THE IRE JOURNAL

Spring 2010
Volume 33
Number 2

2009 IRE AWARD WINNERS

MEDIA MASH-UPS

New models of collaboration

TRACKING OFFICIALS
How to keep tabs on flights and cars of political leaders

SPORTS MEDS
NCAA lacks rules on use of painkillers by college athletes

CATCH AND RELEASE
Uneven punishment of drunken drivers shows system failure

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Entries must have been published online or in print in the year ending June 30, 2010.

THE IRE JOURNAL

SPRING 2010

COVER STORIES:
Pages 16-28

ABOUT THE COVER

The landscape for investigative reporting is changing quickly with collaboration once unimaginable among print, broadcast and online newsrooms.

Illustration by
Wendy Gray, *The IRE Journal*

THE IRE JOURNAL

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FROM THE IRE OFFICE

Can't we all just get along?

BY MARK HORVIT
IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For most of the history of our profession, the answer among journalists at various news organizations has been "absolutely not."

Collaboration traditionally wasn't high on the priority list of newspapers and television stations. And in many ways, that was a good thing. Competition was a healthy motivator. It led to aggressive reporting and higher staffing levels, in part because it served as a great way to pry cash from the tight fists of editors and owners who didn't want to get beaten by the newsroom across town.

As this issue of the Journal makes clear, times have changed in some fundamental ways.

For example:

In Ohio, a group of newspaper editors from publications that had been longtime competitors throughout the state started a cooperative agreement in which they went from sharing stories to working together on investigative projects (page 23).

Nonprofit investigative centers are finding outlets for their work in traditional media. And increasingly they are pairing up to work on stories together, both regionally (page 21) and nationally (page 19).

Creative partnerships are forming at the local level as well. In New Orleans, the Fox affiliate has partnered with a newly formed online site to work on investigative projects (page 27).

So why have we gone from crushing the competition to sleeping with them?

Initially, it has mostly been born of necessity. The new economic realities, including smaller news staffs and less money for enterprise work, have led editors to reconsider working with others and also have created a new willingness to take someone else's excellent work and highlight it.

Additionally, the rise of the nonprofit investigative center has reshaped the landscape in a way that facilitates collaboration. Some of the best investigative reporters in the country now work for organizations that not only aren't driven by profit, but that actually score points with supporters (and funders) by sharing their content.

This new mindset has led to some great journalism.

In the past two years, several partnerships have won IRE Awards, including the "Disposable Army" project involving ProPublica, the *Los Angeles Times* and ABC News; "The Tobacco Underground," which brought together a consortium of journalists from throughout the world; and the Chauncey Bailey Project, a joint effort by journalists in the Oakland, Calf., area.

The competitive spirit remains very much intact.

Investigative units at traditional media and new online-only organizations still jealously guard their secrets when they're not working together. The same two news organizations that work together on one project can easily find themselves competing the next time around.

How those conflicting goals will play themselves out over the long haul will be interesting to watch. For now, in many ways we've got the best of both worlds.

Elsewhere in this edition of the Journal, we have a couple of important pieces of IRE business.

Some highlights of the 2010-11 IRE budget appear on page 13. You can read the complete budget – and download a copy – from the IRE Web site at www.ire.org. The Board of Directors will vote on the budget at their June 10 meeting in Las Vegas, where we'll be holding the annual conference. The meeting is open to members.

Also in Vegas, members will vote in the Board of Directors election, which will be held on Saturday evening, June 12. For all the details, see page 5.

And don't forget another big reason to come to Vegas – the chance to network with other likeminded journalists. Who knows? Maybe you'll be able to set up a collaboration of your own.

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

Seven seats up for election on IRE board

The filing period has begun for those planning to run for the IRE Board of Directors. Seven seats on the 13-member board are up for election. The election will be held June 12 at the IRE annual conference in Las Vegas.

The IRE Board serves as the governing body of IRE and generally meets in person twice a year to discuss and vote on IRE business. One of the meetings is at the annual IRE conference in June. The board periodically has conference calls.

Directors serve on committees and task forces made up of board members and appointed non-board IRE members.

The seats are for two-year terms, and incumbents may seek re-election to the board. A board position is unpaid; board members and their news organizations are expected to pay all, or a substantial amount, of travel expenses to board meetings. IRE will provide limited help in cases of need. Candidates must be IRE members in the professional or academic category.

Board members are expected to help raise funds and contribute financial or other resources to the organization. In addition, they lose eligibility to enter the IRE Awards contest if they have a significant role in the contest entry.

Here is the schedule for this year's elections. Details about each part of the process are available online at www.ire.org. Full information about election procedures is available online at http://bit.ly/cHCSPz.

- April 26: Deadline for candidates to file and appear on absentee ballots; opening day for absentee ballot requests.
- April 30: Candidates' statements posted online on the IRE Web site.
- May 24: Last day to request absentee ballots.
- May 26: Deadline for candidates to be listed on the Web site (5 p.m. CDT).
- June 2: Deadline for absentee ballots to reach the IRE office.
- June 11: Final deadline (at noon CDT) to declare candidacy for the election-day ballot.
- June 12: Board elections at annual membership meeting.

Submit your declaration of candidacy to IRE membership coordinator John Green at jgreen@ire.org. Requests for absentee ballots should be submitted to ballots@ire.org.

IRE members win Pulitzer Prizes

- Daniel Gilbert, who won the Public Service Pulitzer, also won an IRE Award this year. Gilbert, a reporter at the *Bristol Herald Courier*, won for coverage of the mismanagement of natural-gas royalties owned to thousands of land owners in southwest Virginia.
- Raquel Rutledge of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* won the Local Reporting prize for reports on fraud and abuse in child-care programs.
- Sheri Fink of ProPublica shared the prize for Investigative Reporting for a story about life-and-death decisions made at a New Orleans hospital in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The other winner, Wendy Ruderman of the *Philadelphia Daily News*, exposed a rogue police narcotics squad.
- Michael Moss of *The New York Times* won for Explanatory Reporting for reports on food safety. *The Seattle Times*, under the leadership of editor David Boardman, took the prize for Breaking News for coverage of the shooting deaths of four police officers.

MEMBER NEWS

Greg Borowski has been promoted to senior editor-projects and investigations at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, overseeing the newspaper's award-winning Watchdog Team.

Several IRE members were awarded the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University awards:

- **Kristin Carlson** and WCAX-TV, Burlington, for "Foreigners on the Farm."
- **Mark Greenblatt** and KHOU-TV, Houston, for "Under Fire: Discrimination and Corruption in the Texas National Guard."
- **Tony Kovaleski** and KMGH-TV, Denver, for "33 Minutes to 34 Right."
- **Michael Montgomery,** Joshua E. S. Phillips, American Public Media and American RadioWorks, for "What Killed Sergeant Gray?"
- **Phil Williams** and WTVF-TV, for "General Sessions Court."
- **Lee Zurik** and WWL-TV, New Orleans, for "NOAH Housing Program Investigation."

Julie Kramer's third thriller featuring TV investigative reporter Riley Spartz will be released June 22 by Atria/Simon & Schuster. *Silencing Sam* explores the fine line between news and gossip.

FairWarning has launched a nonprofit, online publication to produce in-depth stories on safety and health issues. The new venture is led by **Myron Levin**, who worked at the *Los Angeles Times* before founding FairWarning. Levin runs FairWarning with Joanna Lin, also a former *Times* reporter, and three graduate students at the UC Berkeley and University of Southern California journalism schools.

Steve Luxenberg, a Washington Post associate editor, has won two honors for his investigative memoir, *Annie's Ghosts: A Journey Into a Family Secret*. The Library of Michigan named it a Michigan Notable Book for 2010, and *The Washington Post* selected it as one of the Best Books of 2009.

Bob Mahlburg, who worked at newspapers in Texas and Florida, is now a financial investigator for the Florida Attorney General, Economic Crimes Division.

Andrew McIntosh has been named Investigations Desk Editor for the Montreal-based QMI Agency, a newly launched multimedia news service of Quebecor Media, a Canadian-based media company. Previously, McIntosh was a senior writer and investigative reporter with *The Sacramento Bee*.

John Solomon has been named journalist-in-residence at the Center for Public Integrity, which houses one of the country's largest newsrooms dedicated to investigative journalism. During his extensive career in print and broadcast media, Solomon has worked for The Associated Press, *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times*.

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

IRE MEDALS

The highest honor IRE can bestow for investigative reporting is the IRE Medal.

THIS YEAR'S MEDAL WINNERS ARE:

Toxic Waters — *The New York Times*; Charles Duhigg, Matthew Bloch, Matt Ericson, Tyson Evans, Brian Hamman, Griff Palmer, Karl Russell, Derek Willis, Brent McDonald, Zach Wise

Under Fire: Discrimination & Corruption in the Texas National Guard — KHOU-Houston; Mark Greenblatt, David Raziq, Keith Tomshe, Chris Henao, Robyn Hughes, Keith Connors

SPECIAL AWARDS

The IRE Medal is also awarded to winners of two special award categories:

RENNER AWARD:
Blood of their Brothers – The Border Trilogy — San Diego Magazine; Shane Liddick

FOI AWARD:
Your Right to Know — Freelance; Heather Brooke

IRE CERTIFICATES

NEWSPAPERS

CIRCULATION 250,000-500,000:
Human Trafficking In America — *The Kansas City Star*; Mike McGraw, Laura Bauer, Mark Morris, Keith Myers

CIRCULATION 100,000-250,000:
Flipping Fraud — *Sarasota* (Fla.) *Herald-Tribune*; Michael Braga, Chris Davis, Matthew Doig

CIRCULATION UNDER 100,000:
Underground, Out of Reach — *Bristol* (Va.) *Herald Courier*; Daniel Gilbert

LOCAL CIRCULATION/WEEKLIES:
Crossing the Line — *Lake Oswego* (Ore.) *Review*; Lee van der Voo, Nick Budnick

TELEVISION

NETWORK/SYNDICATED:
The Swedish Crusade — SVC – The Swedish Public Television Service; Ali Fegan, Lars-Goran Svensson, Magnus Tingman, Johan Kallstrom, Mattias Jonsson

BELOW TOP 20 MARKETS:
State of Your Money — WTHR-Indianapolis; Bob Segall, Cyndee Hebert, Bill Ditton

OTHER MEDIA

MAGAZINE/SPECIALTY:
Katrina's Hidden Race War and Body of Evidence — *The Nation*; A.C. Thompson

BOOK:
The Sellout by Charles Gasparino

RADIO:
In The Kennel: Uncovering a Navy Unit's Culture of Abuse — Youth Radio; Rachel Krantz, Charlie Foster, Lissa Soep, Ellin O'Leary, Nishat Kurwa, Graham Smith, Chris Turpin, Tom Bowman

ONLINE:
Disposable Army — ProPublica; T. Christian Miller, Doug Smith, Francine Orr, Pratap Chatterjee, Anvi Patel

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

STUDENT (ALL MEDIA):
Wrongful Conviction, Unequal Compensation — New York City News Service; Clark Merrefield, Rosaleen Ortiz, Dan Macht, Joshua Cinelli, Matt Townsend, Stephen Bronner

BREAKING NEWS INVESTIGATIONS (ALL MEDIA):
Holes in the System — *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; John Diedrich, Gina Barton, Ben Poston, Ryan Haggerty, Daniel Bice

2009 IRE Award Winners

Complete list of 2009 IRE Award Winners and Finalists

IRE MEDALS

The highest honor IRE can bestow for investigative reporting is the IRE Medal. This year's medal winners are:

Toxic Waters — *The New York Times*; Charles Duhigg and the database and multimedia team of Matthew Bloch, Matt Ericson, Tyson Evans, Brian Hamman, Griff Palmer, Karl Russell, Derek Willis; and videographers Brent McDonald and Zach Wise.

The New York Times
NYTIMES.COM

Judges comments: *The New York Times*' Charles Duhigg and a team of database experts and multimedia specialists pulled together an exhaustive amount of information on just how poor the government's record is when it comes to protecting the nation's water. Duhigg and his team found only a fractured collection of enforcement databases on the topic. So, they built their own. Duhigg obtained records by sending out more than 500 FOIA requests to every state and more than a dozen federal agencies. The result? A sweeping indictment of the system. The project drove home the government's shoddy record with compelling human stories and searchable online databases and interactive graphics. The series led to crackdowns, significant new environmental rules and new appropriations for clean-water projects.

Under Fire: Discrimination and Corruption in the Texas National Guard — KHOU-Houston; Mark Greenblatt, David Raziq, Keith Tomshe, Chris Henao, Robyn Hughes, Keith Connors.

Judges' comments: No system can be more impenetrable for a team of reporters than the military "old boy" network, but that's exactly what reporter Mark Greenblatt and producers David Raziq and Chris Henao took on when they followed up on a tip to check out the "Vagisil Award" being given to women in the Texas National Guard. From that one tip, the team – which also included photographer/editor Keith Tomshe and graphic artist Robyn Hughes – found a system of misogynistic actions that went beyond humiliation. In some cases, female officers were being disciplined or even discharged despite exemplary service records. Data and documents gathered by the team showed a systematic refusal to consider women for top posts, and swift punishment for any who complained about the male power structure. In the end, this two-year investigation resulted in the Texas governor firing three top generals in the Texas National Guard and the state legislature changing the way it oversees Texas Guard operations.

SPECIAL AWARDS

The IRE Medal is also awarded to winners of two special award categories:

Renner Award: Blood of Their Brothers: The Border Trilogy — *San Diego Magazine*; Shane Liddick

Judges' comments: Reporter Shane Liddick went alone into a place few of us would dare go – the heart of the illegal drug cartels operating across the border in Mexico. Once inside this crime syndicate, Liddick was able to reach key people throughout the cartel, as well as on the other side in law enforcement. Liddick's reporting in *San Diego Magazine* dispels the stereotypes we have about corrupt Mexican cops and instead shows us a system at least partially populated by honest officers risking – and losing – their lives in the fight to keep some semblance of civilization in their hometown. Liddick chronicles his five years of work on this story in a gritty style that matches the gritty conditions in which he lived to do the reporting. Liddick's investigation helps us understand the complex power structure in play that's changing lives across all of Mexico, starting just 20 miles from San Diego.

FINALIST:

- The Preacher's Mob — *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; Greg Borowski, John Diedrich

FOIA: Your Right to Know — Freelance; Heather Brooke

Judges' comments: London-based freelancer Heather Brooke was frustrated; British public record laws kept the former U.S. journalist from reporting and writing a seemingly mundane story tracking politicians' expenses. Brooke was writing a book on the UK's then not-yet-in-effect Freedom of Information Act when she was denied access to records of members of Parliament's expenses. She began filing FOIA requests Jan. 1, 2005, the day the act took effect. Almost all of her requests were rejected, but she followed the request for MPs' second-home allowances through the appeals process that ended with a favorable ruling from the High Court of Justice, ultimately leading to the resignation of House of Commons Speaker Michael Martin among others.

FINALISTS:

- Death on the Rails — *The Washington Post*; Joe Stephens, Lena Sun, Lyndsey Layton
- Full Disclosure — *York Daily Record;* York Daily Record/Sunday News Staff
- Governor Quinn Keeping Juvenile Prisons in the Dark — Chicago Public Radio WBEZ-FM; Robert Wildeboer, Cate Cahan
- Sexual Assault on Campus – Center for Public Integrity; Gordon Witkin, David Donald, Kristen Lombardi, Kristin Jones, Laura Dattaro, Claritza Jimenez, Laura Cheek
- Smithsonian Freedom of Information Stories — *The Washington Post*; James V. Grimaldi, Jacqueline Trescott

IRE CERTIFICATES
NEWSPAPERS

Circulation Over 500,000 or wire service:
(See Medal Winner above)

FINALISTS:

- Clout Goes To College — *Chicago Tribune*; Jodi S. Cohen, Stacy St. Clair, Tara Malone, Robert Becker, Tracy Van Moorlehem
- Dead by Mistake — Hearst Newspapers; Eric Nalder, Cathleen F. Crowley
- Death on the Rails — *The Washington Post*; Joe Stephens, Lena Sun, Lyndsey Layton
- Financial Fraud — *The Wall Street Journal*; Mark Maremont

Circulation 250,000-500,000:

Human Trafficking in America — *The Kansas City Star*; Mike McGraw, Laura Bauer and Mark Morris, Keith Myers.

Judges' comments: Reporters Mike McGraw, Laura Bauer and Mark Morris conducted an exhaustive examination of the U.S. government's unfulfilled promise to stop the trafficking of illegal workers and underage girls sold into the sex trade in the United States. Reporters found that despite spending millions of tax dollars, the government's multi-agency effort is plagued by turf wars and poor coordination. In many cases, victims continued to suffer when they were denied services. Others, upon deportation, found themselves returning to the abusive conditions they'd fled, a direct violation of U.S. policy. In the weeks following the publication of this series, the Obama Administration signed into law an additional $12.5 million for anti-human trafficking efforts. The chairwoman of the House subcommittee over detention and deportation policies stated she would use *The Star*'s series during oversight hearings to highlight needed reforms.

FINALISTS:

- Blago Hit Up Burris For Cash — *Chicago Sun-Times*; Natasha Korecki, Dave McKinney
- Cashing in on Kids — *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; Raquel Rutledge
- Inside Scientology — *St. Petersburg Times*; Joe Childs
- Trust Betrayed — *South Florida Sun Sentinel*; Sally Kestin, Peter Franceschina, John Maines

Circulation 100,000-250,000:
Flipping Fraud — *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*; Michael Braga, Chris Davis, Matthew Doig

Judges' comments: In this well-crafted series, Michael Braga, Matthew Doig and Chris Davis, of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, exposed how a vast scheme in the housing market in Florida happened, and ultimately, contributed to the economic collapse in the state. Reporters undertook a massive effort to collect and analyze every Florida real estate transaction from the past decade. The series identified hot spots where flipping was widespread and identified big players engaged in suspected fraudulent flipping practices. Judges were impressed with the creativity behind the *Herald-Tribune*'s online presentation. The series caused the Florida Attorney General to set up a statewide task force, and federal investigators are building cases against at least two flipping rings named in the series.

SARASOTA Herald-Tribune

FINALISTS:
Judge Hecht — *The News Tribune* (Tacoma, Wash.); Adam Lynn, Sean Robinson
Seeing Red: A Daily Herald Investigation of Red-Light Cameras — *Daily Herald* (Arlington Heights, Ill.); Joseph Ryan, Marni Pyke
Tainted Justice — *Philadelphia Daily News*; Barbara Laker, Wendy Ruderman

Circulation under 100,000:
Underground, Out of Reach — *Bristol* (Va.) *Herald Courier*; Daniel Gilbert

Judges' comments: Reporter Daniel Gilbert tackled a subject that many would find incomprehensible. Apart from his daily reporting, over a year's time Gilbert dissected an obscure and complicated Virginia state law that forced people to lease their gas rights to private energy corporations. Using extensive open records requests and building his own database, Gilbert not only found a state escrow fund of $25 million that could not be accessed to pay land owners but also gas and oil companies that never paid into the fund. He found reporting errors and redundancies that showed the fund was losing money, and he brought it all home with engaging interviews with shortchanged land owners. The series led to the first audit of the decade-old escrow fund, more attention by the department that runs it, and $700,000 in back payments by oil and gas companies, and pending state legislation to make it easier for people to get paid.

BRISTOL Herald Courier

FINALISTS:
- Charity Paid Leaders $2.5 Million — *York* (Pa.) *Daily Record/Sunday News*; Melissa Nann Burke
- Digging Up Dirt on Flowers — *Southtown Star* (Bartlett, Ill.); Duaa Eldeib
- Grants, Graft and Greed at Workforce WV — *Charleston* (W.V.) *Gazette*; Eric Eyre
- Trapped in Tamms — *Belleville* (Ill.) *News-Democrat*; George Pawlaczyk, Beth Hundsdorfer

Local Circulation/Weeklies:
Crossing the Line — *Lake Oswego* (Ore.) *Review*; Lee van der Voo, Nick Budnick

Judges' comments: *Lake Oswego Review* reporter Lee van der Voo and her colleagues didn't buy it when an investigation cleared the local police department after an officer complained of widespread corruption. Van der Voo, assisted by colleague Nick Budnick of sister weekly *The Portland Tribune*, spent a year investigating the investigation. The resulting three-part series showed how Lake Oswego Police Lt. Darryl Wrisley was forced to leave a job 17 years earlier after an internal investigation found he sexually assaulted a woman while on duty; that he was arrested on charges of assaulting his wife and driving drunk; and that powerful friends saved his career. They examined the charges, the officials who protected him, and the laws that prevented disclosure of his misdeeds by reviewing internal affairs investigations, job applications, background checks, memos, police reports and disciplinary files they sued to obtain.

Lake Oswego Review

FINALISTS:
- For Their Own Good — *Houston Press*; Chris Vogel
- Is It True (Not Really True) — *The Examiner Newspaper* (Beaumont, Texas); Jerry Jordan
- A Quiet Hell — *Houston Press*; Chris Vogel
- Wild Rides — *Houston Press*; Paul Knight

TELEVISION
Network/Syndicated:
The Swedish Crusade and The Cardinal — SVT (Sveriges (Swedish) public broadcasting service); Ali Fegan, Lars-Goran Svensson, Magnus Tingman, Johan Kallstrom and Mattias Jonsson

Judges' comments: These documentaries by reporter Ali Fegan and Producer Lars-Goran Svensson made huge headlines around the world. The team, following up on a rumor that an ultra-conservative Catholic group SSPX (Society of St. Pius X) denied the existence of the Holocaust and was able to confirm its link with extreme right-wing, neo-Nazi, Islamophobic groups in Sweden. They also found and got an interview with church head Bishop Richard Williamson, who told them there were no gas chambers and no Jews died in them. Then, just days after the first SVT documentary, the Vatican lifted a 20-year excommunication of Bishop Williamson. A second documentary detailed how the Vatican knew of Williamson's denial of the Holocaust before it reinstated him. Argentina withdrew the Bishop's residence visa – forcing him out of the country. He now faces criminal charges in Germany, where it is a crime to "incite racial hatred."

FINALISTS:
- The Cloning Scam — RBSTV/GLOBO-TV; Giovani Grizotti, Andrew Maciel, Flavia Varela, Giovana Giovannini
- Follow the Money: Congress & TARP Oversight — CBS News; Sharyl Attkisson, Chris Scholl, Bill Piersol, Rick Kaplan
- Ice Rink Pollution — Danger in the Air — ESPN—E:60; Bob Wallace, Andy Tennant, Robert Abbott, Michael Baltierra, Robbyn Footlick, Ben Houser, Martin Khodabakhshian, Yaron Deskalo, Max Brodsky, Jena Janovy, Rachel Nichols, Nate Hogan
- Inside the Financial Fiasco — NBC Dateline; David Corvo, Liz Cole, Allan Maraynes, Chris Hansen and NBC staff

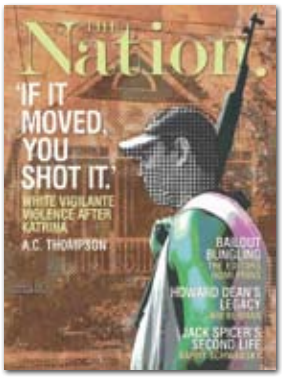
Top 20 markets:
(See Medal Winner Above)

FINALISTS:
- 33 Minutes to 34 Right — KMGH-Denver; Jeff Harris, Tony Kovaleski, Tom Burke, Arthur Kane, Jason Foster
- Deporting Justice — WFAA-Dallas; Byron Harris, Mark Smith, Sasha Gurevich, Kraig Kirchem, Billy Bryant, Greg Johnson
- Safety for Sale — WFAA-Dallas; Mark Smith, David Schecter, Kraig Kirchem
- Beyond the Verdict — KMSP-Minneapolis; Jeff Baillon, Brad Swagger, Eric Gedrose, Spencer Driskill

Below Top 20 markets:
State of Your Money — WTHR-Indianapolis; Bob Segall, Cyndee Hebert, Bill Ditton

Judges' comments: Bob Segall, Cyndee Hebert and Bill Ditton dug through 1,680,743 individual purchases and examined 17,000 documents by hand to analyze where Indiana taxpayers' dollars were being spent. But then, in a very compelling and entertaining way, they brought the story home by taking the role of the "outraged citizen." Segall took complicated concepts and made them understandable with great interviews and creative production. This series has resulted in massive spending cuts from the top down, multiple state budgetary reviews, a new governor's spending committee, a new state purchase process which has turned down many requests that used to be rubber-stamped, and out-of-state travel expenses by state employees has been slashed – in one office by 50%.

FINALISTS:
- Danger Creek — KGAN-Cedar Rapids, Iowa; April Samp, Teal Anderson, Tim Wilcox
- Failure to Report — WREG-Memphis; Keli Rabon, Jim O'Donnell
- Section 8 Scandal — WWL-New Orleans; Lee Zurik
- Weapon of Choice — KCTV-Kansas City; Ash-Har Quraishi, Chris Koeberl, Ken Ullery, Chris Henao



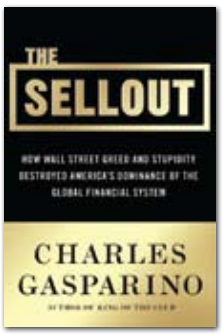
OTHER MEDIA

Magazine/Specialty:
Katrina's Hidden Race War and Body of Evidence —*The Nation* — A.C. Thompson

Judges' comments: A.C. Thompson, who works for the nonprofit investigative center ProPublica, conducted an examination that shed light on a sensitive subject and detailed a largely unexplored story: that white vigilantes in the New Orleans neighborhood of Algiers Point shot and threatened African-American men with impunity after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005. Thompson used medical and autopsy records, documentary footage and interviews with both alleged victims and perpetrators, including police officers, doctors and others. Thompson, whose work was supported by The Investigative Fund, documented a disturbing picture of violence in a compelling investigative story.

THE investigativefund

FINALISTS:
- Critical Condition — *The Chicago Reporter*; Jeff Kelly Lowenstein, Kimbriell Kelly, Jessica Young, Jennifer Fernicola
- Financial Traps — *Consumer Reports*; Andrea Rock, Robert Tiernan, Dylan Chang
- How the U.S. Funds the Taliban — *The Nation*; Aram Roston
- Plundering the Amazon — *Bloomberg News*; Michael Smith, Adriana Brasileiro



Book:
The Sellout by Charles Gasparino

Judges' comments: There have been many books about the economic crash, but "The Sellout" by investigative reporter Charles Gasparino stands out in large part because of the careful research. The book exposes the self-indulgent, risk-hungry, contempt-filled attitude of many of the Wall Street traders and bankers that led to the crisis and puts the most recent crisis into historical context. Gasparino's work goes beyond simple finger-pointing and presents, in a reader-friendly, compelling way, why the system collapsed and how current policies may be leading to another round of excessive risk-taking.

FINALISTS:
- Doctors of Deception by Linda Andre
- Gangs in the Garden City by Sarah Garland

Radio:
In the Kennel: Uncovering a Navy Unit's Culture of Abuse – Youth Radio; Rachel Krantz, Charlie Foster, Lissa Soep, Ellin O'Leary, Nishat Kurwa

Judges' comments: With this gripping, frightening and well-told tale, Youth Radio exposed an American sailor's abuse by his chief and fellow dog handlers in a canine unit in the Persian Gulf. The sailor had been hog-tied in a chair, left in a kennel spread with feces and forced to simulate sex acts on videotape. Beyond uncovering one sailor's suffering, Youth Radio's reporting revealed widespread psychological, sexual and physical abuses across the unit, a pattern the U.S. Navy had investigated, ultimately dropping the case, holding no one accountable and even promoting the unit's chief. Relying on the Navy's investigation and interviews with nearly two dozen sailors and officials involved in the case, the Youth Radio team found more than 90 incidents of hazing, solicitation of sex and embezzlement, and the suicide of the chief's second-in-command. The reports resulted in a call by the Chief of Naval Operations for a review of the Navy's response to the complaints, the forced retirement of the unit's chief and an investigation into the conduct of commissioned officers in the Bahrain chain of command.

FINALISTS:
- Dollar Politics — National Public Radio; Peter Overby, Andrea Seabrook, Brian Duffy
- Not Enough Money or Time to Defend Detroit's Poor — National Public Radio; Steve Drummond
- Pumps Under Pressure — KPCC; Molly Peterson, Cheryl Devall

Online:
Disposable Army — ProPublica, *Los Angeles Times* and ABC News; T. Christian Miller, Doug Smith, Francine Orr, Pratap Chatterjee, Avni Patel

Judges' comments: Civilian contractors have been part of the ongoing story of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But ProPublica's reporting with the *Los Angeles Times* and ABC News in the Disposable Army series is remarkable for its depth and complexity in digging into the American government's shabby treatment of the contractors who were injured like soldiers but have had to battle for basic care and benefits while the survivors of those who have perished have been left in poverty. The reporting team fought for two years to win access to the Labor Department's database of civilian contractors, combed through numerous court records and interviewed 200 contractors. The reporting led to a congressional hearing and a systemic overhaul by the Labor Department and the Pentagon.

FINALISTS:
- The Climate Change Lobby — The Center for Public Integrity & International Consortium of Investigative Journalists; David E. Kaplan, Gordon Witkin, Marina Walker Guevara, Susan Headden, Marianne Lavelle, David Donald, M.B. Pell, Marian Wilkinson, Ben Cubby, Flint Duxfield, Fernando Rodrigues, Marcelo Soares, William Marsden, Christina Larson, Murali Krishnan, Akiko Kashiwagi, Mitsuhiro Yoshida, Marianne

Lavelle, Kate Willson, Te-Ping Chen, Andrew Green, Matthew Lewis, Brigitte Alfter, Laura Cheek, Dan Ettinger, Aaron Mehta

- The Deadly Choices at Memorial — ProPublica; Sheri Fink
- EPA Fails to Inform Public About Weed-Killer in Drinking Water — Huffington Post Investigative Fund; Danielle Ivory, Lagan Sebert
- Investigating the Economic Structure Behind the Moldovan Regime — SCOOP; Vitalie Clugreanu, Dumitru Lazur, Irina Lazur, Stefan Candea, Vlad Lavrov

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

Student (All Media):
Wrongful Conviction, Unequal Compensation — New York City News Service; Clark Merrefield, Rosaleen Ortiz, Dan Macht, Joshua Cinelli, Matt Townsend, Steven Bronner

Judges' comments: In 26 states, if you are wrongfully convicted of a crime, you have the right to compensation for the time lost while incarcerated. But, in New York state, a team from the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism proved the compensation system is broken because the law set up as a "moral obligation" is full of loopholes that keep victims from getting what is due them. Using open records requests and large document searches, Clark Merrefield, Rosaleen Ortiz, Dan Macht, Joshua Cinelli, Matt Townsend, Steven Bronner of the New York City News Service built an array of databases to prove their case. With great difficulty they tracked these former prisoners, now on the fringes of society. The project, completed under the direction of instructor Andrew Lehren, was compelling and well-written.

FINALISTS:

- Childhood Lead Poisoning Rates in Chicago — ChicagoTalks.org; Matthew Hendrickson
- Faces of the Health Crisis — University of Southern California/Neon Tommy; Callie Schweitzer, Neon Tommy Team
- Loan Mods — ProPublica; Karen Y. Weise
- The Siren Song of Alcohol — The Daily Iowan; Danny Valentine, Melanie Kucern, Christie Aumer
- Wombs for Rent — PBS Now/Freelance; Habiba Nasheen, Hilke Schellmann, Maria Hinojosa

Breaking News Award:
Holes in the System — *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; John Diedrich, Gina Barton, Ben Poston, Ryan Haggerty, Daniel Bice

Judges' comments: Five reporters from the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* took the breaking news of the end of a 21-year hunt for a serial killer and turned it into a hunt of their own – a hunt to find the flaws in the Wisconsin criminal justice system that allowed Walter Ellis to kill a total of seven women. The reporters uncovered missing and faked DNA evidence in state databases that could have helped convict Ellis sooner. They also discovered Ellis had been a federal informant for a bribery investigation, allowing him to manipulate the criminal justice system while continuing his killing spree. The investigation also held the Milwaukee County Sheriff David A. Clarke, Jr. accountable. Clarke had called the state's handling of its DNA databank an "abomination," but the *Journal Sentinel* revealed his department had also failed to collect DNA samples from hundreds of felons in the Milwaukee area.

MILWAUKEE • WISCONSIN
JOURNAL SENTINEL

FINALISTS:

- Dallas Cowboys Practice Facility Collapses — *The Dallas Morning News*; Mede Nix, Brooks Egerton, Brandon Formby
- The Fort Hood Shootings — ABC News; Brian Ross, Joseph Rhee, Matthew Cole, Avni Patel, Vic Walter, Richard Esposito, Mary-Rose Abraham, Anna Schecter, Asa Eslocker, Angela Hill, Bob Woodruff, Pierre Thomas, Jim Hill, Christine Romo, Jason Ryan, Rhonda Schwartz, Brian Deer, Judd Parson, Sandra Tukh, Rehab El Buri, Justin Grant, Megan Chuchmach, Mark Shone, James Goldston, Jim Murphy, Jon Banner, David Reiter

To keep their watchdog teeth 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

Big business, big influence

Supreme Court case fuels need for transparency in donations, lobbying

By Charles N. Davis
National Freedom of Information Coalition

FOI advocates must demand more information on the many ways that corporations exercise undue influence not only on elections but also on legislation, policymaking and public discourse in general.

Outraged by the U.S. Supreme Court's opinion in *Citizens United*? Most journalists, already quite convinced of the linkage between money and corruption in politics, reacted with dismay to the opinion in what will forever be known as the "Hillary: The Movie" case.

At issue in *Citizens United* was whether federal campaign finance laws apply to a critical film about U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton intended to be shown in theaters and on demand to cable subscribers. After hearing initial arguments, the court ordered re-argument, to focus on the constitutionality of limiting corporations' independent spending during campaigns for the presidency and Congress.

The court held 5–4 that restrictions on independent corporate expenditures in political campaigns are unconstitutional, overruling key parts of campaign finance precedents, upending an area of the law in the process.

It's important to note, however, what the court left alone, and why. The court upheld the disclosure requirements in McCain-Feingold by an 8–1 margin (with Justice Thomas dissenting). They require that if a political ad is not authorized by a candidate or a political committee, the broadcast of the ad must say who is responsible for its content, plus the name and address of the group behind the ad.

Citizens United did not knock down the ban on corporations giving money directly to candidates or political parties. Nor did it open the door for corporate money to flow to parties or candidates beyond current contribution limits. *Citizens United* deals only with "independent expenditures," which by definition are not coordinated with parties or candidates.

Citizens United, then, ends bans on corporate spending for independent ads that contain statements expressly advocating the election or defeat of a candidate, and does little else.

The court's reasoning rested at least in part on its belief in transparency as an agent of accountability in political life, and it seemed quite convinced that sort of scrutiny already is taking place on a grand scale.

Writing for the majority, Justice Kennedy states: "The First Amendment protects political speech; and disclosure permits citizens and shareholders to react to the speech of corporate entities in a proper way. This transparency enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages."

Not so fast, I'd say. We have a lot of work to do if we are to provide the sort of openness the court already thinks exists.

As Ellen Miller of the Sunlight Foundation noted in an excellent blog post on the subject, there are more than 13,000 registered lobbyists working in Washington to influence our elected officials and government employees. These 13,000-plus lobbyists spent $2.5 billion on lobbying in the first three quarters of last year.

"All of this monied influence, and we have no idea who they meet with or what they discuss," Miller wrote.

She's so right: The corrosive thing about the money-driven influence peddling that masquerades for political discourse in our nation's capital is, well, the money. It confirms the worst cynicism people already have about the relationship between lawmakers and lobbyists, and indeed enshrines it with First Amendment protection.

But that cynicism can be reduced by the disclosure of lobbyist contacts – disclosure we don't currently have in Washington, or in many statehouses. Journalists and citizens should be able to track lobbyist meetings in the run-up to congressional hearings and floor votes.

Legislative contacts should be reported within 24 hours of any meeting. In the age of the Internet, the requirement that contributions by registered lobbyists be reported semiannually is an anachronism. It should be amended to require contributions be reported within 24 hours of the lobbyist contribution being made.

FOI advocates must demand more information on the many ways that corporations exercise undue influence not only on elections but also on legislation, policymaking and public discourse in general. Now that Big Business is the equivalent of a citizen, it's time they opened the books so we can see the influence game in full view.

Many corporations do their lobbying indirectly, through trade associations that reveal little about their sources of funding. The Federal Elections Commission should examine rules that require those associations to disclose the fees paid by each of their members and require publicly traded companies to disclose exactly how much they pay to belong to each of their various associations.

Corporations also indirectly seek to influence legislation and public opinion by bankrolling "front groups" – so-called "independent" nonprofit advocacy groups. Why not require publicly traded companies, at least, to reveal all of their payments to such organizations?

There is much work to be done, but already tremendous progress has been made toward providing the transparency the Supreme Court assumes is in place.

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

IRE budget includes new programs

By Mark Horvit
IRE Executive Director

To review the proposed budget, go to the IRE Web site: www.ire.org.

We are in the process of working on IRE's budget for 2010-11. The budget will be adopted during the next Board of Directors meeting, on June 10 in Las Vegas during our annual conference. The meeting is open, and members are welcome to attend; details on time and specific location will be posted in advance.

The $1.2 million spending plan projects revenues similar to this year in most categories. It includes some of our staple programs, including the Better Watchdog Workshop series, which in the coming year will be funded by a $100,000 grant from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation.

It also includes several new programs that IRE did not have when last year's budget was drafted. Among them:

- The Campus Coverage Project. Through a three-year, $500,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education, IRE has launched a program designed to teach investigative reporting skills to college and university students, with a strong focus on the tools needed to provide better watchdog coverage of their campus administrations. The project is being conducted in partnership with the Education Writers Association and the Student Press Law Center.
- Bilingual Border Workshops. Through a $75,000 two-year grant from the Ford Foundation, IRE is conducting a series of four workshops focusing on issues important to journalists covering communities on the U.S.-Mexico border. This grant also includes funding to allow us to continue holding Ethnic Media Workshops in New York City.
- Community Partnership Pilot Program. Through a $40,000 grant from the McCormick Foundation, IRE will be working with four news organizations in two cities. We will provide in-newsroom training and follow-up training to help the selected news organizations improve their local watchdog coverage.

The budget calls for membership income to hold steady in the coming year. Membership has stabilized and, in the past month, seen an increase. Similarly, we are forecasting income generated by the database library, in-newsroom training and several other programs to remain at the same levels as this year.

IRE's fiscal year runs from July 1, 2010, to June 30, 2011.

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 "CAR2010: Don't stop the learning," On the Road Training blog, http://ow.ly/1oDRC

By Jaimi Dowdell
IRE Training Director

IRE Resource Center staff have been busy adding tipsheets from the CAR conference: http://bit.ly/blUKxv. Handouts include information on forensic accounting, Web scraping, data on deadline, Twitter and more. In addition to this, many of the wonderful presenters and attendees have been sharing their tips, data and tutorials on the NICAR list and via Twitter. Tweets about the conference used two main hashtags: #nicar2010 and #nicar.

Our friends at the Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism at Arizona State University blogged about various sessions. Their coverage is online at http://bit.ly/dwgYpZ. Photos from Ben Welsh of *The Los Angeles Times* are online at Flickr. Search "NICAR2010."

If you weren't able to attend the CAR conference or are ready for more learning, here are some resources to keep you moving:

- QGIS mapping tutorial from Tim Henderson, *The Journal News* (White Plains, NY): http://bit.ly/aU3b9G.
- "Good Habits When Making Software" from Brian Boyer, *The Chicago Tribune*: http://bit.ly/dmIBMq.
- Jacob Fenton, Investigative Reporting Workshop, has created a page for Web-only conference resources. It includes front- and back-end code from Fenton's session about getting started with Google maps flash API using Flex and GeoDjango: http://bit.ly/bsmoSF.

continued on page 35

Shawn Rocco | News & Observer

Thomas Hicks, former Gov. Mike Easley's lawyer, answers questions after the State Board of Elections ruling. "This matter needs to be completely reviewed by the agencies that have the resources to do it," Hicks said.

Five lessons from investigating a governor

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

A key set of documents that helped unlock a big part of our story relates to records of private flights taken by the governor. Since our first stories ran last spring, we've seen other news organizations use these same types of records to produce compelling stories.

The News & Observer disclosed new information during the past year about the actions of North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley, a Democrat who ended his second term in January 2009. The coverage, much of which flowed from a two-part series called "Executive Privilege," led to the resignation of the chancellor, the provost and the chairman of the board at North Carolina State University; the firing of the governor's wife from the university; a $100,000 fine against the Easley campaign committee for breaking election laws; calls for new laws and ethics reforms; and ongoing federal and state investigations.

The state's elections board, made up of three Democrats and two Republicans (a majority appointed by Easley), reviewed that evidence about flights and home repairs and referred their case to a state prosecutor.

An inner-circle aide to the governor was indicted on 57 corruption counts. In April, he cut a deal and pleaded guilty to one count of tax evasion and pledged his cooperation in the ongoing federal probe.

We learned five things that might be helpful to others:

1. Take a look at Flightwise (www.flightwise.com).

A key set of documents that helped unlock a big part of our story relates to records of private flights taken by the governor. Since our first stories ran last spring, we've seen other news organizations use these same types of records to produce compelling stories.

Because a state trooper always traveled with Easley, we knew there would be records about whom he was flying with and where he was going. We first sought the records in 2005, again in 2007 and then at the end of Easley's last term. But we were always denied access because of a provision in state law that allows for secrecy around "security plans." Without seeing the records, we were unsure if the law protected them. Once he left office, we appealed to the new governor, who decided to release the records.

We also received all records kept by troopers of "events" they attended with the governor, eventually getting roughly 200 paper copies. They were not perfect. Plans can change. Troopers make errors. And they don't cover everything. So we viewed every document as being inaccurate and then tried to verify it prior to deciding if we would use it in publication. We built a database of all state flights, for example, and used it as a cross-reference. This process also helped identify gaps in the records, including an entire year that was missing. That gap became part of the ongoing story.

In verifying whether private flights occurred, we found great benefit in Flightwise, a flight tracking service formerly known as fboweb.com. We found it to be superior to the more well known Flight Aware tracking service for two reasons: cost and depth. The Flightwise site allowed us to download flight data by aircraft tail numbers going back to 2001. We also could download data by destination or departure airports going back to 2001.

For example, we were interested in the governor's second home in a coastal village called Southport. Flightwise allowed us to download all flights between Raleigh and Southport in set periods of time. These downloads were all covered by one fee: $24.95 a month. Even with airports that see lots of commercial traffic, you can download the data and then easily tease out all private flights.

2. Consider seeking waivers on motor vehicle records.

One aspect of our story involved two vehicles the governor's family was driving but did not own.

While federal and state rules have become difficult to navigate when it comes to tying license plates on cars to ownership, we were able to make cross-references with tax records on personal property, which did not show anyone in the governor's family listing a vehicle for personal property tax purposes. In our case, the vehicles that were being driven by the governor's family had stickers on them listing dealer names in cities far from Raleigh.

This raised questions. How could someone be driving a vehicle but not listing it for taxes? Why would these dealers have these cars garaged in the governor's home, far from their dealerships? Eventually, our efforts to interview the car dealers led to waivers of the privacy provisions involved. We also were able to publicly confirm ownership information from our state motor vehicle agency.

3. Keep reporting on officials after they've left office.

One thing we acknowledged from the beginning was that Easley would no longer be in office when much of our reporting would be published. While we had reported on various cabinet-level systemic failures during the Easley administration, some readers wondered why we hadn't published what we did about Easley personally while he was still in office. We were patient with such inquiries, the obvious answer being that the records and other information in most cases were not available. The N&O sued Easley in his last year in office, for example, over destroying

Ethan Hyman | News & Observer

McQueen Campbell, center, was named to the N.C. State board by Gov. Easley. Campbell boasted of his influence with the administration.

public records. Also, some of the actions taken did not happen or were not apparent until literally the final year and even months of his tenure.

But some episodes we have reported on were several years old. In no instance did we let the age of the information affect how we treated it, which was a good rule.

The broader issue is this: Resist any tendency to set aside or discount looking into public officials if they are no longer in their position. Sources open up. Information becomes available. And we obtained private records almost certainly unavailable when Easley still was in power, including closing documents from a real estate deal that show he received a $137,000 discount at closing. If the reporting is solid, it is always relevant. Readers have responded to us in far greater numbers with appreciation for staying with the story and not letting it drop.

Good stories are good stories.

4. Publish their words.

On several occasions throughout our reporting, we found it useful to publish key exchanges with officials so that readers could judge the actual questions and answers.

This had a tremendous effect on the reporting, both in terms of transparency and of letting readers follow along as questions were raised and answered, or not.

In one telling example, three extended outtakes helped to cement how versions of stories were shifting. This approach also highlighted crucial exchanges where it was clear that an official was dodging an answer.

5. The power of the timeline.

One of the great disappointments throughout our reporting was stiff and constant resistance from the subjects involved, including the chancellor and provost at N.C. State and the former governor. We made efforts to seek comment throughout a two-month period prior to publication of our two-part series in May. They constantly refused.

And so a crucial part of our reporting focused on the construction of a timeline of events, backed up online with a document supporting each dated entry. One of the arcs we were covering was about the creation of a position for the governor's wife at N.C. State. In written documents, the story put forward was fairly simple – that the provost of the university had decided on his own to hire the first lady of the state to work under him in a new position that he created. The sequence of events as outlined with phone records, appointment documents and so forth in the timeline was difficult to reconcile.

The timeline made it virtually impossible to believe that story.

The records showed, for example, that he wasn't the actual provost at the time – but he was filling in as the interim provost and that job interviews were already under way to replace him when the job for the first lady was created.

Prior to publication, we received complete refusals of any comment from the governor, first lady, provost and chancellor as well as a denial of any involvement from the chairman of the board of trustees (who also was a friend of the governor's).

We published what we knew, including the timeline. It was too powerful to be ignored. Within days, resignations followed and the FBI began serving subpoenas. Eventually, e-mail messages were released that showed the governor and his friend, the chairman of the board, were directly involved in creating the job for the first lady.

A summary of our reporting is at http://blogs.newsobserver.com/content/executive-privilege.

Andy Curliss is a member of the investigative team at the News & Observer.

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MEDIA
MASH-UPS
New models of collaboration

Collaborations spread quickly, giving stories a broader reach

By Brant Houston
University of Illinois

When it comes to collaborations among investigative journalists, February 2010 may have been the biggest media mash-up month in history.

The Center for Public Integrity, National Public Radio, and five state and regional investigative centers teamed up to reveal the lack of effective response to sexual assaults on campuses across America.

The Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University and Frontline co-produced a piece that exposed the abysmal working conditions inside regional air carriers and also published a piece with The Watchdog Institute in San Diego and ABC on stimulus money for renewable energy going overseas.

Both the Center for Public Integrity and the Center for Investigative Reporting joined forces to look at mismanagement of funds by the Department of Homeland Security.

In partnership with *The Times-Picayune* and Frontline, ProPublica continued its series into police misdeeds in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

But those were just a few of the collaborative stories that month and only an indication of the major, ongoing change in the way that investigative reporting is being carried out in the United States and abroad.

Mostly led by nonprofit news organizations, collaborations are increasing quickly among local and regional newsrooms. Simultaneously, Web, print and broadcast partnerships are being explored and forged in cities and states. Globally, investigative journalists not only are joining forces to pursue a story across one border, but also creating regional projects across continents.

The Web has made all of this easier, both in sharing information while working on an investigation and in the distribution of the stories. Online tool such as wikis or Google documents can help journalists from different organizations or regions centralize their information. Once completed, the investigation can be seen or heard anywhere in the world.

And the wider use of databases also encourages collaborations by making it possible for one organization to obtain a large national government database, slice it into regional subsets and distribute to other newsrooms for localized stories.

As David Cohn of the investigative online venture Spot.Us, has suggested, "On the chess board of journalism, content is King (the most important piece) but collaboration is Queen (the most powerful piece)."

Better content, broader distribution

While a strong stimulus for collaboration has been the pragmatic need to pool resources for lengthy and sometimes costly investigative pieces, journalists also are realizing collaborations result in more varied, richer content.

For example, Maggie Mulvihill, a founder of the New England Center for Investigative Reporting, said other centers' findings during work on the Campus Sexual Assault project motivated her to dig harder for information in New England.

"The generosity and collegiality shown by all the journalists towards getting the most powerful package of stories possible was also pretty inspiring," she said. "While we are still in a competitive business, this proves we can find a way to share data and contacts and still produce a great piece of journalism."

Journalists also see how collaborations ensure a broader distribution to other news organizations and the ensuing deeper impact.

"You can't beat this collaboration thing as a force multiplier," said Gordon Witkin, managing editor at the Center for Public Integrity. "Collaboration is giving us reach and clout we could never achieve on our own."

The state centers had their work distributed locally and regionally. Rita Hibbard of InvestigateWest in Seattle reported that its work on the campus sexual assault project ran on Seattlepi.com, was published in *The Spokesman-Review*, and was heard on KUOW-FM in Seattle. The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism's work ran in many state newspapers, and other centers' work received wide distribution.

TIPS FOR COLLABORATIONS

1. Decide whether collaboration is truly needed.
2. Decide who will lead and coordinate the effort.
3. Bring in every partner at the beginning of the collaboration (no playing catch-up).
4. Be clear on what each partner can and will bring to the story (content? media? distribution?).
5. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each partner (experience? skills? resources? unique knowledge?).
6. Communicate routinely on progress.
7. Avoid duplication of efforts.
8. Decide who will do legal review.
9. Decide who will do follow-up stories.
10. If it works, make it routine.
11. Have a graceful exit strategy for partners who can't perform.

But the new way is still evolving. Long-time investigative journalists grew up in a highly competitive environment so they're more than cautious about sharing ideas and sources. To some, openness seems a bit naïve and utopian.

"If you're an aggressive journalist, accept that this is going to feel a little weird... we're used to competing, not collaborating," Witkin said.

Newspapers and nonprofit journalism centers also have been slow sometimes to involve ethnic media and citizens in their reporting, fearing errors and omissions from those who have not received journalism training and do not have significant experience in the profession.

At the same time, the new journalists who come from computer science backgrounds and a Web world of tweets and wikis may see so-called "legacy journalists" as stodgy and out of touch with the "here comes everybody" digital world.

Yet more and more the differences are blurring, such as at the Sunlight Foundation, where journalists embrace the new techniques and programmers learn to appreciate the standards for quality and credibility.

Key differences

It's not that collaborations are new. Frontline and the Center for Investigative Reporting together have produced stories for decades. In 2000, more than a dozen newspapers formed two different groups that examined the Florida ballot results of the 2000 U.S. presidential election.

In 1997, the Center for Public Integrity formed its International Consortium of Investigative Journalists to do stories that disclosed international scandals while at the same time providing material for specific countries. In 2003, the Global Investigative Journalism Network became a vehicle for journalists to find and aid each other on multi-national stories.

Of course, IRE itself set the standard for collaboration in 1976 when journalists from nearly 30 news organizations created the Arizona Project after the murder of IRE member Don Bolles. Despite having some industry leaders disparagingly refer to the project as "gang-bang journalism," the team successfully completed and expanded work on corruption in Arizona that Bolles had under way when he was killed.

But what is different now is the extraordinary number of collaborations. They now are more the rule than the exception – so much so that more than 20 nonprofit newsrooms have formed the Investigative News Network to help nurture the growth of nonprofits and to distribute their work.

As in the examples from February, the collaborations can be partnerships between two organizations or a consortium of several newsrooms. They can involve nonprofit and for-profit news organizations, traditional print and broadcast and new media Web sites, university classes and metropolitan newspapers, and for-profit ethnic media.

How to collaborate

Because of the multitude of possible ways of working together, journalists are focusing as much on how to collaborate well as on whether to collaborate at all.

"I think one of the most important elements of a successful collaboration is having a mutual understanding of what collaboration means," said Joe Bergantino, another founder of the New England center. "By definition, of course, it means that the partners are all contributing something. What that 'something' is needs to be clearly spelled out ahead of time."

Bergantino suggested the understanding should be put in writing so that when there are multiple partners involved "everyone can actually see what they're agreeing to and give it some careful thought."

Bergantino and others emphasize that it is crucial to avoid collaboration in name only. "It's also important to spell out the specific advantages and potential downsides to collaborations so that they can be fully discussed and vetted," he said.

Witkin and others suggest bringing in prospective partners at the beginning of the collaboration so that the nuts-and-bolts details can be dealt with right away. Those details can include finances, deadlines, credit, lawyers, fact-checking and standards. "There are all sorts of logistics to deal with," Witkin says. "The further you go down the road alone, the tougher it gets to make everything work in the end."

Generally, the participants in the campus sexual assault project agreed that they learned during the project that it's never too early to involve everyone and to check in often on progress and findings. In particular, the state centers, which have small staffs, realized that they needed as much lead time as possible in order to meet deadlines.

Global obstacles

On a global level, the hurdles for collaborations can be even greater.

"There are plenty of challenges, to be sure – financing these complex, multinational investigations, working in different cultures, with different languages and, sometimes, different standards," says David Kaplan, who directs the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

ICIJ has been successful in numerous multinational stories, however, including ones on tobacco smuggling, climate change politics and the privatization of water. The Center for Investigative Reporting recently did an international story with several partners on the carbon trading market and climate change. In Europe, journalists have worked on cross-border collaborations about the misuse of farm subsidies and human trafficking.

"The good news is that there is big demand for quality content," Kaplan says. "Editors around the world recognize that they need in-depth stories that dig into the major issues of the day."

Journalists outside the United States also encounter different levels of freedom of information and physical threats on collaborative stories. While a U.S. journalist may worry about libel suits, journalists in Asia, Africa, Latin America or Eastern Europe often must deal with threats of violence or death.

Yet those journalists persist in doing investigative stories. For example, members of the Forum for African Investigative Journalism already have collaborated on stories about pharmaceutical industry abuses and, despite the inherent dangers, are doing investigations into government corruption throughout the continent.

In these efforts, they may be confirming what legendary editor Bob Greene, who led the Arizona Project, suggested was one of the strongest reasons to collaborate on investigative reporting: Collaboration is an insurance policy, because you can't get rid of the story by getting rid of one reporter.

Brant Houston is the Knight Chair in Investigative Reporting at the University of Illinois. He also serves on the boards of several state centers and is the chair of the steering committee for the Investigative News Network. He is a co-founder of the Global Investigative News Network.

HOW TO GET ALONG
Learn newsroom culture, build trust and agree on a detailed battle plan

By Stephen Engelberg
ProPublica

> **"People, I just want to say, you know, can we all get along?"**
>
> **– Rodney King, after the acquittal of police officers accused of beating him prompted a wave of rioting in Los Angeles.**

In the post-apocalyptic landscape that is American journalism, collaboration among competing news organizations seems a natural development. Across the country, metro dailies that used to send separate reporters to the governor's news conference now operate joint bureaus in state capitals. To many news organizations, it no longer makes sense to pay multiple reporters to serve as stenographers at routine events.

That logic is unassailable. But in the past two years, a number of publications have tried something bolder: Collaborating on investigative projects with outsiders. ProPublica has participated in more joint efforts than any other news organization in the country, and it has given us a unique perspective on the pleasures and frustrations of working with others.

During the past two years, we have published 225 stories in 49 different venues. Some were arrangements in which we provided stories. A fair number were true collaborations in which editors and reporters joined forces to create stories that could not have existed otherwise. On several occasions, we placed stories in multiple outlets at the same time.

From this work, we've derived some basic lessons about how to work well with others. Some are obvious – clear, direct and honest communication is essential. Other lessons are more subtle. When Paul Steiger and I launched ProPublica down the road of collaboration, we expected to grapple with differences among editors in how to write and present stories. A *Newsweek* cover story, a piece for "Slate" and a segment on National Public Radio were going to require different approaches and thinking. We expected that our staff would be learning skills as they worked with partners and were prepared to defer to producers at, say, "60 Minutes" on how to frame stories for their medium.

But we discovered that the differences among news organizations were even more profound than we anticipated. Every newsroom has a unique culture which infuses its decision-making. It influences every aspect of reporters' and editors' work, shaping what gets pursued, how it is presented and when it is published. Collaborations are a process in which partners come to understand each other's fundamental values. This is why the first joint story is invariably the most complicated. It's a bit like driving to a new destination with a MapQuest printout on your lap. The return trip always seems to take half the time.

To a great extent, a joint project is a lot like working with another department in a big newsroom, but with a lot more potential pitfalls.

SOME LESSONS

Hands across the water

At their core, collaborations are about building trust. Reporters trained to compete fiercely for every scrap of news have a natural suspicion of outsiders. We have found that initial phases are crucial in making a collaboration work. If possible, the first meeting to discuss a joint project should take place in person. Conference calls are a lousy way to launch a relationship. While newsrooms have become much more open to change, there is an understandable skepticism about working with outsiders. What if a ProPublica reporter working with our organization stumbles across the next Watergate and takes it to another news organization? What if we get sued? What if we disagree about how to write the lead?

Most issues turn on a core question: Can we trust you? We try to offer commonsense answers in these initial meetings. All information gathered through a joint effort belongs to the collaboration. We don't take information from one partner and give it to another. We have robust preparations for fighting lawsuits. Feel free to talk to our general manager about how it would work. There are a thousand ways to write every lead. Seven hundred of them are pretty good. We'll eventually agree on one.

In the Internet, it is argued that the wisdom of the crowd limits deceptive behavior. A company that deceives customers gets a low rating and loses business. Those principles apply to collaborative journalism. We behave ethically because it's the right thing to do. But it's also in our self interest. ProPublica's goal – writing stories that prompt change – can be best realized by publishing with others. That requires a pristine reputation for honest dealings.

Credit and presentation are issues that should be clarified at the outset. Every organization has different rules about bylines, mention of ProPublica's role and Web links. It is tempting to leave these details to later. Don't. Late requests for things that can't be done – "but we NEVER link to another Web site" – are much worse than having a frank exchange at the beginning.

Marching forward together

So you've agreed on an area to pursue, now what?

We've found that the key to success is creating a stable system to manage the project. We ask a collaborating organization to name an editor in charge. That person should have the authority to direct the project and make day-to-day decisions. Organizations don't make joint projects work; people do. Reporters need clear direction as they pursue complex issues. The editors need to talk regularly to assess what we've found and where we're going. If possible, disagreements over how to proceed should be resolved among the reporters. They should be sharing notes from interviews and in regular contact about what they're doing. At this stage in a joint project, it's almost impossible to over communicate. E-mail is efficient, but using the phone will help avoid misunderstandings.

The contact between editors needs to be routine and consistent. Investigative stories have a way of morphing as the reporters turn up new facts. You want everyone to know when a crucial aspect of a story is confirmed, or disproved.

Writing as a process

Creating an investigative story from a mass of notes is hard even when it involves a single organization. Doing so between two or more organizations is exponentially harder. This is an area in which news organizations substantially differ. How much do we need to publish a story? Do we want to break off a news nugget now and do a fuller story later? There is no universal standard to settle any of these questions. Ten years ago, investigative reporters aimed to do multipage, multiday series of stories. With the shrinkage of all publications and the quickening of news cycle created by the Web, that model is fading. ProPublica has done some multipart series, notably a recent four-part effort in conjunction with the New Orleans Times-Picayune. But we understand that journalism is shifting and that what you put on the air or in print is only a piece of a fuller package that unfolds online.

The reporters should agree on what story they are trying to tell. And the editors should decide how much space (or air time) will be allotted. Then, the real fun can begin.

Everyone has a different method for writing stories. Some people can sit side-by-side with a collaborator. Others need to put on sound-dampening headphones to shut out their surroundings. A team needs to find a method that works for all.

One thing we've learned at ProPublica: Editors need to review the drafts as they go back and forth. Things don't always get better when they're re-written. And failed drafts contain valuable clues to what's going wrong, from holes in the reporting to misconceptions about what story we're trying to tell. Collaborative stories will take some time to hammer out. Keep on overcommunicating.

ProPublica's reporters are drawn largely from print backgrounds. When working with television or radio, we allow experienced hands to take the lead in writing the script. A program like ABC's "20/20," with which we did our story on the treatment of contractors injured in Afghanistan and Iraq, has a particular tone and visual vocabulary. We aren't shy when it comes to making suggestions about fairness, balance or accuracy. But we understand that the decision to work with someone else carries with it an implicit acceptance of how their medium tells stories.

Crossing the finish line

Getting an investigative story written is always an intense process. If possible, allow lots of time to get the final steps right. It was my experience producing projects within a single organization that speed kills. This is even more true when working across organizational boundaries. You will have two sets of lawyers reviewing the story as well as the leaderships of both organizations. There are myriad last-minute details for the Web, graphics and the story itself. Give yourself time to catch the inevitable dropped balls. Locking in a publication date is a valuable tool for project management, but pick a date that includes ample slack time. My rule of thumb as an editor at *The New York Times* and *The Oregonian* was that everything took twice as long as anticipated. On a joint project, that might be more like three times as long.

One area that needs to be coordinated is Web strategy and publicity. ProPublica has a full-time person who launches our stories into the world. We do everything we can to maximize the impact of a story, from providing it to bloggers to arranging appearances for reporters on other media. We have found that doing this right can make an enormous difference but it takes time.

The bottom line

Collaboration is worth it. Yes, you give up some autonomy when you collaborate. But the insights and resources you gain far outweigh the headaches, even on the initial efforts. There will always be a place for spirited competition among news organizations. Increasingly, though, collaboration offers a way to expand the depth and breadth of journalism.

Stephen Engelberg is managing editor of ProPublica. Previously, he served as a managing editor of the Portland Oregonian and the investigative editor of The New York Times.

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

By Robert J. Rosenthal
Center for Investigative Reporting

Collaboration in California gives investigative stories greater reach and impact

The first thing you have to decide about collaboration is this: Do you really want to do it? Because if you go into one half-hearted, it will fail. It is a difficult, complicated and organization-altering strategy. It is all about interpersonal relationships, people (with egos) giving up control, and the reward of getting a better story. Besides, you might get to tell a story via a new medium and reach a bigger audience.

In today's world of journalism, collaboration is crucial to success – a central piece of the new model for growth and survival.

In today's world of journalism, collaboration is crucial to success – a central piece of the new model for growth and survival.

In our transformative and often demoralizing time as journalists, the crucial adhesive to collaboration is the story. Editors and reporters – in our case, investigative reporters – still react in this age of technology with their guts: We all know when a great and challenging story is in our sights. I am very optimistic about our future because of the openness to collaboration, something that barely existed even two years ago.

Some context is crucial to understanding the necessity of collaboration.

Until I left big newspapers – where I managed or ran departments and newsrooms at various levels for more than 20 years – I was not interested in collaborating with outside organizations because, frankly, it was a pain in the butt. And it was difficult enough to get departments within my own newsroom to work together.

But our world has tipped.

United to solve a murder

In late August 2007, I got a call from Sandy Close, the venerable and formidable editor of New America Media. Just a few weeks earlier, Chauncey Bailey, editor of *The Oakland Post,* had been shot to death as he walked to work.

She, along with other Bay Area journalists who knew him – including Dori Maynard, Linda Jue and Martin Reynolds – wanted to make sure his murder would not be forgotten.

I was unemployed at the time, and Sandy asked if I would come to a meeting of journalists and listen to the options and discussion about how they might respond. It was a long and complicated meeting. At least 40 journalists attended. It was emotional, sad and fragmented, but held together because of the outrage over the killing of a fellow journalist, and friend to many in the room.

The outcome was The Chauncey Bailey Project, a tremendously successful collaboration. Bay Area news outlets, working in print, television, radio and online, joined forces to share information and resources with the goal of continuing Bailey's reporting into a criminal organization in Oakland – reporting that had apparently led to his death – and to report on the circumstances of his murder.

To manage the collaboration, there was an agreement that someone had to be in charge. I was asked, mainly because I had no vested interest in any single organization. Getting to the bottom of the murder was our common goal. The reporters stayed on the investigation for about two years, publishing dozens of stories that revealed a conspiracy to kill Bailey while raising serious questions about the Oakland Police Department's handling of the investigation. Full coverage remains online at www.chaunceybaileyproject.org.

Why did it work? Many people and organizations wanted to be part of the story. But no one organization would have had the resources or staff available to devote full time to the investigation.

Challenges included learning the different skills of reporters, figuring out who could and could not work together. Figuring out publication times, who would publish the story first and who would get credit when newspapers, TV and radio stations, Web sites and weeklies were involved. How would we communicate? How big would the loop be on crucial, explosive and even potentially dangerous discoveries? How would we vet and edit for libel, accuracy and a host of other issues to make sure the investigative reporting was the highest quality?

All of those issues were worked out over time. Early on, we had some major stories in our hands and let them slip away because it took a while to organize and focus the reporters, most of whom were working full time for other news organizations. Ultimately, the core

reporting team emerged. Tom Peele, Bob Butler and Mary Fricker began working out of the offices of the Center for Investigative Reporting, which I joined in 2008 as executive director. The key editing was often done by Mike Oliver and Michelle Maitre of the Bay Area News Group.

One of the most important stories done by The Chauncey Bailey Project was the broadcast and detailed written account of a secretly videotaped jailhouse exchange among members of the criminal group, Your Black Muslim Bakery.

The existence of the tape had been previously reported, but we knew the broadcast of it would be explosive. There were two TV stations involved in CPB – one with a 10 p.m. show, one with an 11 p.m. show – multiple newspapers from the Bay Area News group, radio stations, Web-based organizations and weekly papers.

Everyone wanted it first. The solution was simultaneous release of the video and print stories on everyone's Web sites, timed to the first television broadcast at 10 p.m. The next morning, front pages throughout the Bay Area had the print story, and it was all over radio, TV and on multiple Web sites. It was total saturation news coverage – all attributed to The Chauncey Bailey Project.

Growth through collaboration

When I joined CIR, I knew that if the 31-year-old organization with an admirable history but small shadow were to grow, a crucial strategy would be collaboration. I knew I was going to hear frequently many reasons why collaboration was not a good idea. But I was committed to collaboration on reporting in every medium and just as importantly, to collaboration with as many distribution partners as possible.

I was no longer going to put myself in a work environment where the first thing I heard was why new ideas were not going to work, and I had zero patience for the corporate think I had been part of as a top editor for a more than a decade. That kind of thinking slowed, stalled, gummed up, and made almost impossible nearly every innovative approach I had seen newsrooms attempt.

I had witnessed the philosophical and spiritual disconnect between the business and editorial sides of the newspaper industry. One focused on profit, the other on the journalism. I came to believe that the new model had to be based on an agreement, a meshing, a symbiosis between the business and the journalism, the lack of which had helped create the disdain and distrust I had witnessed in the old model.

In the case of CIR, I had no choice. I had to become the publisher, the money guy, and the person responsible for creating and sustaining an editorial vision. So collaboration was relatively easy but painfully slow.

At CIR and with our California Watch project, the business of distribution is based on multiple partners, multiple collaborations and an upfront core value rooted in quality investigative reporting. That's what we can offer. It is not based on exclusivity, although we don't rule that out, but the norm has been inclusion and attaining the biggest audience possible with multiple partners in multiple mediums.

Here's an example. Our senior correspondent at CIR is the respected international and environmental reporter Mark Schapiro. At his core, he is a long-form writer with great knowledge and range on issues related to the environment. Carbon offsets and cap and trade have been the focus of his recent work; it is a dense, complicated and very important story.

How do we distribute his work? Our Web site is not a destination. So we reached out to multiple partners and offered a great story. By the end of 2009, after months of difficult, challenging reporting, Schapiro's hard work on this obtuse subject paid off. In a span of a few months, he had a story in *Mother Jones* magazine, a cover piece in *Harper's* magazine, a two-part series on Marketplace, a PBS News Hour segment, and, in collaboration with Frontline/World, a co-branded Web site called Carbon Watch, whose central element is an interactive map with a series of first-class short videos that grew out of Schapiro's reporting for *Mother Jones* about carbon offsets in a Brazilian rainforest. He is also working with Frontline. We are also working with USC Annenberg School of Journalism on an experimental game-based storytelling initiative using avatars.

With California Watch, which was launched in fall 2009, we already have published stories with more than 40 news organizations, including ethnic media, traditional newspapers, public radio, local television and online news sites. Initially, connections with the publishing partners were personal, and phone calls and meetings work better than e-mails. As we've pushed more stories, e-mails work but phone calls are faster.

One of the most innovative collaborations California Watch and CIR are involved in is with KQED public radio. We are splitting salary and expenses for Michael Montgomery, an exceptional reporter and radio producer, to work full time with us on stories from inception to finish. They are then broadcast on KQED's The California Report, which airs on 28 public radio stations around the state; some reports are also broadcast nationally through NPR or shows like Marketplace.

One commitment we made early on, as we attempt to cover the state of California, was to partner with ethnic media. *La Opinion* has run several of our stories, translating them into Spanish and making that translation available for others. New America Media has translated stories into Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese, and distributed them through their California network to ethnic media outlets statewide. We look forward to deepening this fruitful collaboration with New America Media, which will help us reach the increasingly diverse population of the state.

In another form of collaboration, this one designed to expand our reporting capacity, we are collaborating on investigative reporting projects with students at USC Annenberg and UC-Berkley's Graduate School of Journalism. A crucial job we want to fill in our new model is the collaboration editor, a job title I never saw in any news organization I worked in.

I got up early this morning to finish this essay. California Watch put out a story last evening on the increase of maternal mortality rates in California. As I write this, I've seen the story on the Web sites of newspapers across the state, seen a video version on KGO-TV, heard a radio version on KQED, and saw the story on a diverse range of sites: Alternet, NewAmerica Media and Oakland Local.

And I just went out to get the *San Francisco Chronicle* from my driveway. There's a big headline over the lead story:

"Maternal death rate up sharply
State's dramatic rise coincides with
C-section increase, task force says"

It's the California Watch story, and there's also a front-page reefer sending readers to California Watch for more information.

This collaboration stuff is not theory. It's happening. It's working. It's essential.

Robert J. Rosenthal joined the Center for Investigative Reporting as executive director in 2008. Previously, he worked at The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The *Philadelphia Inquirer and at the San Francisco Chronicle.*

FORMER RIVALS SHARE CONTENT IN OHIO

By Benjamin Marrison
The Columbus Dispatch

As reporting staffs shrink, news organizations are looking for ways to maximize resources to best serve readers.

Thousands of stories, columns, editorials, graphics and photos have been shared through the cooperative.

One new tactic: Ohio's largest newspapers have been sharing stories with former rivals. "The Ohio Revolution," also known as the "Ohio Rebellion" in some quarters, has been highly successful in allowing competitors to share their best stories with a wider audience of readers.

More than two years ago, the eight newspapers in the Ohio News Organization – with combined Sunday circulations of about 1.7 million – created a secure Web site where we share all of our content. Such cooperation was unthinkable at one time, given how aggressively we competed and the fact we come from a mix of family-owned and chain-owned newspapers.

We agreed to share everything. That means any story that's in *The Plain Dealer* on Tuesday, for example, can be in any of the other OHNO papers the same day. Thousands of stories, columns, editorials, graphics and photos have been shared through the cooperative. While we share our stories in print, any paper using a competitor's story must direct online readers to the originating newspaper's Web site.

Not satisfied with simply sharing completed stories, the OHNO newspapers have worked to leverage our collective resources in joint projects. The first test of that relationship was to collaborate on statewide polling. We work together on the questions, share the costs and run them in all papers on the same day. The expertise in our newsrooms has made the process smooth and efficient and the end result quite powerful.

Now, we're doing joint reporting projects. The first was a relatively simple collection of stories in 2009 about the effects of the H1N1 flu on Ohio and a helpful primer to guide readers toward the best possible health practices during the pandemic.

We developed a story list, divvied up the assignments and shared all of the stories via a secure Web site established exclusively for OHNO content and available only to the eight members: *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, *The Cincinnati Enquirer, The Columbus Dispatch, Dayton Daily News, Akron Beacon-Journal, The Blade* in Toledo, *The Repository* in Canton and *The Vindicator* in Youngstown.

Success! Collectively, we turned around several newspaper pages worth of consumer-oriented stories, photos and graphics in record time compared with the time it would have taken any one newspaper to report and write it. Readers loved it.

Columbus Dispatch illustration

Kevin Riley, the editor at Dayton, summed up the eight-paper relationship this way: "We've developed a new kind of journalism in our state, one where the newspapers work for the greater good of Ohioans rather than being pre-occupied with each city's parochial interests."

Digging Deeper Into Public Records

Given our successes, we decided to take on a meatier topic. And I'll say at the outset that it resulted in another success but not without some management missteps, a little pain and a lot of learning on the fly.

The OHNO editors agreed in late summer to examine whether the state and its many governmental entities – school districts, library systems, cities and villages – could afford relatively rich pension programs for public employees at a time when many government leaders were slashing budgets, laying off employees and even asking for tax increases.

The idea developed after the pension fund managers asked

the state to approve an increase in the amount of money that local governments are required to pay into the funds. The fund managers realized they were they were out of compliance with a state law requiring a certain asset/liability ratio.

Given that the pension plans are quite generous compared to those in the private sector, we believed that taxpayers likely would be surprised, if not outraged, to learn that they might be asked to pony up more of their local tax money to pay for government pensions many could only dream about.

The editors agreed that one newspaper would lead the project and all papers would contribute. *The Dispatch*, which had done preliminary reporting to obtain databases from Ohio's five public-employee pension systems covering local government workers, agreed to manage the effort.

The Dispatch would write the main story. Each paper could write a local sidebar to focus on communities in their coverage areas that have particularly challenged budgets.

Each paper submitted a list of counties for which they wanted pension-cost data. Darrel Rowland, our public affairs editor, generated a custom spreadsheet for each paper – sorted by the 45 requested counties and governmental units within each county – showing specific cost figures and five-year projections for the workforces in every school district, city, township and village. Each of the four state datasets was different, so they had to be converted into a common format (sometimes easy, sometimes requiring a bit of Pivot Table work).

One minor problem: The police and fire pension fund did not include a field for counties, so we in Columbus could not tell if, for example, the Madison Township Police Department or the Village of Waterville Fire Department were entities covered by one of the OHNO papers. That meant our analysis had to include details on all 900-plus safety departments in Ohio, and reporters from each paper had to comb through the data and pluck out the police and fire units in their area. That meant the analysis was not quite as clean and direct as we had hoped. But we went as far as the data would allow and developed significant findings.

Learning key lessons

The Dispatch's James Nash drafted the main piece and sent it to all member papers a couple of weeks before the scheduled publication date. (We agreed earlier that we would all publish on the same Sunday.)

We discovered that some newsrooms were farther along in their reporting than others, which created some problems, but it wasn't the biggest problem. That came when the editors and reporters in each newsroom reviewed a nearly final draft of the story.

The conversation that ensued was much like what happens with a project produced by a single newsroom: At some point in the reporting and writing process, editors review the findings and ask tough questions. In this case, opening the questioning to editors from eight newsrooms made for some occasionally tense conversations. We realized that some of the questions and tension were rooted in the fact that only a few of the editors were intimately familiar with the reporting that had gone into the story.

There was also a difference of opinion on methodology. Both methods suggested were sound and defensible, but we needed to settle on one. We had to settle that before we could move forward.

Editors and reporters who joined the conversation all were pushing to take the path they believed best for the story.

We held a conference call to talk about our disagreements, and it became clear that the key people in the various newsrooms had questions that had not been answered and that some good ideas had not been considered. They also wanted more detail about key issues. So we agreed to meet in person to talk about concerns and move forward.

That meeting was scheduled for the day following a meeting of the executive editors who make up the OHNO board.

At that point, I was dreading both meetings. The worst-case scenario playing out in my mind was that each editor would stick to the position of his or her respective newsroom representatives working on the pension project and we'd have a stalemate. I also feared that the incredible cooperation we had enjoyed daily for the past couple of years would fall apart.

I could not have been more wrong.

The executive editors asked tough questions of each other and of *The Dispatch*. They were open to challenges of their people while remaining supportive of the project and the process. It never turned defensive.

The key moment – for the project and future projects – came when Bruce Winges, editor of the *Beacon Journal*, explained how he framed the situation to his staff.

"We need to treat this like one big newsroom, not eight smaller newsrooms," Winges said.

That simple statement helped me understand how I could get this project through the tough vetting stage, and I realize how I had mishandled the project from the start.

We wanted a joint reporting project, but in reality, *The Dispatch* had done the reporting and turned over its work near the end. We did not follow the fundamental best practices of projects reporting, because we didn't keep everyone informed along the way.

The eight executive editors agreed that there could be only one editor leading a project, not eight. That editor had to have the authority to direct the project and not be undermined by the wishes of any of the member newsrooms. In the end, however, each paper always retains the right to publish or not publish a project if editors have concerns about it.

When the editors and reporters working on the project met later, we went through the questions from each paper and resolved them. We agreed that the different paths that the various newsrooms had proposed earlier were worth traveling – in future projects.

And about two weeks later, the newspapers published the package. Four papers even used the same illustration as their Page One centerpiece.

The experience was worth the few headaches that came with learning how to manage a project across eight newsrooms. The impact of those stories was immeasurable. Readers in every major market in a state of more than 11 million people saw the same stories – stories about a pocketbook issue made all the more relevant in those markets because of the local reporting in them.

In late January, representatives of the eight newsrooms met again to begin the next project.

We brainstormed together. We narrowed the scope. We divvied up tasks in a logical manner. We could feel the excitement in the room about collaborating to produce another high-impact report.

The lesson we learned is this: Collaborating on an investigative project involving multiple newsrooms requires complete buy-in and support from the top editors, constant and consistent communication, and a unified approach. Above all, we had to think and act not as eight newsrooms but as one.

Benjamin Marrison is editor of The Columbus Dispatch.

POWER IN NUMBERS

Reporters unite in one city to cover health care access

By Jacob Kushner
University of Wisconsin

"All Together Now" was the optimistic name coined for an experiment that would test a new model of journalism in Madison, Wis.

The plan was ambitious: Organize competing news media to collectively investigate access to health care. The project offers journalists a narrow but important insight into what collective journalism can accomplish.

Initiated by the editors of two Madison print publications, "All Together Now" sought to create a community impact greater than the sum of its parts.

Its parts were many. Twenty Madison news organizations ranging from local radio and TV stations to magazines and student newspapers to the city's homeless-issue newspaper bombarded the Madison news scene this past October with more than 40 stories on local health care access. All of the content was aggregated to a Web site created for the project: www.atnmadison.org.

Reviewing the journalism produced, it's clear the project succeeded in involving a wide range of Madison's media and produced important stories. But can other markets replicate Madison's model to collectively produce journalism that is increasingly difficult to produce individually?

"The biggest strength is that everybody can do it," says project co-founder Bill Lueders, news editor of the weekly city paper *Isthmus*.

Twenty Madison news organizations ranging from local radio and TV stations to magazines and student newspapers to the city's homeless-issue newspaper bombarded the Madison news scene this past October with more than 40 stories on local health care access.

But there's no denying that Madison is an anomaly when it comes to friendliness among competing news media. The progressive state capital is home to an equally progressive media scene – one with a history of collaborations between companies.

The fact that more than 30 journalists from at least 20 companies showed up to the preliminary meeting speaks more to pre-existing relationships than to the project's unifying nature.

To be sure, collective journalism isn't for everyone. Missing from the action were a couple of the city's biggest players, including its daily newspaper, T*he Wisconsin State Journal*.

What about a collective project didn't appeal to the biggest outlet in town? The paper's editor, John Smalley, said because the project was collective rather than collaborative, it didn't lend itself well to a publication going through a "tremulous" time of newsroom layoffs.

"I think it's a good and useful model for the community and for the marketplace to be exposed to that sort of full-pronged approach, but I don't know that there's any great gain individually for any individual outlet."

Lueders understands the hesitation by some media to participate but believes the success of "All Together Now" should ease those fears.

"I think it's harder for larger publications like the *State Journal* to make a leap like this when it still seems sort of new and risky," Lueders said. "They probably had some

MEDIA MASH-UPS

well-founded fear. I think they were worried that they would be seen as part of an advocacy effort and that the reporting of all these other publications would somehow reflect on their publication."

The model allowed each outlet to play to its respective strengths rather than conform to a particular style. A local radio station broadcast the voices of local people telling their struggles accessing health care. College newspapers reported how their university's health insurance program serves the rising number of students no longer insured by their parents' plans. And a number of media produced investigative work, exposing the reasons for a shortage in primary care physicians, the ineffectiveness of a state insurance overseer and the obstacles to mental health care for depressed mothers.

The model allowed each outlet to play to its respective strengths rather than conform to a particular style.

Collective reporting certainly has some kinks to work out, most notably balancing cooperation with competition and answering the question of whether it can bring significant changes and solutions.

One participant wrote in a post-project survey that "Healthy competition is at the core of what drives a journalism community forward," warning "we cannot lose sight of the fact that competition produces better journalism."

But Brennan Nardi, ATN co-founder and editor of *Madison Magazine*, says if anything, "All Together Now" sparked competition among local media in health care reporting. "You can be competitive under this model," Nardi said. "You want your story to be the best because it's going to be held to the standard (of) the other media at the time."

Despite the project's scope, it's difficult to gauge what tangible effects it had on access to health care in Madison. "I think we effected change for the better in journalism. I'm not sure the same could be said for health care access," Nardi said.

So if success through impact isn't guaranteed, what do collective projects like "All Together Now" offer journalists?

For the reporters, it's an opportunity to give their stories more publicity and more punch by providing a context into which their work fits and receiving cross-promotion in other media.

For editors, it answers what Lueders calls the "why now?" question – justifying ever-present topics such as health care because the collective effort *makes* it timely.

And for everyone involved, collective reporting can create a comprehensive treatment of an issue that no single outlet could ever accomplish alone.

"It afforded journalists the opportunity to sort of get out of the chasing of the deadline … to stop and say, 'Let's decide on a subject that's really important to a community, and let's go after it hard core,'" Nardi said. "That does make it greater than the sum of its individual parts."

Nardi and Lueders say they hope to launch a second All Together Now project this May, reaching out to players who didn't participate in the first. This time, they won't expect participants to collaborate on stories. Instead, they will encourage outlets to use their individual expertise to achieve novel, collective journalism.

Jacob Kushner participated in the project as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison journalism school and as a reporting intern for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism (www.wisconsinwatch.org). His study of "All Together Now" was advised by UW-Madison journalism professor Jack Mitchell.

NEW ORLEANS EXPERIMENT

TV station joins forces with online investigative site

By Lee Zurik (WVUE-New Orleans)
and Steve Beatty (The Lens)

After Hurricane Katrina soaked New Orleans, the city faced another problem: It was getting a little too dry.

Several deserted houses burned to the ground not far from where Karen Gadbois lived. Looking over the charred remains, chimneys and metal stair frames, she couldn't recall what the buildings used to look like. An artist by training, Gadbois was frustrated that she lost that memory. And she realized that it would spread: City officials were talking about bulldozing entire neighborhoods.

She began a simple blog, "Squandered Heritage," to catalog the houses that were being added to the city's demolition list. That first venture into online news ultimately led to a new partnership between the Fox TV affiliate in New Orleans and an online startup founded by Gadbois, who also reports for the site.

One wood-frame bungalow near her home was set to be torn down, with plans to replace it with another nondescript dollar store. In a town that loves its architecture nearly as much as its food and music, this small demolish-and-rebuild plan hit a nerve. Her regular readers got out from behind their keyboards and demanded that something be done. The day that the house was picked up and moved to another part of the city was the day that Gadbois first tasted civic success.

Emboldened, she set out to visit more houses set for razing. She was stunned to find some didn't exist. The addresses simply weren't there. She realized these same addresses also appeared on a list of "houses" that had been boarded up as part of a federally financed city-run program.

Investigative reporter Lee Zurik had been reading Gadbois' blog with increasing interest and pitched the story to his news director at the city's leading TV news program. "Take a couple of days. Do it," Zurik was told.

The result was more than 50 stories that caused the program to be shut down after it was revealed the workers were paid for work they didn't do, and some contractors had ties to the mayor and the program administrator.

The result was more than 50 stories that caused the program to be shut down after it was revealed the workers were paid for work they didn't do, and some contractors had ties to the mayor and the program administrator. The series won the IRE Gold Medal for 2009, the DuPont Award, as well as other professional recognition.

Gadbois' work caught the attention of other journalists, including Ariella Cohen of *CityBusiness*, a New Orleans weekly newspaper.

The two realized that citizens were hungry for detailed reporting on land use and urban planning to remake a ravaged city.

After months of writing grants, Gadbois and Cohen, who had left her reporting job, eventually secured a $155,000 grant from the Open Society Institute, founded by billionaire George Soros. They used the money to form The Lens (thelensnola.org).

Though still focused on "the built environment," the nonprofit investigative Web site has added two staffers and expanded to cover schools, politics, campaign finance, environmental issues and criminal justice.

Amid that startup, Zurik moved to WVUE-TV and persuaded his new bosses to team up with The Lens on joint reporting efforts. Each features the other's work on air and on their own Web sites.

The partnership works for each side, though not quite in an equal red-beans-and-rice sorta way. It's

Karen Gadbois | The Lens

Using new social media platforms, neighborhood organizations in New Orleans convinced developers to move some houses to vacant lots rather than tearing them down. The successful citizen activism led one participant to help create The Lens, a nonprofit online news site.

more like the TV station is the well-known gumbo, and the nonprofit is the hot sauce that really brings out the flavor.

Sources are more likely to open for a major news outlet like the Fox affiliate, which offers a wide viewership. And an established news operation offers Lens reporters access to investigative tools, such as paid online services and data sources.

The Lens reporters don't have a daily deadline and can take two weeks or more to look into a single topic before bringing an outline to their TV partners. Zurik chuckles as he remembers a viewer's tip to have his research staff look into something. Local affiliates don't have that luxury. Instead, reporters at The Lens fill that role.

The operating principles of the partnership are simple – but sometimes difficult for naturally competitive reporters. Story tips are shared. Ideas are batted around jointly in weekly brainstorm sessions. Key interviews are conducted together.

Not each story is necessarily bound for both outlets. If the station doesn't find a story particularly attractive for TV, it still finds a way to tout the findings of The Lens by bringing reporters on air during its morning show. Likewise, the Web site might link to WVUE's video of a story that it decided not to chase.

The particulars of the partnership have been spelled out in a written agreement that was crafted by writers but approved by lawyers. No money changes hands, and safeguards are in place to prevent each side from overstepping boundaries.

The partnership began in mid-January, with The Lens launching an examination of the city's long-troubled economic development program. The overall problems had been known, but the reporting team was able to dig deep into details of two recent grants to entrepreneurs who haven't delivered any development work. WVUE followed with a nine-minute lead story on its hourlong nightly newscast. The next night featured a look at how the mayor is shifting money that was earmarked for the city's recovery.

Gadbois investigated the economic development story, putting her back in familiar territory – standing in a flood-damaged building, wondering how city policies had failed its citizens.

At least now she's in a better position to get answers and to do something about it.

Steve Beatty is managing editor of The Lens, a nonprofit investigative news Web site. Previously, he worked as an investigative reporter for the nonprofit Pelican Institute for Public Policy and as an editor at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Lee Zurik is anchor and chief investigative reporter for WVUE-TV in New Orleans. He is an IRE medal recipient.

Nurturing sources

By Jim Schaefer
Detroit Free Press

Collected WISDOM

I'm always amazed and humbled that sources talk to me. If I were a real person, and not a journalist, I'm not sure I would.

Not because I'm not a nice guy. There's just too much at risk, really, talking to a reporter. A job. A reputation. Money. Even personal safety. Yet day after day, there these people are – on the telephone, on the street, on e-mail. Talking, talking, talking to reporters. *Did you hear this? Can you believe what happened to so-and-so? I hear Joe Blow has herpes!*

Are these people nuts?

I guess they're just human. And it helps me greatly as a journalist to remind myself of this. Sometimes reporting can get really complicated. *That cop will never talk to me. He can't talk to me. He'll be fired!* Or, *there's no way that doctor will tell me what's going on. She's bound by HIPPA, for crying out loud!*

I've had people charged with crimes admit them. I've had people confess their inner-most thoughts. I've had people say things that could get them ostracized by family and friends, sued for millions or even seriously harmed.

You know how that happened? I asked. Sure, it doesn't always work. But if you sit around over-thinking, as we all sometimes do, you may find yourself paralyzed. Just ask.

Regular people need us. Society needs us. Good government needs us. The trick in this business is identifying yourself as the one single journalist whom people should turn to when in need.

Get off your duff

This can be difficult, especially if you've got nine Facebook chats going at the same time, and three of them involve old flames. Seriously, step away from the computer. At 3 o'clock, take a walk. I don't care if it's to the donut shop, the corner store or a simple stroll downtown. Have the goal that you are going to run into one person you know.

Did you ever work the police beat? Remember making 100 calls a day to various cop shops just to see what's up? That's how I view the afternoon walk. Just get outside and see what's up. The point is to be visible. You can be the smoothest talker, the funniest joker or the best-looking reporter in town. But the reporter who gets the tip, I think, is the reporter seen the most.

Don't weasel

You may have sources who call you their friend. I don't correct mine. But I also don't call them my friend. I can't be their friend. I might have to slam them in the paper some day. My best sources know this.

You owe them this kind of transparency. Being clear about your role is essential to developing and maintaining a healthy relationship. People may not view you as a member of their team, which is good, but they will view you as trustworthy, reliable and fair.

Sources I deal with know how they are going to appear in the paper or on our website. I tell them. They may not like what they hear, but the heads-up always pays off.

Also, try hard not to be manipulated. You probably have had conversations with people who threaten to go to your competition if you don't do a story immediately or their way. This can be frustrating, especially if you're sitting on a bombshell. Call the bluff. I explain that I really won't publish something before it's ready. This usually wins me more time and in the end, a more satisfied source.

If a source does go to the competition, don't burn the bridge. Analyze why. Call the source and ask. Put this source on the list of people to call more often, or to see on your daily stroll. Sell yourself to prevent it from happening again. I never disparage other reporters whom I respect. But I won't hesitate to point out the flaws of reporters whom I don't hold in high regard.

Deliver the goods

The best way to develop new sources is to deliver when people entrust you with important stories. Your name gets passed along. You become known as a reporter with the juice to get good play. Once you build this concept, it's like a savings account. You earn interest on your good name as it is passed around, even while you're not paying attention. People will contact you.

Inevitably, though, we all run into people who aren't going to talk. And, really, can you blame them? This happens even with good sources. Use this as an opportunity to find alternates. Broaden your go-to list.

But try not to over-analyze your methods. Keep it simple. Step out of your shoes and ask yourself: If you were a real person, and not a journalist, would you talk to you?

Jim Schaefer is an investigative reporter at the Detroit Free Press. His work has included sexual abuse among clergy, sports investigations and unearthing the text-message scandal that led to the jailing of former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. Schaefer has won numerous national awards, including an IRE certificate, the George Polk Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

Alan Hawes | Post and Courier

Clemson senior cornerback Crezdon Butler, left, suffered a neck injury during a game against Wake Forest. He received a painkilling shot that he says made the long bus ride home more comfortable.

PAIN MANAGERS

NCAA has no rules on meds, injections for college football

By Gene Sapakoff
Charleston (S.C.) *Post and Courier*

As with many good investigative reporting ideas, the Charleston (S.C.) *Post and Courier's* three-day series on painkiller use among college football players began with an off-hand comment. A Clemson University player answered the usual questions following a game. When the cameras and recorders were turned off, he was asked how he dealt with a nagging injury.

"I do what I have to do," he told me as he limped into the locker room.

I began casually surveying players, trainers and coaches about painkillers – injections and pills. Every "no comment" and "we really don't talk about that" made the subject more interesting. What do players take to stay on the field or get back on the field as soon as possible? How much? How often? Is painkiller use supervised? Monitored? Eventually, the topic became broad enough to challenge the newspaper space likely available.

While our approach to gaining information from the University of South Carolina followed our standard request procedure – phone call and letter/e-mail, follow-up phone call and finally FOIA – we did not hesitate to ask an attorney for the South Carolina Press Association to help when stonewalled. He gave us a comment about the situation, which we ran by the school's general counsel and had our information within a few hours.

We narrowed our presentation into a three-day series published in October, the heart of college football season. It's online at www.postandcourier.com/news/special_reports/playing-pain. Here's a quick breakdown of the coverage:

Day One: Types and amounts of injected painkillers used by college players on game days during the 2007 and 2008 seasons at the two major college programs we regularly cover, Clemson and the University of South Carolina. We also reported on two smaller state programs, The Citadel and Coastal Carolina. Using information obtained from the universities, we included charts showing the number of shots, separated by school and game date. A sidebar outlined the primary drugs: Toradol and Marcaine.

Day Two: A story on counselor Marcus Amos, an NCAA-approved speaker concerned that prescription painkiller abuse among college football players "is rampant." Amos works and lives in Augusta, Ga., just across the South Carolina border.

Day Three: The NCAA, the ruling body of college athletics, has an infamously thick rule book and monitors such things as excessive distribution of bagels to prospects making recruiting visits. But, stunningly to us, the NCAA has absolutely no policy on injected or prescription painkiller use. We also ran two sidebars, on South Carolina high school policy and NFL policy.

We believe the NCAA's head-in-the-sand approach to painkillers was remarkably interesting and demanded awareness. Indeed, that part of the series got the most reaction – lots of surprise and applause.

Federal medical privacy laws prevent the use of individual player names, and university athletic departments are traditionally protective. But that was fine, as we were more interested in general data.

Clemson and The Citadel provided requested information in a reasonable time. However, Coastal Carolina asked for a Freedom of Information Act request, and the University of South Carolina, even with the FOIA, was slow to provide information.

Players were cooperative in discussing painkiller use, or non-use. But interviews with players at major universities these days can be difficult to arrange. Often, they're carefully managed by public relations staffers.

Letters requesting medical information must be very specific, listing drugs, types of drugs, date ranges and other details.

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In dealing with major college or professional athletes on sensitive matters, it's best to get as far away from official settings as possible, or at least from coaches and PR staffers. Don't forget to mix in details such as time of day, scene, emotion and personal background facts. A few players asked to go off-the-record but very little of that information was necessary after patient accumulation of enough on-record quotes.

Dealing with the NCAA is another matter. Five people on the NCAA's health and safety committee, including the chairman, declined comment. A request for an interview with Mary Wilfert, the NCAA's associate director of Health and Safety, initially was met with a two-paragraph statement from the NCAA public rela-

Wade Spees | Post and Courier

Marcus Amos calls prescription painkiller abuse "rampant" among college football players. The counselor in Augusta, Ga., has received a prestigious NCAA speakers grant but often is turned away by athletic departments that he says think he will point fingers at school doctors and trainers.

tions office. Wilfert eventually agreed to be interviewed. As with so many investigative stories, persistence is critical.

Aware of Web distribution, some national organizations previously willing to brush off reporters from less-than-major news outlets might be more likely to cooperate.

We are fortunate at the *Post and Courier* to have a watchdog editor, Doug Pardue. He is a seasoned veteran of investigative reporting and editing and has won many national awards. The synergy between editor and reporter worked splendidly in this case, with Doug offering suggestions and making tweaks without a major overhaul. His news background plugged into a "sports story" offered fresh ears and eyes, and made for some good questions. Along with almost daily communication over the last month of the project, his most significant impact was the suggestion for the lengthy piece on NCAA reaction, which I originally had budgeted as a sidebar.

Also, having such an editor made for an ally in fighting for space and multimedia promotion. Along with the print and online versions of the story, we teased the series with a Webcast. It was one of the highlights of the *Post and Courier*'s weekly half-hour Comcast cable television show.

While there were many helpful editors and photographers – including assistant managing editor/sports Malcolm DeWitt, photo editor Tom Spain and TV/Webcast director Warren Peper – Pardue was critical to the success of this series, as he has been to so many of the *Post and Courier*'s award-winning projects.

Online search and research applied to all three days of the series. Learning about the painkillers, navigating NCAA manuals and committee assignments, confirming historical football data and biography research on sources were made easier via laptop.

The series attracted widespread interest, and some good suggestions for future projects:

- Expanding painkiller surveys to other sports.
- Tracking prescription painkiller distribution.
- Taking a deeper look at painkillers of all kinds in high school and adult "recreational" sports.
- Continuing to monitor the universities we wrote about in this series to check for any rise/decline in painkiller use.

There was general praise for raising awareness and opening eyes to the situation. Most intriguing, and seemingly most important, was the feedback from the medical community. An anesthesiologist suggested Toradol actually was more dangerous than we reported and provided detailed case stories. A college health center director suggested a series on "the out-of-control second-hand market for Ritalin among college students." A local "pain management center" suggested tracing painkiller abuse through each decade starting with the 1960s.

Ultimately, we are concerned about the abuse of painkillers, and hoped to influence high school and other youth sports organizations away from use and overuse. By providing personal stories, general data, demonstrating the NCAA's lack of interest and engaging the sports medicine department of the most prominent hospital in our area (Medical University of South Carolina), we raised awareness and alerted parents and young athletes.

Gene Sapakoff has been a columnist and sportswriter for the Charleston Post and Courier since 1986. The Colorado State University graduate also has been published in Sports Illustrated, The Sporting News, Baseball America and on ESPN.com.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Drunken drivers escape punishment in Missouri

By Joe Mahr and Jeremy Kohler
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

When a drunken driver killed three people on a suburban St. Louis highway last February, our story noted his extensive DWI history. Digging deeper, we found that authorities had bungled earlier chances to put him in prison. Twice in the three years before the crash, police had arrested him for DWI and quickly let him go. In each case, they forgot to file felony charges.

Weeks later, another chronic drunk at the wheel killed a young couple and their unborn child. It turned out that guy had gotten a break, too. He had just gotten a plea deal for a DWI meant for first-time offenders, even though he had four DWI convictions. Prosecutors hadn't checked his background thoroughly before letting him walk out of court with full driving privileges.

Sniffing out another botched case, we found police and prosecutors had inexplicably failed to bring DWI manslaughter charges against a drunken driver in a 2005 fatal crash. He killed someone, and never had to show up to court.

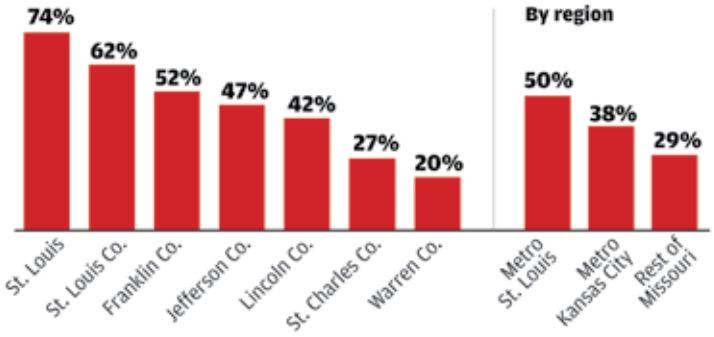
Our editors started thinking project. We were reticent at first. The topic has been covered everywhere. The *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* had just nailed a five-part series about Wisconsin's drinking culture, part of which delved into that state's reluctance to send chronic offenders to prison.

But it was clear that St. Louis had unique problems. The examples showed how the system failed to punish drunken drivers – with many different types of failures in almost every case. Mistakes aside, it seemed the system was geared toward forgiving drunken drivers, rather than punishing them.

But these were just anecdotes. The question remained: How frequently did authorities screw up? How commonly do chronic offenders get great plea deals? We needed data to quantify the extent of the problems, and a methodology that could hone in on the worst failures.

REPEAT OFFENDERS AVOID DWIs

Plea deals are the norm for first-time offenders, but even drivers arrested on repeat DWI offenses are often able to avoid alcohol convictions in those additional cases. For example, 74% of drivers arrested again in the city of St. Louis were not convicted of a DWI or related charge.



Note: Based on 2006 arrests, to give court cases at least two years to be completed. Metro areas defined by census bureau, but include only Missouri portions. Convictions are for DWI, BAC, or a higher charge (such as vehicular assault) that goes on someone's driving record.

SOURCE: Post-Dispatch analysis of data from Missouri Department of Revenue and Office of State Courts Administrator | Post-Dispatch

We committed ourselves to a different kind of DWI story. The *Journal-Sentinel* did boffo work exploring devastating consequences of alcohol abuse and drunken driving. We didn't dwell much on those. We put the system under the microscope. The *Post-Dispatch* investigation is online at www.stltoday.com/dwi.

We filed public-record requests for driving records of drunken drivers in Missouri and Illinois. Illinois refused, citing federal privacy law and an internal secrecy rule. Missouri recognized that the federal law allows data to be shared with reporters doing public-safety research. The problem was the price: Missouri's law allows charges for assembling records at "actual cost." The Department of Revenue said that would be $8,500. After months of negotiation, we ended up paying $540, and the state provided an electronic database of about 150,000 DWI arrests since Jan. 1, 2005 – as well as separate databases containing driving histories of everyone arrested.

Then we keyed in on four main problems:

Spotty enforcement

Using Microsoft Access database and Excel spreadsheet software, we crunched arrest data for each area department and compared it to the department's population served, officers employed and traffic stops (data kept by other state agencies). We turned the data into rates for each department – such as DWI arrests per resident, per traffic stop, etc. We consulted with national traffic safety researchers on the best way to rank departments, and then crunched the numbers – showing a wide gulf in area enforcement. We used Microsoft Mail Merge to mass-mail letters to every department to correct any of our figures and offer their feedback on why enforcement was so spotty. Then we did a ride-along with a DWI officer to show how challenging the arrests can be, and why so many officers try to steer clear of them. (Spoiler alert: There was a lot of vomit involved.)

A failure to charge

Using data on past convictions,we determined who qualified for felony charges when they were pulled over for DWI in 2008 on the Missouri side of our metro area. We then went through online case dockets to see who was actually charged, and then provided each county prosecutor with a list of all those not charged. We asked: Why not? The prosecutors clarified a couple of cases where suspects had been charged with felonies. But many, they admitted, had not been. It turned out that more than a third of all those who qualified for felonies weren't charged with them, including half of the chronic offenders in our largest county.

Culture of deal-making

The next question was, for those even charged with any level of DWI, how often are they convicted? We compared arrest data to conviction data – seeing what happened with each arrest – and found convictions were rare. The vast majority got plea deals that kept DWIs off their records. We then crunched our conviction data to find cases of repeat offenders being arrested. These were the people whom prosecutors said wouldn't get breaks. And yet they avoided DWI convictions half the time. We found out that reason rested largely with the type of court system we have in Missouri, which allows DWI cases to be heard by municipal courts. Crunching data for those courts, we found that only one DWI arrest in seven handled by those courts leads to a DWI conviction. Just

like we did for police and prosecutors, we mass-mailed letters to these courts to offer them the chance to correct our figures and explain to us why they offered such deals. Few courts responded, and a couple clarified minor data issues, but most ignored us. Still, we had given them the chance.

Rewards for the uncooperative

We found the deal-making in Missouri has been taken to the extreme, including those people who simply refused to cooperate with police during their arrests. Missouri, like most states, has a special punishment for people who don't provide blood-alcohol samples during their DWI arrests. These people are supposed to have their licenses suspended for a year, regardless of what happens in criminal court. We crunched driving data and found that prosecutors routinely cut deals to let these people not only avoid convictions, but the one-year suspensions as well. They didn't miss a day of driving. Using the Missouri driving data, we found one case of someone who killed someone else months after getting such a deal.

Looking back, we saw four keys to our success:

We pushed hard for data. The Missouri data helped us quantify the breakdowns. Without the data, authorities might have just shrugged off anecdotes as a few cases that "fell through the cracks" of a complex, but essentially solid system. With the data, we left little room for debate. The system is broken. The only thing left to debate was how to fix it.

We were diligent about getting every record, even those of marginal importance. When police or courts delayed or denied our requests for access, we ramped up the pressure exponentially. Word got around that we weren't taking no for an answer. When a small-town bureaucrat gives you the run-around, sometimes it doesn't hurt to ask, "Is this how you treat people in your community?"

We showed authorities the data before we published it. Doing so gave them the chance to point out problems with the numbers that we wouldn't have recognized on our own. It also put the onus on courts, prosecutors and police to explain themselves. Most ignored us, but they couldn't complain later that we failed to get their input. And we made some good sources that helped offer context for the stories.

We abandoned the traditional multi-part series. Our editor, Jean Buchanan, wanted to split up the stories for an occasional series. First we grumbled about it. Then we realized it was crucial. We popped the first two failures – of enforcement and charging – in September. Tips came in about other problems in the system. One was about a drunken driver who'd been caught going 100 mph. He showed up to court drunk and still got a great plea deal – no DWI conviction. While pulling out of the court parking lot, he was arrested for DWI again. Same deal: no conviction. We framed our second story, on the culture of deal-making, around his case. We wouldn't have gotten wind of his cases had we done the traditional multi-part series.

The run-and-gun approach also created a lot of reader reaction and momentum for reform. On Sunday, Oct. 11, the day our second story ran on the plea deals, Missouri's governor called us to pledge to reform the system.

In December, the governor proposed sweeping changes to the state's DWI law, including moving most cases out of municipal courts and putting them in state courts; plus making it a crime to refuse to take a breath test. All jurisdictions would be required to enter DWI arrest and case information into the Missouri Highway Patrol's DWI tracking system.

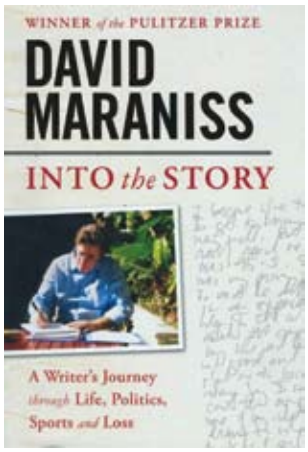
At this writing, a DWI bill is out of committee in the Senate and House, and appears to be moving ahead with bipartisan support.

Joe Mahr is an investigative reporter for The Chicago Tribune. Previously, he worked as an investigative reporter/editor at the Post-Dispatch. Jeremy Kohler covers crime and law enforcement for the Post-Dispatch. He is also a part-time journalism instructor at Washington University.

He showed up to court drunk and still got a great plea deal – no DWI conviction. While pulling out of the court parking lot, he was arrested for DWI again.

Laurie Skrivan | Post-Dispatch

Jane Fulhage holds a family portrait showing her husband, Charles, and son, Eric. Her husband died in a car crash in Columbia, Mo., caused by a prior DWI offender. The intoxicated driver, weeks earlier, had admitted to a DWI in St. Charles County but was allowed to keep his license. "The system failed me," Fulhage said. "I have to live without him every day."



INTO THE STORY: A Writer's Journey Through Life, Politics, Sports and Loss
By David Maraniss
Simon & Schuster, 304 pages, $26

AUTHOR REFLECTS HUMILITY, EMPATHY IN MASTERFUL PROFILES

By Steve Weinberg
The IRE Journal

During 1994, I read a talk that *Washington Post* reporter David Maraniss presented to journalists gathered at the Freedom Forum. By then, I knew his byline well. He had started at the *Post* in 1977, had been stationed in Austin, Texas, for the newspaper, had served as an editor, had covered the presidential campaign of Bill Clinton, and was about to complete the first thoroughly reported Clinton biography, "First in His Class."

The talk focused on how Maraniss thought deeply about what he wanted to write during a calendar year, how he carried out his plan, how he persuaded editors to buy into the plan, how he fought off distractions with the potential to sabotage the plan. At the time, I served as editor in chief of *The IRE Journal*. Maraniss' words impressed me deeply, so I asked for permission to reprint the talk in *The Journal*. The Freedom Forum folks and Maraniss said yes. The piece appeared in the November-December 1994 issue. It never stopped resonating with me; I have re-read it over and over.

Since 1994, I had read four more books by Maraniss, plus quite a few newspaper and magazine pieces he wrote. Now, in 2010, I can read even more of his excellent journalism between hard covers.

The collected works of journalists often fall flat in book form. The re-published pieces from newspapers and magazines can seem stale. Frequently, the writing style is unremarkable.

But once in a while, the anthologies click. A few even become classics within journalism. Perhaps the most notable example of a classic anthology is "Poison Penmanship: The Gentle Art of Muckraking," by Jessica Mitford. The ingredients include a remarkable writing style; commentary about the published stories from the perspective of glorious hindsight; and a gently didactic, memorable introduction by the author.

The Maraniss anthology is a gem, too.

Instead of presenting the 32 pieces chronologically, Maraniss relied on what he calls "my sense of flow" to divide the pieces into four sections. The first section ("Ripped Apart and Sewn Together") and the last section ("The Arc Toward Home") tend toward the personal, "to give the reader a feel for how I view the world." Section two ("Political Lives") and section three ("Sporting Passions") focus on what Maraniss states "are the central concerns of my writing career."

Maraniss is especially skilled as a profile writer. He makes complex individuals come alive on a printed page about as well as any journalist I have studied. How does he do it?

Most individuals "are a combination of good and bad," Maraniss has concluded. Making a concerted effort to understand that mixture is almost always worthwhile. The effort means abandoning the notion adopted by so many profile writers and book-length biographers that individuals can be fairly described according to an overriding motivation, such as ambition or greed or romantic love or carnality. As a biographer myself, I have rejected reductionism. So does Maraniss, with a mixture of humility and empathy.

"Like all humans, I carry a set of biases," he says, "people with whom I agree or disagree, policies that I admire, and policies that I abhor. But my obsession as a biographer goes in a different direction, not toward molding subjects so they fit into my world view, but trying to comprehend theirs – the forces that shaped them, why they think and act the way they do."

Maraniss says that "the world of nonfiction writing is a continual graduate school." He is not only a bright student, but also an inspiring teacher.

Steve Weinberg, a former executive editor of IRE, has written eight nonfiction books. He teaches at the Missouri School of Journalism.

Most individuals "are a combination of good and bad," Maraniss has concluded. Making a concerted effort to understand that mixture is almost always worthwhile. The effort means abandoning the notion adopted by so many profile writers and book-length biographers that individuals can be fairly described according to an overriding motivation, such as ambition or greed or romantic love or carnality.

Blogs

continued from page 13

From "Free mapping tool available for IRE members," IRE blog, http://bit.ly/90Znqn

IRE members have access to a Web-based data exploration application to quickly and easily analyze demographic data while on deadline.

ESRI and IRE made a special agreement to offer ESRI data to IRE members at no cost. This program will save journalists time and money by making ESRI data available in an easy-to-view format. A complimentary Business Analyst Online (BAO) Basic subscription through Dec. 31, 2010, is available to all IRE members. BAO combines GIS software technology with extensive demographic data for the United States in the form of reports and maps.

Reporters can use BAO to investigate demographic patterns and compare areas through interactive maps. Visit IRE's ESRI BAO page to find out more: http://bit.ly/d4WzM3.

From "Links: Squishy crime numbers, FEC data blog," Uplink – http://data.nicar.org/uplink/node/150

By David Herzog
NICAR / University of Missouri

Using campaign contribution data? You will want to check out the Federal Election Commission's new data catalog at www.fec.gov/data. The catalog, definitely still in the building stages, has links to the commission's lobbyist bundled contribution, leadership PAC and lobbyist PAC files in a variety of formats, along with documentation.

The commission also launched a disclosure blog (www.fec.gov/blog), where the FEC's in-house data guru Bob Biersack discusses the ins and outs of the commission's databases.

From "Tips for investigating campus assaults," IRE On the Road blog – http://bit.ly/ba05EL

After 12 months of reporting, the Center for Public Integrity reached troubling conclusions about how some colleges and universities collect and report sexual assault statistics, and how sexual assault cases are handled through the campus judicial system. The Center's Kristen Lombardi and David Donald recently spoke about this project and how you can conduct a similar investigation in a one-hour IRE webinar (www.ire.org/training/online).

This session can help you learn how to make sense of federally mandated campus crime data (Clery Act data), how to identify and investigate cases, and how to better prepare yourself for overcoming potential reporting barriers. Lombardi and Donald also discuss the federal laws at work in these proceedings, what they require of schools, and ways you can use public records requests to your advantage. The live webinar was held on Feb. 23.

IRE SERVICES

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

Programs and Services:

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

IRE AND NICAR DATABASE LIBRARY – Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. The library has copies of many government databases, and makes them available to news organizations at or below actual cost. Analysis services are available on these databases, as is help in deciphering records you obtain yourself.
Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281; David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127. To order data, call 573-884-7711.

ON-THE-ROAD TRAINING – As a top promoter of journalism education, IRE offers loads of training opportunities throughout the year. Possibilities range from national conferences and regional workshops to weeklong boot camps and on-site newsroom training. Costs are on a sliding scale and fellowships are available to many of the events.
Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281; or Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org, 614-205-5420

Publications:

THE IRE JOURNAL – Published four times a year. Contains journalist profiles, how-to stories, reviews, investigative ideas and backgrounding tips. The Journal also provides members with the latest news on upcoming events and training opportunities from IRE and NICAR.
Contact: Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org, 614-205-5420

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.
Contact: David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127

REPORTER.ORG – A collection of Web-based resources for journalists, journalism educators and others. Discounted Web hosting and services such as mailing list management and site development are provided to other nonprofit journalism organizations.
Contact: Mark Horvit, mhorvit@ire.org, 573-882-1984.

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LEARN FROM MANY OF THE BEST JOURNALISTS IN THE BUSINESS AT THE IRE CONFERENCE, JUNE 10-13.

The growing list of speakers includes James Risen and Walt Bogdanich of *The New York Times*, Brian Ross of ABC News, Byron Pitts and Ira Rosen of 60 Minutes, Stephen Engelberg of ProPublica, Leonard Downie Jr. of *The Washington Post* and many more. Showcase panelists include Julian Assange of Wikileaks and Valerie Plame Wilson, who will provide a different perspective on anonymous sources. Our keynote address will be delivered by Vivian Schiller, president and CEO of National Public Radio and former senior vice president and general manager of NYTimes.com. You'll get tips and practical advice from many of the winners of this year's IRE Awards, as well as the Pulitzer Prizes and other investigative journalism contests.

This year's conference, at the Paris hotel in Las Vegas, will deliver what you've come to expect from IRE, and more. We'll present dozens of panels offering tips and techniques from reporters, producers, editors and news directors. You'll leave not only with story ideas but also with roadmaps detailing how to get those stories. You'll be able to take all of the practical advice you learn and apply it to everything from breaking news stories to enterprise pieces. You'll learn how to incorporate social media and how best to use the Web as an investigative tool. You'll have a chance to take hands-on training in computer-assisted reporting skills. We'll have sessions geared toward nonprofit journalism centers, including a special track on Thursday. And, as always, you'll have plenty of chances to network.

We've kept the cost of attendance down this year, with hotel rates of only $119 a night.

For the latest information, visit the conference Web site:
www.ire.org/training/conference/lasvegas10.