THE IRE JOURNAL

Fall 2009
Volume 32
Number 4

2009 IRE Awards Entry Form Inside

HEALTH COOPERATIVE
Hearst pools resources for national project on medical mistakes

CONDO SALES
Suspicious deals spark curiosity in San Diego

NEW MATH
School district loses millions in high-risk derivatives market

Join IRE and NICAR in Phoenix for the 2010 Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference. The annual event, which offers hands-on training, panels on the latest trends and insight into cutting-edge developments, will be hosted by the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University from March 11-14.

The 2010 CAR Conference will give you the tools you need to dig deeper into stories and give readers, viewers and your online audience the information they're demanding. It will offer something for everyone, from beginners to those with years of experience. The training provided at the conference helps journalists stay ahead in a competitive environment and will give you skills sought by employers.

"We're honored to be hosting IRE's 2010 CAR conference here at the Cronkite School," said Chris Callahan, dean of the school. "I attended my first CAR conference back in 1995, and have always found the sessions to be among the very best concentrated journalism training experiences in the world. With our new digital media complex in downtown Phoenix and faculty members such as Knight Chair Steve Doig, we hope to help IRE deliver a first-rate CAR training experience next spring."

At CAR 2010, you'll find panels designed with all skill levels and areas of interest in mind.

- Get advice on covering major issues, including the economy, housing, government spending, K-12 and higher education, courts and crime, health care, consumer safety, a special focus on covering the 2010 U.S. Census and more.
- Collect proven tips for building CAR into your beat and quick-hit reporting.
- Explore how tools such as mapping, statistical analysis or social networking can add scope and credibility to your stories.
- Producers and editors talk about developing stories from start to finish.
- Learn how to find and gain access to public data sources.
- Find out what works in developing stories with visuals, video, and Web presence.
- Build your skill set with hands-on classes taught by experienced CAR practitioners.
- See what's next in CAR at demos of the latest applications.

PRE-REGISTRATION ENDS MARCH 1

$190 Registration Fee

$100 Student Registration Fee

For more details or to register, visit http://data.nicar.org/CAR2010

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Photo by
Wendy Gray, *The IRE Journal*

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FROM THE IRE OFFICE

On-the-road inspiration

BY DOUG HADDIX AND JAIMI DOWDELL
IRE TRAINING DIRECTORS

For more than a year now, we've been privileged to travel the country sharing IRE's watchdog and data training. We've met journalists, students and professors whose work renews our optimism about the future of investigative reporting.

Despite a scary economy, dedicated journalists and educators are working hard to learn new skills, sharpen the tools on their belt and position themselves to thrive during this information revolution.

While we never could name nor do justice to all of the inspirational characters we've met this past year, here are a dozen who left a lasting impression:

Robin Martin, owner and publisher of *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, showed up for hands-on Excel spreadsheet training during several days of IRE custom training at her newspaper. Her willingness to sit elbow-to-elbow with reporters and editors learning new software spoke volumes about the value of teamwork.

As a recent college graduate, **Keegan Kyle** found a way to make it to a computer-assisted reporting boot camp in Minneapolis. He learned a little about staying in a hostel that week as well as a lot about spreadsheets and databases. He took those skills and put them to work covering the night cops beat at the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*. Less than a year later, he landed a full-time job as an investigative reporter for the Voice of San Diego.

Even though the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* was in bankruptcy reorganization, Editor **Nancy Barnes** hired IRE for three days of custom training for her talented newsroom. Reporters and editors learned more about data, documents, the "invisible Web," digital mapping and collaborative story brainstorming.

Brent Wistrom of *The Wichita Eagle* spent all morning in Access database training, brainstormed reporting strategies during lunch for a special Sunday package and rushed off to catch a plane for out-of-state reporting on the story. There's a reporter not only committed to getting the story but also to getting better as a journalist.

Karl Idsvoog, an associate professor at Kent State University, proudly showed off a state-of-the-art, high-definition broadcast studio where he and other faculty help students produce multimedia stories. His passion for investigative reporting and video storytelling has helped students produce impressive projects.

Fresh from his Pulitzer Prize win, **Jim Schaefer** of the *Detroit Free Press* inspired a Detroit watchdog workshop audience with his advice about digging through records and developing sources for a rolling investigation. Speakers of his caliber routinely donate their time to help make IRE workshops and conferences so successful.

Brandon Stahl, a reporter with the *Duluth News Tribune*, attended a CAR boot camp and was determined to put the skills to work. After working through the difficulties of his first CAR project, an analysis of emergency response times, he's gone on to analyze campaign finance reports, pet licenses, housing assessments, polling data, building inspections, crime and more.

On the heels of newsroom reorganization, reporters and editors at the *Dallas Morning News* took advantage of two days of IRE custom training to help adapt to new community beats and a renewed focus on watchdog reporting across beats and departments. **Maud Beelman**, assistant managing editor and a longtime IRE member, arranged the training to help smooth the transition.

After just three hours of hands-on spreadsheet training, reporter **Paul Sloth** of *The Journal Times* in Racine, Wis., couldn't wait to get back to the newsroom. The day after the training, he spent 10 hours analyzing spreadsheets, which he said gave him about half a dozen great stories.

Paul Waithaka is launching The Kenya Monitor, an online news service for Kenyan nationals living in the United States. He shared his entrepreneurial spirit during conversations at an Ethnic Media watchdog workshop at Boston University.

In addition to hosting the Boston workshop, **Maggie Mulvihill** and **Joe Bergantino** worked through the weekend on a big story for their New England Center for Investigative Reporting. Their passion and commitment show what it takes for a nonprofit news operation to succeed.

Like Willie Nelson, we just can't wait to get on the road again. There's no telling who will inspire us and produce work that truly makes a difference. Maybe it'll be you.

Doug Haddix and Jaimi Dowdell joined IRE as training directors in fall 2008. For information about bringing IRE training to your newsroom or campus, check out the custom training page at www.ire.org/training/specialized or contact the training directors at doug@ire.org or jaimi@ire.org.

IRE meets $75,000 challenge fund goal

Dedicated IRE members, and others who believe in the importance of public-service journalism, helped IRE reach its $75,000 Challenge Fund for Journalism V goal and obtain a much-needed $50,000 grant.

The program ran from August 2008 to August 2009 and was sponsored and funded by the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the McCormick Foundation.

The grant will go toward helping IRE continue to serve our members and our industry at a time when IRE's training and resources are more important than ever.

IRE has a strong base of donors who give year after year, quite often when they renew their IRE memberships. The CFJ program challenged IRE to count only donations from new donors and increased funding from IRE's current donor base.

"We are so grateful to the more than 600 people who stepped up to the challenge, reached deeply into their pockets and helped leverage more than $125,000 in funding for IRE," said IRE Development Officer Jennifer Erickson. "Sincere thanks to everyone who donated personally, encouraged others to give and spread the word about our challenge in what we all know is a tough time for our industry."

IRE continues to raise funds to pursue its mission of fostering excellence in investigative journalism. To support IRE, contact Erickson at (573) 884-2222 or jennifer@ire.org, or visit IRE's Web site at www.ire.org/donate. Or you may send a check payable to IRE to: IRE, Missouri School of Journalism, 141 Neff Annex, Columbia, MO 65211.

National workshop set for campus coverage

Seventy-five students from around the country will receive full scholarships to participate in the new Campus Coverage Project.

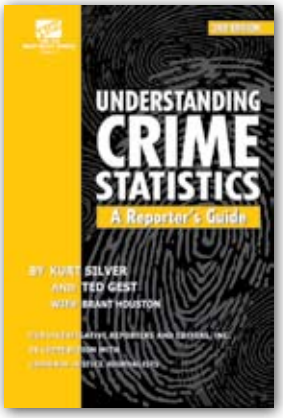
The conference, scheduled for Jan. 7-10 at Arizona State University in Phoenix, will focus on specific campus-coverage issues and overall reporting techniques and skills.

IRE will present the campus conference in partnership with the Education Writers Association and the Student Press Law Center. The program is being funded with a grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education.

Additional training opportunities will be provided throughout the year.

"This project will give student journalists access to some of the nation's top investigative journalists and education reporters. They'll learn critical skills for reporting on their college communities, investigating issues that affect campus life and holding leaders accountable," IRE board president Alison Young said. "It's the kind of program I wish I'd had an opportunity to join when I was in college."

IRE publishes first e-book on using crime statistics



The IRE Bookstore has its first electronic book available for purchase. "Understanding Crime Statistics: A Reporter's Guide, 2nd Edition" is the first of several eBooks planned for journalists.

The eBooks provide useful desktop references that you can have with you on the go. The PDF is compatible across eReader platforms, or can simply be opened on a computer desktop. Upon purchase, the eBook is available for immediate download.

Information about IRE books and other materials is available online at www.ire.org/store/index.html. Or, call the IRE Resource Center at 573-882-3364 to place an order.

MEMBER NEWS

Todd Bensman and **Guillermo Contreras** of the *San Antonio Express-News* received The National Press Club's 2009 Edwin M. Hood Award for diplomatic correspondence for their three-part series on illegal gun smuggling.

David E. Kaplan, the Center for Public Integrity, won a Knight-Batten Award for Innovations in Journalism, for "Tobacco Underground."

Keegan Kyle of the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* joined the Voice of San Diego as public safety reporter.

David Donald and **Kristen Lombardi,** the Center for Public Integrity, won the Society of Environmental Journalists' first-place award in outstanding online reporting for "The Hidden Costs of Clean Coal."

Ana Garcia and **Fred Mamoun**, KNBC, and **Eric Longabardi**, TeleMedia News Productions, tied for the honor of TV journalist of the year by the Los Angeles Press Club.

The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences presented KHOU-TV the award for outstanding regional news story in investigative reporting for "Hiding Homicide," by reporter **Mark Greenblatt**, executive producer **David Raziq** and photojournalist **Keith Tomshe**.

Theresa Marchetta, KMGH 7News anchor and investigative reporter, received the 2009 Kaiser Permanente "Thrive Award" for excellence in health care reporting for her "Elite Medicine" report. The award was presented at the Colorado Association of Black Journalists' banquet. Marchetta also received a regional Emmy for best news anchor.

Jim Morris and **M.B. Pell,** the Center for Public Integrity, won the Society of Environmental Journalists' second-place award in outstanding online reporting for "Perils of the New Pesticides." Morris has since joined the Sunlight Foundation.

Please send Member News items to Doug Haddix (doug@ire.org). Read updates online at http://data.nicar.org/irejournal/membernews.

To keep their watchdog instincts sharp, journalists need to stay connected with the latest news and trends about public records and open meetings at the federal, state and local levels.

IRE FOI Files

Hidden trauma

Records pivotal in revealing rogue, criminal paramedics

By Charles N. Davis
National Freedom of Information Coalition

A review of more than three-dozen morphine theft cases by *The Bee* found that lax narcotics storage, tracking and security policies facilitated each of the crimes. The cases, two-thirds of which occurred in 2005-2006, were identified through public records requests, online searches of state enforcement records and news reports.

They're the heroes: the ambulance drivers and paramedics, firefighters and nurses who work tirelessly to protect us.

It's easy to forget that they also are just like the rest of us, too, complete with flaws and human foibles.

Andrew McIntosh of *The Sacramento Bee* was reminded of that as he watched what he thought was an isolated local story about firefighters cheating on a paramedic exam explode into much, much more. Thanks to California's freedom of information laws, McIntosh was able to provide valuable scrutiny into a critical function of the government – caring for its citizens at their time of greatest need.

What McIntosh found will keep you up at night:

Paramedic Michael Carey, high on drugs and in desperate need of money, arrived at the accident scene on a highway near Modesto to find a 72-year-old woman in the car, bloody and unconscious.

Searching for identification in her purse, Carey came across the thousands that Cleotilda Maria Arroyo had saved to purchase a house in Mexico – a powerful temptation for a man whose struggles with alcohol, pills and bills had left him bouncing checks, even for his state paramedic license.

Carey called for an air ambulance to fly Arroyo to the hospital and pocketed $6,100 of her cash.

Carey's record was full of warning signs, yet officials did little or nothing to get him off the streets. Three days after stealing Arroyo's money, Carey showed up for duty reeking of alcohol and his employer, Riggs Ambulance Service, called police to give him a Breathalyzer test. According to the state's enforcement files, he registered an alcohol level almost twice the legal limit.

Instead of being arrested or put on leave, however, Carey was sent to a hotel for the night. His license was not revoked for good until a five-month police investigation led to his arrest for grand theft. He was sentenced to six months in jail, but served just 10 weeks.

McIntosh found forged EMT certification exams, use of another paramedic's license number to manufacture a state license card, falsified continuing education training and a system that moved at glacial speed to punish such wrongdoing.

But wait – it gets worse. There's also the morphine theft racket, in which McIntosh found EMTs taking the morphine from vials, shooting up and then replacing the morphine with worthless saline solution. He found records of an EMT who sexually assaulted a woman in the back of an ambulance.

It's a problem waiting for systematic analysis by other reporters across the country, McIntosh said.

"It's still happening, and it's happening a lot out there, and there are addicts in rare cases out there," McIntosh said. "I'm not talking about even a lot of EMTs, but the minority of bad ones are really bad, and the system in many states is broken."

Morphine theft by paramedics has become a perplexing problem across the country, with recent cases in at least 17 other states. A review of more than three-dozen morphine theft cases by *The Bee* found that lax narcotics storage, tracking and security policies facilitated each of the crimes. The cases, two-thirds of which occurred in 2005-2006, were identified through public records requests, online searches of state enforcement records and news reports.

McIntosh said that *The Bee* asked for "everything we could get our hands on" when beginning to broaden the investigation.

"The initial response was that we asked for too much, that these things are not available," he said. "When we made it clear that McClatchy corporate was more than willing to litigate this, everything came pouring in."

In fact, McIntosh said that the FOI request was so productive that it fueled the story.

"We got settlement agreements, charges against emergency personnel, emergency suspension affidavits, copies of forged cards, police reports, even private employers' disciplinary records that had been submitted to the board," he said. "It was a huge part of the story."

The Bee, to its credit, linked to the original FOI-driven documents in each story, allowing readers to see the records themselves. The series has resulted in real changes to the way the state licenses and disciplines EMTs and firefighters.

That's FOI at its finest: providing documented scrutiny of those charged with protecting us at our most vulnerable moments and reforming a broken regulatory and compliance system.

It's a story that should be done in every state in the country.

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.

MEDICAL TEAMWORK

Hearst pools journalists to probe deadly mistakes

By David McCumber
Hearst Connecticut Media Group


Mayra Beltran | Houston Chronicle

Lauren Ashkar kisses her father, Bashar Ashkar, as Nora Ashkar and Sharon Ashkar visit in a nursing home in Houston. Bashar Ashkar went to Methodist Hospital in 2005 to get a steroid injection. The doctor hit an artery by mistake, and he now has "locked in" syndrome and is in a nursing home.

Given the resource challenges we all face these days, it was downright refreshing to be part of a media company leveraging its groupwide resources to take on a sprawling national investigation.

Dead by Mistake, a Hearst Corp. project, documented the enormous national toll of death and injury from preventable medical errors, showing conclusively that such errors, including hospital-acquired infections, are the nation's leading cause of accidental death, killing more people than traffic accidents.

Dead by Mistake is the third, and by far the most ambitious, story resulting from the combined efforts of Hearst investigative staffers. As such, it represents the maturation of an initiative led by Phil Bronstein, executive vice president and editor-at-large at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, to get Hearst's newspapers working together – along with the company's television stations and digital media – to create memorable investigative journalism.

Previously, Hearst newspapers had not pooled their journalistic talent in such a focused, complementary and cooperative way.

Dead by Mistake underscored the tragic point that up to 200,000 Americans die from preventable medical mistakes and infections every year. The Hearst team found that a decade after a landmark study outlined the problem and proposed simple steps to reduce the carnage, the healthcare industry, federal government and states have not followed that blueprint – making the close to 2 million needless deaths in that time even more outrageous.


Ferraro family photo

Sebastian Ferrero, 3, died after a medical overdose at a Florida clinic.

Other key findings of the Hearst investigation include:

- Twenty states have no medical error reporting at all, five have voluntary reporting systems, and five are still developing a reporting structure. In the 20 states that currently require medical-error reporting, hospitals are reporting only a tiny portion of their mistakes. Standards vary wildly and enforcement is often nonexistent.
- The medical industry has lobbied hard against reform, spending millions in efforts, so far successful, to forestall a national reporting system for medical error.
- Although Congress approved legislation creating "Patient Safety Organizations" as a voluntary system for hospitals to report and learn from errors, the new organizations have no meaningful oversight and further insulate the public from the process.

The data analysis also was very productive. One of the biggest challenges of the project was its central premise: No one is counting the deaths from medical errors. We found how hard it is to do so, given the lack of any national structure. We found, for instance, that doctors routinely fudge death certificates to obscure the fact that people die of medical errors. And hospital discharge data is purposefully vague when it comes to identifying such errors.

Nevertheless, reporters obtained and analyzed several types of data, using phone interviews, Freedom of Information Act requests, and even negotiation with state health departments and hospital associations. Methods for analyzing and presenting the data ranged from using spreadsheets to build tables for graphic presentation and on the Web, to visual mapping, and even a statistical analysis carried out by an independent group.

The idea of investigating medical errors came up more than a year ago during a conference call to brainstorm project ideas. Jacquee Petchel, assistant managing editor and I-team leader at the *Houston Chronicle*, suggested that the subject would be worth a look. Then, Bob Port, senior editor and investigative leader at the Albany *Times Union*, became aware of the study, "To Err Is Human," conducted a decade ago by the Institute of Medicine. The anniversary of the report and its recommendations would provide an excellent news peg.

One of two lead reporters on the project was Eric Nalder, a two-time Pulitzer winner. Nalder was working for Hearst's *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* when it ceased print publication in

As the process evolved, other journalists from both Hearst newspapers and TV were brought into the story to provide local angles, copy and photo editing, photography, design and a dynamic, fully interactive Web site.

Twenty states have no medical error reporting at all, five have voluntary reporting systems, and five are still developing a reporting structure.

January. Steve Swartz, president of Hearst's newspaper division, decided to retain Nalder as a senior enterprise reporter for the entire division. When Nalder began his new job with Hearst, *Dead by Mistake* was off and running. His role was to direct reporting efforts. Port oversaw data gathering and analysis, and both reported to Bronstein. As the project progressed, Bronstein asked me to be the line editor.

Nalder divided his time between reporting and coordinating the work of others. He spent about six weeks reading documents and enlisting talent from around Hearst to help with the project. He soon realized he had worked himself into an extremely challenging job. He was dealing with reporters across the country, a number of whom he had never met.

Cathleen Crowley, medical writer for the *Times Union,* reported and wrote the mainbar with Nalder, and was also instrumental in pulling together the entire project.

As the process evolved, other journalists from both Hearst newspapers and TV were brought into the story to provide local angles, copy and photo editing, photography, design and a dynamic, fully interactive Web site.

Fully understanding the context of the project, and what made it possible, also requires a detour to the 40th floor of the Hearst Tower in Manhattan. There, Eve Burton, vice president and general counsel, has helped underwrite Hearst's investigative efforts.

Shortly after she joined the company in 2002, Burton moved almost all of the company's newsroom legal work, including access issues, prepublication legal review and libel defense, in-house rather than contracting out the work. That resulted in significant savings, and she lobbied to return some of that to the newsrooms to help hire investigative reporters and editors. Ultimately, Steve Swartz approved the hiring at each large property of key investigative talent, including Nalder, Port and Petchel.

Burton also decided that any monetary damages won when Hearst sued to gain access to public records should be used to support investigative work.

So when Port discovered that private funding had fallen through for a Columbia University-based project looking at what had happened since the publication of "To Err is Human," Burton's fund financed the work of 18 students at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism investigative reporting program. Guided by instructor John Martin, a former Newark *Star-Ledger* reporter, the students got a start at gathering documents, reports and some case examples. Then two of the students, reporter Olivia Victoria Andrzejczak and Web producer Kyla Calvert, were hired to work directly with Hearst reporters and editors on the project.

Swartz, who became Newspaper Division president in January 2009, made clear his strong interest for great investigative work at Hearst newspapers and threw his critical support behind *Dead By Mistake.*

Meanwhile, reporters and editors across the group were getting good traction on the story. Bronstein made clear early on that he wanted this to be both a national and a local story for each Hearst newspaper, so that the participating papers would have equity in the story in exchange for the time and effort their staffers gave to it.

So in each state served by the Hearst papers, reporters did stories looking closely at each state's failures and accomplishments in trying to reduce medical errors. Also, they told the stories of more than 30 people who died from or were badly injured by their medical care. This reporting not only localized the story but also contributed reach and power to the bigger picture mainbar.

Reporters and editors who worked on these aspects included Audrey Lee, Sunday editor at the *San Antonio Express-News;* David Sheppard, projects editor at the *Express-News;* and two of their reporters, Melissa Stoeltje and Don Finley; Petchel and *Houston Chronicle* enterprise reporter Terri Langford; Lance Williams, then *San Francisco Chronicle* investigations editor and reporter (now with the Center for Investigative Reporting); Crowley and Port in Albany; reporter Brian Lockhart at the *Advocate* in Stamford, Conn., who is part of Hearst's Connecticut investigative team; Debra Friedman of the *Greenwich (Conn.) Time* and Dan Tepfer of the *Connecticut Post* in Bridgeport.

The *Houston Chronicle* also provided huge assistance, including the time of photography director Steve Gonzales, who coordinated and edited photos from across the country, and copy editor Stephanie Milner, who put in tremendous time and energy as the project careened toward publication.

The first installment of *Dead By Mistake* ran August 11 in Hearst papers across the country. Carmen Cano, executive director of product development for Hearst Newspapers' digital team, designed the DeadbyMistake.com site, which went live the following day.

Hearst's TV effort on the story was headed by Wendy Wilk, Hearst Television Washington bureau chief, and senior correspondent Laurie Kinney. The stories ran on 20 Hearst TV stations, and all posted links to the entire package on their Web sites. Both broadcast and newspaper newsroom reporters at Hearst properties like KCRA-TV in Sacramento and the *San Francisco*


Karen Warren | Houston Chronicle

Ramona Barley went into a Texas surgical center for an operation and contracted a nearly fatal infection. She woke up two months later to find that her left leg had been amputated to save her life.

John Carl D'Annibale | Albany Times Union

Adele Rizk of Troy, N.Y., holds a photo of her daughter Diane Rizk McCabe, who bled to death after a C-section delivery at a hospital in Albany, N.Y. With their grandmother are Diane McCabe's children: Jenna, 2, and Louie, 8.

Chronicle cooperated to an unprecedented degree.

Public reaction has been enormous. The issue has been raised more prominently with and by President Barack Obama in the ongoing discussion about health care reform. Hundreds of comments and e-mails have come from readers, and the story has received wide distribution on social-media sites.

Deadbymistake.com now includes a blog and a place for readers to tell their own medical error stories. This crowd-sourced content will be a tool for further reporting.

Indeed, Hearst's work on *Dead by Mistake* is continuing. Nalder, Crowley and others are investigating several more parts of the story, with additional installments to come. Also, congressional reaction continues to build as the story has placed the issue squarely into the national debate over healthcare reform.

This was not an easy project to coordinate. Anything with so many participants and moving parts is going to be difficult, and the effort pointed up the fact that Hearst journalists must find better ways of communicating to make future projects go more smoothly. Data sharing, for example, among disparate content-management and print production systems has been extraordinarily difficult.

Nevertheless, this project represents a giant step forward at a time when most journalism of this scope and complexity is in retreat. It has served to underline the relevance of newspapers and investigative work in our tattered media landscape. After all, as Swartz says, "There's nothing newspapers can do better than cover a great story."

David McCumber is editorial director of the Hearst Connecticut Media Group, and editor of the Greenwich Time and the Advocate in Stamford, Conn. He worked for 10 years at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, as projects editor and as managing editor. He is the author of four books of nonfiction.

The data trail

By Bob Port
(Albany, N.Y.) *Times Union*

We obtained and analyzed the following data for *Dead By Mistake*:

Adverse Event Data: California
Reporters requested and obtained nearly 700 electronic copies of adverse event reports made by hospitals to the California Department of Health, which characterized the events as "investigated and substantiated." Each report was reviewed, and extracted information was included in a spreadsheet, which allowed reporters to search by facility, event type and type of penalty issued.

Reporting Rules Data: nationwide
In order to determine which states have mandatory adverse event reporting systems in place, reporters canvassed hospital associations, departments of health, and, where appropriate, patient safety organizations in the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. Interviews were conducted by phone and via e-mail, and results were inserted into a spreadsheet. A clickable map of states, categorized by type of reporting system, also included information on hospital-acquired infection laws.

Participation in Safety Programs: California, Connecticut, New York, Texas, Washington
Hearst reporters focused on individual hospitals in the states served by Hearst newspapers and compiled lists of each facility's participation in three prominent national programs created to reduce medical error. These are the American College of Surgeons National Surgical Quality Improvement Program, a campaign to improve quality and safety of surgical practices; the Leapfrog survey, created by a nonprofit organization founded by large employers to improve patient safety and health care quality; and the 5 Million Lives Campaign, sponsored by the nonprofit Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and aimed to improve patient safety by inviting hospitals to document their use of 12 proven safe practices. The results – who participates and who doesn't – were presented in searchable, clickable maps on the Web.

Hospital Patient Safety Indicators Data: California, Connecticut, New York, Texas, Washington
In collaboration with The Niagara Health Quality Coalition, a New York-based nonprofit specializing in quality of care statistical analyses, Hearst reporters created a searchable database of patient safety measures, established by the federal government, for nearly 2,000 hospitals. To do it, Hearst reporters requested anonymous patient discharge data from five states: California, Connecticut, New York, Texas and Washington. Obtaining the data often was a struggle, as data suppression rules varied from state to state; some states still used outdated coding schemes; and, at times, state departments of health demanded exorbitant fees before they handed over the data. The Niagara Health Quality Coalition then applied federal guidelines to data collected by Hearst to run a risk-adjusted statistical analysis, which allowed for the extraction of several safety indicators identified by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Although the way hospitals collect and disclose data to the state are complicating and limiting factors, the indicators provided healthcare consumers with at least a small window into each hospital's performance record.

Bob Port is senior editor at the (Albany, N.Y.) Times Union and leads the newspaper's investigative efforts.

Terry Barner | Panama City News Herald

BUDGET DRAIN

Leaky pipes, slow response cost city millions in revenue

By Matt Dixon
Panama City News Herald

What I discovered when comparing the data is that 20 percent of all leaks during the five years were not addressed for at least two days after being reported. Of those, the average time between the city being aware of a leak and work beginning to fix the problem was more than six days.

It was a slow day. You know, that kind when you really have to scramble for a daily.

That all changed, however, after scrolling through the city of Panama City's "Bids & RFP's" Web page. (Yeah, I was that desperate.)

The city was seeking a firm to conduct a water audit. According to the request for proposals, the city was looking for a company to help it determine how it lost 26 percent of all water – 575 million gallons – that it bought in 2007. By lost, I mean water the city purchased (from the county) and never received revenue for because it went missing in their system before it reached a customer.

To put the 26 percent figure in perspective, the American Water Works Association says it is acceptable to lose roughly 10 percent of water from a system the size of Panama City's.

I kept the city clerk real busy for about the next week, filing

Terry Barner | Panama City News Herald

open records requests. For the four-part series, we mined city data files with Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, used GIS water flow data, property records and Caspio online database hosting service to compile a database of every water leak (http://www.newsherald.com/sections/infocenter/water/?appSession=77937015458333) reported in Panama City during five years. Users can search the database by street name and date the report was filed.

The database of more than 4,000 leaks drew tons of Web traffic. It was put up after the first three articles ran, so at that point reader interest was high.

The best way to obtain this information from the city or county that you cover is to ask for non-revenue data. That is the term that water wonks use to describe water lost in a system, either by leaks or bad water meters.

The term is, indeed, an accurate one. I applied the city's wholesale water rate to the 2.4 billion gallons that it lost in five years and determined that about $3.5 million in revenue had poured from city pipes during that period. My estimate was conservative, considering the wholesale water rate is the lowest one the city charges.

Another aspect of my investigation included requesting every water leak work order issued by the city during the past five years, along with the number of times the city actually went out to fix leaks. My aim was to compare the data and determine how responsive city workers were to reported water leaks.

When asked about the lost water, city officials said it could be three things: water leaks, old inaccurate water meters or water being used by the city that was not being recorded accurately. This third kind, officials said, would not produce revenue anyway because the city's public works department can use city water for free.

I would love to say I used sophisticated software to analyze the thousands of work orders we received as part of our request. But the reality is that we are a small newsroom and the work was done with an Excel spreadsheet, lots of five-hour energy drinks and some long, long hours.

What I discovered when comparing the data is that 20 percent of all leaks during the five years were not addressed for at least two days after being reported. Of those, the average time between the city being aware of a leak and work beginning to fix the problem was more than six days. In other words, a lot of the water being lost was because of an aged and leaky system and the city's failure to respond quickly.

One other aspect that really tied our series together was video I shot and edited for our Web site.

As our stories (http://www.newsherald.com/news/city-74676-water-unaccounted.html) came out, many people called me to report leaks that they had called in days – in some cases, weeks – earlier that had not been fixed.

I spent two days visiting with these people, documenting their stories and shooting video of water clearly bubbling out of the ground. We were able to tease to the video on our Web site the day that the final story, about the city's slow response time, was published.

It was a perfect cap to an investigation that spurred much reader interest and uncovered millions in revenue the city literally was leaking.

Matt Dixon is a government and investigative reporter with the Panama City News Herald.

MASTERPIECE OR MASTERFUL FAKE?

Forgeries infiltrate Australian art market

By Quentin McDermott
Four Corners ABC-TV

When Pamela and Ivan Liberto, a middle-class couple from Melbourne, Australia, were jailed for art fraud in November 2007, it was big news. During the past 30 years in Australia, they have been the only people to receive a jail sentence after being convicted of art fraud.

Their incarceration was living proof that forgers and fakers had been taking Australia's art lovers, galleries and auction houses on a multimillion-dollar ride.

Fakes have flourished because Australia's police have not been diligent about pursuing art fraud. The country's art market is relatively small, and it's difficult to prove intent to deceive.

Criminologist Kenneth Polk of Melbourne University says the police "tend to avoid the problem of art crime; they tend to avoid the problem of art fraud; they tend not to know anything about it; they tend not to be very interested in it. One of the difficulties is that the cases don't come up that often, and therefore there's no expertise in the police to deal with this issue."

Stuart Purves, director of Australian Galleries and a senior figure in Australia's art world, says the law isn't tough enough. "It's not frightening enough. I think it should be like robbing a bank. If you rob somebody's idea and someone's culture and copy it, you know, 'track and whack,' I used to say, but they tell me that's very old-fashioned now."

In our Four Corners TV program, the Libertos spoke publicly for the first time. Four Corners is a public affairs investigative TV program that's been on the air since 1961. Eighteen months after they were sent to jail for faking the work of Aboriginal artist Rover Thomas, they still are claiming their innocence and declaring that the works – which were seized by the police and later destroyed – were genuine.

The Libertos embarrassed three of Australia's biggest auction houses – Sotheby's, Christie's and Lawson-Menzies – by successfully selling their fakes as real Rover Thomas paintings.

The evidence against them was powerful. Associate Professor Robyn Sloggett, director of the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at Melbourne University and one of Australia's foremost forensic investigators of artworks, examined the paintings microscopically and concluded that they were fakes.

In addition, Pamela Liberto's alibi was vague. She said she had acquired the paintings from her late father through another man who had since died. But she had been estranged from her father for decades. The jury didn't believe her.

The Libertos now claim that they were easy targets for an art establishment plagued by unscrupulous dealers. "We were the right people to nail, the easy people to nail at the right time," Ivan Liberto told Four Corners. Guilty or innocent, the Libertos have a point. There are professional forgers in the market who largely go unpunished.

Search for fakes

Sloggett estimates that up to 10 percent of the pictures bought and sold on Australia's secondary art market are "problematic."

"We're talking about works that don't have secure provenance or are out-and-out fakes or have 'slipped identities,' which means someone's got a work that they think is by Arthur Streeton that's been hanging in their family home for 50 years, but there's no evidence to support that," she said.

Our program set out to investigate the problem of fakes and forgeries to gauge how rampant it is in Australia's secondary art market. What we discovered was disturbing.

We delved into one of the biggest scandals ever to hit the Australian art market – the disappearance earlier this year of the New South Wales art dealer Ron Coles. Coles has been found, lying low and driving a cab on the New South Wales coast. Coles has refused to be formally interviewed by police, but protested to journalists. "I haven't got anyone's paintings. I haven't got anyone's money. I'm a victim in this, too."

We discovered that Coles, who was one of Australia's biggest art dealers and a well-known face at major art auctions in Sydney and Melbourne, was allowing paintings by major artists to be altered and reselling works by minor artists after they had been altered to look like the work of major artists. We were able to reveal that one painting of an indigenous figure, by the renowned artist Sidney Nolan, had been altered so that the figure's genitals disappeared.

We also were able to reveal that Coles possessed forged letters that falsely recorded the sale of paintings by him to the Australian War Memorial. We also examined some of the fakes that were uncovered when the New South Wales police raided Coles' investment gallery.

What they found were fakes of some of Australia's most popular and enduring artists. We filmed one of these artists, David Boyd, personally inspecting the fakes that were painted in his name – and his candid assessment of Coles: "He's a dishonest wretch and a cheat."

Boyd is sympathetic to the plight of buyers who have to decide what's fake – and what isn't. "In a way it's flattering to have someone copying your stuff even though they're trying to make some boodle out of it. But naturally it's not fair to the people who buy paintings."

Uneven punishment

Robert Dickerson is another elder statesman of the Australian art world, and his wife, Jenny, has worked hard to protect his reputation. But they too have had to contend with a succession of fakes, one early example being a work called "Blue Boy."

continued on page 33

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Artist Will Blundell paints what he calls "innuendos." He says they are not fakes of famous Australian works but tributes to them.

CONDO PUZZLE

Web newsroom pieces together property deals

By Kelly Bennett and Will Carless
voiceofsandiego.org

Buyers let their identities be used to obtain mortgages and purchase condos in exchange for the promise of money. They weren't paid, and most of the condos have fallen into foreclosure, ruining the straw buyers' credit.

A quick scan of real estate records revealed a puzzling trend: Dozens of condos were selling for more than $300,000. But San Diego was years into an unprecedented housing downturn, and similar condos nearby were selling for half that price.

We added each condo to a growing spreadsheet and spotted even more peculiar patterns.

Some of the owners listed had bought three, four or five condos within the span of a few days at the high prices, using conventional loans with 20 percent down payments.

This did not appear to be an example of the problems with no-money-down loans, the type that have come to symbolize the excesses of the housing boom. But we knew that this was questionable, especially when many of the units fell into foreclosure. As we'd seen many times before, it was easy to spot these trends but difficult to explain them. Many of the steps in these transactions are private, such as where the money goes after a bank approves a mortgage or who does an appraisal.

We were determined to demonstrate how these sales worked. Our investigation is online at www.voiceofsandiego.org/sommerset. During three months, we eventually found that:

- A team led by a Bay Area-man, Jim McConville, picked up at least 81 condo conversions from distressed developers and orchestrated their sale to more than 20 buyers who had actually rented him their identities.
- Buyers let their identities be used to obtain mortgages and purchase condos in exchange for the promise of money. They weren't paid, and most of the condos have fallen into foreclosure, ruining the straw buyers' credit.
- By arranging purchase prices well above market value, McConville was able to pay the developers and capture what the developers' records state as more than $12.5 million.
- Two lenders said they were tricked into making the loans and face millions of dollars in losses. One said he had to shut his doors after 17 years.
- The American taxpayer is likely on the hook for the toxic debt.
- The real estate financing system – all the way up to giant government-run mortgage companies – remained vulnerable to greed and deception in 2008.

The buyers

With just names on the property records, we wondered what the buyers knew about the condos. Had they invested the down payments with someone who'd imprudently steered them into high-priced deals? Had they had their identities stolen? Did they even know they owned these condos in Escondido and San Marcos in north San Diego County?

We assembled as much as we could about each transaction from public records and searched databases for contact information for the less common names on the list.

One afternoon, when we'd reached the end of the public records road, we wrote a script for our interviews with the buyers. We figured they would hang up or say their identities had been stolen.

But in our first phone call, a buyer who owned four condos spilled the beans. He'd responded to a real estate ad on Craigslist in which an investor was offering up to $50,000 for people willing to let their identities be used to buy condos.

He signed up with the investor, Jim McConville. The buyer had filled out the forms with members of McConville's team and waited to be paid. But three of his units already had received notices of default. When we talked to him, he was expecting McConville to make the payments current.

What a story!

We called the next buyer on our list, and the next. We got a similarly incredible story. Some had found McConville through meetings at a friend's house, or through family members who worked for him. None had been paid; all faced the credit-ruining impact of several foreclosures. Though he owned five condos, one of the buyers lived 500 miles away and never had seen them.

We had what we needed to tell the gritty details: Willing participants in the transactions were giving us the nuts and bolts.

They gave us documents such as the original Craigslist ad. They turned over loan documents and signed waivers giving the developer permission to hand over documents to us, giving us a private look at the details that weren't available via public records.

We'd also found one of the crucial pieces to our story. Our editors, Andrew Donohue and David Washburn, emphasized that we needed to find characters whose stories could help readers understand the complicated transactions.

From an animal portraitist in Orange County to a professional bass fisherman in Northern California to a mover in the Bay Area, all were so mad that they told us a lot. Many had seen this investment as the answer to their economic struggles. Instead, it brought only trouble.

Next, we had to figure out why in the world the lenders had agreed to give mortgages on these deals when they were so overpriced, and how buyers got multiple loans at once.

The lenders

Several small lenders were listed on the deeds for the condos – some having loaned more than a dozen mortgages to the straw buyers. Now that some were beginning to foreclose, we figured the banks would be absolutely unwilling to talk to us. Sure enough, most refused to discuss particular loan records.

But after leaving dozens of voice mails and sending detailed e-mails describing the numbers and dollar amounts of the loans, we got a representative from one lender on the phone and he started talking.

His bank had done 10 of the loans, and he said he'd been scammed. These buyers had credit scores that could still pass muster in 2008 – and there were 20 percent down payments

coming in with the transactions. He didn't know that the buyers had been applying for loans from a number of different lenders at the same time, until the records were all filed at once.

Weeks later, we got another break. Another lender talked to us after we'd nearly given up hope of getting another banker on the record. He described the loan applications as "spotless," and said the trouble with these loans forced his company to shut its doors after 17 years in business.

Between the two lenders, they represented 26 of the 81 loans. They both said they also were not aware that McConville's company was to receive at least $120,000 from every sale. McConville denied repeated requests for an interview.

The deals

Our final challenge was to figure out what had happened between the developer of the condos and McConville. What went on behind the scenes?

We'd actually written a first, frustratingly vague draft of the story before one of our many voice mails was returned from the developers who had sold McConville the condos. We went in to meet with their attorneys.

In what turned out to be a pivotal interview, we learned from the developers' records that large chunks – more than $100,000 per condo – of the purchase price for each of the many condo sales had actually been directed back to a company controlled by McConville in the form of "marketing fees."

To satisfy their construction lenders, the developers had agreed to sell their remaining condos to McConville in bulk for between $109,000 and $187,560 per unit. McConville had then turned around and sold them to people whose identities he'd attained.

We tallied the marketing fees from each of the units in this series and were shocked at the total: McConville's company had been sent $12.5 million.

The Web presentation

We had another compelling piece to weave in: The fact that such questionable property transactions could have been taking place in the summer of 2008. With all of the talk of financial regulation to tighten the real estate market, these deals still went through. We created a Part Two describing how the deals had somehow slipped through the cracks in the new, post-boom real estate industry.

Having worked on this project for a few months, we wanted to roll it out in a big way. In a small newsroom like ours, we all have a lot of fun getting ready to release a big investigation.

Donohue, our editor, has orchestrated standing partnerships with television stations Cox Channel 4 and NBC 7/39. For this story, in the days preceding our release of the story, the stations received a private draft of the story and filmed a sharp nine-minute television version with some of the straw buyers, adding perspective from tenants who'd been living in the units owned by McConville's buyers.

The television segment ran the same day as our Part Two. We appeared in the segment and in the studio to speak more about the story. We've updated the TV segments in-studio as we've received new information in the subsequent months.

Our photo editor, Sam Hodgson, photographed some of the straw buyers and the condos and found a McConville mugshot from a previous arrest in Northern California. We included a six-pane cartoon sketched by Ashley Pingree Lewis to graphically explain the story of one of the buyers and her five condos.

It was the first week on the job for our Web editor, Sarah Johnson. She worked with voiceofsandiego.org CEO Scott Lewis to engineer the special appearance of the investigation's home page and the permanent index page. Johnson also created maps of the complexes, shaded to indicate the scope of the transactions and the extent of the foreclosures, and built some other maps and graphs.

To bring readers along with us, we included several source documents, including the Craigslist ad that one of the buyers had responded to initially, the transaction statement that showed money going to McConville's company, a letter McConville had sent the developers in 2007 touting his credentials and a spreadsheet of the transactions.

The fallout

This story's not over. Most of the condos have gone through foreclosure and have been repossessed by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and a couple of other banks. Buyers now on the bank-owned units are paying close to $60,000 for units that last summer sold to these straw buyers in the $300,000 range.

Around the state, McConville's real estate empire has been collapsing, leaving foreclosures, displaced tenants, devastated straw buyers and furious investors from San Diego to the San Francisco Bay area. Our project's home page includes links and videos to the media coverage from around the state that followed our investigation.

Kelly Bennett has been covering the housing market and local economy as a staff writer for voiceofsandiego.org since 2006. Will Carless, a former investigative reporter with voiceofsandiego.org, received a 2008 IRE Medal for The Redevelopment Investigation. He now lives in Yogyakarta, on the island of Java, where he is a freelance author.

With all of the talk of financial regulation to tighten the real estate market, these deals still went through. We created a Part Two describing how the deals had somehow slipped through the cracks in the new, post-boom real estate industry.

Vicki Jenkins stands in front of one of the five condos she signed mortgage documents for in 2008. It was the first time Jenkins had seen the condos she owned.

Douglas Kilpatrick | Special to The Morning Call

Construction earlier this year of a new $55 million Broughal Middle School in Bethlehem, Pa.

COSTLY LESSON

School district gambles and loses on derivatives

By Tim Darragh and Steve Esack
The Morning Call (Allentown, Pa.)

The borrowers needed a way to finance costly projects they had put off for years. They heard the siren call of financial advisers who assured them that swaps would save tens of millions of dollars over the life of the bond issues, not unlike mortgage brokers who highlighted only the initial teaser rates on subprime borrowers' loans.

The ongoing real estate collapse was ignited by lax lending standards and many buyers who didn't appreciate the risky nature of their loans.

Morning Call reporters spent five months investigating one local school district's borrowing plan using variable-rate bonds layered with complex derivatives called "swaps." It became clear that local government shared some of the same traits of the subprime meltdown. The newspaper's investigation is online at www.mcall.com/news/local/swaps/all-news-swaps-060609-pt1,0,1306292.story.

As the economy slipped on thinner ice in 2008, Bloomberg News issued a warning shot largely focused at the state of Pennsylvania: A number of its school districts were at risk because they had financed much of their long-term debt using variable-rate bonds and unregulated swap instruments.

In a swap, a business or government enters into a contract with an investment bank to hedge against possibly rising interest rates on the underlying bond. Swaps also are used to make money by betting on the interest rates of different bond indexes. Whichever side has the greater sum in the swap receives the difference. It's easier said than understood.

It wasn't until 2003 that the Pennsylvania state legislature put some limits on local governments using swaps. Before that, the standard way to borrow for costly building projects was to issue conservative fixed-rate bonds or variable-rate bonds that fluctuated with the market. With the new financial freedom, some local governments, at the recommendation of their paid financial advisers, went aggressively into the derivatives marketplace.

One of them was the Bethlehem Area School District, an eastern Pennsylvania community of five municipalities that had survived the collapse of the giant Bethlehem Steel Corp. in the late 20th century and emerged as the thriving edge of the New York metropolitan area's real estate boom. As the economy surged in the early 2000s, Bethlehem cranked up the spending on its school reconstruction, building two new middle schools and renovating two high schools. Those four projects cost twice as much as what the district had spent on construction in the previous dozen years.

Beginning in 2003, Bethlehem took its adviser's recommendation and financed around $220 million in school construction with variable-rate bonds and swaps. The school board approved each swap request on four bonds, even though its members would later admit they had no idea how swaps worked or how much risk they were assuming. At its peak, the district put 75 percent of that long-term debt in the fluctuating instruments.

In a sense, the school district was acting like the subprime borrowers of the early 2000s. The borrowers needed a way to finance costly projects they had put off for years. They heard the siren call of financial advisers who assured them that swaps would save tens of millions of dollars over the life of the bond issues, not unlike mortgage brokers who highlighted only the initial teaser rates on subprime borrowers' loans. And, just like many subprime borrowers, Bethlehem school officials, intoxicated by low interest rates and promises of little risk, took on more debt than they should have.

In June 2008, the district's then-financial adviser, Les Bear of the firm Ferris Baker Watts, told a wary board that he stood behind the swap deals, even though he could not say how much the transactions had cost the district. Superintendent Joseph A. Lewis and business manager Stanley J. Majewski Jr. endorsed Bear and his investment strategy.

Financial meltdown

Then the world financial tsunami hit two months later. Interest rates soared. For the last 15 weeks of 2008, debt payments blew out the budget by $2.3 million, according to district reports. A European bank involved in the deal teetered precariously and announced it would pull out, forcing the district to begin ending its swaps at a financially disastrous time. Exiting just one deal in May forced the district to pay its trading partner, J.P. Morgan Bank, $12.3 million.

With the market blowing up in fall 2008, *Morning Call* education reporter Steve Esack began investigating. But like a lot of education reporters, he knew virtually nothing about the bond market. In November, Esack filed state Right to Know requests for copies of the district's bond and swap records. He got them in January, only after a new, tougher state public records law went into effect.

Reading through the thick bond records, Esack began to learn how international bond markets worked and how much money financial advisers, lawyers and banks make on the deals. Esack then created an Excel spreadsheet listing all firms and the dollar amounts they received.

Then, he moved to swap contracts. The first contract showed that JP Morgan used a company, Rockport Financial Markets, as an agent in the transaction. Records showed that Rockport's managing member was Matt Kirk, a former state GOP vice president. Esack did the same search for most of the companies listed in the bond document and discovered that Kirk also was the managing member of Access Financial Markets, a firm that was listed

as working for taxpayers as "bond structuring agent" and "swap structuring agent."

With an adviser being paid by both JP Morgan and taxpayers on the same deal, Esack realized this might not be a typical school budget story. He asked senior writer and investigative reporter Tim Darragh to join the investigation.

Together, they pored over the thick bond and swap documents. They saw in the records that Kirk's firms had dual roles on at least one other bond and swap deal.

They also saw that the swap deals were being awarded to the firms of the district's financial adviser, Bear, regardless of which company employed him. Bond records also showed Bear's firms were paid to represent the district as well as the bond underwriter. In a regulated marketplace, serving as swap adviser and bond underwriter would be a conflict of interest, but in the unregulated derivatives field, it was acceptable (although not recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association).

Bear's firms also often received fees for overseeing the weekly selling of the swaps called "remarketing," as well as annual service fees. So in some cases, Bear's firms got paid four different ways on the same transaction. However, there are no allegations that any wrongdoing occurred in connection with those transactions.

Both Bear and Kirk declined comment.

Together, the reporters refined the database and calculated that taxpayers were on the hook for $25.5 million in fees to financial advisers, banks and lawyers. Bear's and Kirk's firms got the bulk of that, mostly for swap fees. By carefully reading the records, the reporters saw that swap fees were paid by the banks at the outset, but repaid by taxpayers as the banks adjusted interest rates and lowered bond premiums. The administration's insistence that taxpayers were not responsible for the swap fees led to a memorable quote from Christopher "Kit" Taylor, former head of the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board: "What turnip truck did they fall off of?"

Pricey payments

The fee information, while stunning, only showed half the picture. The reporters needed to find out if the swaps were reducing the cost of the borrowing, as claimed by Bear, Kirk and the district administration.

Reporters then asked for – and after several attempts finally received – the district's monthly and semi-annual swap bills. They built another simple Excel spreadsheet listing the bond to which the swap was attached; the interest payment on the bond; the swap amount for the district and the bank; and the net benefit or cost to the district.

Esack and Darragh, both taxpayers in the district, had hit pay dirt. Bethlehem had paid nearly $10 million more in swap payments to the banks than it received since 2003 – far more than the up-front money it had received as enticements from the banks. The administration also had no idea it had spent that much because it didn't track the spending.

In all, the interest payments, fees and net swap payments cost Bethlehem $57 million between 2003 and spring 2009.

Reporters did not make a direct comparison to what the district would have paid had it used the low fixed-interest rate bonds of the time – about 4.2 percent. That's because a fair comparison would have required finding a similarly rated public agency, issuing similar bonds on the same or nearly same date. None existed in Pennsylvania, according to bond records available on our newsroom's Bloomberg terminal and MSRB's EMMA Web site (www.emma.msrb.org).

To try to refute the news articles, the district later undertook such a comparison, but used smaller bond issues that were in some cases months off. The district also did not include the $12.3 million swap termination payment to JP Morgan and fees paid to advisers in its analysis. Had it done that, the district's own accounting would have showed that its plan cost taxpayers $16.6 million more than if it had used fixed-rate bonds.

The reporters also checked board minutes for every time swap deals were brought up. They found that the school board voted, on the advice of the administration, to terminate a swap in July 2007 – a financial move that would have brought $600,000 to the cash-strapped district.

But records showed the district never terminated it, a fact unknown to the board and Superintendent Lewis until reporters approached them this past spring. The district's business manager, Majewski, said that in the rapidly changing market, the swap had turned negative just before the board's vote. At the reporters' request, a Bloomberg analyst plugged the district's swap contract data into proprietary software, which showed that the district still would have made money at any time between the recommendation and for at least three days after the board vote. Majewski could not explain the discrepancy.

Finally, reporters showed that Bethlehem's overspending, led by debt service, emptied the district's reserves, threatening optional programs serving struggling students and children from poor families. About a week before school began in August, the board cut those programs – and 45 jobs – as a state budget stalemate made funding even more uncertain.

Before publication of *The Morning Call*'s four-part series, Lewis announced his retirement, saying the reporters' inquiry had nothing to do with his decision. Meanwhile, JP Morgan announced it was ending municipal swaps amid a nationwide U.S. Securities and Exchange/Justice Department investigation of the entire swaps market. A month after publication, the state auditor general undertook an investigation. Majewski also decided to retire.

Bethlehem's leaders now agree the level of risk must be reduced by moving back into fixed-rate bonds. The financial damage, however, has been done. More program cuts and tax increases will be needed in the coming years to dig Bethlehem out of the deficit hole it created by building gleaming new schools and playing the market.

Investigative reporter Tim Darragh has worked at The Morning Call since 1981. He has won numerous awards, including a 2008 National Press Club award for an investigative report on puppy mills. Before joining The Morning Call in 2002, Steve Esack was an intern at The Philadelphia Inquirer and a clerk at the Philadelphia Daily News. He won first- and second-place Keystone Awards this year from the state newspaper association.

Plenty of financial data awaits reporters who want to look into municipal bonds and swaps.

Before beginning, you must educate yourself. University professors and organizations such as the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board are helpful. Learn the basic terminology.

First, examine the bond deals. Use the MSRB's EMMA Web site (www.emma.msrb.org) to look up the "official statements" of municipal bonds. These records list the bond's purpose and the names of all financial advisers and law firms involved in the deal. The statements also highlight local history and mention litigation and investigative probes you may not know exist. Go to the government agency to get all the contracts that list fees.

Next, tackle the swap deals. In Pennsylvania, the Department of Community and Economic Development keeps records of "Qualified Interest Rate Management Agreements" – swap contracts – for local governments. That's where reporters start to see which governments have swap deals and how often they amended them. (Amendments also generate fees for the financial advisers and other firms. Bethlehem had 17 swap transactions, the most in the state.) To get a true cost of the swap, reporters will need to calculate the monthly bills.

It's difficult to find apples-to-apples comparisons between swaps used to hedge variable rate bonds and plain fixed-rate bonds. The bigger questions are about risk. Did the local government understand the risks of swaps? How much risk should a government accept in its portfolio? Is the government willing to risk a catastrophic loss in return for the possibility of budget savings?

Like human treasure chests, IRE members carry invaluable lessons learned through years of refining their investigative skills. Collected Wisdom is our effort to share that treasure. The feature will continue with a column in subsequent issues of The IRE Journal.

Collected WISDOM

Key Lessons

By Jeff Leen
The Washington Post

Finding story ideas

This becomes the biggest challenge over time. It never gets easier. As your skills improve, your standards rise, and you do more and more investigations. You don't want to repeat yourself. I look for freshness, originality and surprise. I listen to my gut for a feeling of outrage or a sense of wow. I look to expose wrongdoing that has a lot of scope and does a lot of harm. A murder has tremendous harm but narrow scope; one person and his or her family are primarily affected. A serial killer has more harm and more scope. A genocide is the ultimate in harm and scope.

Here is a simple formula for an investigative project. A news story is a break in the daily pattern of mundane events: a murder, a plane crash, a police shooting. An investigative project is a pattern within those breaks: a series of murder investigations botched by poor police work, a design defect causing 737s to crash, several police shootings at unarmed people in cars.

Ideas can come from anywhere – a tip on the phone, a pattern in a computer database, a brief in the paper suggesting something larger. Be flexible, inventive and opportunistic. Obviously, good investigative ideas can arise from smart and aggressive beat reporting, but realizing an investigative idea always requires sustained effort. Time and resources. There are no shortcuts.

Often the idea presents itself to reporters who keep their eyes and ears open. Sounds like a simple cliché. But here is how it works. I got the idea to investigate the Medellin Cartel when I was at *The Miami Herald* in 1985 from my eyes: seeing kilos of cocaine marked up with letters, numbers and symbols during press conferences at the U.S. attorney's office in Miami. The markings were cartel destination codes, but I didn't know that at the time. I just knew that if there was a code, then there was something behind the code, a hidden logic that might illuminate the drug trade. I made the pursuit of that logic my mission. Two years later we did a 10-part series introducing the cartel to the world.

Sari Horwitz was covering her social services beat at *The Washington Post* when a toddler named Brianna Blackmond was killed by her mother's boyfriend; a judge and a city agency were supposed to be looking out for Brianna. Sari heard from sources that Brianna was not an anomaly. Two years later Sari and two other reporters introduced readers to 40 other Briannas.

Dan Morgan spent 30 years covering agriculture at the *Post*, and one day he presented a memo saying he had "cracked the code" in farm subsidies. His insight: the system gave farmers money whether they needed it or not. That memo led to a nine-part series that exposed $15 billion in wasted subsidies. David Ottaway heard a Nature Conservancy official casually mention that the world's largest environmental charity allowed logging on its land. Sue Schmidt heard from a lobbyist she knew about the corrupt practices of a lobbyist she didn't know, Jack Abramoff. And so on.

The computer can provide the starting point. In the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports database, Jo Craven, then a *Post* researcher, noticed that a column of information was missing: justifiable homicides. The FBI left them out because justifiable homicides are not considered to be crimes and thus not used to calculate crimes rates, the primary purpose of the UCR. Jo FOIAed the data, and when she got it three months later, she crunched it and found a spike of police shootings in D.C. Nine months and three additional reporters later, the *Post* reported a pattern of reckless police shootings in D.C.

Sometimes the brain wave can come from an editor. Len Downie wanted a deep look at Dick Cheney; 18 months later Jo Becker and Bart Gellman provided him with one: Through 200 interviews they documented Cheney's hidden hand changing the course of government in a dozen ways.

Here is a simple formula for an investigative project. A news story is a break in the daily pattern of mundane events: a murder, a plane crash, a police shooting. An investigative project is a pattern within those breaks: a series of murder investigations botched by poor police work, a design defect causing 737s to crash, several police shootings at unarmed people in cars.

Cultivating sources

The absolute worst time to develop a source is when you desperately need one. Building sources means building trust, and that can happen only when the pressure is off. Think of how you would react to a high-pressure salesman. It is elementary to say so, but sources need to see you as a human being, and vice versa. They need to believe in you and what you represent. Take them to lunch. Learn about their lives, and share something of yourself. Nothing is ever a one-way street.

The more knowledgeable you are about the world they live in, the more respect you will get from those you write about, and the easier it will be to make sources. If you know nothing, nobody will want to talk to you. If you know something, somebody might want to talk to you. If you know more than they do, most will want to talk to you. Learn to speak their language. Know the difference between a DEA 6 and an FBI 302.

And put stories in the paper. Nothing brings sources faster than writing a tough investigative piece. Remember that every agency or company or sports team is a house divided. Write a tough story, and half of them will hate you and the other half will love you. Those who read it and sympathize will see you as their voice and help you. Even those who hate you will see they have to deal with you, if only to protect their side.

World Cup: Portugal Edges England; France Beats Brazil | SPORTS, E1

The Washington Post

DISTRICT & MARYLAND EDITION

SUNDAY, JULY 2, 2006

HARVESTING CASH | *Reaping Money for Nothing*

Farm Program Pays $1.3 Billion to People Who Don't Farm

Maryland Senate Race May Hinge On Ethnicity

Mfume Leads Cardin In Sharply Divided Primary, Poll Shows

Big Crowds for History's Big Picture

Baghdad Market Bombing Kills 66

Attack Is Largest Under New Regime

Folklife Festival for a New Era

Holiday Weekend Events

4th on the Mall

City Has a New Bounce in Its Step

D.C. Tests Tree-Friendly Sidewalks Made of Recycled Tires

MS-13 Blamed in 3 Pr. George's Slayings

INSIDE

Space Shuttle Launch Scrubbed

Prepping for and nailing the big interview

Write out your questions in advance. Arrange them in an order that allows you to flow from subject to subject in a sequence that makes sense and builds to the information you want. Do not write more than 20 questions. As you ask the questions, write out new questions, and ask them at the end. Interrupt your written questions if you need to ask a follow-up or something occurs to you.

Visualize the interview. War-game the interview in your head. Ask yourself the questions, and try to anticipate possible answers and follow-up questions. War-game the interview with your editor, with each of you playing each role.

Put important documents that you want to confront the subject with in a special file, and label them with Post-its so you can handle them quickly. Allow the subject to stake out a position, and then confront him with a document. Make copies in case the subject grabs them. Offer them to the subject if he or she wants them.

Do the interview in person. Save the toughest question for last, unless it is so tough you want to ask it first.

Arrive 10 minutes early. Use the time to breathe, relax and get comfortable in somebody else's space.

Taming and visualizing data

Remember: simple elegance. Less is more. The data should serve the story. It should be a distillation of the story's most important points. The graphic should have visual wow, meaning that it translates its impact to the reader in an instant. But it should be interesting enough that the reader wants to spend time with it and drill down into its information. A graphic can bear a heavy information load if it has visual wow and tells a story with layers of information in an elegant way.

Dissecting documents

Look for an honest man or woman, a guide who can lead you through the documents. Master all of a document's parts. Remember that every document is part of a chain; there was a document before it and most likely one after it. Seek to understand the document within its chain. Create a filing system that allows you to put every document at your fingertips. Mark documents with Post-its. Use documents to lead you to sources who can lead you to documents and more sources and more documents …

Telling the story

Remember: simple elegance. Less is more. Every writing process is a journey from complexity to simplicity, from chaos to order. Figure it will take 20 drafts to get it right.

Investigations generally have two structures: the overview or the case study. The overview weaves many examples and themes and is broad. The case study is narrow and drills down on one example. Use sidebars for elements of the story that do not fit this structure. The overview structure generally is: lede, cosmic nutgraph, specific finding nutgraphs A, B, C and D, break, and sections A, B, C and D expanding on the specific finding nutgraphs. The case study structure is generally lede, nutgraph, break and telling the story in a chronological fashion. Use these two structures, and modify them to your needs.

Pay attention to sentence structure. It's the oldest advice around, but that doesn't make it any less valuable: Use simple declarative sentences with strong verbs. Carefully manage your use of clauses, such as limiting introductory clauses and other clauses. Strive for the commalessness of a Hemingway or Bruce Chatwin. Pay attention to sentence length. Use sentences with more than 30 words rarely. Most magazine sentences are 22 words. Use long sentences for effect.

Remember that successful investigations proceed in waves of reporting and synthesis. The most common problem is to do too much reporting and too little synthesis as you go along and leave all the hard work for the end. You can encourage synthesis by introducing one of several devices at the points where synthesis is necessary: memos, weekly meetings, source-tracking software, chronologies, graphics and outlines.

Managing the investigation

I'm viewing this from an editor's perspective. First and foremost, remember that you are managing people, and act accordingly. Try to understand the strengths and weaknesses of those you are dealing with, and compensate accordingly. Rarely do you find in one person all of the skills necessary for a major investigative project: street reporting, database reporting, document reporting, writing and strategic thinking. Sometimes putting together teams of people with different strengths allows you to blend skills in ways that make the overall stronger. But each additional person makes the management challenge grow geometrically.

An editor's first duty is to provide the "oxygen" to make the investigation grow. Investigative stories are expensive, risky and some of the most difficult work we do as journalists. Each project is a gamble with the newspaper's resources and reputation. There are always a hundred reasons not to do an investigation. The good editor has to provide the one reason for doing it. In federal law enforcement they had a saying: "Big cases, big problems. Small cases, small problems. No cases, no problems." It's the same way in journalism. The bigger the story, the bigger the risk, the bigger the heart of the editor. Support from the top is key. Great editors understand this intuitively; the limits of what can be done are set by the executive editor. It is no accident that the names Gene Roberts, John Carroll, Steve Coll and Len Downie have been connected with so much great investigative journalism.

Remember that successful investigations proceed in waves of reporting and synthesis. The most common problem is to do too much reporting and too little synthesis as you go along and leave all the hard work for the end. You can encourage synthesis by introducing one of several devices at the points where synthesis is necessary: memos, weekly meetings, source-tracking software, chronologies, graphics and outlines.

How do you recognize these synthesis points? They are the points at which reporting and thinking slows and becomes difficult.

The memo can launch the project, help you and the reporters keep track of the project and focus the project at key moments in the process. It forces reporters to synthesize and clarify what's important.

The weekly meeting forces everybody to stay on the same page, surfaces issues and encourages reporters to keep digging to have something new to say each week.

Source-tracking software can provide the nuts and bolts of an organized project. In the pre-PC era, this was done with a box of files. I remember reporting until my desk and cubicle were swamped with documents. I couldn't think until I ordered them in my box of files. It cleared my brain, and then I was ready to start reporting again.

A chronology is one of the most powerful tools for managing an investigation. Graphics are another powerful tool. They allow you to visualize your information and to discover your strongest material. You can even organize a multi-part series around your most powerful visual ideas. An outline is the time-honored way of writing any long and complicated piece. It should be part of every reporter's process. Sometimes I write the important parts of a project on 3-by-5 cards and then shuffle them around until I find the best order.

The best advice is to start writing as early as possible in the process, so you can distill your information and see what's strong, what's weak and what's missing.

Jeff Leen is the assistant managing editor for The Washington Post's investigations unit, where his work has helped win six Pulitzer Prizes, on subjects ranging from D.C. police shootings in 1998 to Dick Cheney's vice presidency in 2007. Before The Post, he worked as an investigative reporter at The Miami Herald. He is the co-author of Kings of Cocaine (1989) and author of The Queen of the Ring (2009).

Trench Journalism

By Sarah Cohen
Duke University

There's no magic bullet investigation. Through the years, I've learned that cutting-edge investigative reporting often emerges from tedious tasks, effective teams and meaningful statistics.

Tedium leads to exclusivity

One of the best ways to get a story that no one else has is to do the work that no one else wants to do.

Sometimes it involves data entry. Television stations and newspapers have done this for years with travel records of public officials or sick-time analysis.

At other times, it involves collating records – often on paper, but sometimes a mix of electronic and paper – from many jurisdictions or over different periods of time. That was an approach we took at *The Washington Post* during a story on local homeland security spending – obtaining the same public records from each agency and locality that had gotten money.

Most often, though, it means creating structured data out of unstructured data. That involves summarizing documents you want to read anyway in a rigorous (and often very tedious) way. The payoff is huge: You can begin to quantify the seemingly unquantifiable. An added benefit is more confidence the night before publication.

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During a story on child fatalities in Washington, D.C., we created a database that summarized all of the documents available on each death. We tracked cause of death, the age of the child, the involvement of child welfare agencies and the kinds of mistakes identified by a review panel, along with their recommendations for change. It helped us organize the stories, identify patterns that weren't obvious, and document and quantify our more impressionistic reading of the documents and the reporting. At the same time, it helped us keep track of elements of the story that had been verified, as well as loose ends.

Teamwork works – sometimes

Teamwork is more than just sticking a bunch of people on the same story. But when teams have been created with an eye toward efficiency and breadth, they produce much more than the sum of their parts.

Some teams are created just to split up individual tasks or stories; each person takes a piece, and then everything should magically come together at the end. It often doesn't.

One tempting mistake is to separate the work too much. In particular, the team probably should be working together a lot in the early stages, with each member bringing something different to the interviewing and backgrounding table. Each will be looking for something different from a common set of sources. For instance, an early public records request will often be too narrow if the goal is simply to find a few examples or document known ones. Someone who will be looking for patterns will want different records than the person looking for deep reporting on specific examples. Shortchanging can irreparably harm the story. At the very least, background interviews with experts and government agencies should be done together whenever possible.

In the middle of the story, there is less time spent together, but it's important that everyone have the experience of working on each element of the story.

For a data reporter, it's crucial to hear how people answer questions and what the scenes look like. This is even true in short-term stories that seem to have boundaries designed for efficiency. In one campaign finance story, the data work was being used to identify people who had given the maximum amount to a candidate but had never before given substantial amounts to any candidate. The interview revealed a twist: Money was being raised subscription style, through small automatic credit card payments. This immediately led to a new set of data queries to find people who had maxed out their contributions in small monthly or quarterly installments.

It's possible this story would have been found anyway. But this division of the work maximized the chances that each of us would notice something different, even on a routine story.

For the person focused more on street reporting, looking through the data in detail will spur ideas on how to focus the story or find more examples. It also will help identify false starts: quirks in records or data that they may not have thought to mention but are issues known only to someone steeped in the beat.

Statistics really can lie

The best way to find stories is almost always from the bottom up, rather than the top down. For one thing, you can't verify a statistic. All you can do is ask for interpretation.

Instead, the classic give-and-take between lab work and field work – or data reporting and street reporting – almost always will yield surprises, better stories and less bickering about the underlying meaning of any findings that appear in the final piece.

The recipe is pretty simple: Using a tip or an idea, first find one real-life example. It might come from a source, or it might come from trial and error in testing an idea. Next, query the data for more examples that seem similar. Report out. Then repeat until a pattern emerges. Summing and counting those examples is a simple last step.

When a team of reporters at *The Post* was trying to document how much the Agriculture Department paid in crop subsidies to people who never farmed, there were two ways to approach it: through statistics collected in the Census of Agriculture, or by finding the individual farms in a database of 200 million records. Other reporting had identified a few possible locations, methods and historical anomalies that often would lead to the unintended payments, but we had no specific example. The pattern emerged after a few false starts, ending with a set of a hundreds of thousands of farms that met the test.

Spot checking them gave us no false hits, letting us estimate that billions of dollars had been spent on the unintended payments. The similarity was this: They all had received payments that required no proof of farming, but had never received the payments that come after disasters or bumper crops reduce their income. A final check revealed that, had they grown crops, these farms would have qualified for one of those payments at least once in the past five years.

Deriving the same figures from statistics published in the Census of Agriculture should have resulted in a similar scale, but it was nowhere close. In fact, it was nearly five times the level. We decided to publish the smaller estimate and to ignore the statistics. The reason? Even though agricultural economists suspected the larger number was correct, there were several unconfirmable theories about why it might be a little high. Instead of having to waver, we published the verifiable numbers that fit exactly with our story.

The opposite approach – examining broad statistical patterns and drilling down to find examples – can work, but it's risky. You never know if your examples are reflected in the data, and what other examples you never thought of might also be included. It is most risky when you are seeking a rare or unique pattern, especially one that previously had not been studied.

Sarah Cohen is a professor at the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy at Duke University. Cohen worked as database editor at The Washington Post for nearly 10 years. In 2002, she shared the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting for a series on failures of child welfare agencies. A former IRE training director, Cohen also is author of "Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News."

Trailing Corruption

By Sheila S. Coronel
Columbia University

As a journalist in the Philippines for many years, I uncovered corruption and malfeasance in high places: the presidency, Congress and the Supreme Court. Since then I've realized that the patterns of Third World corruption – and how journalists can cover it – are pretty much the same around the globe.

It's rare to catch officials in the act of accepting bribes. The offers are made through intermediaries. Bank secrecy laws make it difficult to follow the money, especially if the transactions are done through offshore bank accounts.

Spending leads

It's rare to catch officials in the act of accepting bribes. The offers are made through intermediaries. Bank secrecy laws make it difficult to follow the money, especially if the transactions are done through offshore bank accounts.

It is, however, easier to follow how the money has been spent. After all, what's the sense of accepting bribes if they can't be enjoyed? Fortunately for journalists, officials are likely to spend ill-gotten wealth on things that can be documented: cars, houses, high-priced holidays, expensive schools abroad for their children. Journalists who follow the paper trail of visible assets and the lifestyles of officials are bound to hit pay dirt. When we began investigating then-Philippine President Joseph Estrada in 2000, we couldn't prove that he was taking bribes from businessmen. What we could show was that he was spending many millions more than he had officially declared in his asset disclosures. We found he had set up dummy companies to purchase multimillion-dollar mansions for multiple mistresses. Our exposés contributed to his downfall and eventual imprisonment.

Property deals

The bribes are not always in cash. Many times, the payoffs are in luxurious housing. Journalists on the corruption trail therefore should not just follow the money. They should also follow the real estate, whether it's in Sierra Leone, where a journalist was jailed last year for reporting on two houses being built by a minister, or in Alaska.

U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska was investigated for the new first floor and wraparound terrace in his mansion in a ski resort outside Anchorage, both supposedly paid for by the energy services company Veco. A federal judge later set aside Stevens's conviction, citing misconduct by prosecutors. Connecticut Gov. John Rowland resigned from office in 2004 and subsequently spent time in federal prison for, among other things, a new tub and other renovations on his cottage paid for by state contractors and employees. U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel of New York was the subject of a *New York Times* story showing he was getting cut-rate rental for four luxury apartments in a Harlem development owned by one of Manhattan's top developers.

Family matters

The money and asset trails of wives, mistresses and the rest of the clan are gold mines. Rowland is a classic example: His wife got a $32,000 loan to publish a children's book. She also received a $15,000 honorarium to speak at a company conference. Both were found to be favors from businessmen hoping to get preferential treatment at the state capitol.

In 2007 my students at the Columbia University Journalism School reported that Libby Pataki, the wife of the then-governor of New York, had received $2 million in state funds for her pet project, a women's museum. The students found that most of that money went to highly paid consultants. Eight years after the money was released, the museum had made just one acquisition: a women's suffrage wagon.

Collected WISDOM

In my investigation of the Philippine Supreme Court, I found that some lawyers advised their clients to contract the services of law firms run by the sons of Supreme Court justices, who could be expected to lobby on their behalf. I looked at how the law firms of these well-connected sons had grown dramatically. I also found one instance where a justice's son approached a lawyer on the Supreme Court staff and offered her a bribe.

Family is not the only tie that binds when it comes to corruption. Investigating the network of connections of officials – school, ethnic or linguistic group, fraternity, country club and other ties – can provide important clues in corruption investigations.

Questionable contacts

Nonprofits linked to officials are often suspect, and their disclosures can be mined for information. Gov. George Pataki steered the $2 million earmark for the women's museum to a nonprofit run by his wife. The U.S. Family Network, a nonprofit linked to former Senate Majority Leader Tom DeLay, got $2.5 million from companies associated with the former lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Elsewhere, former Philippine President Estrada pumped millions in payoffs from illegal gambling through spurious nonprofits that were supposedly providing scholarships to needy students. The Indonesian dictator Suharto also was notorious for using foundations to stash his wealth.

Corruption and money in the developing world are often tied up with foreign aid, investments in oil and minerals, military purchases and big-ticket infrastructure projects. In Costa Rica, three former presidents were tried for corruption -- one in connection with medical equipment bought from a Finnish government grant and the other two for bribes supposedly from the French telecom giant Alcatel.

In the Philippines, journalists have inspected roads and bridges supposed to have been built with foreign funds and found them haphazardly constructed or nonexistent, despite the millions spent on them. The lesson: where the money is, that is where the corruption also is. And that's where reporters ought to poke their noses.

Collaborative success

Recently the most successful investigations of cross-border corruption have involved collaboration among journalists investigating the same corrupt company in different countries. As corruption becomes more global in scope and more sophisticated, journalists also have become savvier and more open to sharing tips, sources, documents and information. Together, they've mapped relationships, followed the money and assets, and poked their noses where the deals and illicit profits are being made.

Sheila S. Coronel is professor and director of the Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She was co-founder and executive director of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

Timely Investigations

By Nancy Amons
WSMV-Nashville

There is one document that I save on my laptop, my BlackBerry, my desktop and on a flash drive because it is so valuable I would cry without it.

It's a simple Word document with links to Web sites or in-house databases I use almost every day. I call it "Investigative Hotlinks." It probably breaks all kinds of IT protocols, but I keep user names and passwords there, too.

When I'm in a breaking news situation, or have only 10 minutes to background someone, this is where I go.

For example, the metro Nashville property assessor has a great site where you can see pictures of people's houses as well as the sale price and other information. It's hard to find that part of the assessor's site unless you keep drilling down, which is annoying, so I set up a link to the funky URL so that it's just one click away.

Another site for viewing metro property transactions requires a password. The link and password are on "Investigative Hotlinks," too.

"Investigative Hotlinks" has about 25 of the Web links I use over and over again. If the document is on the same computer where your databases are stored, such as voter registration, you can set up a link to those, too.

I use the list several ways. When new reporters join the station, I forward a copy to them (minus certain passwords). It saves them months of figuring out where to find things. Also, if I'm in the field and the desk calls with a question – "What was that site for checking a trucking company's background?" – I can e-mail it to them from my BlackBerry.

The list can generate ideas, too. When I have a few minutes, I browse it and remember stories I have been meaning to do, like reviewing state employees' expense accounts and travel records, which are now online in Tennessee.

For more than 20 years, Nancy Amons of WSMV-Nashville has been breaking important stories in Tennessee. She has won two National Headliner awards, a Green Eyeshades award, seven Associated Press awards, a Silver Gavel, an Iris, four Emmys and awards from the American Women in Radio and TV, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Tennessee Trial Lawyers Association. She was Tennessee Associated Press's Broadcast Journalist of the year in 1995.

You can set up a list for your market or coverage area. To get you started, here's a sampling from "Investigative Hotlinks:"

Autotrack
https://atxp.choicepoint.com/at/login.asp?ReferringPage=/at/mainmenu.asp

Here's how to see who owns a certain property in metro Nashville, or to look at the property at that address. Good, too, for finding neighbors. There are photos of the houses.
http://170.190.30.53/WebproNashville/Default.asp?br=exp&vr=6

How do I check the ownership history of metro property or see if a company has liens against it?
www.registerofdeeds.nashville.org/recording/logon.asp

Here's how to find out the owners of property everywhere in Tennessee.
www.assessment.state.tn.us

How do you find out if someone has a felony conviction record in Tennessee?
www.tennesseeanytime.org/foil/foil_index.jsp

Who's on the sex offender registry in Tennessee?
www.ticic.state.tn.us/SEX_ofndr/search_short.asp

How do I see who owns a business in Tennessee?
www.tennesseeanytime.org/soscorp

How can I look up a civil court file in the metro area?
caselink.nashville.gov

How do I look up a criminal history in metro Nashville?
http://ccc.nashville.gov/portal/page/portal/ccc/caseSearch/caseSearchPublic/caseSearchPublicForms

Reporting and Dockets - metro
http://ccc.nashville.gov/portal/page/portal/ccc/reporting

To find out if a person is in the Metro jail, go to:
www.nashville-sheriff.net

How do I look up cases in federal court? (this is both civil and criminal)
https://pacer.login.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/login.pl?court_id=00idx

Who is giving money to a candidate in Tennessee? (you can see PAC donations as well)
www.tennesseeanytime.org/tncamp

IRS revocations
www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=96136,00.html

The trucking company that just had a fatal crash - what's its record like?
http://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/SafeStat/disclaimer.asp?RedirectedURL=/SafeStat/SafeStatMain.asp
http://safer.fmcsa.dot.gov

Staying On Track

By Mike McGraw
The Kansas City Star

I've been a reporter for nearly 40 years, with most of that time spent as an investigative reporter. I love what I do and have never wanted to do anything else.

> Three things turned me on to investigative reporting: Covering organized labor in Kansas City in the 1970s and 1980s, during the zenith of Teamsters Union corruption (and seeing how dues-paying union members got sold down the river by their leaders); going to IRE conferences in the 1970s and 1980s and being amazed that these bright, successful journalists would actually share their secrets with me; and reading a wonderful book by the late Jonathan Kwitny called "Vicious Circles, The Mafia in the Marketplace," published in 1979.

At age 61, I've learned a lot of lessons about my craft – some learned far too late; others learned early on, but not followed nearly often enough. Here are a few:

Getting psyched for the story

Especially now and especially in newspapers, it's hard for some reporters to get psyched for a story. I've seldom had that problem, and I think the reasons are that I don't often hang at the water cooler swapping gossip. It's depressing. It's counterproductive. It's a waste of time, and it's often inaccurate. Besides, it's more fun to be out of the office. And remember, it's not about some editor who's pissed you off; it's not about you and the fact that you work too hard for too little money; it's not about a former friend or colleague who got laid off; and it's not about the corporate bean counters who just cut your salary. It's about the story. Go after it. Become immersed in it. You'll be happier in the long run and do a better job.

Bootstrapping your way to success

Use multiple sources simultaneously to bootstrap, or triangulate, your way to success. For example, I was recently seeking an unnamed woman peripherally involved in a human trafficking case. She had allegedly married an immigrant trafficker to help keep him here legally. That's all I knew. I used the immigrant's unique name to find his bride's name in county marriage license records. I then used her name and address to find her cell phone number on documents she filed to get municipally-owned utilities turned on in her home. She ended up, through her attorney, providing great little nuggets about the trafficker's lifestyle.

Cultivating sources

Never lie. Never misrepresent yourself. Allow sources to go off the record (you can usually get them back on later) and always tell sources they will have a chance to rebut what is said about them – then follow through. Those three rules, which of course are not universally followed, have helped me cultivate lots of helpful sources – and helped keep me out of trouble when my stories are published. Treat people humanely, and approach them as one human being to another. Find some common ground, be open, and explain what you are doing and why. Keep your mouth shut and your ears open. Lawyers and lawsuits and keyword legal search engines are great places to find and cultivate sources. I spend a lot of time on Pacer and various state court search engines. (LexisOne is a great, free keyword legal search engine.) Unions and rank-and-file workers are also good sources that are often overlooked. File FOIA requests often. Ask for minutes of meetings, then contact the participants directly. And keep an open mind. You'll often find that, indeed, something did go wrong, but what really happened will be seven degrees off from what you thought.

Managing the investigation

Everybody's brain and organizational methods are unique. For me, keeping multiple electronic text files is helpful. I often stay late or come in on weekends just to do file maintenance and reorganize. I may reorganize my files three or four times during a long project. I always have a "to do" file working – calls I want or need to make. I always keep a separate source file (and later fold it into my master source file). Then I separate the information (interviews) by category or subject heading and make sure to use certain key words in each file so I can find the information later on a system-wide search (Copernic Desktop Search is a great system-wide free search engine). Later, if I am doing a multi-day project, I'll reorganize files by day. I often go back and re-read all text files and go over all my documents again several times (they take on new meaning as you gain more insight). I also keep a separate "electronic file cabinet" of all unscanned paper files, using key words in the descriptions to make the information easier to find later. After a particularly good interview, write a paragraph or two in story form and store them all in a separate "story" file. Chronologies are almost always worthwhile.

Working on your writing

For way too long, I didn't pay much attention to my writing style and believed that if I worked my butt off to find stuff out, then readers were going to be willing to wade through my dense prose. Wrong. A great editor taught me – way late in the game – that good writing is half the battle or more. Just a few simple rules make a big difference and can result in snagging lots more readers than you'd otherwise attract: Don't spend too much time on any one issue and keep the train moving so readers can't get off; use active verbs and describe some physical action every few paragraphs to keep the reader interested; use one source for one finding and then move on, avoiding going back to the same source later to present a different finding.

Verifying

I can't stress this one enough. Verify, re-verify and then verify again. Verify every name, every fact, every line. Go back to original notes or recordings, not earlier versions of your story. If you're not sure, then go back to the source and go over it again and again. Let your sources know how it will be worded in the story and make sure they agree with the context. I don't read entire stories to all sources, but I might read or go over some lengthy sections, especially if they are highly technical. That beats the hell out of being wrong.

Mike McGraw is a special projects reporter for The Kansas City Star. He also worked at The Hartford (Conn.) Courant and The Des Moines Register in Iowa. He has covered a wide range of issues including organized labor, agribusiness, meatpacking, food safety and art world fraud. He is a former member of the IRE Board of Directors and a contributor to IRE's "The Reporter's Handbook." His awards include the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting and two George Polk awards.

Search For Truth

By Pat Stith
Retired investigative reporter

Facts are 15 cents each, two for a quarter. A bunch of facts doesn't necessarily add up to anything. Truth is a good deal more elusive, but that's what we ought to be looking for – the truth of the matter.

There is no acceptable level of error. Mistakes lower reader confidence, harm your reputation and ruin otherwise beautiful stories.

Playing fair is not some hill we have to climb. It's not something we do just for the people we write about and readers. It's something we do for ourselves. When we deal fairly with people, and our story is accurate, every lousy thing we report will stick.

It doesn't matter what you think is off the record. The only thing that counts is what your source thinks is off the record. I'm not talking about allowing someone to "take back" something they've said in an interview by saying, after the fact, "That was off the record." I'm talking about taking great care to avoid misunderstandings. Because if a man or woman believes you have betrayed them, they will never forgive you. And they will try to harm you at every opportunity.

Preparing for a showdown interview is science. Studying the subject matter and the subject as carefully as possible. Honing questions. Indexing documents. Those things can be taught. However, the interview itself – asking the right question at the right time, your tone, your body language – that's art. Some people get pretty good at it, and some people don't.

Some newspapermen and women swear by it, but I've never have much use for a "balanced" story. I like stories that are accurate and fair. Grabbing quotes on two or three sides of an issue and forcing readers to try to figure out what's going on is not reporting. That's stenography.

You can't explain what you don't understand. So when you don't understand, don't sit there, nod and act like you do. Get a better explanation. Because if you don't understand, all you can do when it comes time to write is repeat what you've been told. More stenography.

There is a lot of difference between facts and the truth. Facts are 15 cents each, two for a quarter. A bunch of facts doesn't necessarily add up to anything. Truth is a good deal more elusive, but that's what we ought to be looking for – the truth of the matter.

THE SUNDAY NEWS & OBSERVER

SUNDAY, MAY 13, 2007

WHAT DO WE WHINE ABOUT AT WORK? YOU NAME IT. WORK & MONEY

A COMPENDIUM OF TRIANGLE COLLEGE GRADUATIONS CITY & STATE

A CIA LEGEND AND JOHNSTON'S SHADOWY AERO CONTRACTORS SUNDAY JOURNAL

DOES RELIGION HELP OR HURT HUMANITY? A&E

Could growth hobble Wake?
Schools crunch isn't the only worry

SPEED UNLIMITED | First of four parts

Speed kills, courts shrug

Speeding leads to more fatal wrecks than alcohol. But the state's leaders lack the political will to make speeders pay. A death in Southport shows the human cost.

Ann Williams holds a photo of herself and her husband, Joe Williams, who was fatally injured in a head-on collision with Nancy Moseley in 2006.

In Iraq, Bush has few choices

Nancy Moseley has always had a heavy foot. Eventually, she killed with it.

SON'S EPIC RUN SAYS, 'I LOVE MOM'
Mountains-to-sea trek raises cash to fight MS

Pat Stith was an investigative reporter for 35 years prior to his retirement last fall from The News & Observer in Raleigh, N.C. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1996 and finished strong – two of the last four series he and his partners reported were finalists for IRE Awards. He is a member of the North Carolina Journalism Hall of Fame. Stith works full time now as a consultant to a law firm.

Data Lessons

By Ron Nixon
The New York Times

1. All databases are dirty.

2. Agencies almost always use databases for tracking and not analysis.

3. Never assume that someone is going to look at the data the way you do.

4. You will never find a story with just a database.

5. Data must be personalized in a story; otherwise, it's just a collection of numbers and dry text.

6. Make sure you know the universe of your database.

7. Never make the data say more than it can.

8. Don't trust numbers; they are not infallible. As Mark Twain said, "Figures don't lie, but liars can figure."

9. If you come up with something that makes you say "Wow!" you've probably made a mistake. Check it again.

10. Always try to knock down your own analysis. Other people will. Be prepared.

Ron Nixon is a reporter on The New York Times' computer-assisted reporting team and is assigned to the paper's Washington bureau. Prior to joining the Times, he was CAR editor for The Star Tribune in Minneapolis-St. Paul. A previous training director for IRE, Nixon trained hundreds of reporters around the country in CAR and investigative reporting techniques.

Page-turners

By Steve Weinberg
The IRE Journal

The first book by James Bamford reached stores in 1982. Unknown even to most IRE members, Bamford was described in the book jacket bio as holder of a law degree who "specialized in investigative writing" from his office in Natick, Mass.

Bamford chose one of the most difficult topics imaginable for his first book: an exposé of the National Security Agency, a government body so swathed in secrecy that quipsters said its acronym stood for "No Such Agency."

As I began reading "The Puzzle Palace," I noticed this claim on page four: the NSA "controlled 68,203 people – more than all of the employees of the rest of the intelligence community put together." Wow, I thought. Then, I wondered how Bamford could be sure, since the number of NSA employees is classified.

On page 387, I located the endnote explaining Bamford's sourcing: He had approached the National Credit Union Administration by using the Freedom of Information Act. The credit union within the NSA limited its membership to employees and their family members. The credit union had to list the number of "potential members," which equaled the number of NSA employees.

Today, 27 years later, that is my favorite endnote when demonstrating information-gathering techniques.

For nearly 30 years, I have been reading (and occasionally writing) books with *The IRE Journal* audience in mind. I hope the thought of books as teachers does not sound so obvious that it strikes anybody as condescending. Talented journalists (and sometimes non-journalists) who write books spend years gathering information, thinking about narrative structure and developing a writing voice. Because I believe the formulation that "time equals truth," I study the main text, the footnotes, endnotes and bibliographies of books with special care. The best book is quite likely to teach me more about high-quality in-depth reporting than the best broadcast documentary, the best newspaper or magazine investigation or the best online entry.

Before writing this essay, I have skimmed every issue of *The IRE Journal* and my own weighted shelves to remind myself of especially useful books for investigative journalists. The disclaimer is obvious, I suspect: This listing will contain only a small percentage of all the superb books that instruct us well.

Although recent books have served as superb teachers, a few books old enough to qualify as classics dominate my list of teaching tools.

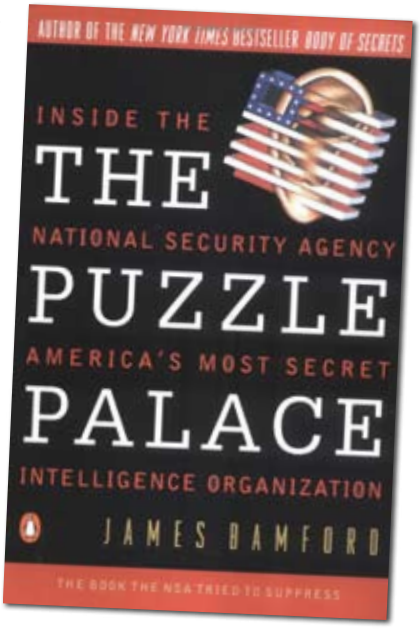
The first is "All the President's Men" by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, published in 1974. Yes, it is 35 years old. Yes, Hollywood adapted the book, and the film version perhaps caused the original print version to seem overly familiar. Yes, technology as adapted by journalists might make pen-and-paper note-taking as practiced by Woodward and Bernstein seem archaic. Still, the reporting, writing and ethics lessons embedded in "All the President's Men" wear so well that I have re-read the book three times that I recall.

Example: As soon as Bernstein learns that a suspicious and perhaps politically motivated break-in occurred at the Watergate building, he calls the types of potential sources journalists too frequently ignore, the people without offices – desk clerks, bellmen, maids and servers.

As for Woodward, instead of staying at his desk bound to the telephone, he ventures to the courthouse for a preliminary hearing, too often dismissed by journalists as pro forma. Once at the courthouse, Woodward is not passive. He asks a well-dressed man his reason for attending the hearing. When the man responds evasively, Woodward refuses to quit asking questions. The answers Woodward solicits help push the story forward. After the case moves to a grand jury, Woodward's in-person persistence leads him to a courthouse clerk who allows a look through that year's grand jury files. In those files, he spots the names of the Watergate grand jurors. The clerk had warned Woodward that no note-taking would be allowed, and the clerk is watching Woodward carefully. So Woodward memorizes a few of the names, excuses himself to use the men's room, writes the memorized names in a notebook, returns to the clerk's office, then visits the men's room again and again until all 23 names are on paper.

In 1979, Barlett and Steele expanded their 20,000-word newspaper series into a nearly 700-page book titled "Empire: The Life, Legend and Madness of Howard Hughes." The sourcing is breathtaking, with an emphasis on documents from litigation (civil and criminal) plus congressional hearing records.

Before Woodward and Bernstein achieved their deserved fame, another young reporter named Seymour Hersh had published a book in 1970 titled "My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath." That book did not yield a Hollywood classic, but it showed journalists what skepticism, persistence and extensive knowledge of people and paper trails could accomplish, even when faced with lack of cooperation from the normally closed military establishment. The book is especially useful because of its source notes at the end. "All the President's Men," despite its greatness as a text, lacks endnotes.



In 1975, *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporters Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele published a remarkable exposé from the private sector, rather than the White House or the military. The topic: the business empire and personal life of reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes. In 1979, Barlett and Steele expanded their 20,000-word newspaper series into a nearly 700-page book titled "Empire: The Life, Legend and Madness

continued on page 34

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

UNEVEN PLACEMENT

Rookie teachers land in struggling schools

By Mackenzie Ryan
Salem (Ore.) Statesman Journal

It started by reading the Oregon school report card – and grew into a *Statesman Journal* investigation on how poverty, race and teacher placement are linked to student achievement in the Salem-Keizer School District.

One school stood out as the only one to earn a "low" rating among all elementary schools in the state: Hallman Elementary School, a 450-student school in northeast Salem.

Intrigued by its declining test results, I began to ask questions about why this school fared so poorly. Turns out, the school had four principals in eight years. With each new leader came a different approach to education. I then requested information about staff turnover. Only six of the original 50 staffers were still working at the school; classroom teachers worked an average of 2.5 years before leaving the school.

Why was there such high turnover? One district staffer told me: That's just how it is at the neediest schools.

That comment set into motion a five-month, data-intensive investigative project showing that the newest and least experienced teachers are more likely to work in Salem-Keizer schools with the most low-income and minority students. See the story at www.statesmanjournal.com/experience.

Lori Cain | Salem Statesman Journal

Fourth-grade teacher Laura Fender helps her students understand timelines and reading comprehension.

To begin the project, I looked for a model for my analysis. I used a 2007 Duke University study, as I liked how the researchers had divided the schools into quartiles and compared elementary schools to other elementary schools. I did not include charter schools and alternative high schools in the analysis, as their students come from all over and are not representative of a particular neighborhood.

Next, I wanted to see how other newspapers had approached this topic because sources told me that teacher retention at high-poverty schools is a national issue. I e-mailed fellow Gannett employees Melissa Walker of *The Des Moines Register* and Jaime Sarrio and Lisa Green of *The Tennessean*, who answered many questions about how they tackled similar stories.

Next, I had to set some benchmarks. How would I define a teacher of less experience, a high-poverty or high-minority school?

I requested the school district's payroll database, which I used to determine experience levels at different schools. Types of teachers in the analysis include classroom, special education and other teaching specialties. After talking to national education experts, I defined new teachers as those in their first or second year of teaching.

I used other state education data to give depth: free-lunch enrollment as an indicator of poverty; the percent of minority students as a measure of diversity; and state test results as a sign of student achievement.

Using published education research, I based school performance on state reading and math test scores in fourth, eighth and 10th grades.

I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and an Access database manager to separate schools within each elementary, middle and high school level into quartiles for each category. Schools labeled as "high" are at or above the 75th percentile and "low" if they are at or below the 25th percentile, when compared with other schools in the same level in the school district. "Average" falls in between.

Midway through the analysis, I checked with national experts, who confirmed that I was on the right track.

I used the week of the school district's spring break to do the bulk of the data analysis, as I was juggling daily and weekend stories on my beat while working on this project. As I neared the May publication date, my editors also gave me two weeks of dedicated time to finish reporting and writing.

Among the most challenging aspects of this project was the learning curve in the data analysis. I had attended an IRE and NICAR boot camp in Columbia, Mo., but had worked with only one or two sets of data before – never four sets! I had to learn new Access language and, after consulting the NICAR listserv, the cross-tabs function, another first.

As I continued my reporting, I requested more information to provide even more depth to my stories. The nagging question: Why were there job openings at the most challenging schools?

I looked through the teachers union contract, finding a "first consideration" clause. In practice, teachers who wanted to transfer to a different school and meet qualifications are given that new job. And one source told me that those transfer requests are often put in before an opening appears.

I also requested teacher transfer requests, but the district had tracked that electronically for only a few months. After talking to national experts, I believed I needed at least a year or two's worth of information for any sort of analysis. So that was a dead end.

But the district did have multiple years of data about why teachers leave the district, such as for retirement or moves. The data show that elementary teachers at low-poverty schools leave the district at about the same rate as those at high-poverty schools – suggesting that the job openings at the high-poverty schools were occurring because of internal transfers.

At one point I took school district maps and highlighted the "low," "average" and "high" schools in different colors in each of the different categories. The visual trend was clear. Schools in the south and west parts of the community, where families are more affluent and less diverse, have more experienced teachers and higher test results. But schools in the east and northeast, where there is more poverty and diversity, have lower teacher experience levels and test results.

I showed the maps to my editors, who were shocked at the clear link established by the data. My colored sheets of paper became the basis for large graphics in print and online, which allowed readers to quickly see the trend and then see more school-specific statistics.

With the data crunched, I moved on to how to organize the stories and possible follow-ups to the report.

Like so many issues in education, there was a lot of gray. Some schools, like Hallman, were clearly struggling with teacher retention. But a few schools with large low-income and minority student populations were excelling.

I worked closely with project editor Michelle Maxwell to structure the package into a two-day report. The first explained the issue, while the second explained solutions and anomalies.

We decided to write case studies for each day, highlighting schools struggling with these issues and the ones that are overcoming the odds. I focused on elementary schools; because of their size, their demographics and teacher experience rates were more pronounced. This approach provided the balance I wanted in the stories, and the community responded positively.

By August, school district leaders announced an education reform project to explore teacher evaluation and incentive-pay scenarios, which could address turnover at challenging schools.

The school district's human resources department was well aware of the issue and is working on ways to improve retention through training and mentoring programs. I received many comments, e-mails and letters congratulating the newspaper on the in-depth analysis and balanced approach. One reader called it "as strong as journalism as I have seen in the *Statesman Journal* since coming to Salem 35 years ago."

Mackenzie Ryan is the education reporter at the Statesman Journal in Salem, Ore., where she writes about the second-largest school district in the state.

We decided to write case studies for each day, highlighting schools struggling with these issues and the ones that are overcoming the odds.

Lori Cain | Salem Statesman Journal

Lori Cain | Salem Statesman Journal

Lori Cain | Salem Statesman Journal

The newest and least experienced teachers in Salem, Ore., tend to work in schools with the most minority students and those from low-income families.

New and expanded blogs on IRE's Web site provide tips, success stories and reporting resources. Here are excerpts from a few recent blog posts, in case you missed them or haven't explored the new online offerings.

Snapshots from our blogs

From "Tips on Interviewing Sources," IRE On the Road blog – www.ire.org/training

By Doug Haddix
IRE training director

There's nothing wrong – and everything right – with rehearsing interviews, especially those that must be done by phone, according to Manny Garcia, executive editor of *El Nuevo Herald* in Miami, Fla.

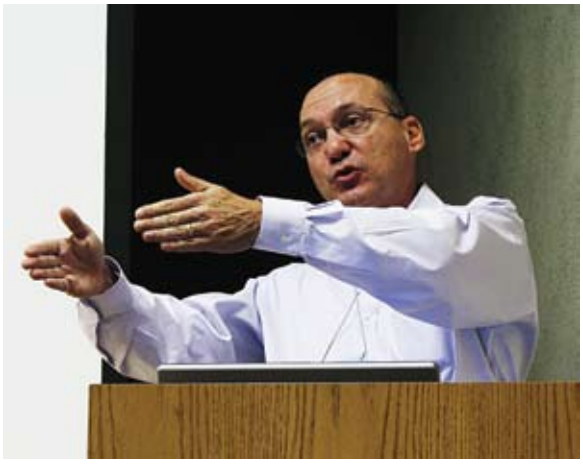
Sometimes, a reporter has only a minute or two to make a pitch by phone, given obstacles such as call-waiting and voice mail.

Garcia's advice came during an IRE Ethnic Media Watchdog Workshop at Boston University on Sept. 12.

At the end of every interview, he said, ask the source if you forgot to ask something. Often, that opens up a crucial second round of the interview.

Garcia's other tips included:
• Request the emergency contact list of every government agency you cover before an emergency. That way, you'll have cell phone numbers for key officials during a crisis. If the office recoils, file a formal records request under your state open records act.
• Humility works better than hubris during interviews.
• Obtain internal telephone directories of the offices you cover. If possible, get copies from previous years to help locate former employees, who may be likelier to talk than current workers.

Doug Haddix | IRE Journal



Manny Garcia

From "EveryBlock Goes Open Source," Uplink blog, http://data.nicar.org/uplink

By Derek Willis
The New York Times

By now you may have read that EveryBlock, a Knight Foundation-funded project, has released its source code to the public. Getting a chance to look under the hood is a great opportunity to see how other folks tackle some of the tasks we all face, or are likely to. A version of the code is online at http://github.com/brosner/everyblock_code.

The first thing to note is that the code has the GPL license, which means that if you incorporate any of it into an application you're building and then release that code, it will need to be under the terms of the GPL as well. You can still play with, run and even alter the EveryBlock code without releasing it.

So what's in there? A lot of people may be checking out the site's publishing system, but for CAR folks, I think the most interesting aspect is the code that performs address extraction from text. These natural language processing utilities already have been turned into their own Web utility where you can test the code out against articles, reports or other text.

Map makers may be more eager to look at how EveryBlock constructs its maps using open-source tools, and those files are available as well.

Even if you aren't doing address matching or don't know Python, looking at code is a great way to see how certain tasks are accomplished and whether a language might make sense for you to try.

From "Overcoming obstacles to investigate public officials," Quick Look mentoring blog http://data.nicar.org/taxonomy/term/131

By Andy Curliss
The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.)

Our running investigation has focused on former Gov. Mike Easley of North Carolina. We have revealed numerous instances of unreported gifts, favors or other perks provided to the governor while he was in office and shown how many of those people who made the gifts benefited from the governor or his administration. The reporting has included revelations about a six-figure discount for the governor on coastal property, a job for his wife at N.C. State University, free travel, free cars, free golf and more.

Follow-ups have delved into the university system, including undisclosed severance deals for numerous top university administrators. Federal and state authorities have opened wide-ranging probes, with subpoenas mirroring the newspaper's reporting. The chancellor, provost and chairman of the board at N.C. State have resigned. The former first lady was fired by trustees.

Search for art fakes

from page 11

"Some years ago a young man brought a painting into our Melbourne gallery and asked for an authentication of this painting or a valuation," she said. Her son, Stephen, who runs the gallery in Melbourne, thought the painting looked a bit odd. The fake was later offered at an auction for $16,000. After her son raised the alarm, the painting was withdrawn and ultimately taken out of circulation.

But that wasn't the end of the story. The same forger also was responsible for selling another fake Dickerson, "Pensive Girl," at a major auction house. The police later arrested the forger.

Unlike the Libertos, who were sent to jail, this professional faker was sentenced to repay the money he had obtained by deception – and given just 40 hours of community service. The forger estimates he's spotted about 200 fakes in 20 years. Following his conviction, he says he now acts as a consultant in the art world – a "poacher turned gamekeeper."

His story says much about the failure of Australian law enforcement in nabbing professional forgers. Four Corners has had a long history of tracking down the Australian art world's fakers and forgers. This year, for the third time in three decades, we returned to interview Australia's most prolific producer of fakes – an eccentric, elderly artist called Will Blundell.

Blundell has produced thousands of paintings and drawings in the style of well-known Australian artists – including Brett Whiteley and Sir Arthur Streeton. He says he has never passed off his pictures as the work of other artists – even though others have and have made small fortunes by doing so. He denies he fakes pictures – he calls his works "innuendos."

"To do these only keeps the artist alive. That's why I've painted so many of the Whiteleys. There may be complaints about them, that they are on the fringe of copyright, but since I've started executing a lot of his works, they seem to be going up in price," Blundell told us.

The resulting program was "Fake!" It looked at the way in which fakes, even when identified, can disappear back into the art market, only to reappear months or years later. "Fake!" was produced by Peter Cronau and researched by Karen Michelmore.

Among the possible solutions to the volume of fakes are greater scholarship and more complete catalogs of artists' works – or a national database of forgeries and fakes. Our sources for this investigation came almost exclusively from within the small, tightly-knit coterie of dealers and auctioneers who together help drive Australia's art market. An envelope of documents arrived from one confidential source, a folder of detailed information about a particular questionable artwork from another. Some artists spoke up to protect their own legacy. But only very few – perhaps 5 percent – would go on the record. It's that 5 percent who helped Four Corners to put flesh on the bones of the more scandalous examples of fraud and fakery in Australia's art market, and it's their evidence which – hopefully – will help to clean it up.

Quentin McDermott has worked for the Four Corners ABC-TV program since 2000. Before joining the news program, he worked for 25 years for magazines, local and national newspapers, and television in the United Kingdom.

Blundell has produced thousands of paintings and drawings in the style of well-known Australian artists – including Brett Whiteley and Sir Arthur Streeton.

Acclaimed Australian artist David Boyd inspects fakes that were intended to be passed off as his work.

Books

from page 29

of Howard Hughes."The sourcing is breathtaking, with an emphasis on documents from litigation (civil and criminal) plus congressional hearing records.

The later books from the duo focused on issues bedeviling American society. In their 2004 book "Critical Condition: How Health Care in America Became Big Business and Bad Medicine," Barlett and Steele showed how to translate data from documents so that readers would think about the familiar (health care) in new, productive ways. The opening of the book illustrates how the duo meshes the results of their reporting with a writing style meant to draw readers in:

"You are standing in a line at the supermarket to buy a box of Cheerios. You notice that the two customers in front of you are making the same purchase. The cashier rings up the first box at $5.41, just as advertised in the newspaper. But when the second box is scanned, the price registers at $6.76. Strange, you think. Even more strange, the customer doesn't seem to notice the difference. Then it's your turn. The cashier scans the box and the price flashes $29.92. Why would anyone pay more than five times as much as another person for an identical box of cereal? They wouldn't. But when it comes to health care, you don't have any choice. And that's precisely the kind of spread that hospitals use in selling their services. Except that you don't know it – it's their secret."

Nina Bernstein wrote frequent newspaper pieces about the breakdown of the foster care system. Her frustration grew as the broken systems in locale after locale failed to improve. Her 2001 book, "The Lost Children of Wilder," told the story with one interminable case as the connecting thread. The combination of Bernstein's expert reporting combined with an unforgettable narrative seared the foster care mess into my mind forever.

Bernstein became aware of the case while reporting for *Newsday* in 1990. A public interest lawyer had filed a lawsuit 17 years earlier that challenged the New York City practice of sending lots of its foster care money to private church-affiliated foster care agencies. Catholic agencies tended to give preferential placement to Catholic children. Jewish agencies did the same for Jewish children. Protestant children and children without a Christian affiliation tended to fall through the cracks. Bernstein focused on one of those children, Shirley Wilder, to drive the book narrative. The foster care system failed Wilder. She gave birth at 14 years old to a son, Lamont, who ended up in the foster care system himself.

Steve Weinberg is senior contributing editor to The IRE Journal and a former executive director of IRE. He has written eight nonfiction books.

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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OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM

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(CHECK ONE CATEGORY ONLY)

FOR OUTSTANDING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN:

NEWSPAPERS Highest single day circ:_____

_____Circulation less than 100,000
_____100,000-250,000 circulation
_____250,000-500,000 circulation
_____More than 500,000 circulation (or wire service)
_____Local-circulation weekly

TELEVISION Market size:_____

_____Network or syndicated program
_____Top 20 market
_____Below Top 20 market

*International entries will be placed into appropriate categories by IRE staff. Contest judges can then move entries into other categories. IRE can award a special citation for deserving international work.

OTHER MEDIA

_____Magazine/Specialty Publication
_____Book
_____Radio
_____Online

SPECIAL CATEGORIES:

_____Tom Renner Award (any medium, any size)
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_____Student Work (any medium, any size)
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(CHECK ENTRY FEE)

MEMBER

_____$55 entry fee (Current IRE Member)
_____Free entry (Current Student Member)

Name of member involved in entered work:

_____

NONMEMBER

_____$115 entry fee (Non-IRE Member)
_____$25 entry fee (Non-IRE Student Member)

Payment must accompany entry.

If checking nonmember entry, you must designate one of the contributing reporters listed below to receive one-year membership. Provide all contact information: (Please type or print clearly)

Name: _____

News organization: _____

Mailing address: _____

_____

_____

_____

Phone number: _____

Fax number: _____

E-mail: _____

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE

By entering this contest, you and your news organization grant IRE permission to use the entry, including the information on this form and the questionnaire, for educational purposes. Such uses may include: 1) print, video or online resources, 2) IRE compilations, feeds or award tapes and 3) streaming video from IRE's Web site. The **authorized signature** of at least one entrant or the contest coordinator, by and/or on behalf of the respective news organization is **required** for contest entry.

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

To be completed by person submitting the entry. (Please type or print clearly):

Contact person: _____ News organization: _____

Mailing address: _____

Phone number: _____ Fax number: _____ E-mail: _____

Title of Entry: _____ Length (time) of radio or TV entry _____

Reporters involved in effort: List significant contributors in the order they should appear on IRE plaques or certificates. If this entry is named a winner, only those people listed will be entered into our official records. Check the box next to the contributor if he or she is a current IRE member. Attach additional sheet if necessary.

	Name	Title	Member
1.	_____	_____	☐
2.	_____	_____	☐
3.	_____	_____	☐
4.	_____	_____	☐
5.	_____	_____	☐

Payment may be made by personal or company check payable to IRE, or credit card. Please complete the section below regarding your payment method.

Please do not submit entries without the required entry fees.

AmEx____ **VISA**____ **MasterCard**____ **Discover**____ **Card Number:** _____

Exp. Date _____ **Authorized Signature** _____

Check:____
Check Number:_____

Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.
Missouri School of Journalism
141 Neff Annex
Columbia, MO 65211
www.ire.org

IRE AWARDS 2009

ENTRY FORM INSIDE

The annual contest of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.

DEADLINE: Postmark by Jan. 8, 2010

Categories

Newspaper:
For outstanding investigative reporting at a daily or weekly newspaper.
Categories are: Circulation less than 100,000; Circulation between 100,000 and 250,000; Circulation between 250,000 and 500,000; Circulation more than 500,000; and Local-Circulation Weekly.
(Appropriate category determined by highest single-day circulation of the week.)

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

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

Online:
For outstanding investigative journalism primarily published on the Internet.

Special Categories:
Tom Renner Award: Outstanding reporting in any medium covering and exposing organized crime (limited to 10 stories).

IRE FOI Award: Honors individual or organization in any medium whose significant actions further open records or open government.

NEW - Breaking News Investigation: For outstanding investigative work done within 30 days of a news event or development. (Limit to 5 stories.)

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

International Entries: International entries will be placed into appropriate categories by IRE staff. Contest judges can then move entries into other categories. IRE can award a special citation for deserving international work.

* If submitting an entry in the Renner or FOIA as well as another category, you must submit a separate, complete entry packet for each category.

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

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