



Virginia Chapter Newsletter

SPJ NATIONAL OUTSTANDING SMALL CHAPTER 2002-03
February 2004

Is the First Amendment for Everyone?

STUDENTS, PROFESSIONALS AND WATCHDOGS TO TAKE ON SCHOOL FREE-PRESS ISSUES

How free is the student press?

In October, Hampton University's acting university president confiscated the student newspaper before it could be distributed.

Just a few months earlier at Virginia Tech, the host of a student TV show called "Sex Talk Live" was fired.

Student editors, professionals and journalism watchdogs will weigh in with their thoughts on college and high school freedom of the press and related ethical issues in a panel discussion Thursday, March 11. The sponsors are two chapters of the Society of Professional Journalists - the Virginia Pro Chapter and the VCU Campus Chapter.

The meeting will be at 7 p.m. in the VCU School of Mass Communications Library, T. Edward Temple Building, 901 W. Main St., Richmond. The event is free.

Why was the Hampton Script withheld from distribution? The acting president wanted her letter about student cafeteria cleanup to appear on page one, but student editors placed it on page three. As a result of the confiscation, the school lost a \$55,000 grant from the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

The Virginia Tech TV host was fired not because of the program itself but because he later lied about who he was while interviewing the program's chief critic, a Virginia legislator.

Student journalism has been most in the spotlight recently at Hampton and Virginia Tech. However, editors and reporters at Virginia colleges and high schools sometimes feel a tug-



The acting president of Hampton University wanted her letter about student cafeteria cleanup to appear on page one. The editor-in-chief of the Hampton Script will be a member of an SPJ panel March 11. (Image courtesy Black College Wire)

of-war between what they think students need to know and how officials want campus stories told.

March 11 panelists are

- Talia Buford, editor-in-chief of the Hampton Script
- Devon Marrow, executive editor of the VCU Commonwealth Times
- Adam Goldstein, legal fellow with the Student Press Law Center in Arlington
- Tom Mullen, adjunct lecturer in the journalism department at the University of Richmond and an experienced newspaper reporter and editor

Dan Neman, movie critic for the Richmond Times-Dispatch, will moderate the panel.

Parking is available at a deck adjacent to the T. Edward Temple Building, on the street and in other VCU lots. For parking details, visit www.vcu.edu/maps/acmap/wmpark/wmpark.htm.

For more information, telephone Gail Gilmore, (804) 379-5493, or Dan Neman (804) 649-6408.

[Deadline is March 31](#)

It's Time For George Mason Nominations

Nominations are now being accepted for the SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter's highest honor, the George Mason Award. The annual presentation recognizes an individual for outstanding contributions to Virginia journalism.



George Mason (1725-1792) was a Virginian and author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. The chapter's highest award is named for him. (Photo by Ron Jennings, © 2004 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

Past recipients have been chosen for a lifetime's work, while others have been recognized for an especially outstanding year. Winners include editors, broadcasters, reporters, attorneys, publishers, columnists, legislators and journalism educators.

The award, presented since 1964, is named for George Mason, a Virginian who was author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which became the basis for the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights.

A nomination should summarize your nominee's contributions and should be mailed by March 31 to chapter president Brian Eckert, Director of Media & Public Relations, University of Richmond, 28 Westhampton Way, Richmond VA 23173. Nominations can also be e-mailed to Eckert at beckert@richmond.edu or sent by fax to (804) 287-6491. (Be sure to include your name, telephone number and e-mail address, as well as the nominee's contact information.)

A banquet honoring the George Mason Award winner and also naming the winners of two journalism scholarships will be Thursday, June 3, at the University of Richmond.

Steve Schwartz, a George Mason biographer, has tentatively agreed to speak at the banquet. This year's dinner event also is expected to draw several former scholarship winners.

Retired Washington & Lee journalism professor Hampden H. "Ham" Smith III won the prestigious George Mason Award last year. The 2002 recipient was press-law expert Alexander Welford. Marvin L. Lake, public editor of The Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk, was the 2001 winner.

Coming May 1

Virginia Beach Session's Focus To Be Radio-TV Pros and Students

The Society of Professional Journalists is working with two other journalism organizations to provide a training opportunity primarily for broadcast journalists and students.

The May 1 session at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center offers an opportunity to learn about improving your marketability and diversity in the newsroom, among other things.

SPJ is a co-sponsor of the conference, which was organized by Virginia AP Broadcasters and the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

The day's events will start with registration at 12:30 p.m., followed by workshops through the afternoon and a reception and awards banquet that night for VAPB winners, as well as winners of regional Murrow awards from RTNDA. Critiques of students' work also will be offered.

The workshops include "Diversity in the Newsroom," "Challenges That Newsrooms Face with HIPAA," "VCU Study on the 21st Century Newsroom," and "How Not to Get a Job." Journalism and communications majors from throughout Virginia are being invited to the event.

The cost for the workshops is \$20 for working professionals and professors and \$10 for college students. Professionals can save \$10 by attending the VAPB/RTNDA Awards Banquet Saturday night and pay only \$10 along with the cost of dinner. (The dinner price has not been finalized, but it is not expected to be more than about \$45.)

If you plan to stay overnight, please contact the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center as early as possible.

For information about prices and reservations, contact Joyce DeWitt at the Richmond AP bureau, (800) 552-9935 or jdewitt@ap.org.



The Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center will be the site of a conference organized by Virginia AP Broadcasters and the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

Scholarship Application Deadline is April 5

If you know a college student who plans a career in journalism, now is the time to urge him or her to apply for an SPJ scholarship.

Applications are being accepted for two scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 each for college students, attending schools in Virginia, who will be juniors or seniors in the next academic year.

The scholarships are awarded annually by the Richmond SPJ, SDX Educational Foundation with the assistance of the Virginia Professional Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

The deadline is April 5. The scholarship application form is available at www.spj.org/virginia/.

Students attending colleges or universities in Virginia are eligible. The applicants do not have to be majoring in journalism, but must demonstrate an intent to pursue careers in print or broadcast journalism.



SNIPER TRIALS REVISITED: Dorothy Abernathy, Virginia bureau chief for the Associated Press, left, moderates a panel on coverage of the sniper trials during a program at VPA headquarters Jan. 29. With Abernathy are Kerry Sipe of Pilotonline.com; Paula Miller, public relations officer for the Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office; Tom Kapsidelis, Virginia editor at the Richmond Times-Dispatch; Kari Pugh, reporter for The Free Lance-Star in Fredericksburg; and Steve Helber, Richmond photographer for the AP. The SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter event examined the incredible challenges posed by the trials in a dinner-workshop that featured barbecue and beer. (Photo by Wayne Scarberry.)

President's Message

A Terrific Panel and a Tasty Barbecue

By Brian Eckert
SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter President

A crowd of around 50 people turned out for our January professional program on "Sniper Trials Revisited." But the great attendance wasn't the only thing that charged me up about SPJ and our chapter's work. Don't get me wrong – the size of the group is the best we have had at a professional program in quite a while, and I am delighted so many made the time. But the quality of the program, the variety of members, non-members and guests, and the level of interest in the discussion made for a truly exciting and enjoyable evening.

Dorothy Abernathy of the AP and Denise Williams of VPA coordinated invitations to a terrific panel, while arranging facilities and a tasty barbecue buffet dinner. (Special thanks go to Ginger Stanley, executive director of VPA, for once again providing us with a "home" for our activities.)



The topic and panel motivated a wide variety of members, representing pro, associate, retired, honorary and student categories, to attend. Several members brought guests who are Virginia working press (and even a few spouses).

Members of the outstanding VCU campus chapter and other VCU journalism students attended. And everyone was especially pleased to welcome a journalism professor and a student representative from Longwood University, who are considering startup of a new campus chapter.

Virginia Pro has an ambitious schedule of spring activities planned. A March 11 program in conjunction with the VCU campus chapter will look at censorship of the collegiate press – which is alive and well in Virginia. (See a related story in this issue for details.) In April, we'll hold an SPJ Ethics Week program on photojournalism in a digital age – the chapter has applied for a grant from the SPJ Foundation to bring in a leading expert from the Poynter Institute as keynote speaker. In May, we will co-sponsor two events: a two-day program in Fredericksburg on "The New Americans," with VPA, VPW and APME; and a conference providing a training opportunity aimed primarily at broadcast journalists and students with Virginia AP Broadcasters in Norfolk on May 1. In June, we will present the George Mason Award, two college scholarships, and our high school essay contest winner at the annual George Mason Banquet. While all of that is going on, we will be raising funds to support the Richmond SPJ/SDX Educational Foundation, which oversees the scholarship funds.

Please support your chapter by attending an event, bringing along a prospective member or guest. And let us know what the chapter can do for you in terms of professional development topics and service to journalism.

Here are a few miscellaneous notes in closing. Please consider attending the Regions I-II joint conference April 16-18 in Harrisburg, Pa. (see

<<http://spjkeystone.tripod.com>> for more information). The SPJ national conference is scheduled for New York in September – more info to come. Chapter board member Don Dale of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and chapter VP Jim Mann of The Free Lance-Star of Fredericksburg will retire in coming months – but both of them have promised me they are not retiring from their work for SPJ. University of Richmond students have approached me about forming a campus chapter – we expect to be up and running before the end of this semester.

First Person

“We’re in the truth business...”

**By Jonathan Hunley
SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter Board Member**

I have worked at newspapers – in some capacity – since I was 16 years old. I don’t write that to impress you. Others have worked longer – I’m only 27. But what that means is my entire working life has been spent in the media business.

The roles have changed – child prodigy to college intern to cub reporter to somewhat-experienced beat reporter to now editorial writer/columnist/general hack – but my goal has been the same: To provide readers (whomever they may be at the time) with news of some import. Sometimes this has been that their tax bills were going up. Sometimes it has been that their neighbor’s office in the



Jonathan Hunley
SPJ Virginia Pro Board
(Photo courtesy The Free
Lance-Star)

Pentagon was attacked by terrorists (some Fredericksburg-area folks were injured and others killed like this on 9/11). Once it was that my wife, like all good wives, was throwing away one of my favorite bachelor decorations.

Throughout this working life, I have faced certain obstacles. Thank goodness they weren’t the awful things you usually read about in Quill or other trade publications. I haven’t had to spend a night in jail to protect a source (but I have wondered if lying about this would have gotten me some of the jobs I didn’t get), and I can’t relate in the least to war correspondents. Their bravery surpasses mine by a thousand-fold.

But I have had the sheriff’s department called on me, had politicians threaten me and my newspaper with a frivolous lawsuit, been told by a teacher that I’d never get a job in journalism if I didn’t learn to write concisely, and been called down by editors – even by some I really admired – for everything from talking too loud to questioning news judgment.

Sometimes, it would have been easier to quit. I graduated from a good college; I could get a comfortable, well-paying job doing something else.

But I've stayed. I wouldn't have been – I wouldn't be – happy doing anything else.

A friend of mine likes to joke that all journalists do all day is talk to people and write down what those people said. That's true to a certain extent. But it's better to think about our jobs as promoting freedom – or at least promoting freedom as far as the Patriot Act will allow us. This may sound grandiose or silly, but it's the truth.

We're not an entity of the government, but we are an entity of the people. Questions exist out there that wouldn't be asked if we didn't ask them. Some information is kept under wraps until we seek it and publish it or broadcast it.

We journalists, we're in the truth business. We're into spreading it, for all to hear and see. That's why people like Jayson Blair, Stephen Glass, Mike Barnicle and others bother us so much. They're like Pete Rose in baseball. They violated our No. 1 rule: We must be credible, or our audience will rightfully turn away.

A few years ago, a colleague made me look like an idiot in front of a group of high school students attending a journalism workshop. A student asked how we got into the newspaper business. I piped up and said that I fell into the business because I knew I wanted to write, that I could write, but that I didn't want to write books.

My colleague responded that you shouldn't get into journalism "because you're a failed fiction writer."

I don't consider myself a failed fiction writer, though on some days I've felt like a failed nonfiction writer. Regardless, if the readers keep reading (and, let's be honest, if the publishers keep paying), I'll keep writing and editing.

So should you.



Hats off to SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter member Dwight Rohr of radio station WKEY in Covington. Rohr had the chapter's 2002 Region II Small Chapter of the Year award framed as a gift to the chapter and placed it on display at the radio station.

Mission Statement

The mission of the SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter is to represent and bring together Virginia journalists on issues of importance to the profession to achieve fellowship, education and support, and to improve our credibility with the public.



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TO: