

grassroots editor



*A journal
for newspeople*

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2007 Golden Quill & Golden Dozen Awards



Editorial skills and courage exemplified by winners
of the ISWNE contest

and the

The 32nd Annual Gene Cervi Award

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2007 Golden Quill contest and Eugene Cervi Award

This year's Golden Quill winner is a newcomer to ISWNE but not to the profession. For almost 30 years, Lori Evans has worked for three Morris Communications newspapers in Alaska — first as a reporter for the *Juneau Empire* and later as that paper's assistant editor. In 1991, when Morris bought the *Peninsula Clarion* in Kenai, she was named that newspaper's editor. In 2005, Evans was named editor and publisher of the *Homer News*, an award-winning weekly that Morris had acquired five years earlier.

Clarence Burley, editor and publisher of the *Menlo Park (Calif.) Recorder*, established the Golden Quill award in 1961 as ISWNE president. His goal was to recognize "good editorial writing in the weeklies...not necessarily to select the best editorial of the year, but simply to recognize a good piece of writing...something turned out under pressure of a deadline...in the heat of indignation or inspiration...or simply an idea the writer had to get off his chest."

Guy and Marcia Woods, who sold their *Sangre de Cristo Chronicle* in May 2006, are the recipients of the 2007 Eugene Cervi Award. They were introduced to ISWNE through a Hazel Brannon Smith scholarship in 1987, the first recipients of that annual award. The Woods embody all that Cervi and Smith represented: personal courage, a bulldog tenacity, and someone who fought the good fight.

ISWNE is dedicated to encouraging and promoting high standards of editorial writing and to facilitating the exchange of ideas. These awards, we believe, serve those purposes.

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Golden Quill Winners

1961-2007

- 1961 **Hal DeCell**
Deer Creek Pilot, Rolling Fork, Miss.
- 1962 **Don Pease**
Oberlin (Ohio) News Tribune
- 1963 **Hazel Brannon Smith**
Lexington (Miss.) Advertiser
- 1964 **Mrs. R.M.B. Hicks**
Dallas (Pa.) Post
- 1965 **Robert E. Fisher**
Crossett (Ark.) News Observer
- 1966 **Owen J. McNamara**
Brookline (Mass.) Chronicle-Citizen
- 1967 **Alvin J. Remmenga**
Cloverdale (Calif.) Reveille
- 1968 **Henry H. Null IV**
The Abington Journal, Clarks Summit, Pa.
- 1969 **Dan Hicks Jr.**
Monroe County Democrat, Madisonville, Tenn.
- 1970 **Richard Taylor**
Kennett News & Advertiser,
Kennett Square, Pa.
- 1971 **Edward DeCourcy**
Newport (N.H.) Argus Champion
- 1972 **C. Peter Jorgenson**
The Advocate, Arlington, Mass.
- 1973 **Robert Estabrook**
Lakeville (Conn.) Journal
- 1974 **Phil McLaughlin**
The Miami Republican, Paola, Kan.
- 1975 **Betsy Cox**
The Madison County Newsweek,
Richmond, Ky.
- 1976 **Peter Bodley**
Coon Rapids Herald, Anoka, Minn.
- 1977 **Rodney A. Smith**
Gretna (Va.) Gazette
- 1978 **Robert Estabrook**
Lakeville (Conn.) Journal
- 1979 **R. W. van de Velde**
The Valley Voice, Middlebury, Vt.
- 1980 **Garrett Ray**
Independent Newspapers, Littleton, Colo.
- 1981 **Janelou Buck**
Sebring (Fla.) News
- 1982 **Albert Scardino**
The Georgia Gazette, Savannah, Ga.
- 1983 **Francis C. Zanger**
Bellows Falls (Vt.) News-Review
- 1984 **John McCall**
The SandPaper, Ocean City, N.J.
- 1985 **William F. Schanen III**
Ozaukee Press, Port Washington, Wis.
- 1986 **Henry G. Gay**
Shelton-Mason County Journal,
Shelton, Wash.
- 1987 **Ellen L. Albanese**
The Country Gazette, Franklin, Mass.
- 1988 **Michael G. Lacey**
The New Times, Phoenix, Ariz.
- 1989 **Tim Redmond**
Bay Guardian, San Francisco, Calif.
- 1990 **Bill Lueders**
Isthmus, Madison, Wis.
- 1991 **Stuart Taylor Jr.**
Legal Times, Washington, D.C.
- 1992 **Hope Aldrich**
The Santa Fe (N.M.) Reporter
- 1993 **Michael D. Myers**
Granite City (Ill.) Press-Record
- 1994 **Jim MacNeill**
The Eastern Graphic, Montague, PEI, Canada
- 1995 **Brian J. Hunhoff**
The Missouri Valley Observer, Yankton, S.D.
- 1996 **Patricia Calhoun**
Denver Westword, Denver, Colo.
- 1997 **Tim Giago**
Indian Country Today, Rapid City, S.D.
- 1998 **Gary Sosniecki**
Webster County Citizen, Seymour, Mo.
- 1999 **Jeff McMahan**
New Times, San Luis Obispo, Calif.
- 2000 **Jeff McMahan**
New Times, San Luis Obispo, Calif.
- 2001 **William F. Schanen III**
Ozaukee Press, Port Washington, Wis.
- 2002 **Paul MacNeill**
The Eastern Graphic, Montague, PEI, Canada
- 2003 **Jeremy Waltner**
Freeman Courier, Freeman, S.D.
- 2004 **Charles Gay**
Shelton-Mason County Journal, Shelton, Wash.
- 2005 **Bill Lueders**
Isthmus, Madison, Wis.
- 2006 **Gary Sosniecki**
The Vandalia Leader, Vandalia, Mo.
- 2007 **Lori Evans**
Homer News, Homer, Alaska

The judge's comments

Choosing the best dozen out of an even hundred entries and from those dozen the one best editorial was as daunting a task as I've had in years.

The difficulty lay not in the fact that there were so many of them, but in the fact that there were no bad ones. Every piece was crafted with skill. Every writer demonstrated professionalism. The topics all were important. Journalistic courage abounded.

Efforts to establish firm elimination criteria faltered because editorials that seemed flawed in one area had strengths in other areas. Every single entry had at least some redeeming qualities.

And so the exercise became a matter of choosing the editorials that not only reflected

the spirit of the ISWNE — demonstrating courage by raising an issue of importance to the local community, offering an opinion and supporting a course of action — but also that had a personal appeal to a very human (that is, prone to error) judge.

Generally speaking, I perceived strength in editorials that spoke to a very local issue or that had a very local impact; that were expressed succinctly, directly and clearly; that were laid on a foundation of logic; that offered a course of action; that focused on issues whose significance transcended the community.

I judged as less effective editorials that addressed a distant topic; that scolded; that took to task other journalistic endeavors; that, from a structural standpoint, were more in the nature of personal columns or investigative/analytical

pieces than editorials.

I read every entry from the first word to the last and placed them in two stacks, reluctantly moving the second stack out of contention. I scanned every entry in the remaining stack and divided it into three new stacks. I moved some from the third stack into the first stack, and some from the first stack into the second stack. I read the new first stack. I moved some from the second stack into the first stack. I put the third stack on the floor. I put the second stack on the arm of the sofa.

Eventually the first stack was down to 14 entries, then down to 10, then back up to 12. The Golden Dozen. One rose to the top. The Golden Quill.

About the judge

Jack Getz has been teaching basic reporting and public affairs reporting to journalism students at South Dakota State University for 22 years.

The lessons he delivers in classroom and lab are based to a significant degree on lessons he learned on the street and in the halls of state and local government as a community newspaper reporter.

Graduating from college with a journalism degree, he set off along a twisty career path that led first to reporting for a small daily newspaper for three years, then to a brief stint in graduate school, then to a two-year romantic fling with corporate communications (ending, as some romances do, in disillusionment), then to 15 years on the staff of a medium-sized daily newspaper as reporter and city editor, then to another year in graduate

school, and finally to the ivory tower.

He is a native of South Dakota who has been unable to dislodge himself for very long from four-season country. His professional career has been spent in North Dakota, Minnesota and, mostly, South Dakota. His graduate studies have taken him to Arizona and Missouri.

He holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of Arizona and a doctorate in higher education from the University of South Dakota.

He has served as a newspaper writing coach, a panelist, a workshop presenter, and a judge of journalistic competitions in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Utah and Washington. For seven years, from 1992 to 1999, he was associate editor of *Grassroots Editor* while ISWNE was headquartered at South Dakota State.



Jack Getz

Golden Quill Winner



Lori Evans

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September 14, 2006

Unlimited property tax exemption needs to go now

The Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly's use of a residency requirement in an attempt to rein in the unlimited property tax exemption previously given to senior citizens is a step in the wrong direction.

The assembly needs to bite the bullet and cap the exemption at the state-mandated \$150,000. Period. Otherwise the issue will continue to drag on, in effect, forcing nonseniors to shoulder a bigger share of the borough's tax burden than should be required of them.

Capping the exemption is not being disrespectful to seniors. It isn't ignoring their contribution to the quality of borough life. It isn't designed to send them to the poorhouse or elsewhere to enjoy their retirement.

But the exemption, even with the residency requirement, penalizes other residents who live and work here. Given the borough's changing demographics — more seniors, fewer young families — the unlimited exemption is just not fair.

When the assembly meets in Homer next week, it should reconsider this ill-advised, poorly considered residency requirement and defeat it. Then, it should ask the borough mayor to present a comprehensive rewrite of the property tax exemption ordinance for the assembly to consider. That rewrite should cap the exemption at \$150,000 and provide relief for hardship cases. No senior should fear losing his or her property once the exemption is capped.

Capping the exemption is a realistic recognition that times have changed. When the ordinance took effect 20 years ago there were far fewer seniors living in the borough — and the cost to the borough was an

estimated \$131,000. Just five years ago, however, 1,947 seniors claimed the exemption, amounting to \$210 million. This year, 2,661 seniors claimed the exemption for a total of \$400 million.

By all accounts, the senior population is growing. And why not with such a great tax break? The Kenai Peninsula Borough is the only one in the state that offers the unlimited tax exemption.

In addition to doing precious little to stop what has become an entitlement that's out of control, there's another reason the assembly should do everything in its power to defeat this legislation and start all over: It's too complex. The borough and its citizens don't need more red tape.

Not only would seniors have to be eligible for a permanent fund dividend to receive the unlimited exemption, but, with some exceptions, they could not be absent from the peninsula for more than 120 days in any one year. Does anyone really think tracking these absences is the best way for borough employees to spend their time — not to mention your tax dollars?

Capping this property tax exemption is reasonable and fair. The borough no longer can afford to be unlimited in its generosity. It can make exceptions for hardship cases.

If the assembly chooses not to reconsider this residency requirement on the exemption, the borough mayor should not hesitate to veto it.

Lori Evans can be contacted at lori.evans@homernews.com.

FROM THE JUDGE

An Associated Press reporter of my acquaintance, responding to the assertion that wire service writing is simply too dispassionate to be beautiful, said, "Clarity is eloquence."

The Golden Quill goes to an editorial that is eloquent in its clarity.

There is no need to search for the writer's opinion. It is right there in the first sentence, expressed about as succinctly as possible. Readers are saved the chore of flailing their way through a scene-setting, mood-creating, portrait-painting wash of words to get to the point.

Paragraph two expands on the point. Paragraph three blunts the arguments on the other side of the question.

All that follows speaks to the issue.

The strengths of this piece, in addition to its strong lead and clear expression all the rest of the way, are these:

- It addresses a matter of obvious importance to the community served by the newspaper. Extending this thought, the newspaper may have been the only communications venue in which this particular matter was discussed at all.
- It sounds a clarion call for action.
- It follows a path of logic and reason as opposed to emotion; its appeal is more to the head than to the heart.
- It exemplifies editorial leadership. At the same time, in an unspoken but implicit manner, it encourages its readers to think for themselves.
- And — this is significant — while its criticism is strong and direct, its discourse remains civil.

An explanation from the winner

Some editorials write themselves because of the topic and this is one of them. Overall, Alaska has one of the lowest tax burdens of any state in the nation (no state sales tax, no state income tax), plus Alaskans enjoy a privilege residents of other states don't: an annual dividend from the state's permanent fund. Not to mention, they get to live in what many people consider one of the most spectacular places on Planet Earth.

But I stray.

There's a difference between doing a nice thing and doing the right thing.

In this particular case, the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly tries to be nice to the borough's senior citizens by using a residency requirement to rein in the unlimited property tax exemption all seniors in the borough enjoy. It's absolutely the wrong thing to do, because it's unfair to all the other property-tax paying citizens in the borough.

The exemption made sense years ago, as a way to honor those residents who helped build the borough when there were no paved roads, no running water and other amenities that we take for granted. There were fewer seniors who qualified. The borough had more money. The state gave more money to municipalities to help fund services. The exemption was a way to help seniors live their retirement years in Alaska, to say "we want you to stay here."

Times have changed. The senior demographic is fastest-growing segment of the borough's population. Property assessments are rising. And the state's revenue-sharing program has disappeared.

All of which means that younger property taxpay-

ers are shouldering more of the tax burden.

Instead of confronting the issue and capping the exemption at the state-mandated \$150,000, the assembly considered (and adopted) a complicated residency requirement, which allows seniors to be gone from the borough for 120 days and more under certain conditions.

Listen to some of the testimony assembly members heard: "My wife and I enjoy running to the sun and find shoveling snow more difficult as we get older, not mentioning maintaining our balance on the ice! You're asking us to sacrifice what we've worked for all these years."

Or this: "All during my productive years, I worked two and three jobs — and my wife worked — so now I can go Outside for three, four months to avoid the harsh Alaska winters."

Excuse me, but anyone who can afford to go Outside for three or four months can afford to pay property tax. The exemption forces some younger taxpayers to work two and three jobs to be able to afford to live here and pay for themselves and wealthy seniors who can afford to pay their own way and should pay their own way.

Then, we shake our heads and wonder why we're losing young families.

It just doesn't make sense.

And, of course, the editorial was an attempt to show that.

P.S. The assembly is still arguing over the issue. In May, they decided to put the question to the voters. In October, residents will be asked if the exemption should be capped at \$300,000.



Steve Dills

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July 26, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

Here is a disquieting thought, expressed in an ancient cliché: One can't have his cake and eat it too.

In this case, readers are urged to trade their healthy lawns for a healthy lake. Evidence indicates the two cannot coexist. The use of pesticides enhances the beauty of a home — an individual property — but at the same time it degrades a body of water — a community property.

The writer risks angering at least some of his readers by suggesting that their property maintenance practices are dangerous. But if local editors fail to take a stand to protect the environment, who will?

The editorial is well-reasoned and well-written, and makes effective use of documentary support for its position.

Ban pesticides to protect lake

Is that green expanse you call a beautifully manicured lawn actually worth the time, effort and cost you devote each year?

That's a question which surfaced last week as we scanned headlines across the country. We've also noted, on recent trips around town, that gardens are becoming an interesting alternative to grass and more grass.

Our home town now has a committee actively promoting a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides on lawns.

It's an intriguing idea. One that we've raised before in this watershed which draws so many people because of its pristine lake. It's an issue which must be addressed by all municipalities around the lake, but it takes someone to spearhead the effort. Without public lobbying, it's certainly not an issue which Sylvan Lake's council is going to discuss.

The last time we raised the issue was in May of 2004. That was about a year after the City of Toronto prohibited the use of pesticides. And almost 15 years after the first Canadian municipality adopted its standards.

The first community to restrict the use of cosmetic pesticides was Hudson, Quebec, in 1990. Their bylaw was challenged and ended in a Supreme Court of Canada decision in 2001 which upheld the municipality's right to pass the bylaw. Toronto's bylaw was also challenged. Crop Life Canada, an industry body that represents the manufacturers of pesticide products, failed in its challenge.

"We are absolutely delighted that the Ontario (Superior) court has followed the lead of the Supreme Court of Canada in finding the municipalities have the power to protect citizens from the risks of pesticides," said Jerry DeMarco, managing lawyer of the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, who represented the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, in the case.

Since that time there's been a move in many communities across the country to follow suit.

Yet it's not an idea which is catching on in Western Canada, our research indicates.

"There are over 11 million Canadians, or 36.5 percent of Canada's total population, benefiting from enhanced protection from unwanted exposure to syn-

thetic lawn and garden pesticides," according to a report authored by Mike Christie last month.

"This figure includes the additional province-wide protection provided under Quebec's Pesticide Management Code."

The report notes 117 municipal bylaws are currently in place across Canada. That includes 93 in Quebec, 13 in Ontario, five in British Columbia, four in New Brunswick, one in Nova Scotia and one in Manitoba. Nothing in Alberta. Four of the biggest cities in Canada have bylaws — Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Halifax.

We believe use of pesticides to grow grass greener and faster, more evenly and thicker than your neighbour, without intrusive weeds, should be banned.

"Environmental protection has emerged as a fundamental value in Canadian society and the common future of every Canadian community depends on a healthy environment," states the Toronto bylaw. It also refers to health risks associated with use of pesticides and notes "pesticides used in lawn and garden care are known to enter streams and rivers, which discharge into Lake Ontario, the source of drinking water for the City of Toronto."

That last clause heightens our interest in calling for protection around the lake. While there are proposals for a water line out of the Red Deer River to serve Sylvan Lake, the possibility still remains the town could draw water from the lake to serve its residents.

We also note that currently wastewater from the Town of Sylvan Lake as well as Jarvis Bay and part of Norglenwold goes through a series of lagoons and eventually ends up spilling into the Red Deer River before the City of Red Deer takes water out to serve its residents. That's one of the reasons cited by the province for a regional sewage system. To stop discharges before Red Deer gets its water. That may be another reason why the town is operating its wastewater system on a temporary permit instead of a long term licence.

While a pesticide prohibition isn't the only solution, it's certainly worth considering.

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Illegal meeting bad way to start principal search



Gary Sosniecki

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April 26, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

It's the same song, second verse. Again a unit of government wants to operate in the dark. Again, a vigilant editor draws attention to the issue.

This editorial makes its point in a manner that is firm but not strident. It is a model of reasoned discourse.

Particularly effective is the writer's willingness to accept the intentions if not the actions of the public figure responsible for closing the hiring process. Most people in local government positions are honestly public-spirited, but occasionally some need guidance in how to carry out their public duties. If no one else serving in the public sector is willing to provide such guidance, the editor is justified — obligated, really — to do so.

The Van-Far R-1 Board of Education got off to a bad start in its search for a new high-school principal Thursday night when it set the process for the search in closed session.

That's a clear violation of Missouri's Sunshine Law.

How ironic that a process so open that students, faculty and staff will be part of the interview process was conceived in a meeting that was illegal because no members of the public — including the same students, faculty and staff — were allowed to attend.

The Sunshine Law allows closed meetings for this commonly used exception: "Hiring, firing, disciplining or promoting of particular employees by a public governmental body when personal information about the employee is discussed or recorded." Personal information is defined as "information relating to the performance or merit of individual employees."

No such personal information was discussed about a particular employee being considered for the principal's job Thursday night, because, according to Superintendent Kevin Freeman, the process isn't that far along yet.

All that was discussed was the process itself. And it was wrong — even illegal — to do that in private.

The public was not present to hear any discussion of what seems to be an innovative process of hiring a principal. A committee of six to 10 school employees, including teachers, support staff and Superintendent Freeman, will review the applications and conduct the initial interviews. Students will give tours of the facilities to the principal candidates when they interview, then report on their impressions.

The school board then will interview only the two or three finalists.

The public was not present to hear any discussion about whether such an open process, with so many people other than administrators and school-board members involved, will intimidate potential applicants who already have jobs and expect their applications to be treated with confidentiality. The more people who see an application, the more likely the identities of the applicants will be known throughout the community and will spread back to the applicants' hometowns.

The public was not present to hear if any board members — the public's elected representatives — felt their role in the process was being minimized.

The public was not present to hear why one board member, Larry Wheeler, voted against the process.

In defense of Superintendent Freeman, we have found him to be one of the most open superintendents we have dealt with in our 30-plus years of covering school districts. He is forthright with his answers even when he doesn't like the questions. He cares about educating Van-Far's students, he cares about the professional development of the faculty and staff, and he cares about molding the sometimes-divisive faculty into a cohesive team.

He is bringing the new ideas of a younger generation to the school district. Broadening participation in the principal's search to include students, faculty and staff members could create unity behind a new principal, something the past two principals have not enjoyed.

But a first-time superintendent can be prone to "rookie" mistakes, and, having never hired a principal before, setting the search process in a closed meeting was one of them. What a shame that no school-board members — some who have considerable experience — questioned whether it was illegal to hold such a discussion in private. Then again, we don't know that they didn't because the public wasn't present.

The Vandalia Leader has been the community's watchdog in opposition to illegally closed meetings since long before the current editors came to town, which probably is why violations of the Sunshine Law are a rarity here.

"An open government ... can reinforce the legitimacy of a chosen public policy," *The Leader* stated in an April 6, 1994, editorial. "Instead of patronizing its constituents by judging what may or may not be proper for public consumption, an open government allows all to participate in the formation and improvement of that policy."

We are optimistic that Thursday's violation of the Sunshine Law will be the exception, not the rule, for the Van-Far R-1 Board of Education.

Gary Sosniecki can be contacted at vandalialeader@vandaliamo.net.



Luke Klink

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December 7, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

Only in the last generation or so have most Americans become truly conscious of, and thereby protective of, the global environment, which includes wildlife. But there is no unanimity as to just how far that protection should extend.

The writer demonstrates courage by advocating a course of action that many of his readers – perhaps not a majority, but a significant number, nonetheless – will oppose. But he is right.

Where two movements, both of which seem socially responsible and culturally correct, come in conflict, only one of them can prevail. This well-crafted editorial’s closing sentence says it all: People come first.

Put people before deer

Kill the deer and cut down the cattails. While you’re at it, kill the turkeys too.

The state Department of Natural Resources with its usual stick-in-the-mud aplomb has temporarily halted an \$8.1 million expansion of the Taylor County Airport. The DNR apparently puts preserving four insignificant acres of wetland in one of the swampiest counties in the northwoods ahead of personal safety.

Local pilot Ron Bashor hit the nail on the head last week when he said pilots would take any safety measure they can get when taking off and landing planes at speeds of more than 100 miles per hour. An aluminum aircraft at that speed — along with its pilot and passengers — are at the mercy of any deer, turkey or other wildlife that unfortunately strolls onto the runway.

An airport runway needs to be in an area unattractive to wildlife for the safety of plane passengers.

Bashor compared aircraft to “tin cans” without bumpers that don’t fare well in a collision. It is time for the DNR to shove its oppressive rulebook back in the desk drawer and let the airport work begin. It is time for the agency everyone loves to hate to understand that the airport expansion does not have to result in fewer net acres of wetland. It is possible to create even more wetland elsewhere, so what is the point of the airport construction delay other than to squabble about which agency has greater authority — the DNR or the Federal Aviation Administration.

To its credit, the county airport committee recently hosted a meeting for all the state and federal bureaucratic agencies who must agree to an airport expansion environmental impact study. They weren’t all there, but it was an important first step toward getting the project off the ground. They will try another similar meeting within the next month. The study states airport expansion will have no significant impact.

In its infinite wisdom, the DNR wants to make certain the state never runs out of lakes, wetlands, swampland or any other low place a cattail might grow. It is kind of like the old adage, “if you can float a canoe” there, then it must be a wetland and must be preserved.

By its own account in its Wisconsin Lakes Book, Taylor County is home to 101 lakes and flowages. If a duck needs a place to land, it already has plenty of spots to pick from.

Taylor County often is forced to deal with wetlands. It wasn’t that long ago when the highway department hoped it could find bottom when digging out peat in search of stable ground to rebuild Hwy Q. It wasn’t that long ago when it poured gravel by the truckload into the mucky Matt Ochs Lake to build footings for a new bridge over Keyes Avenue. Highway projects routinely require construction through wetlands, and it is a simple process of exchanging one wetland here for one wetland there.

Unfortunately, the DNR is obsessing with the wetland around Taylor County Airport. It might seem noble to preserve all wetland everywhere for all God’s creatures, but it is time to look at the wetland — especially the wetland around here — the way the animals do.

A duck doesn’t know if it is landing at the Medford Mill Pond or Lake Esadore. A deer doesn’t know if it is in a swampy thicket at the airport or along the Black River. A turkey endeavoring to get its heavy body off the ground doesn’t know if a plane is taxiing down the runway toward it at 100 miles per hour.

A pilot does know the danger of wildlife on an aircraft runway. That is why Bashor is asking for as wide a runway safety area as possible.

All this wildlife scampering about the Taylor County Airport will eventually find itself in the wrong place at the wrong time with terrible consequences. It is time for the DNR to let the FAA do its job, and that job is looking out for personal safety. It is time to increase the 400-foot-wide safety area along the runway to 500-foot-wide, even if it means relocating a few soggy potholes.

The safety of people should always come before deer and turkeys.

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Funeral protestors know, show no shame



Betta Ferrendelli

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September 28, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

Given their outrageous tactics, the demonstrators, small in number and mostly members of one family, might be achieving their ends by inciting national outrage. If publicity is their goal, they certainly are reaching it.

Nonetheless, when the funeral protestors showed up in the community, it became the editor's duty to offer comment. The hitherto distant issue was now a local issue. The people whose personal sorrow and emotional devastation were compounded by an unexpected, unwarranted, hate-fueled attack were acquaintances and friends.

Yet the issue is a thorny one. Those of us whose credo is freedom of expression are understandably squeamish about advocating limits on freedom of expression.

The editorial serves to demonstrate convincingly that no freedom is absolute.

It may be hard for the average person to comprehend what is going through the small minds of those who claim to believe in God and who use such a belief to say that homosexuality is wrong and immoral as a legitimate reason to protest at funerals for fallen U.S. troops.

Such was the case in Rio Rancho last week when a 31-year-old soldier, killed by small arms fire in Iraq, was laid to rest at Vista Verde cemetery.

This is not the first stop these people have made. A small group of protestors (to match the truly insignificant gray matter between them) has shown up at other funerals for soldiers holding signs that say, among other things, "God hates fags."

It is always interesting when people claim they know what God is "thinking."

We have Fred Waldron Phelps Sr., to thank for this. He is the self-described "fire and brimstone" pastor and leader of the Westboro Baptist Church, an independent Baptist church in Topeka, Kan., listed as a "hate group" by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Phelps is known for preaching that God hates "fags" and that God will punish both homosexuals and "fag enablers" (whom his church defines as anyone it considers to be insufficiently anti-homosexual). Along with funerals, Phelps and his followers picket various events, especially gay pride and other high-profile political gatherings, to argue it is their sacred duty to warn others of the wrath to come.

When criticized, Phelps' followers say the First Amendment protects them in doing so. President Bush recently signed the Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act in response to Phelps' protests at military funerals.

Yet, they manage to do it anyway.

To stand in protest of homosexuality at a veteran's funeral is the ultimate form of disrespect. Would anyone with any sense of regard, compassion and conscience hold up a sign thanking God for IEDs (Improvised Explosive Device) while attending a funeral for a veteran who gave his life in the name of freedom?

It is ironic that these protestors can do exactly that. They can protest until the proverbial cows come

home and seemingly get away with it. In this country — because so many have died for so long in the name of freedom — protestors such as this pathetic little group have every right to hold signs denouncing gays while standing on American Flags and shouting slogans of hate.

Though these protestors have that right, there is a time and place to protest such views. At a funeral when a young veteran's life has been tragically cut down is not only the wrong place and time, it is a form of cruel and unusual punishment to the grieving family.

For any number of reasons, most of these brave young men and women have volunteered for military duty. Some soldiers die doing what they're supposed to be doing: Following orders sent down through the chain of command. To disgrace a fallen soldier during his or her funeral is, as one letter writer in the *USA Today* described it, "a slap in the face to everything this country stands for."

To protest at a veteran's funeral speaks volumes about these protestors — that they have hearts the size of peas and hard as granite. And the question of why they do it fails all means of trying to explain their actions as logical.

Let's hope New Mexico's lawmakers will act swiftly when the Legislature convenes in January and enact Bush's law like our Colorado neighbors to the north have done. It is the least and the best thing as a state we can do for veterans who pay the ultimate price.

Speaking from a Biblical sense, what would Jesus do were he to walk among these protestors? Was it not Jesus who taught that everyone should love and respect other human beings no matter what? And wasn't it also Christ who taught that all should live their lives as an example to others — to allow your "light to shine before all men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven."

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September 21, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

Even the best-intentioned local government figures tend to protect their domain in inappropriate ways. When they inappropriately draw a veil of secrecy over a public function, the local press has an obligation to sound the alarm.

Sounding the alarm is not a matter of making the news-gathering process easier. It is a matter of preserving democracy. The editor is not talking about freedom of the press. He's talking about freedom of the people. This is not a "right to report" issue. It's a "right to know" issue.

The law spells out the proper procedures in the municipal hiring process. All local government has to do is "follow the law."

The strength of this editorial lies in the writer's decision to resist the temptation to shout or to recriminate, but quietly yet firmly, with authority and erudition, makes his point.

Follow the law

Hardin's tempest in the stockpot this week could certainly have been avoided if city officials had paid a little closer attention to the law.

While it does not appear that there was any irreparable damage done to the honest administration of government — save some reputations sullied by careless rumor-mongering — those involved in the hiring of a new city clerk committed some "technical violations" that should be of concern to all.

In essence, an attorney with the Montana Freedom of Information Hotline says the failure to properly close at least one meeting to the public by not ascertaining that the job applicants' right of privacy outweighed the public's right to know was probably not serious enough to nullify the subsequent hiring. The fact that those taking part in two meetings in regard to the city clerk hiring failed to keep minutes of the meeting makes the matter more complicated. Without a written record we are left with only the personal recollections of those involved — tenuous stuff indeed.

Montana's Constitution includes two important sections under Article II that directly address the public's right to know. Section 8 states, "The public has the right to expect governmental agencies to afford such reasonable opportunity for citizen participation in the operation of the agencies prior to the final decision as may be provided by law."

Section 9 continues the theme:

"No person shall be deprived of the right to examine documents or to observe the deliberations of all public bodies or agencies of state government and its

subdivisions, except in cases in which the demand of individual privacy clearly exceeds the merits of public disclosure."

That being said, it is important to remember that "the public" — also popularly known as "the taxpayers" — has a stake in how its government runs. Public servants must always be mindful that they are the employees, not the keepers.

Those involved in running the public business must be always mindful that it is their responsibility to uphold and follow the law, even when — perhaps especially when — it is inconvenient or humbling.

Had the mayor and the city council taken pains to properly determine whether the city-clerk job applicants' personal privacy outweighed the public's right to know in making the decision to close part or all of the meetings on Aug. 15 and Sept. 6, much of the hassle in connection with what has turned out to be a controversial hiring process might have been avoided.

Secondly, the mayor and the city council should have followed the law (2-3-121, Montana Code Annotated, 2003) and kept accurate minutes of the meetings. As it stands now, we have only their memories upon which to rely, not a good circumstance by any means.

We encourage the city and its officers to be mindful of these matters in the future. Next time, the issue could be far more consequential than the hiring of a clerk.

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Code of shame

It hurts even here when Milwaukee is shamed by a failure to hold police to the same standards as ordinary citizens

E. Michael McCann, the venerable, straitlaced, daily church-going district attorney of Milwaukee, was so frustrated by police conduct in the beating of Frank Jude Jr. and the ensuing trial that in his summation to the jury last week he uttered a profanity. Who can blame him? This travesty of justice is both a curse and cause for cursing. And now that the verdict is in, perhaps for crying.

We should weep for Milwaukee. Comfortable in the small-town confines of Ozaukee County, we don't live in that troubled city, but it is the heart of the region we call home. For many reasons — the jobs, education in its fine universities, culture, entertainment and more that it provides — we depend on it. The Jude case has inflicted anguish on that city, and we feel its pain.

There is plenty of pain. The savage beating of a man by police officers and their exoneration by a jury has put the moral corruption of a segment of the Milwaukee Police Department and the willingness of some in the community to excuse it on shameful display.

Much has been made of the fact that the trial of policemen accused of beating the bi-racial Jude was decided by an all-white jury, but the real outrage is that jurors of any race could fail to hold those involved in the crime accountable.

The strategies and courtroom performance of the prosecutor and defense attorneys in the nationally watched trial can be parsed ad infinitum, but the essential facts of the case are indisputable:

A man was horribly beaten. Police officers administered the beating. A large number of officers took part in or observed the beating, but only a few would defy what McCann called the police "code of silence" and give information. The former officers on trial (fired for their parts in the beating) were not charged with being the specific perpetrators of the crime — not charged with kicking Jude in the face, or jamming a

pen in his ear, or cutting his clothing away with knife, while repeatedly calling him "nigger" — but with being a party to the crime. Even with the bar set that low, the jury refused to hold police officers responsible.

In the aftermath of this failed exercise in justice, one that undermines the trust in police that is a basic requisite for the progress to which Milwaukee aspires in improving the lot of its struggling minority population, city leaders are left to grasp at straws of hope.

One is that outrage over the case seems to be shared by white and black Milwaukeeans alike, and that may be basis for reform through citizen efforts to review police conduct or legislation.

Somewhat hopeful too are the signs that the case has opened eyes, including those of the district attorney. Throughout his long and mostly laudable career, McCann has famously given the benefit of the doubt to police. In fact, his slow response to the Jude beating — it wasn't until months after the crime and, significantly, after the beating was detailed in a newspaper story that the DA started investigating in earnest — did not help the case. McCann has now been quoted as saying he will no longer assume that police testimony is the truth.

The DA's courtroom expletive was provoked by the refusal of police witnesses to the crime to tell what they knew. Besides the now familiar photograph of the grotesquely battered face of Frank Jude Jr., the enduring image of this sorry affair will be the mental picture of police officers saluting their never-rat-on-a-fellow-cop code with their silence, even as representatives of their department were preaching to teenagers in Milwaukee neighborhoods on the evils of the so-called no-snitching code.

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April 20, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

The shadow cast by a planet darkens its satellites. The shame of a city is shared in the villages.

There are aspects of this piece that might have barred it from the circle of honor: Its lead is a bit slow to develop, its issue is "local" only in a sense, it offers no clear solution — and yet it is a compelling editorial. There are times when appealing to the conscience of a community becomes necessary.

What emerges from this example of skillful and effective use of the language is a soulful plea for human decency.



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August 24, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

A bit slow-starting, a little sarcastic, here is an editorial that ends up packing a wallop. It demonstrates that sometimes shock tactics work.

Readers who might be slightly annoyed by the author's unrelenting parody also might come to recognize that they themselves are portrayed in the reading-primer. And that is a good thing.

There is no question as to the importance of the subject matter. The writer had discovered that simply saying "Drive safely" had little effect.

His alternative method of delivering the message is infinitely more powerful.

By coming on a little strong, he maybe even saved a life.

See Dick run over

It's an American tradition for newspapers to run look-out-for-the-kids editorials before school starts each year. But, like most old-fashioned rituals, the tradition needs to be ashcanned.

Telling drivers to look out for kids is about as effective as telling them to unplug the lights on the Christmas tree when they leave the house or reminding them to check the batteries in their smoke alarms. If they haven't gone on to another section of the paper by the end of the first sentence, they're snoring by the end of the first paragraph. One friend even asked us once if that week's please-slow-down plea was a space-filler.

No, we need a new approach for avoiding tragic traffic accidents involving schoolchildren. We need to reach the right audience. We need to place the blame for these accidents squarely on the shoulders of those responsible — the children. Just as the 12-year-old hoodlum is responsible for his actions when his parents have raised him a hoodlum, the 8-year-old should have enough sense to stay out of the way of 7,000-pound vehicles driven by people who are too busy to pay attention.

Herewith a draft of a new page in the first-graders' reading book — call it a space-filler in their textbook, if you'd like — that should supply them ample warning:

Look, look. See Dick. See Dick walk. See Dick walk to school. See Dick walk to school beside the road. See Dick walk to school beside the road in the fog.

Look, look. See John. See John drive to work. See John drive past Dick. John is in a hurry. See John's Egg McMuffin in his steering hand, his cup of coffee between his legs and his shaver in his other hand. See John look at his face in the mirror to catch any spots he has missed.

Look, look. See Mary. See Mary drive to work. See Mary drive past Dick. Mary is very busy. Mary takes periodic sips of a strawberries-and-creme frappuccino blended creme with whipped creme on her console. Mary is talking on her cell phone while she applies makeup.

Look, look. See Frank. See Frank drive to work. See Frank drive past Dick. Frank is one of the drivers who caused the principal at Evergreen Elementary to pull his crossing guards off the streets because they were in too much danger from the motorists. Frank accelerates when he sees someone in a crosswalk in front of him. Frank cusses at half of the things he sees on the road. When Frank passes bicyclists in his muscle car, he waits until he is five feet behind them before laying on the horn and passes them with 18

inches to spare.

Look, look. See Annabelle. Annabelle is on her way to the store. See Annabelle drive past Dick. Annabelle is 93. Last week Annabelle's Cadillac jumped the curb and went through the front window of the Stop-n-Shop. Annabelle is fine. No one is worried about Annabelle, not legislators, the Department of Licensing or her children.

Look, look. See Derek. Derek should be on his way to school, but he is skipping today. See Derek drive past Dick. Derek routinely drives 57 in a 25 zone. Derek is on a first-name basis with the police. Derek has 12 moving violations, but Mommy and Daddy keep paying for his car. Derek is the Beltone Poster Boy. Derek plays music (that's using the noun loosely) in his car at 585 decibels. Derek's music plays so loudly he wouldn't hear the bump if he hit a 900-pound elk let alone a 45-pound child. See Derek look into his girlfriend's eyes as they pass Dick.

Look, look. See Bill. See Bill drive to the store to get something more to drink. Bill has four citations for drunk driving. Bill has six citations for driving without a license. Bill doesn't have a license, but he needs something more to drink. See Bill weave past Dick.

Look, look. See Patty. See Patty drive to the doctor's office. See baby Angela in the carseat beside her. See Ricky in the back seat with Spot. Ricky is 4. See Patty look around to tell Ricky, "It makes me angry when you shoot your dart gun at Spot in the car. It makes me angry when you get out of your seatbelt and pour orange juice on the baby's head. It makes me angry when you rip up the medical forms we are taking to the doctor. Now that I have informed you that those things make me angry, please don't do those things. I know they might not make other people angry, but they make me angry, okay?" See baby Angela spit out her pacifier. See Patty reach down on the floor to get it. Oh, oh. See the car hit Dick.

Look, look. Dick is dead. Everyone is sad. Dick's parents are sad. Dick's friend Jane is sad. Dick's other friends Jack and Jill are so sad they don't even want to go up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Patty is sad. Patty's insurance company is sad. Dick's classmates are sad. See the Methodist Church filled with sad people. Hear the sad music. See Dick buried in a little casket in the sad brown cemetery.

So there you have it. The new, improved before-school editorial tradition. Hey, wake up. You're snoring.

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Time to end the RSU war

Rogers State University faces a catastrophe that can only be averted if it promptly settles its ongoing war with Joshua Fellman. Time is running out fast.

The four-year-old bloodletting involves alleged computer hacking. One student settled with the university two years ago, but the Fellman cases have dragged on and on in both state and federal court.

RSU attorneys can cite legal reasons for continuing the fight, but courts of law have taken a back seat in importance to the court of public opinion — where RSU has already lost.

The cases are convoluted, but the underlying facts are simple: RSU declared war on students it alleged were involved in computer hacking. It expelled Fellman, but that was overturned in court due to outrageous conduct which included erasing — supposedly by accident — much of the tape which provided the only record of Fellman's on-campus hearing.

RSU tried to have Fellman criminally prosecuted, but both state and federal prosecutors — after exhaustive reviews of the facts — scoffed at that. Simply put, even if everything alleged was true, the issue was not worth their time or effort. So much for Fellman being a major threat.

But RSU — by now infuriated that a mere student could question its divine authority — tried to break Fellman in civil court. Fellman responded. After various skirmishes, there now are dueling federal lawsuits. Fellman was willing to drop his case, until RSU pursued and won an appeal to keep its case alive.

Now the battle has taken a truly ugly turn. New court documents depict President Joe Wiley and nine members of his staff as buffoons who make the Keystone Cops and The Three Stooges look dignified and respectable.

In 85 pages filed with the U.S. District Court in Tulsa, Fellman's attorney describes steps Wiley & Co. went to avoid being served with court papers.

The university president is depicted as driving across a lawn, leading a process server on a low-speed chase through Claremore, turning around in a nursing home parking lot, then sneaking through a back

entrance to his office — where he locked himself in for over an hour. Hardly the kind of behavior one expects from the president of a major university.

Another RSU employee tried to hide out by covering windows at her home with black plastic trash bags.

Three administrators were all sick at the same precise time, raising eyebrows. But they couldn't be found at home, raising more eyebrows. Just what are taxpayers and the students who pay tuition getting for their money?

This all comes from just skimming the documents. There are 85 pages of names, dates, times, addresses, license plate numbers and much more. We don't think anyone at RSU wants to see all those dots connected in public.

RSU's attorney says that the allegations were not refuted in its court filings solely "because it was not relevant to our argument" on the legal issues. But with 85 pages of smoke, there undoubtedly is far too much fire for anyone's comfort.

We suspect that the attorneys on both sides would like to settle. For some reason, someone in the RSU administration is determined not to settle, so that they can make an example of Fellman. That simply won't happen.

RSU should settle for a reasonable sum — certainly enough to restore Fellman and his attorney to pre-war status. That would be a financial bargain compared to keeping this litigation going for several more years, and a home run in the court of public opinion.

For his part, Fellman must be reasonable in his demands. We wish his attorney had not filed such a potent salvo, because it may include landmines that cannot be disarmed.

The next move is up to RSU.

It can act wisely for the long term, and in a few months this whole sorry mess will be forgotten. Or it can continue its scorched earth policy.

If it does the latter, it will find that playing with landmines during a Red Flag fire alert is a deadly gamble.

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January 19, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

This simply has gone on long enough.

The editorial suggests, nay demands, that university officials end their protracted legal war with computer hackers before the costs of the battle exceed the spoils of an unlikely victory.

The writer strengthens his argument with examples of what the battle already has cost in terms of damage to the image of the university. The ludicrous nature of some of the twists and turns of the case speak for themselves.

A strong editorial, using strong expression, making a strong point.



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August 2, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

It is a hard thing to allege that a local entity or agency is going about its business in an unethical manner.

It is an even harder thing to face down defenders of the agency. In this case, the defenders are readers of the newspaper.

In a follow-up to an earlier piece, the opinion writer patiently explains the why of his editorial stance. He takes advantage of the opportunity afforded by his critics to bolster his argument and solidify his position. He sticks to his guns.

The author's device of putting the profiling shoe on the other foot is particularly effective.

This is an editorial that needed to be written.

Why it's wrong for police to profile

Three letters to the editor this week take issue with last week's editorial about the Pendergrass Police Department. The editorial argued that it's wrong to profile Hispanics as an ethnic group for traffic stops.

However, the authors of this week's letters seem to think it's OK for law enforcement to single out Hispanics in their patrols.

Over the past few weeks, 86 percent of those arrested and booked in jail by the Pendergrass Police Department have been Hispanic, a much higher rate than the other area police departments and higher than the local Hispanic population would suggest.

In addition, the most recent Pendergrass city court saw Hispanics make up 34 percent of those fined for traffic offenses, but they carried a whopping 49 percent of the total fines levied.

So why is that wrong?

For the same reason it's wrong for government to use its policing power to abuse any group of people because of their ethnic or racial status.

It wasn't too many years ago that black citizens were the targets of government and police harassment. At the time, such government-sanctioned ethnic harassment was perfectly acceptable to most whites.

Today, it is Hispanics who have become a target. Part of that is perhaps due to a backlash against illegal immigration into the U.S.

But the problem of illegal immigration does not give local police *carte blanche* to harass Hispanics with local traffic patrols.

Unfortunately, some view such harassment as being acceptable. Stop'em. Lock'em up. Hell, they're just Mexicans!

One letter this week justifies using the police to stop Hispanic drivers because "...pulling over a Hispanic driver will probably net you an unlicensed

one." And besides, he says, Pendergrass is making money off the scheme.

Such individual prejudice will always exist. But that's far different than police using ethnic profiling as a predictor of crime.

Someone who breaks the law might be Hispanic, but police should not target Hispanics as a group simply to go fishing for a crime.

That's apparently what's happening in Pendergrass: Cars are being stopped because they are driven by Hispanics, then the cops look for an infraction to justify the stop.

But imagine the outcry if the Pendergrass cops were themselves Hispanic and started targeting white men in pickup trucks or white soccer moms driving minivans. Would that be OK?

No one would argue that Hispanics should be given special treatment. If they break the law, they should be arrested.

But neither should they be singled out by police because of their ethnic makeup.

Other local police departments aren't targeting Hispanics in such a manner.

The Jackson County Sheriff's Department isn't doing it.

Jefferson police aren't doing it. Commerce police aren't doing it. Even traffic-fine heavyweight Arcade isn't doing it.

Using police to target any ethnic group doesn't just harm that group, it diminishes all of us. And it has a corrosive effect. When we as a society assent to such practices with silence, it erodes the integrity of our legal system.

That's why the profiling of Hispanic drivers in Pendergrass is wrong.

It should stop.

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The 'how' of the cut in SDPB funding adds insult to injury



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March 8, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

There is no mistaking the editor's position: The state legislature went the wrong way about what likely was the wrong thing.

The writer effectively allows both sides their innings in the matter of the propriety of Public Broadcasting's cut in funding.

The larger question was the manner in which the cut was made. In a rush to beat the clock as the legislative session wound down, legislative leaders tossed public input out the window.

This is an exquisitely crafted editorial on a subject of interest not only in the local community but well beyond the local community. It performs with precision and skill the noblest function of community newspaper opinion pages: holding government accountable.

Whether the South Dakota Legislature's last minute decision March 1 to cut \$500,000 from South Dakota Public Broadcasting's budget was the right decision or not, the way it happened was dead wrong.

The Legislature has been meeting since January and the decision came at the very end of the session through an amendment to the state's general funding bill that surfaced late Friday in committee and was passed hours later.

"If they've got a million or more lying around in cash reserves, is it responsible to ask taxpayers to fund \$500,000 that they don't have?" asked Senator Brock Greenfield, a Republican from Clark.

Clark was referring to figures that show SDPB is carrying a surplus of \$976,745 for the current fiscal year. Julie Andersen, executive director of SDPB, says that number was misleading.

And, she said, given expected cuts in federal funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, last week's action by South Dakota legislators is "crippling."

"It's a big deal," she told the *Rapid City Journal*. "The real hurt is that it's not a one-year cut. It's a \$500,000 reduction in perpetuity."

Too bad Andersen and supporters of SDPB didn't get a chance to put that and other information about SDPB on the table before the lawmakers made their decision. The effort to cut SDPB came as an amendment at the final Joint Appropriations Committee

hearing. Citing time, committee chair Jerry Apa closed the hearing to public testimony.

In other words, the members of the committee discussed the matter without giving the public a chance to weigh in.

And that's just not right.

Greenfield argued that the state has plenty of television and radio outlets. It would appear he isn't watching very closely.

SDPB provides the people of South Dakota with remarkable unique services that are unduplicated — from quality programming for children to extended coverage of Legislature to the live airing of sporting events like last month's state high school wrestling championships.

Some have suggested the cut was more about a perceived liberal slant by public broadcasting than dollars. Greenfield is the executive director of South Dakota Right to Life.

While that might be the motivation for some, one wonders on what basis the rest of the legislators were making their judgments. Obviously it was too late to ask their constituents.

The full impact of a \$500,000 loss to SDPB is yet to be determined, but it will hurt the programming for the people of South Dakota.

And the way South Dakota lawmakers went about it only adds insult to the injury.

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Mo Mehlsak

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October 11, 2006

FROM THE JUDGE

Public officials are no different from the rest of us: They, too, make mistakes. This editorial points out, with some vigor, why the local education board's action was a mistake and how the board came to make it.

Under an eye-catching headline, the author makes a carefully reasoned case for his assertion that the school committee erred when it decided to uphold its new unweighted grades policy.

There obviously is some question in regard to public sentiment on the issue. The writer thinks a majority of concerned parties in the school district share his view, but even if this were not true, he would continue to advocate what he believes is right.

School committee members are chided for using their hearts rather than their heads. The editorial writer has used both.

School Committee throws its weightlessness around

The Portland School Committee had a chance to correct a mistake last week when it reconsidered an earlier decision that abolished a policy of weighting grades and class rank in the city's high schools.

Unfortunately, the board blew it and voted to stick with its new policy of weightlessness.

Not that there aren't reasons to discuss and question whether weighted grades are desirable. In fact, whether schools should weight grades and class ranks is a discussion that has been going on for years in districts across the country.

Which helps explain where the Portland board erred. Had its decision been made after careful study and thorough public discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of weighting, some people would probably still have disagreed with the decision, but few would have criticized the committee's process.

It is widely accepted that weighted grades encourage more students to take challenging courses, and give students improved chances for success when they apply for scholarships and admission to college. On the other hand, weighted grades may discourage students from taking non-weighted classes that truly interest them, can lead to tracking and may send a message to those taking regular classes that their performance and effort have less value.

But there was no discussion of the pros and cons in Portland. Last week's reconsideration of the policy change happened only after about 250 people turned out the previous week to largely criticize the committee's action. Some parents have gone as far as to suggest the committee members are more concerned with social engineering than they are with educating and challenging the city's students.

Ultimately, the committee failed to do its homework. And members wouldn't have had to work hard to do it; although board members Otis Thompson and Stephen Spring and some members of the public claimed otherwise last week, there is plenty of research available on the subject.

A June 2000 paper called "Weighted Grades: A

Conundrum for Secondary Schools" by Gail C. Downs, prepared for the Center for Research & Evaluation at the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development, summarized the pros and cons of weighted grades and suggested the goal should be a school system that encourages learning and equity, while increasing students' chances for college admission and scholarships.

"A school system that adopts weighted grades is not required to consider weighted grades under all circumstances," the report says. In that vein, many school districts now report two sets of grades — weighted and non-weighted — to provide as much information as possible about the achievements and aspirations of all it students, not just the gifted or college-inclined.

But for those students who intend to pursue college educations, the report continues, "college applicants with weighted grades on their transcripts have a clear advantage for admission and scholarships at many colleges and universities. Therefore, this issue should be given significant consideration when implementing specific policy."

Which is what the School Committee apparently did not do.

Spring, one of the proponents of the change in Portland, said he didn't think the turnout two weeks ago suggested that more than a vocal minority opposed the board's action. We think he's wrong. But even if Spring is correct, the School Committee has as much responsibility to craft a policy that protects the interests of a "minority" who hope to compete for admission to the most highly competitive colleges as it does to level the grading playing field.

"My heart won't let me vote to reinstate this policy," Spring reportedly said last week. We just wish he and the other members of the majority — Susan Hopkins, Benjamin Meiklejohn, Jason Toothaker and Thompson — would have used their heads.

Mo Mehlsak can be contacted at mmehlsak@theforecaster.net.



The 32nd annual Eugene Cervi Award

The Eugene Cervi Award was established by ISWNE in 1976 to honor the memory of Eugene Cervi of the *Rocky Mountain Journal*, Denver, by recognizing a newspaper editor who has consistently acted in the conviction that “good journalism begets good government.”

The award is presented not for a single

brave accomplishment, however deserving, but for a career of outstanding public service through community journalism and for adhering to the highest standards of the craft with the deep reverence for the English language that was the hallmark of Gene Cervi’s writing. The award also recognizes consistently aggressive reporting of government at the grassroots level and interpretation of local affairs.

Cervi died on Dec. 15, 1970, from injuries suffered in an automobile accident. He was 64. Several ISWNE members regard him as their “journalism conscience.”

This Year’s Winner Is...

Guy and Marcia Wood

Publishing was a ‘labor of love’ for couple

By Jo Bynum

He started in the newspaper business with a paper route at the daily Sterling, Colo., *Journal-Advocate*, where his father was advertising manager for over 30 years. Fifty years later, a great deal of life has passed his direction, but Guy Wood is still delivering, with help from wife and business partner Marcia.

Guy and Marcia, both 1967 graduates of the University of Colorado School of Journalism, closed on the deal to purchase the *Sangre de Cristo Chronicle* from Joe Gallagher in March 1984.

“We published the *Fremont County SUN* and the *Fremont Trader* in Cañon City, Colo., from 1973 to 1983,” said Guy. “During the summer of 1983 we decided to sell our weekly papers to the daily newspaper in Cañon City. Our goal was to get back to the mountains.

“We have always loved the mountains. We learned the excitement and stimulation, as well as the business opportunities, of working in a resort community while managing a weekly newspaper in Aspen, 1971 to 1973. We always wanted to return to a similar environment.”

In July 1983, the Woods vacationed in Eagle Nest and Red River and were impressed to find mountains in New Mexico. “Like many Colorado natives, we snobbishly believed there weren’t any mountains south of Trinidad,” said Guy.

“All I had seen of New Mexico before our vacation was the area around Farmington, where my father traded sheep,” Marcia added.

In late November they visited Red River and Angel Fire and approached Laurelle Gallagher, who was publishing the *Chronicle* for son Joe, about purchasing the newspaper.

Coincidentally while in Cañon City, Marcia had been volunteering as advisor for the St. Scholastica Academy school newspaper, where two of her students were Moreno Valley natives Lori Gallagher and Barbara Torres.

“Lori often talked about the newspaper her brother founded in the beautiful Moreno Valley in northern New Mexico,” said Marcia. “It didn’t click until we were on our way home that we would be buying Lori’s brother’s paper.”

“We felt buying the *Chronicle* was meant to be, that the fates had plans for us here,” Guy added.

The deal was sealed March 1, 1984, and Guy stayed in Angel Fire. Marcia returned home so daughter Heather could finish 6th grade and son Chris, 2nd



grade, in Cañon City. They moved to Angel Fire in mid-June after their home sold.

That summer the kids took tennis lessons from Nancy Burch, the resort activities director.

Marcia and Guy were soon involved with the ski team, Little League, Cub Scouts and PTA. In fact, Marcia worked with Eagle Nest principal Marla Gadry and Cimarron District Superintendent Thelma Coker to resurrect the Eagle Nest PTA that is still active today.

“When the kids were growing up, there were barely enough kids in the area to field a softball team or have a Cub Scout Pack,” Marcia said.

Guy became involved in the Chamber of Commerce, serving on the board of directors, and Marcia, on the Music From Angel Fire board.

The new venture

“When we came to Angel Fire in 1984, the economy was booming,” said Marcia.

“Texas \$100 bills were three-feet long and we had Kansas auto dealers advertising in the paper,” Guy continued. “The town’s lumber company and the newly established grocery store ran full page ads and Angel Fire Corporation

Real Estate had the back page every week for about the first four to five years.”

Besides a few short-term crises, the paper flourished.

“The very week we bought the paper, on Guy’s first Monday morning in the office” started Marcia.

“The power went out and didn’t come back on until 3 p.m.,” finished Guy. (Then, as now, Monday was a long, hectic day at the *Chronicle*.)

Then there was the New Year’s Day when around 4 p.m. — before Guy’s New Year’s hangover had faded — Rita Arko called from Angel Fire Mini Mart to tell the Woods water was running out from under the front door of the *Chronicle*. A water pipe in the office ceiling had frozen and burst. Water was pouring down on the darkroom equipment, especially on the enlarger used to develop photographs for the paper.

“The enlarger survived. Lee Madore sucked water out of the carpet for four hours,” remembers Guy. During those days, the *Chronicle* office was in the Mini Mart Plaza.

The Woods also became active in the New Mexico Press Association (NMPA), entering the “Better Newspaper Contests” — staffers have brought home more awards than office walls can hold. Both have served on the NMPA board over the years, Guy as president in 1990 and on the current board today. The *Chronicle* also belongs to the National Newspaper Association, and Guy and Marcia are members of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors (ISWNE).

Out with the old, in with ...

Just prior to selling the *Chronicle*, Laurelle had added the earliest computerized Compugraphic typesetting equipment with memory equivalent to 32K, Guy said. “When we had a power blip — which were frequent in those days — it would take 30 minutes to reboot. Service calls were a minimum \$600 just to get the service rep here.”

“Those were the ‘paste-up’ days. The type came out damp and had to be dried with a hair dryer before waxing and aligning onto grid sheets in story form,” Marcia remembers.

When production was finished Tuesdays, Guy would race through the canyon to catch the 6 o’clock bus at the Taos bus station, so the paste-ups could be shipped to the printer in Albuquerque. “I can even remember Chief Bill Conley leading the way out of town a time or two,” Marcia laughs.

Early typesetting equipment evolved through early computers to the server set-up the *Chronicle* has today. Reporters type into computers and layout is fully computerized and PDFs of each page are shipped over the Internet to Albuquerque each Tuesday evening.

The paper is printed overnight and trucked back Wednesday morning. “Technological changes in the industry have been beyond description,” said Guy.

“Producing the paper is faster and easier...but that just allows us more time to massage the final product.”

Good start stumbles

Like every business in Angel Fire, the *Chronicle*’s fortunes have been linked to the resort.

About five months after the Woods assumed control of the *Chronicle*, Dan Lasater purchased Angel Fire Corporation (AFC) for \$19.5 million and the assumption of certain liabilities.

Self-made millionaire Lasater retained Club Development Inc. of Dallas to assist in improvement of Angel Fire ski facilities and other amenities, with plans to provide the finest in year-round facilities for visitors. The resort appeared to be on the fast track to success.

Some of Lasater’s plans to improve AFC were included in an Oct. 11, 1984, *Chronicle* article bearing the front page headline, “Lasater ‘Won’t Tolerate’ Drugs.” Two years later, Thursday, Oct. 23, Lasater was indicted on charges of conspiracy to distribute and possession with intent to distribute cocaine.

AFC President John McIntosh tried to ease property and business owner fears by insisting Lasater’s indictment would not in any way affect the opera-

tion of the resort. Unfortunately, McIntosh was wrong. Lasater pled guilty and was sentenced to 30 months in prison. As a convicted felon, Lasater could not own the five liquor licenses connected to AFC so in a hasty sale, AFC ended up in the hands of Gary Plante and wife Lynda, and Ron Evans.

The lean years

The Plante and Evans purchase followed on the heels of the January 1986 crude oil plummet which started a downturn in Angel Fire’s economy as the second homeowner market started to dry up. Financial problems escalated through the Savings and Loan scandals of the mid to late 1980s.

By 1987 AFC was having trouble with the IRS and failing to pay property taxes. When AFC failed to make its employee payroll on Oct. 22, 1987, the *Chronicle* ran the unpopular story.

Plante sent his employees scurrying through town buying up all *Chronicles* and had returned the Corp’s news rack to the *Chronicle* office by the following morning. Incensed by that story — and the *Chronicle*’s earlier editorializing against his attempts to bring gaming to Angel Fire — Plante pulled all advertising.

This was no small blow to the paper and its publishers. “The corporation was far and away our largest advertiser,” said Guy. “But the situation helped wean us from easy ads, stiffened our backbone and forced us to broaden our base.”

AF Corp’s bankruptcy

With daughter Heather starting college in 1990, the resort’s downturn required action. Guy and Marcia purchased two Ouray County, Colorado papers and for the next five years commuted between Angel Fire and Ouray.

“After three years we knew Angel Fire was where we wanted to be,” said Guy. “We missed our friends, life style, green chile and mellow attitudes of the Moreno Valley. We sold the Ouray properties in March 1995 and returned full-time to the Moreno Valley.”

“Life in a resort community is so different from other small communities,” Marcia continued. “People come and go. It is hard to keep the population of professional and semi-professionals with children so the valley continues to have a disproportionately high retired population. The local economy is tied to the resort and ups and downs in Texas and Oklahoma.”

“We don’t have a retail sector like traditional communities,” added Guy. While the lifeblood for most newspapers is retail, the *Chronicle*’s is real estate and construction.

“It’s been a roller coaster ride with extreme peaks and valleys,” Marcia said. “We go from 30 contractors in the area when times are good down to a small core group when times are bad.”

Chronicling history

Through the years, Guy and Marcia and crew have chronicled the history of Angel Fire, Red River, Eagle Nest and Cimarron.

“It’s difficult to cover four communities — four sets of government, four sets of community events, two school districts,” said Marcia. “Publishing a community paper is a labor of love. And it’s often frustrating. We never feel we have done enough. We don’t have enough time, staff or space to cover every-thing the way we would like.”

“Through it all, we’ve tried to publish a newspaper in the best interest of the community at large,” Guy added. “Local political pressures notwithstanding, always paramount in our hearts is what’s best for the community, not just the vested interest. We’ve been fortunate to have really good people to help us and very supportive business owners.”

“We’ve seen lots of good things happen and lots of sad things, too,” said Marcia. “After almost 21 years we’re becoming the Anasazi. And the worst part of that is watching the original community leaders move, or pass away. “And of course publishing the paper has yielded friendships in Red River, Eagle Nest and Cimarron, too.

“Chronicling people’s lives has been the best part of this job.”

A few words from the couple's supporters

Woods embody Cervi's legacy

By Frank Garred

Wanted: person or couple anxious to settle in a small town or city neighborhood, take charge of local community newspaper with minimal profit margin.

Qualified applicants must be able to deal with provincial local government led by paternalistic establishment that knows what is best for the residents it serves.

Applicants must have following specific skills: accounting, personnel management, public relations, advertising sales, marketing, journalism, sociology, psychology, law, health science, janitorial services. Additional specific qualifications include ability to deal successfully with Postal Service, real estate agencies and developers, corporate conglomerates that operate local franchised and branch services from out of state headquarters.

Successful applicants must be willing to work 80- to 100-hour weeks to support and maintain an independently aggressive, thoughtful, fair, balanced, accurate editorial standard with challenging, probing articulate editorials; well-sourced enterprise reporting and writing; crisp, focused photography; compelling, creative advertising, and packaged to attract and maintain an all too critical and skeptical readership.

Salary and benefits depend on monthly (or bi-monthly) residual bank balance. Equity opportunity available; present family ownership must liquidate due to age and health.

Send resume and list of references, including financial position.

So, who would qualify for such an opportunity as this?

Guy and Marcia Wood...several times over.

Guy and Marcia Wood serve as examples, as leaders among their peers for supporting and sustaining community newspaper principles. Like most of us, their success cannot and is not measured in dollars, but in the dedicated service they have provided to their communities.

Eugene Sisto Cervi may have caused us to set into stone the standards he set and that we emulate today. Guy and Marcia met and exceeded those standards in their careers as caretakers of the Cervi ethic in their chosen communities. They are the "Main Street Militants" (as ISWNE's founding director Howard Rusk Long wrote) of Angel Fire, New Mexico; of Ouray, Ridgway, Cañon City and Aspen, Colorado.

Retiring last spring (2006) at Angel Fire, the Woods have left their legacy for a new generation of publishers in those communities they served.

Marcia has served as president of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors; Guy served as president of the New Mexico Press Association. Both served terms on the NMPA board and Guy is a founding member of the New Mexico FOG (Foundation for Open Government).

So many years, so many awards at Angel Fire. Almost with a sigh, one New Mexico publisher (who does not have to compete in the same division as the *Chronicle*) said he lost count of the paper's general excellence awards.

Yet peer review isn't the definitive criteria the Woods use to measure the *Chronicle's* success. To them it has been the subscribers and advertisers that reflect their determination, leadership and outcome.

Angel Fire is a very small village in northeast New Mexico. It and several other hamlets dot the Moreno Valley and in Angel Fire, at least, it's the Angel Fire Corporation (AFC) that paces the economy — good times and bad. And there were some "bad" times according to Jo Bynum's anniversary story (reprinted on pages 17-18 of this magazine).

It wasn't the first time editorial integrity and advertiser pressure had collided at a paper under the Woods' stewardship. Shortly after the AFC debacle, Guy and Marcia expanded their publishing empire into Ouray, Colorado where in 1990 they purchased the paper there and its sister publication at Ridgway. During their five-year tenure the Woods confronted an expanding grocery chain that wanted to

establish a market at Ridgway. The community balked, and the Woods echoed their constituents' sentiment even though the market promised advertising revenues. The market decided to settle at Montrose. We'll have to ask Guy and Marcia if they received those promised advertising benefits when they were there. Their successor, David Mullings, says the market is a regular insert advertiser today.

Editorial and community integrity over economic safety? You bet.

Let's examine another early-career challenge that faced the Woods. This time it's Aspen, Colorado. In the early 1970s Guy and Marcia were entrenched in their first post-college journalism experience. The two had met in the final semesters of the J-school experience at the University of Colorado. Guy's marriage proposal came as he perched on the Royal Gorge Bridge outside Cañon City, according to a close family member. That was in 1967. The couple landed jobs at the *Ann Arbor, Michigan, News* where Guy entered the management training program and Marcia became a columnist.

"Dad wiggled in his wingtips, tugged at his tie and itched in his polyester pants, all the while wanting mountains and skiing over humidity and golf," son Christopher offered, recounting an "old family story." So Aspen was next.

A group of investors "lured" the Woods to this major Colorado resort community to start a newspaper. "Dad's resistance to allowing the paper to become a platform for investors landed him and mom without a job after a couple of years. Their entire staff walked out upon hearing the news," Christopher said repeating, again, an old family tale.

However, a former Aspen police chief, now the newly elected sheriff of Routt County, Colorado, confirmed this saga. Ironically, he left under similar circumstances.

Next challenge for the Woods family was their investment in the *Fremont County Sun*. That ownership came in 1973, and lasted 10 years, earning awards and turning a profit. Eventually they sold to the area's daily newspaper, *The Cañon City Daily Record*. The Woods family wanted back into a mountain resort setting. Angel Fire was acquired in 1984.

Last year Guy and Marcia ended their newspaper careers...maybe temporarily. Guy was praising the free time they'd acquired with the sale to the Taos, New Mexico (and its parent daily in Santa Fe) ownership.

Ellen Miller-Goins, another veteran *Sangre de Cristo Chronicle* former staffer, who had worked for the Woods some 14 years at Angel Fire, added this note to the article Bynum wrote, and sent to us for this nomination:

"Marcia and Guy frequently went to bat against the powers that be, even at great personal cost with lost advertisers and friends."

She continues: "For example, they battled the Angel Fire Police Department to obtain a transcript of a 9-1-1 call placed by a man accused of a hit-and-run vehicle homicide. And they constantly battled village government to keep meetings and records open."

Not only were they fighting for government transparency, they applied themselves to community service. Here are a few examples:

- When a local resident faced the insurmountable costs of a disease, they sponsored a fund drive to help with the needed kidney transplant.

- When tax funds were lean, they spearheaded a drive to raise money for the local fire department so it could buy ice rescue equipment. It gets cold in that mountain valley in winter.



Guy Wood



Marcia Wood

National Memorial, the nation's first.

- Marcia served on the Music From Angel Fire board.
- Guy served with the Chamber of Commerce board.
- Through Marcia's efforts the dormant PTA at Eagle Nest school was resurrected; it remains active today.

Guy and Marcia were involved, as parents and community advocates, with the ski team, Little League and Cub Scouts.

Miller-Goins' conclusion: "I can attest to Guy and Marcia's passion for journalism, for truth, for accuracy and fairness. Everything I learned about being a journalist I learned from them, and their success as teachers is reflected in the numerous awards we received from the New Mexico Press Association. And I cannot even count how many times we fought for open government!"

"I cannot think of more deserving recipients for this award," she concluded. Neither can we. Guy and Marcia Wood are the embodiment of Cervi's legacy.

Woods' 'brave and stellar work' makes them deserving of award

Guy and Marcia Wood are naturals for the Eugene Cervi Award. Like Cervi, they lived daily — and at great personal and profit expense — the philosophy that good journalism begets good government.

They believed that no matter how small the newspaper, that stories should be researched thoroughly, reported accurately and written with a regard for the language that one rarely finds in even the largest dailies today.

Through constant changes in local government leadership, the Chamber of Commerce (which runs the community of Angel Fire) and the corporation that owns the town, they remained steadfast in their mission over the years to fairly and fully interpret local affairs.

It cost them. It cost them advertising dollars when Chamber leaders got mad. It cost them access to Angel Fire Corporation when corporate leaders found they couldn't be sole source providers of the news. It cost them psychic energy when the mayor actually had the Woods shadowed, believing he could close down their accurate reporting of crime.

It doesn't get more grassroots than Angel Fire, N.M., with a population of 1,048 in 2003. As the publisher of the paper across the mountain, *The Taos News*, I observed from close range their brave and stellar work at the *Sangre de Cristo Chronicle*. They made community government more open, and they created civic dialogue that will make Angel Fire a community capable of governing itself as it grows.

All the while, they remained active in the New Mexico Press Association and the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government to build better newspapers and improve public access to information. Guy and Marsha devoted a lifetime to the good journalism. They deserve so much more than New Mexico can ever repay them.

Sincerely,
Billie Blair
Former Associate Publisher, the *Santa Fe New Mexican*;
Publisher, *The Taos News*;
President, New Mexico Press Association;

GENE CERVI AWARD WINNERS

2007 **Guy & Marcia Wood**, Angel Fire, N.M.

2006 No award given

2005 **Frank Wood**, De Pere, Wis.

2004 **Frank Garred**, *The Port Townsend Leader*, Port Townsend, Wash.

2003 **Gary & Helen Sosniecki**, *The Lebanon Daily Record*, Lebanon, Mo.

2002 **Bill Meyer**, *Marion County Record*, Marion County, Kan.

2001 **Marg Hennigar**, *Lighthouse Publishing*, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

2000 **Allan A. Seiler**, *The Pike Press*, Pittsfield, Ill.

1999 No award given

1998 **Jack Authelet**, *Foxboro* (Mass.) *Reporter*

1997 **Carol Wilcox & Cary Stiff**, *Clear Creek Courant*, Idaho Springs, Colo.

1996 **Charlotte & Marvin Schexnayder**, *Dumas* (Ark.) *Clarion*

1995 No award given

1994 **Jim MacNeill**, *The Eastern Graphic*, Montague, Prince Edward Island

1993 **Bob Bliss**, *The Montgomery County News*, Hillsboro, Ill.

1992 **Robert Trapp**, *Rio Grande Sun*, Espanola, N.M.

1991 **Henry Gay**, *Shelton-Mason County Journal*, Shelton, Wash.



Wood



Garred



G. Sosniecki



H. Sosniecki

1990 **Karl Monroe**, *Collinsville* (Ill.) *Herald*

1989 **William Rotch**, *Milford* (N.H.) *Cabinet*

1988 **Bruce Brugmann**, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*

1987 **James Russell Wiggins**, *Ellsworth* (Maine) *American*

1986 **Rollin McCommons**, *Athens* (Ga.) *Observer*

1985 **McDill (Huck) Boyd**, *Phillips County Review*, Phillipsburg, Kan.

1984 **Richard McCord**, *Santa Fe* (N.M.) *Reporter*

1983 **Homer Marcum**, *The Martin Countian*, Inez, Ky.

1982 **Kieth Howard**, *Yellow Springs* (Ohio) *News*

1981 **Edward DeCourcy**, *Newport* (N.H.) *Argus Champion*

1980 **Robert Estabrook**, *Lakeville* (Conn.) *Journal*

1979 **Houstoun Waring**, *Littleton* (Colo.) *Independent*

1978 **Tom Leathers**, *The Squire*, Kansas City, Mo.

1977 **Charles & Virginia Russell**, *Dewitt County Observer*, Clinton, Ill.

1976 **Blair Macy**, *Keene Valley Sun*, Kennesburg, Colo.



Meyer



Hennigar



Seiler



Waring

grassroots editor



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