



# Virginia Chapter Newsletter

NOVEMBER 2002

## "Meet the Press"

### ***Social Event at VCU to Bring Together Print and Broadcast Students, Professionals***

**BY OLIVIA LLOYD  
VCU STUDENT CHAPTER TREASURER**

College students will have a chance to meet and mingle with print and broadcast professionals Thursday, Dec. 5, at 6:30 p.m. during a "Meet the Press" event.

The SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter is joining with Virginia Commonwealth University's SPJ and RTNDA (Radio-Television News Directors Association) student chapters to invite journalism students from area colleges to participate.

"It's a casual way for students to get a chance to meet professionals to talk about the business ... in a one-on-one situation," said Paula Otto, faculty adviser of the VCU RTNDA Student Chapter and board member of the SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter.



Students will also be able to talk with professionals about the current job market, tools of the trade and preparing resumes. "It's a great chance to maybe start the job search process," Otto said.

SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter members are encouraged to attend the event and speak with students about job prospects and careers in journalism.

The idea for "Meet the Press" was an outgrowth of a discussion among Virginia SPJ delegates during the 2002 National Conference in Ft. Worth, said Wilma Wirt, Virginia Pro Chapter board member and faculty adviser of the VCU Student Chapter.

The event will be similar to programs organized by student chapters in other regions.

Brian Eckert, vice president of the Virginia Pro Chapter, reported at a recent SPJ meeting that students at the University of Richmond have expressed interest in starting a student chapter. They will be given special invitations to attend "Meet the Press" and to learn more about SPJ.

"The idea is to get students interested in journalism and ... in (SPJ's) programs," said George Templeton, president of VCU's SPJ Student Chapter. "It will allow students to see what people in the industry are doing."

The "Meet the Press" event will be in Room 2219 in the Temple Building at VCU.

## **INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

***The Three Truths of Life, A first-person essay by SPJ board member Wayne Scarberry. See page 2.***

***Kick up your heels and celebrate the season! The Virginia Pro Chapter holiday party is Dec. 11. See page 5.***

## First Person

# *The Three Truths of Life*

**BY WAYNE SCARBERRY  
VIRGINIA PRO CHAPTER BOARD MEMBER**

Much of life hinges on three universal truths.

- *Who you know*
- *Being in the right place at the right time*
- *Making your own luck*

They first revealed themselves to me when I was only 15.

I was a high school sophomore in a little mining town in southern West Virginia. This was before the great decline of King Coal (as we referred to it), and our small city, Welch, was a bustling metropolis. At least we thought so.

(To put this into perspective, you should know that the “big cities” within driving distance were Charleston and Roanoke. They were the places to go. That is, if you wanted to brave riding up and down the hairpin curves on the ridges. Or if you were willing to toss money out the window to ride on the “modern two-lane highway” that was the West Virginia Turnpike. It seemed that you should get paid for risking your life by riding on the thing. But that’s another story.)

Welch had a bustling downtown – a movie theater, a drive-in theater, a library, a fire department and several restaurants where you could get curb service. And one more thing: a six-day-a-week newspaper.

The Welch Daily News wasn’t a bad little newspaper. The newsroom had an editor and publisher, a city editor, a sports editor, a society editor, three reporters and a photographer.

I had an interest in taking pictures and had a friend whose father was a studio photographer. He would let me use his darkroom and even gave me a key to his building. Through him, I earned my photography merit badge in the Boy Scouts.

One weekend I took it upon myself to document one of our town’s big annual sporting events: the Little League baseball tournament. This thing was a big deal. Really. Both of the town’s police officers turned out for crowd control, and the games were all live on the radio. Anybody who was anybody was there.

During the two-day affair, I turned out a stack of pictures. My father saw them, thought they were pretty good (as any father would), and encouraged me to take them to Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor was the editor and publisher of the Welch Daily News. He just happened to live down the street.

*Who you know.*

I took them to him that night, and he asked to keep them for a bit. I said OK.

*Making your own luck.*

The next day, to my astonishment, the newspaper ran a double-truck photo spread. Of my pictures.

A week later, Mr. Taylor called me. His photographer had just quit. Would I be interested in being the photographer for the summer?

*The right place at the right time.*

It was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It got me started in this business. At the Daily News I got my first taste of news writing, editing, page design and pre-press work. It gave my life focus. The money I earned made it possible for me to go to journalism school, which prepared me for the work world, which prepared me to advance. And so on.



Wayne Scarberry

The Truths have shown their power to me many times. Without these forces I would have never met my wife, never gotten my first job after college, never gotten my second job, never had the opportunity to cover some big events, never gone abroad.

Without The Truths, I wouldn't be in Richmond today.

There are examples everywhere.

I have countless friends who have gotten their jobs because of who they knew.

Would Patsy Cline have become a country music star if she hadn't worked at the Winchester diner where a Nashville talent scout stopped for lunch? She was in the right place at the right time.

Have you ever heard someone called "an overnight sensation 20 years in the making?" Twenty years of making your own luck, I think.

The Three Truths only give you opportunities. It's up to you to seize them.

This is a lesson that I hope the young learn early. I'm constantly pointing these things out to my kids. I hope they're listening.

In a community college class I teach, I recently joked with my students that I might put a question about The Truths on their next exam for bonus points. I really don't think I will. But when I said that, the adults in the class nodded their heads in agreement.

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## **Region Report**

### ***Musing On Convention Topics***

**BY JONATHAN HUNLEY  
REGION 2 DIRECTOR**

You don't need me to tell you that the story about the sniper shootings is big.

It's big news here, for sure, but on a recent trip to Cleveland I also heard locals there talking about it. And covering the story took a toll on folks in my newsroom and in yours, too.

But if by next spring we all aren't sick of hearing about unlikely suspects, .223-caliber shell casings and cryptic notes, I'm thinking the story, how we covered it and what readers and viewers thought about the coverage could be good issues to tackle at our Region 2 convention. Several folks have mentioned this idea to me, and I think it's a good one.

The convention will be March 29 at the Holiday Inn Oceanfront in Ocean City, Md. That means our gathering likely will be one of the first held after the shootings – and maybe while the trials are going on.

We could make it a convention that is both useful and newsworthy. Think of the publicity SPJ would receive if we could persuade, say, Montgomery County Police Chief Charles Moose to speak. I'm working on that now.

It's also usually interesting to hear how organizations of different sizes covered the same story. How did small papers, for example, devote already-scarce resources to covering something at which a large daily could throw several reporters?

This could be something addressed by editors from those newsrooms as well as a media critic or two.

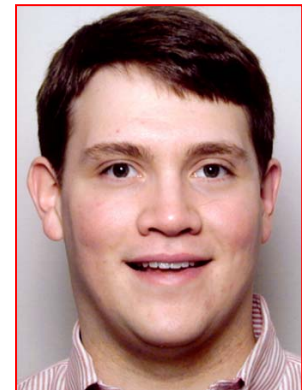
Other suggestions include: organizing a panel of local officials who suddenly found themselves in the national spotlight, a discussion of whether media went "too far" in letting out information and how broadcasters provided wall-to-wall coverage.

And, lest we forget those who pay our salaries, what did the average Washington-area newspaper or Internet reader, radio listener or TV viewer think of the coverage? Did it play a vital role, leaving them feeling informed? Or did it turn into the dreaded "media saturation?"

These are just a few thoughts from me and others in the region. I'd like – and I need – to hear your ideas so we can plan a worthwhile time at the beach next year. I'll be working on the convention's programming with SPJ members from throughout Region 2.

Please e-mail me at [jhunley@freelancestar.com](mailto:jhunley@freelancestar.com) or telephone me at (540) 720-1622.

I look forward to hearing from you.



**Jonathan Hunley**  
SPJ Region 2 Director  
(Photo courtesy The Free  
Lance-Star)

## President's Message

# G-o-v-e-r-n-m-e-n-t

**BY LAURA FORTUNATO  
VIRGINIA PRO CHAPTER PRESIDENT**

Depending on the dictionary and entry of your choice, government is basically understood to be “the complex of political institutions, laws and customs through which the function of governing is carried out; governing as the making and administrating of public policy.”

From there, the nature of governing or government appears to be subject to interpretation and expectations.

If you attended the Virginia Coalition for Open Government's annual conference Nov. 15, you know this to be true. If you didn't, you missed a lot. Throughout the day, “freedom of information” as both a governing value and a tool for culling public records – and as a philosophical ideal – was the center of dialogue and debate.

Virginia Attorney General Jerry W. Kilgore kicked off the day with a treatise on Thomas Jefferson and his thoughts about open government. “In 1774 – two years before he wrote the Declaration of Independence – Thomas Jefferson wrote, ‘the whole art of government consists in the art of being honest.’”

Kilgore also said history has shown that Virginia has been blessed with honest public servants.

“But honesty in government is more than just having officials of character. Honesty in government is an attitude and mindset about who is ultimately in charge of government and public policy. It is an attitude of respect for law, for the Constitution, and for the people who elect officials and pay their salaries. Honesty in government determines whether ‘We, the People’ is a fact or just a phrase,” Kilgore said.

“To determine if this attitude and this spirit are at work,” Kilgore said, “government must be open and accountable to the people. Government should have nothing to fear from being open. The workings of government should work best when on public display.”

Rob Baldwin, executive secretary of Virginia's Supreme Court, in an update on efforts to regulate access to electronic court records, raised several questions: “What is a public record?” and “Does the electronic form of the print document change the nature of the record?” Baldwin suggested that the answers to these questions will go a long way toward helping government decide what records should be open.

A host of other speakers and participants provided commentary on government's ability to balance access to public information and the individual's right to privacy – the central thought being that governments that do well in providing this balance practice good government.

So there you have it. Government as honest government. Open government. Good government.

These thoughts should be nothing new for journalists. Part of what we advocate on behalf of the public is the philosophy of open government as honest and good government. Many journalists have spent a lifetime operating with these goals in mind day-in and day-out. Others have turned in their press passes to become leading advocates of “the people's right to know.” What may be different now is that somewhere along the way, bottom-line journalism, or the economics of running a journalism business in whatever form, may have clouded our vision and allowed our expectations in this area to wane. Perhaps we need to evaluate whether our role as journalists in facilitating between government and the people is meeting the people's expectations, or even our own standards and expectations.

In the coming months a new legislative session will open, and our government representatives will tackle a whole host of issues and challenges to honest, open and good government. At no time in recent history have Virginians' expectations been higher. Perhaps we can do a better job of helping government do a better job of meeting those expectations.



Laura Fortunato  
(Photo by Geep  
Schurman, FRB-  
Richmond)

## Deck the Halls

# **Getting in Step for the Holidays**

A dancin' duo from Dance Masters Studios will add a demonstrative flair to the chapter's holiday party Wednesday, Dec. 11, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Virginia Press Association's new building in Glen Allen.



The swingin' soirée will kick off with wine and cheese at 6 p.m., the dance demonstration is expected to start at 7 p.m., and good cheer will last through the evening. A sampling of other beverages and foodstuffs will also be served, and those who so desire will have a chance to practice a little fancy footwork with the dancers. But you'd better be on time – their chariot will likely whisk them away within an hour!

Dance Masters, a Richmond establishment since 1987, offers lessons in ballroom, Latin, swing, county-western and other forms of dance for children and adults.

This social event is open to all chapter members and their guests. All we ask is that you RSVP to Denise Williams at VPA, (804) 521-7572, so we know how many people to expect. You can also send an e-mail to [denisew@vpa.net](mailto:denisew@vpa.net). VPA is at 11529 Nuckols Road in Glen Allen, just west of Richmond, off I-295 at the 51A-North exit, about a mile north and on the left.

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## Legal Things Considered

# **NPR's Nina Totenberg to Speak in Richmond**

The SPJ Virginia Pro Chapter, in cooperation with the University of Richmond, will present "An Evening with Nina Totenberg" Wednesday, Feb. 5, at 7:30 p.m.

Totenberg, the legal affairs correspondent for National Public Radio, will speak at the university's Modlin Center for the Arts, and the chapter will hold a social with light refreshments immediately afterward. Totenberg will be invited.

NPR's Web site says "Totenberg's coverage of the Supreme Court and legal affairs has won her widespread recognition. She is also a regular panelist on 'Inside Washington,' a weekly syndicated public affairs television program produced in the nation's capital."

Totenberg will share her insight and opinions about trends and leadership on the Supreme Court. She is expected to talk about how the inner workings of the court have changed, how external factors – such as Sept. 11, the president and public opinion – affect the court and how its cases change everyday life.

Tickets to Totenberg's lecture and the chapter reception will be free, but firm RSVPs will be required. (We had numerous cancellations of reserved tickets by our chapter members for the Oct. 24 Bernstein event.) More details will be forthcoming.



Nina Totenberg  
(1997 photo by Ali Etili)



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**TO:**

### **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.