors ignore workplaces as sources for stories until injury or death occurs.

David Barstow and Lowell Bergman served as the primary reporters on *The New York Times* investigation. While waiting for a delayed flight, Bergman engaged in a conversation with a U.S. Justice Department investigator examining the death of a Texas worker who had been crushed by an unprotected conveyor belt. "Did you know it's only a misdemeanor to kill a worker?" the federal investigator asked Bergman.

After Barstow picked up the trail, he conducted an interview with a 40-year employee of the plant where the death occurred. Because of new ownership, the employee said, safety measures had been ignored. Line workers enduring 130-degree heat could no longer take breaks, leading some of them to wilt from exhaustion and even urinate in their pants.

Barstow and Bergman combined the micro with the macro, using computer-assisted reporting to analyze about 30 years of U.S. workplace fatalities. Hardly any had resulted in prosecution of employers, and the few prosecutions resulted in minor penalties.

They enhanced the project further by including an international angle. As Harris explains the revelation, "American businesses were being pressured to adopt minimal safety levels as a cost-cutting technique to stay competitive in the new global environment. If they didn't cut costs enough, they lost out in the marketplace. If they trimmed safety measures and workers died, the price was not as severe."

THE LUFKIN (TEXAS) NEWS EXPOSÉ OF A MILITARY DEATH, 1977 winner

A relative of a Marine recruit from Lufkin, Texas, visited editor Joe Murray in the newsroom. The recruit had died at a San Diego training facility, the relative said, but the U.S. Marines' "official" account of his death made no sense given the severity of the head injuries.

Unsure of how a tiny newspaper could effectively challenge the military, Murray nonetheless asked reporter Ken Herman to make inquiries after covering the local funeral. The reporting showed that the Lufkin recruit never met Marine entry standards due to a lack of formal education, his low IQ (borderline retarded), a criminal record and his small physical stature, among other limitations. Herman also found that the Marine hierarchy then tried to cover up their mistake by lying about a background check. Further inquiries showed that the Marines had violated internal regulations during recruit training, leading to the Lufkin recruit being roughed up unsupervised just before he entered a coma from which he never emerged.

Murray and Herman did nothing sophisticated but did lots right: listening carefully to the whistleblower who entered the newsroom rather than ignoring him, researching the background of the dead Marine recruit before asking tough questions, refusing to take "no access" for an answer from the military authorities, using limited newsroom resources creatively and wisely, and taking the time to write a compelling story instead of a quick daily article.

[Disclosure: Steve Weinberg had never met Roy Harris before publication of the book. However, the director of the University of Missouri Press did ask Weinberg to evaluate the manuscript before accepting the book for the publisher's list. Weinberg accepted a $100 honorarium for the evaluation and eventually donated it to IRE. Later, the University of Missouri Press used a positive comment by Weinberg on the book's jacket.]

Steve Weinberg, a former executive director of IRE, is author of eight nonfiction books, including the just-published "Taking on the Trust: The Epic Battle of Ida Tarbell and John D. Rockefeller" (W.W. Norton).

Uplink

You're reading a featured story from Uplink, IRE and NICAR's online publication devoted to computer-assisted reporting – available at http://data.nicar.org/uplink.

Cleaning EPA's dirty sewers data

By Larry Wheeler and Grant Smith
Gannett News Service

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the nation's aging and overburdened sanitary sewer systems overflow at least 23,000 times a year and discharge between 3 billion and 10 billion gallons of raw sewage into streams, rivers and lakes.

The problem is even bigger – 850 billion gallons bigger – when older sewer systems that discharge both storm water and sewage from the same pipe are included in the tally.

But there is no national database to track when, where and how much.

The best the EPA has to offer is its Enforcement and Compliance History Online database (ECHO; www.epa-echo.gov/echo).The searchable database contains thousands of records depicting enforcement actions, including fines taken against hundreds of publicly owned sewage treatment plants. Many of those enforcement actions were related to illegal or chronic sewage discharges. The online ECHO database worked well for searching out a few facilities in one region, but it didn't answer the question journalists (and readers) typically want to know: Which facility got fined the most?

To begin answering that question, we downloaded the raw enforcement data from Integrated Data for Enforcement Analysis (IDEA; www.epa.gov/compliance/data/systems/multimedia/idea/ index.html), another EPA database.

IDEA is a sprawling collection of three datasets never designed to talk to each other. To construct a complete picture of sewer enforcement and compliance across the nation, we needed to turn the three IDEA datasets into one all-powerful, all-knowing database.

There was nothing in the EPA data dictionary that warned us this would be a mind-bending task, even with substantial help from our dear friend Microsoft Access database manager.

Using variables strewn across 18 tables and two EPA datasets, we first defined our universe as all publicly owned sewage treatment plants with a daily treatment capacity of at least 1 million gallons.

We came up with about 4,250 municipal sewage plants in 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Next, we threw a five-year time bracket around the data to make our results comparable to ECHO.

Eventually, we created a single database that included the name and location of each facility, plus federal, state and local penalties assessed against each facility since 2003. It was neatly organized with one record for each facility and used an EPA national permit number as a unique ID. This allowed us to sort, rank, and look for trends and extremes.

That's when we noticed Ridiculous Data Problem No. 1: State or local fines and federal fines were recorded in separate fields. In some cases, the two fields could be combined to get an accurate total. Other records recorded the same fine in multiple fields, and combining them would have resulted in inaccurate double counting. Ultimately, we devised a set of criteria to sum the penalties for each facility and compared our results to the ECHO database results to ensure accuracy.

We still had a third IDEA dataset to contend with, which became the root of most of our difficulties. This dataset contained EPA enforcement case records, including brief narratives of the civil cases the Justice Department and EPA pursued against sewer operators in an attempt to bring them into compliance with the Clean Water Act and other applicable federal pollution laws. Without that data, our list of fines and penalties would be incomplete.

The third IDEA dataset was organized by case number, which was linked to a national facility number but not the national permit number that was serving as our unique ID in the other datasets of facilities and fines. To solve this dilemma, we used a key table, also available from the EPA's IDEA Web site, to match each facility number to its national permit number, which created one master table.

Then we discovered Ridiculous Data Problem No. 2: Some penalties were recorded in both a facility dataset and the civil case dataset, and some were not. There was no consistent pattern – no magic shortcut to avoid double counting. For each facility that had some kind of enforcement action in our list, we once more were forced to hand-check our combined records against ECHO.

In the course of all this double-checking, we uncovered Ridiculous Data Problem No. 3: Some cases were filed against municipal sewer authorities, cities or counties that owned multiple treatment plants. The downloaded data offered no guidance on whether a fine should be counted against a specific sewage treatment plant or distributed across many treatment plants owned by the same municipal authority. In some cases, we were able to hand-check these records online. For many we were not, and we ended up calling sewage treatment facilities to corroborate our data with the managers.

After finally tackling these data problems, our story showed that since 2003 hundreds of government-run sewer system operators had been fined for infractions that made people sick and killed plants and animals (www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-05-07-sewers-main_N.htm). The story included an online database (http://data.gannettnewsservice.com/sewers/start7.php?loc=interstitialskip) of sewer treatment plants that readers could search.

The moral of the story: What appeared at first to be a simple project – narrowing down three big datasets into one table to analyze – turned into an enormous undertaking. The data was riddled with inconsistencies, incomplete entries and unexplainable quirks. The only way we could have confidence in our findings was to hand-check each and every record for 4,250 publicly owned sewage treatment plants. And that's a lot of poop.

Larry Wheeler covers environment and health issues as a member of the Gannett News Service Enterprise Database projects team. Contact him by e-mail at lwheeler@gns.gannett.com. Grant Smith, a graduate of the Missouri School of Journalism, was an intern for Gannett News Service from January to April and is currently an intern at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Contact him by e-mail at grantsmith04@gmail.com.

Brian Peterson | *Star Tribune*

Deep ruts show the damage caused by ATV riders in a Minnesota forest. The destruction continues despite laws making off-trail riding illegal in state parks.

ROGUE RIDERS

Video-assisted investigation snares ATVs damaging Minnesota forests

By James Eli Shiffer
(Minneapolis) *Star Tribune*

Deep in the Minnesota woods, three riders on all-terrain vehicles found a great spot for a muddy spin. State conservation officers had tried to keep riders out of this place, but two signs forbidding off-road riding had been yanked out of the ground. The rain-filled ruts where the forest floor used to be were just too tempting for ATV joyriders ready to spray some mud.

One of the ATVs that June day sank into the mire. As the rider tried to winch it out, his friend captured the struggle on his cell-phone camera.

Brian Peterson | *Star Tribune*

ATVs fly through the "Sink Hole" on the Red Top Trail, a sanctioned challenge area on one of the most popular trails in Minnesota.

There was another camera watching that day, a motion-activated video camera hidden in the woods. *Star Tribune* photographer Brian Peterson, an avid deer hunter, used the camera to bag the money shot for a video about the widespread damage caused by illegal ATV riding in the Minnesota woods.

Peterson's videography, aided by scriptwriting help from reporters David Shaffer and Tom Meersman, was the centerpiece of "Renegade Riders," the *Star Tribune*'s multimedia investigation into ATV use in Minnesota forests. The three-day series was published in print and online in September, culminating months of public records research, data analysis, interviews, field visits, and ride-alongs with ATV clubs and Department of Natural Resources conservation officers.

The chief findings: Off-trail ATV riding was causing widespread damage to Minnesota's vast state forests. To control it, the state had taken to paying ATV rider clubs to monitor trails, despite evidence that riders tore up a bog on a club-sponsored outing. And although the state mapped a 7,700-mile network of ATV trails, the DNR commissioner rejected concerns of the agency's field staff that some trails could degrade land, water and wildlife.

Those findings were bolstered by five video reports on StarTribune.com. Neither words nor still pictures could match the scenes of riders roaring through a cauldron of mud or the sometimes futile efforts of conservation officers to stop illegal riding by blocking trails with downed trees, signs, fences and boulders.

"This is the first project that I have worked on as a still photographer with the option of using video to help tell the story," Peterson said. "It was the perfect opportunity to use all the new tools in our bag to tell powerful stories on the Web with multimedia."

The same team had collaborated on "Tracks on the Land," the 2002 *Star Tribune* series that broke the story of ATVs driving virtually unregulated on public land, blazing trails at will through wetlands, lakes, old-growth forests and the like. The team was hampered in that series because the reporting didn't get going until late in the ATV season,when most of the riders were gone and only the rutted scars remained. "Needless to say, it didn't have the visual punch that was needed to report the story fully," Peterson recalled.

Nevertheless, "Tracks on the Land" got the state's attention. As Shaffer recalled, "After that series, the Minnesota Legislature passed stricter ATV laws and directed the Department of Natural Resources to designate trails for ATVs, ending the ride-almost-anywhere practice that once existed in state forests."

Still, ATVs continued to pour into state forests. Registrations tripled in the past decade, and the state launched the bitterly contested process of deciding which ATV trails would stay open and which would close in 4.2 million acres of state forests.

Early in 2008, Peterson, Shaffer and Meers-

man embarked on a re-examination of ATVs. They were joined by database editor Glenn Howatt, who would crunch the DNR's record of enforcement actions to see whether conservation officers were catching ATVs ripping up the woods or riding in prohibited areas.

Since Sept. 11, the state had put more restrictions on access to enforcement data. But Shaffer and Howatt successfully argued for its release because it would benefit public safety.

"We used it to count and identify people warned or ticketed for destroying wetlands, riding in lakes, trampling on nonmotorized trails and other ATV violations," Shaffer said.

Here's what the data showed: 1,600 violators had been given tickets or written warnings for riding in the wrong place, including wetlands and state parks. Shaffer called some of the violators, and their unrepentant quotes were highlights of the stories. Meanwhile, Meersman burrowed into the DNR, locating paper records and interviewing staffers about the little-noticed process of mapping out the immense trail system.

With data on violations in hand, the photographer and reporters headed into the woods. They rented ATVs, or drove Shaffer's four-wheel drive truck, because their destinations were miles from the nearest highway.

Meersman and Peterson were eager to revisit the trouble spots they had first encountered in 2002. Shaffer wanted to get the perspective of conservation officers tasked with becoming traffic cops for ATVs over millions of acres. They also wanted to be sure to get the perspective of legal riders. They visited a state-maintained mud hole, where Peterson took some striking video of the roaring, splattering fun. Later in the season, two ATV club members who were acting as state-sponsored "trail ambassadors" allowed Meersman and Peterson to accompany them as they patrolled a trail.

At the *Star Tribune*, major news projects are expected to feature video, even if the subjects don't easily lend themselves to it. For "Renegade Riders," however, that wasn't an issue. Conservation officers pulling over ATVs in the forest, wheels rolling through muddy ruts, panoramas of a lakeshore scarred by traffic – all of these images transported viewers into the story. From the start, we emphasized that the project Web site, www.startribune.com/atv, should showcase the videos, rather than still images and text.

Once Peterson learned how much difficulty conservation officers had in catching off-trail ATV riders, he realized he needed to take unusual measures. "I had used trail cameras to record the movement of deer throughout our hunting property and thought this technology might be perfect for this project," he recalled. It took only a week of surveillance before the camera captured the three violators, not to mention a cameo by a wild turkey.

Some powerful images from the project came from unconventional sources: a screenshot from a video that ATV joyriders had posted on YouTube and DNR "crime scene" photographs of ATV riders stuck in the mud in restricted places. Once he learned that the DNR had these photos, Shaffer requested them, and we featured the images in our print and online reports.

While Peterson did the lion's share of work with the videos, Shaffer and Meersman helped out with the scripts and made suggestions about the sequence of the videos. Graphic artist Mark Boswell put together the print graphics and an interactive map showing state forests with the most ATV violations and total trail access.

As striking as they were, images alone would not have carried this project. The computer-assisted reporting and records research undertaken by Shaffer, Meersman and Howatt paid off with three insightful, vivid stories that underscore the need for tight ATV enforcement to protect sensitive wildlands.

The project showed how the use of hidden video cameras, a technique long used in television, is an important investigative tool for modern print-and-Web newsrooms, and can be powerfully combined with data analysis, public records research, interactive graphics, still photography, boot-leather reporting and evocative writing.

James Eli Shiffer, editor of the ATV project, has been an editor and reporter at the Star Tribune since December 2005. Earlier, he spent 12 years as a reporter and editor at the News & Observer in North Carolina. At the Star Tribune, he recently launched a blog and column called Whistleblower, which showcases investigative reporting in the age of interactive news.

Brian Peterson | *Star Tribune*

Department of Natural Resources conservation officer Paul Kuske writes Dan Doubek a warning ticket for failing to display the registration on his ATV on the Pine Center Trail, which is about 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis.

Brian Peterson | *Star Tribune*

On a busy day on the Pine Center Trail, Kuske checks registration of ATV riders. Ten years ago, ATV enforcement was a minor part of the job. Now, ATVs are the third-largest drain on enforcement time.

CREATIVE, EFFECTIVE REQUESTS

Records yield stories from questionable police hires to kids' school lunches

By Charles N. Davis
National Freedom of Information Coalition

From e-mails in governors' mansions to school lunch menus, 2008 was filled with stories made possible thanks to creative use of freedom of information law.

A look back at a year's worth of FOI-driven stories compiled by researchers at the National Freedom of Information Coalition, an IRE ally housed at the Missouri School of Journalism, reveals a wide range of stories that prove the value of FOI on the beat, in investigative projects and in innovative feature stories.

The list – now featuring more than 150 stories from all over the country – will be finalized for release by the NFOIC during Sunshine Week 2009 in March. It will contain topics from "safe pesticides" to Julia Child's secret life as a spy. A sneak preview reveals some real gems.

Some of the stories dominated the headlines, such as *The Washington Post*'s fine use of FOI to obtain detailed intelligence reports logged by at least two agents in the Maryland State Police's Homeland Security and Intelligence Division. They had conducted surveillance on war protestors and death penalty opponents for more than a year.

In a powerful series of stories, *Post* reporter Lisa Rein revealed that the Maryland State Police classified 53 nonviolent activists as terrorists and entered their names and personal information into state and federal databases that track terrorism suspects.

The surveillance took place during 14 months in 2005 and 2006, under the administration of former Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., a Republican.

The police also entered the activists' names into the federal Washington-Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area database. One well-known antiwar activist from Baltimore, Max Obuszewski, was singled out in the intelligence logs released by the ACLU, which described a primary crime of "terrorism-anti-government" and a secondary crime of "terrorism-anti-war protesters."

The saga continues to reverberate, as hearings into the program have revealed evidence of systemic abuses of the civil rights of peaceful protesters. Many other states' law-enforcement agencies should receive similar requests from curious reporters.

Other stories told cautionary tales of system failure within government agencies designed to protect us. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* produced a riveting story on the Swiss cheese system for hiring police trainees in Atlanta, which opened with this lead:

"Keovongsa Siharath was arrested in Henry County on charges he punched his stepfather. Jeffrey Churchill was charged with assault in an altercation with a woman in a mall parking lot. Calvin Thomas was taken into custody in DeKalb County on a concealed weapons charge. All three are now officers with the Atlanta Police Department."

The story, by Tim Eberly, went on to document a system in which one in three Atlanta Police Academy graduates have been arrested or cited for a crime.

The FOI angle? The AJC simply filed a request for the police academy's job applications, then checked the applicants against criminal records.

The arrests ranged from minor offenses such as shoplifting to violent charges including assault. More than a third of the officers had been rejected by other law-enforcement agencies, and more than half of the recruits admitted using marijuana.

Eye-opening stuff, and all the product of a rather straightforward FOI request. And again, a story that bears repetition in market after market – how good are the police applicants in your town?

The highest profile FOI stories concerned the e-mail of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, of course, but she was far from the only governor whose e-mail caused a stir. A yearlong showdown in Missouri ended in November when Gov. Matt Blunt finally, and reluctantly, released thousands of e-mails.

The most heartening thing to come from the Missouri saga was the creation of a consortium of media outlets including The Associated Press, *The Kansas City Star* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. They teamed up to share legal costs and reporting work on the story. In tough economic times, such an approach, already long overdue, makes even more sense.

Sometimes the issues highlighted by FOI requests document what we always suspected but allow reporters to delve into the data in ways that put a new twist on things.

A fine example is *Newsday*'s work on school lunches. That's right – school lunches. *Newsday* owns the story, folks, and it's a story of intense interest to readers.

According to a series of *Newsday* reports, school lunches are high in fat and sodium and low on fresh ingredients. Lunch programs, which are expected to pay their own way without help from the school budget, rely on chip and cookie sales – not to mention sugary soda from machines – to amp up their profits.

In one particularly fascinating story, *Newsday* used FOI to request the menus of 47 schools in 10 Long Island school districts. They then had a registered dietitian analyze the contents.

The results were about as ghastly as you'd imagine, and the stories have kicked off a roiling debate about school nutrition that already has schools embracing reforms large and small.

Looking back, it was quite a year for FOI. Despite fewer reporters making fewer requests thanks to the industry's macroeconomic contagion, public records still play a vital role in keeping government accountable and in informing readers.

Charles N. Davis is an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and the executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, which is headquartered at the School. Visit the coalition's Web site at www.nfoic.org.

IRE SERVICES

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

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UPLINK – Electronic newsletter by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. *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.
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141 Neff Annex
Columbia MO, 65211
www.ire.org