

## Smash hit in Oregon

by **Kathy Campbell**  
CJIG head

“Wildly successful!”

That’s how I’ve been describing the Eugene workshop for journalists and journalism educators. And by all accounts, it was!

About 100 of us gathered at the Valley River Inn on the Willamette River in beautiful (and only slightly rainy) Oregon on the weekend of Feb. 9-11 to talk about civic innovations in newsrooms and classrooms. Provocative and compelling keynote speeches (one of which is excerpted elsewhere in this edition of the newsletter) punctuated the lively workshop sessions.

As much fun and inspiration as the workshop itself provided, it’s the aftermath that made the whole

affair “wildly successful” to me. People are networking and sharing ideas all over the country — research ideas, community involvement initiatives, student-newspaper collaborations. It was wonderful to see participants new to the idea of civic journalism sparkling with enthusiasm over the possibilities it offers and equally rewarding to renew the excitement of our work with long-time colleagues.

As I said in my welcoming remarks on the first evening, it’s very exciting to be a part of this, because what civic journalism does for me — and I hope for you — is give me permission to be passionate rather than cynical, hopeful rather than terminally

*Continued on page 3*



**See page 3 for information about CJIG programs at the convention.**

## Civic journalism to the rescue

*Transformation from Within: How Civic Journalists May*

*Chris Peck, editor of The Spokesman-Review in Spokane, was the keynote speaker at the Pew Center for Civic Journalism workshop on Civic Innovations in Newsrooms and Classrooms Feb. 9, 2001, at Eugene, Ore. Following are excerpts of his remarks.*

I want to talk tonight about a coming transformation, perhaps even revolution, in the newsrooms of America’s newspapers, TV stations and online news operations.

I want to talk about the internal and

external pressures I see building toward that change and why I think some of what we have learned about civic journalism can be useful in helping newsrooms weather the coming upheaval and even emerge stronger and more relevant from it.

Here are the five signs of a common revolution (cited in the Utne Reader):  
**Corporatization of America**

Scarcely a week passes that another publicly traded media company doesn’t announce further staff reductions to

drive up the stock price. Talk to the journalists in these newsrooms over a beer and you get a clear sense of the dispiriting impact this corporate culture is having ... squeezing the purpose, the passion and the joy from journalism.

**Resurgence of citizen movements**

To many of our readers and viewers, we are part of the big business of America that isn’t always appreciated

*Continued on page 2*

# Transformation from Within

*Continued from page 1*  
and is often resented.

## ***Rediscovery of the world's mysteries, the spiritual, the communal***

Honestly, newspapers don't get this. Spiritual growth is now the very element of life to 82 percent of Americans, according to a recent Gallup Poll. Instead of exploring these spiritual matters, most papers and TV stations opt, instead, for more coverage of XFL football.

## ***The graying of America***

Our strongest and most loyal readers and viewers are either retiring and moving to Cabo or appearing for the last time on our obituary pages. ... Retirees like to read about retirees. But who has a seniors beat? Who in the newsroom, in fact, is over 60?

## ***A new, connected generation***

The next generation of Americans is wired, worldly and wondering if the news their parents read isn't a bit like an Oldsmobile, a vehicle for an earlier generation.

Now let's go inside the newsroom and examine the internal pressures.

## ***The search for superhire***

Recall the cover of the American Journalism Review in December 2000. The cover story headline read: "Superhire 2000 – Today's ideal journalism recruit should have a firm grasp of the basics, be Web savvy, have a TV presence and be able to write really, really fast."

## ***A growing inability to make sense of what is happening***

The world is getting far more complex. The ag beat isn't about tractors anymore but about biogenetic engineering. The business beat isn't about running a local shoe store but about manufacturing shoes overseas for sale to international markets. Sports have become girl's basketball (and) the XFL.

## ***Weariness over the pace and tenor of the news***

Reporters and editors are people, too.

They grow weary of being manipulated, ignored, lied to and criticized.

## ***Not my kind of people anymore***

Journalists, for decades, knew... they could go into any newsroom and enjoy a healthy dose of black humor and cast an occasional cynical eye at the community. ...

Now, there is all this talk about connecting to the community, interacting with it, trying to find stories that go beneath the surface and move in from the edges of conflict.

## ***Pressures foreshadow change***

What we face today in the newsroom ... is an intersection of external and internal pressures and the definition of a serious fault line that foreshadows big changes, even a revolution.

Under the old model, the media assumed a common vision of the world that could be fed to the masses. But that old model of journalism misses the mysteries of the world, misses the emerging differences between the Gen Y reader and the aging journalist, misses the spiritual, technological and political advances of our time. ...

To succeed today, journalists have to be smarter, clearer and more immediate than ever before.

And there, hormonally charged in the wings, waits Gen Y. Gen Y will change the world first; then it will assault newsroom culture where journalists of a different generation desperately are trying to make good hires.

Without question, Gen Y represents the future of journalism. By Gen Y, I mean young people born between 1977 and 1995.

There are more than 70 million of them. They think differently, too. Gen Y is open-minded, inclusive and global. They are suspicious of big corporations. They see themselves as innovators and like others who innovate.

They value free expression.

There is one more bit of good news: Gen Y likes newspapers. Local news,

in particular, is the reason this generation goes to newspapers. Still, Gen Y readers don't go as often to the newspaper as earlier generations.

## ***Challenge and opportunity in Gen Y hands***

Both the challenge and the opportunity for the future of newspapers and mainstream broadcasts rests in the young hands of Gen Y ... optimistic, confident and computer-savvy hands. ... They don't care much about traditional news but will thumb through a paper when it is local news they crave.

## ***Finding the map***

I think much of what we have learned in nearly a decade of experimentation with civic journalism offers the media the best hope to build readership and viewership among Gen Y. Civic journalism has taught us two great lessons: One is about connectivity and the other is about interactivity.

People want to be connected to their communities. The tools of civic journalism facilitate that connectivity.

People also want to interact with each other and with the media. The practices of civic journalism facilitate that interactivity.

Connectivity and interactivity, it seems to me, can begin to bring an alignment between the business goals, the journalistic goals and the needs for the emerging Gen Y community in the years just ahead.

## ***Using the map***

Now is the time for the journalists to take the lead, time for journalists to get out from behind their closed, corporate doors and get down to the street.

We no longer can put out newspapers by phone, e-mail, government reports and unnamed sources. These traditional sources of news too often miss the perspective that comes from spending time in the largely undercovered communities that exist in every town and city.

A key revelation about the importance of connecting with these com-

*Continued on page 4*

# Civic journalism at 2001 AEJMC convention

Aug. 5-8, 2001 Grand Hyatt Washington

## Pre-convention workshop

Working title: "How are Journalism Educators Helping Students Find Fresh Stories in the Community"

More information about presenters and participants will be available in the summer newsletter.

Saturday, Aug. 5, 1-5 p.m.

## "Inclusivity: Building Diversity in Framing News Reports and Covering Communities of Color"

Freedom and Responsibility panel

Co-sponsor: Minorities and Communication

Presiding: Jane Twomey, American University

Panelists: Ellen Foley, ME, Philadelphia Daily News; Mindy McAdams, University of Florida; Shirley Staples Carter, Wichita State University; Nora Paul, University of Minnesota  
Sunday, Aug. 5; 9:45-11:15 a.m.

## "Researching New Trends in Community Newspapers: Ways to Identify Stakeholders and Find News"

Research session

Co-sponsor: Media Management and Economics

Presiding: Kathy Campbell, Southern Oregon University  
Presenters: Dan Suwyn, ME, Savannah Morning News; Ellen Foley, ME, Philadelphia Daily News; Jan Schaffer, director, Pew Center for Civic Journalism; Ken Smith, University of Wyoming; David Coulson, University of Nevada—Reno  
Sunday, Aug. 5; 4:15-5:45 p.m.

## "Honoring Jack McLeod: Five Decades of Communication Scholarship"

Research panel

Primary sponsor: Communication Theory and Methodology

Presiding: Jessica Zubric, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Discussant: Jack M. McLeod, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Papers: "Communication and Socialization," Steven Chaffee, University of California-Santa Barbara; "Community Integration and Democratic Participation," Lewis Friedland, University of Wisconsin-Madison; "Media Orientations," Daniel McDonald, Ohio State University  
Monday, Aug. 6; 2:45-4:15 p.m.

## "News in a Digital Democracy: Convergence and Specialized Audiences"

Professional Freedom and Responsibility panel

Co-Sponsor: Scholastic Journalism

Presiding: Sharon Hartin Iorio, Wichita State University  
Presenters: Jack Dvorak, Indiana University; Jim Warren, Washington Bureau of Chicago Tribune; Nora Paul, University of Minnesota; Mindy McAdams, University of Florida  
Tuesday, Aug. 7; 8:30-10 a.m.

## "In the Public Interest? Evaluating Media Coverage of the 2000 Election"

Professional Freedom and Responsibility panel

Primary sponsor: Communication Theory and Methodology  
Presiding: Patricia Moy, Washington

Papers:

"Missed Opportunities in Pre-Election Polling," Philip Meyer, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; "Why the Press Has Lost Touch with the Meaning of Our Campaigns," Tom Rosenstiel, Project for Excellence in Journalism; "Sleuthing for Clues: How Voters Learned About the Candidates," Jan Schaffer, Pew Center for Civic Journalism  
Tuesday, Aug. 7; 2:45-4:15 p.m.

## Smash hit

*Continued from page 1*

discouraged about our profession.

The workshop was sponsored, planned and pulled off beautifully by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, despite the best attempts of various airlines to keep the Pew folks in California for the weekend. We are very grateful to Jan Schaffer, Dana Clark

Felty, Rebecca Wyhof and Jacquelyn Jackson for all they did to ensure the success of this workshop. The University of Oregon provided a warm welcome through Dean Tim Gleason and other faculty who attended throughout the weekend. And we even managed to sneak in a quick CJIG business meeting to polish up the panel plans for the

August AEJMC convention.

Do check out the convention schedule at the top of this page and plan to join us for as many sessions as you can in August. I promise the same kind of intellectual excitement and successful connections that were generated in Eugene.

## Transformation from Within

*Continued from page 2*

munities is not just that these communities will one day be dominant in the community but that they already are.

I know in my community, these neighborhood groups and specialized organizations wield enormous power. Sometimes they are organized to stop projects; sometimes they are organized to promote a special interest, but their force and influence continues to grow.

Yet how are most of our newsrooms still organized? Where do we send our people? To the big edifices where the big desks sit.

I say get out of that door and down to the street. ... Get a feel for the stories and story lines from street level, from people with real experience and knowledge, before writing a word.

Frankly, if newspapers don't do this more intently, the new media will. The Gen Y young people yearn to be connected. Once connected, they compulsively must interact with one another. For the media, and for newspapers in particular, this offers a tremendous opportunity.

In this kind of newsroom, the role and definition of a journalist must change. To get this sort of a newsroom in place, editors will have to begin hiring journalists who possess an interest, willingness and a talent for working with the public, engaging the public and helping the public understand journalism.

That means, as well, that educators in the journalism schools must begin training a new kind of journalist who recognizes this need for connectivity and interactivity.

When this revolution comes, as I think it will, journalists no longer will have the only key to the pressroom. No, the space in the paper, the content and the direction the news takes will be a shared, interdependent responsibility between the community and the journalists.

In the transformed newsroom culture that I have described, the challenge of getting the story right, on deadline, will be heightened, and the newsgathering processes will be more open for more people to see. If we can get it

right, which I think is far more likely in a connected, interactive environment, then the honor of journalism will be restored.

And it will be fun. The journalists will be meeting real people, hearing real stories. Journalists will still edit, illustrate, design and present the news to the highest standards and ethics of our business. We'll be in the thick of the fray, trying to save the world.

And when we get there, we will have revolutionized journalism from within. We will have led a revolt, quietly and creatively, calling forward heroes from deep within the ranks of those reporters and editors whose work will have become indispensable to those who live around us.

And that, finally, will get the attention of Wall Street. I think the day is coming when the stock price of media companies will be based at least in part, on the value that the newspaper brings to the community.

The revolution to re-claim journalism can start to happen tomorrow, in your newsrooms, if you take up the cause.

### **CIVIC JOURNALISM INTEREST GROUP NEWS**

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