

POLAR BEAR



Winter, 2001

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**ALASKA PRESS
CLUB CONTEST
DEADLINE**

**Friday
January 25,
2002**

Hello Press Club members...

We are well into the winter and I want to tell you all how much I appreciate all the work people have been putting in on the various board projects. We are turning into a good team! I must say that I was a reluctant president at the start. But after thinking about it during the summer break, I felt it would be best to tackle a lot of loose threads this year and clean house. We seem to be doing that with a vengeance.

We are working on getting our non-profit tax status back, and we have undertaken

some money savers in changing our teleconference provider to GCI and in scouting out another printer, now that TimeFrame has downsized.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We made good on all the bills. Allen Baker and I wrote out the final checks for this year recently. We are solvent! WHEW!

And we have attracted some new board members to fill suddenly vacated seats.

And we FINALLY rewrote the bylaws.

And we are taking stock of how to better distribute board seats in the future to better reflect different segments of the industry.

All this and 52 new members. We've done a lot in the few months since summer.

J-Week organization is underway, thanks to Ta Brant and Diana Campbell. It looks like it will be a really good one, with the added cachet of the downtown Marriot as its venue. I can see the limos pulling up now...

Thanks again for all your input as to presenters and workshops. Got to run now. Deadlines, deadlines. Hope all of you have a wonderful holiday season.

See you all later.

—Ellen Lockyer

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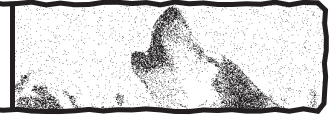
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Voice in the Wilderness



Editor's Column

by Rhonda McBride

In the next week, a special contest issue will arrive with rules and entry forms. TV reporters, take note: there's a new category in this year's contest, "Best Liveshot." So give us your best shot.

It's taken several years to convince the board this new category is needed. I want to thank board member Allen Baker for his leap of faith in introducing the motion for the new category. Many board members, Allen included, resisted this change, because they felt liveshots should naturally fall under "Best Breaking News."

But over the years liveshots have become more than just a tool for covering "breaking news." Giving them their own category will contribute to developing the craft of the liveshot.

In this era of 24/7 news, liveshots have become the mainstay of modern news coverage. But this genre is still a long way from maturing. It smarts when my print and radio colleagues find fodder for parody with lead-ins like, "I'm standing here behind this building where 36 hours ago..." I agree. Our viewers deserve better than that.

Live television coverage of the September 11th terrorist attacks are the most recent reminder of the power of live TV. Those of you who saw the second jet crash into the World Trade Center will never forget that moment. With it came the realization that the first crash wasn't an accident. You knew in that single moment our world had changed forever.

Most liveshots are rarely so memorable. But they seem to have more impact on viewers than even a well-crafted story on the same subject. There's something about the energy of being live that draws viewers in. Some reporters take undue advantage of this, and instead of focusing on the content of the story, put all their energy into the live presentation. It's seductively easy for form to take precedence over content. That's why I'm glad we have a contest category to recognize reporters for using the form to enhance content.

Having said that, the live shot is still wide, undiscovered country for story telling. Wireless microphones and "mast cams"—small cameras mounted on top of the live truck—are great story telling tools. The trick is to remember to use them in the right situation. And that takes practice. How can a station cover the BIG story, if its reporters don't have practice every day using these tools?

Here in Alaska, the best is yet to come. Right now, live reporting is fairly limited. Even though KTUU, Channel 2, bought a satellite truck several years ago for just under a million dollars, it's limited to the road system (though it has traveled on the ferry to Kodiak). Channel 2's operations manager, Trent McNelly, believes in three years someone in the Anchorage market will have a "flyaway uplink"—which is a portable live unit that can be packed up and flown on a Cessna 185. It's expensive—around a quarter of a million dollars. And it takes two engineers to set up. But it would make it possible to do live reports from remote villages. In some ways, live coverage of news in Alaska has taken some steps backwards in recent years. Alascom used to provide uplinks in remote communities like McGrath and Barrow. In the late eighties, I remember watching Laura Bliss, in her brightly colored parka, doing live shots from Barrow on the grey whales that got trapped in the ice. It was exciting to watch local coverage of a story that had become an international "save the whales" sensation. We don't have that same capability today.

But there's also the Internet. During the war in Afghanistan, video has been fed using satellite phone technology. The images are slow and jerky, but eventually improved video compression may make it possible to do liveshots from Alaska villages via the Internet. Well, actually, it's possible right now, just not visually appealing. The State Troopers make use of the Internet for sending still photographs. And this one small step has led to a giant step in Rural coverage. When there's an avalanche, we can see the damage right away.

See EDITOR, next page

UPDATE: Alaska Press Club Board Actions

by Sonya Senkowsky, Alaska Press Club Secretary

The board of the Alaska Press Club meets at 1 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month by teleconference. Current board officers are: Ellen Lockyer, President; Tataboline Brant and Diana Campbell, Vice Presidents; Allen Baker, Treasurer; Sonya Senkowsky, Secretary. Other board members are: Karen Aho, Theresa Bakker, Sheila Balistreri, Rod Boyce, Alex DeMarban,* Amy Miller, Roseanne Pagano, Gilbert Sanchez,* and Lynne Snifka.

**Recently appointed by the board to fill vacancies left by Hal Spence and Wesley Loy, who stepped down.*

Recent key board actions

Much of the discussion over the past few months has centered on three key issues—updating the organization's bylaws, reviewing rules and organization of the annual journalism contest, and, as always, planning for the main event, J-Week.

To date, the board has...

- Set J-Week for April 18 - 20 at the downtown Marriott. Diana Campbell and Ta Brant, co-vice-presidents, are sharing the responsibility of planning the 2002 event. A keynote speaker has not yet been set, though many other details have been falling into place.
- Established a contest committee, headed by Robert Meyerowitz and Lynne Snifka, which met over the summer to evaluate the contest structure and begin suggesting changes. Committee members have said their goals include giving the contest a higher profile and "making it a contest people really want to enter." They are in touch with other states' press clubs to mine for new ideas. They are also reviewing rules and contest categories for the future.
- Added a new category to the TV section of the contest: Best Live Shot. This change came in the December meeting, after having been initially brought up last year by former board member Rhonda McBride. The issue was introduced this time by Allen Baker, and after some discussion (with input and clarification from Sheila Balistreri), the board agreed to add the category.
- Approved a revised version of the press club bylaws, which will soon be distributed and posted for membership consideration. The full membership will be asked to vote to approve these bylaws in 2002. Credit for heading up this mind-numbing task goes to Allen Baker, who drafted the revisions, and to Ellen Lockyer, who has had the board doggedly sifting through line by line of a bylaws revision at every month's meeting. The new bylaws lay out more clearly the organization and purpose of the board, and give more clear guidelines to future board members. A version of the new bylaws is online at www.alaskapressclub.org.

Other issues...

Establishing nonprofit corporation status for the Alaska Press Club. This would allow the press club to receive professional assistance from groups established to help manage nonprofits. It would also allow donors' donations to be tax-deductible. State nonprofit status for the group lapsed in February, 1995, and federal status was never attained. Sonya Senkowsky is investigating and will fill out the necessary paperwork to apply for nonprofit status in early 2002.

EDITOR, from previous page

I know younger reporters get annoyed with me—and yes, I admit, I even get annoyed with myself when I hear myself telling younger reporters about the days when we had to type all our stories and never imagined that devices like fax machines and cell phones would tyrannically rule our lives. But the enticing prospect of liveness from the Bush might just keep me around in the business long enough so I can talk about the times when there wasn't even a contest category for liveness, just to watch the jaws drop. You've got to be kidding. Imagine that.



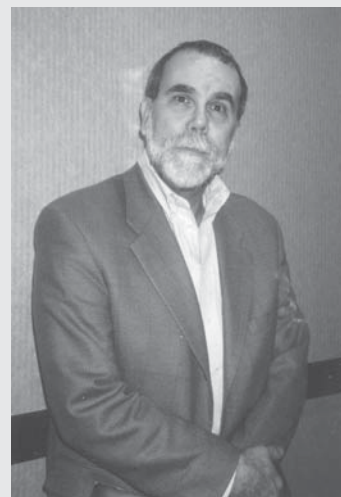
Ellen Lockyer, Press Club President.



Alex DeMarban, new board member.



Diana Campbell, Vice President



Gilbert Sanchez, new board member.

Going Live —

Then...

History Of The Alaskan “Liver”

by Al Bramstedt, General Manager, KTUU-TV

The history of television in our marketplace is typical of American history. There is a lot out there that is not correct. As for the history of live reports in newscasts in Anchorage television, I believe they began when Channel 2, then known as KENI-TV (the station’s call letters from December 1954 to June 1981), simply ran a long camera cable out of the basement of the Forth Avenue Theatre Building where the station used to be located, beginning in 1955.

In February of 1956 the Fur Rondy Sled Dog Race start / finish line was in front of the Theatre. By running a camera cable to a single television camera, RCA TK 31, to the front of the Theatre, KENI-TV was able to do live coverage of the World Championship Sled Dog Race.

Not until 1958, when KENI-TV brought microwave broadcasting to television in Anchorage, did live television reporting actually come to our marketplace. These live reports were not as we know them today. The live reporting did not occur within the station’s newscast.

The use of this first live microwave truck was limited to program length broadcasting. Here are some examples of these types of early broadcasts: the World Championship Sled Dog Race, Senator John F. Kennedy giving a campaign speech live from the Idle Hour Supper Club in September of 1960, the Oil Lease Sale bid opening at the Sydney Laurence Theatre in September 1969, and the Christmas Mass from the Holy Family Catholic Church, an annual broadcast that has been produced and aired on Channel 2 since Christmas of 1958.

Certainly short, live broadcasts were technically feasible back in the beginning days of microwave broadcasting in 1958, but it just was not done. If the station was going to go through all of the work to get a “liver” set up it was going to be used for more than a few minutes.

That all changed in May of 1996 when Channel 2’s microwave truck rolled into Anchorage just in time to get broken-in for the Miller’s Reach Fire in the first week of June. This truck, unlike the original, was designed for quick set up and break down. Now there is no longer the need to select events to be covered live that will be of program length.



Channel 2’s live truck, circa 1958. (photo courtesy of KTUU, Channel 2)

“Certainly short, live broadcasts were technically feasible back in the beginning days of microwave broadcasting in 1958, but it just was not done. If the station was going to go through all of the work to get a “liver” set up it was going to be used for more than a few minutes.”

...And Now

The Art of the Live Shot

By Jason Moore, KTUU Reporter

It's 4:45 p.m. and I've just run a red light. There's no way I could have stopped for the light anyway, not on these glazed streets with fresh snow falling. My attention is split between driving and reading over my script pages. Check the clock again. Speed up a little more. I think I can make it. I have to make it. I'm the lead! That light was still yellow, legal. At 4:55, a visibly frustrated live truck operator greets my arrival with microphone and I.F.B. (Interruptable Feedback) cord in hand, wondering where the photographer is. Sorry, he's still editing my package. String the I.F.B. cord up the back of my jacket, set the lights, sound off a mike check, collect what thoughts I can. Seconds later I hear the familiar toss "live on the scene" from the anchor, and I'm supposed to think about ART!

So often is the case for television live shots. It's not art, it's panic. This, of course, is the reporter's fault. Set up the interviews too late, spent too much time logging the tape and writing the script, spent what free time I had putting golf balls in the newsroom. But, there is an art to live shots that can enhance the story and contribute to the viewers' understanding of the story.

What every broadcast journalist should remember is why we are going live. A live element is like anything in this profession: another tool in the chest to help us tell a story. To make the most of a live shot reporters should keep in mind what could be called the "Triple I's: Identify, Illustrate, and Introduce."



Jason Moore, Channel 2 News.

Identify. When a reporter goes live, hopefully, there is a good reason to be on location. Explain where you are and how it pertains to the story. "This is the intersection where the accident happened. We're looking to the north. The car was travelling this direction." Chances are many of the viewers have been to the area, and a brief explanation will help orient the viewer. It's a way to bring the viewers to the scene to see it for themselves.

Illustrate. This is probably the most important element to an effective live shot. Try to think of a way to illustrate something about the story in your live shot. "Police say icy roads may have contributed to the accident. Take a look at how slippery these roads are." Don't be afraid to pop the camera off of the tripod and move around. Show the slippery roads. Maybe slide your shoes across the ice to demonstrate how slippery the road is. Make sure something about the story motivates the movement. Some stations demand movement in live shots, and often times it does not add to the story.

Introduce. Everything you do in your live shot should be for the purpose of introducing your story. Don't give it all away, but rather use it to set up your story. It's a beginning. The story still needs a middle and a strong ending. Keep the live introduction to 15 or 20 seconds. Just enough information to set the scene. Let the package tell the rest of the story.

If you're smart, you will be thinking about how to handle your live shot when you're on the scene of the story, not when you're back at the station writing your script. Think about where the live van should be parked, which direction the camera should be pointing, what movement you may want to include. Let the live van operator know what you want to do before he/she arrives on scene and gets set up. And, most importantly, budget your time so you can be on scene, with your photographer, to work out the details in advance of the desperation bred by the impending deadline.

Most have heard of the familiar broadcast adage: Make air not art! I say it's possible to have both.

Putting the Luster Back into the Alaska Press Club Contest

by Robert Meyerowitz, Contest Co-Chair

Following are my observations and ideas about the Press Club awards. I want to make it very clear that I don't think the awards are broke and need to be fixed; in general they seem to work very well. Rather, I think there may be some ways that we could further enhance them and make them even more competitive and prestigious. I'm willing to work on that.

It may be that you disagree with some or all of what follows. That's fine—this is very much off the top of my head. I'm sure I've overlooked some critical points. Please tell me about them, or about what seems right or reasonable. I'll collate the responses and send this out again promptly.

The Contest Itself

Reassessing Categories

Do we have the right ones? We unfortunately do not have a tally of entrants and categories from last year (which is something we certainly ought to rectify by making one next year). I think it's still worth looking at the list to see if we have too many. I also want to note, however, that I'm not convinced a category isn't worthwhile because it may have few entries. It seems to me that part of the contest's purpose is to promote better journalism—so if few enter, say, "Investigative Reporting," we may want to look at ways to stimulate more entries there rather than kill the category.

Print Categories

Along these lines, I wonder whether we should continue to differentiate print by frequency, i.e., non-daily and daily categories. Most print contests have circulation categories, e.g. above and below 40,000. The place to set that bar is at the median circulation point, which I'm guessing is somewhere around 6,000. This would let similarly-sized papers such as *The Frontiersman* and the *Anchorage Press* compete head to head, while smaller weeklies and the smallest dailies would be in their own category. At the same time I think we should have several overall (open) print categories.

Changing Categories

Whatever we do with the categories, we ought to propose it to as much of the membership as possible before we make any changes, because it has such a direct effect

on many of them. I'd recommend proposing any changes the board agreed upon in the *Polar Bear*, and also using as mass an e-mailing as we can manage. I know we solicit e-mail addresses on the contest forms. Does anyone collect them? Could we compile a membership email list?

Anchorage Daily News Participation

The *Anchorage Daily News* has by and large sat out this contest lately. Some individual reporters enter but it appears that most do not. This is no surprise if you talk to editors there, who tend to disparage the contest. Their take is that it hasn't really been worthwhile since they killed *The Times*. In fact, I was discouraged from entering the contest when I was an ADN reporter. I think it would be wonderful to have ADN back—is there a drawback to that I'm missing? The way to get them back, I'm guessing, is to speak with Pat Dougherty, the editor, listen carefully to his objections, figure out whether and how they can be addressed, and ultimately perhaps persuade him to at least encourage his reporters to enter. Getting the *Daily News* to pick up the tab for the entry fees may be harder given the current economic climate, but that would be wonderful, too. I can at least go and talk to Pat if no one objects, and report back on that.

Categories with Few Entries

It's not clear to me what happens in categories that only have one or two entries. Sometimes they get awards and sometimes they don't, but when they do is it merely by default? We apparently don't have a uniform set of instructions for judges. I think we should, and they should explicitly address this point. My recommendation is that we tell the judges not to award a prize, even if there is only one entry, unless the work merits it. The same proviso should then be included on the entry form. This may only

clarify rather than mend something, but I still think it's worthwhile in the name of transparency.

Judging

Continuing with the transparency theme, it seems to me there's been some grumbling about this for the last couple of years. Two years ago I raised the point that some daily categories had been judged by employees of McClatchy, Inc. (which owns the *Daily News*). I understand that the contest is a lot of work and that the people who must recruit judges have their hands full, but this still rankles. This year, people from the *Anchorage Press* complained that Ta Brant (a former Press employee) had helped sort entries; she subsequently beat a current Press employee in the Feature Writing category and the Press failed to even place in the Best Weekly category. While I think their complaint is sour grapes, it does raise an interesting point: should people who help plan the contest be barred from entering? Should people who recruit judges? My guess is that the first is OK and the second isn't, but I realize this may further narrow an already small pool of willing volunteers. I also think we should agree not to recruit judges from organizations that enter or may enter the contest.

Money

How about having some cash prizes? Here's how we could do it: We approach the major media organizations in state—McClatchy, Media News, Morris, etc.—through their local publishers or managers, and ask them to fund a prize. In return we could let them name that prize for an Alaskan journalist; so, for example, McClatchy could fund the Kay Fanning prize for investigative reporting, or the Howard Weaver prize for Feature Writing. This would honor our own and conceivably make the contest even more enticing.



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Presentation & Promotion

More Pomp & Circumstance? Our emcee Mel Kalkowski, bless his heart, goes through the list of winners at breakneck pace. I gather this is not his fault. By the time we're done with the keynote speaker there's very little time for the awards presentation. Yet I believe most people come to the banquet to hear the awards results. To that end I wonder whether we shouldn't dispense with the keynote speaker and devote more time to the winners—make a bigger deal out of it and them. At the same time, I'd suggest moving the keynote speaker to a cocktail reception the previous night. This would give us more evening content, which is especially important for out-of-towners.

Everyone left the awards banquet the moment Mel was done. Should we try to make it more of a party? We've had Robert Howk's band in the past—should we get a band again for next year? Does anyone want to return to the hangar? Should we have (more) free booze? Should we have snacks and dessert instead of dinner?

More TLC for Judges

Lynne Snifka judged a Wisconsin press contest and got a thank-you box of cheese. Should we send something to our judges, too... so that they're conditioned to salivate at the thought of working with us again? I think we should.

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

We should make a better effort to publicize the contest and results. First, I think we should, if possible, secure the judges and print their names in an issue of the Polar Bear before the contest. Then we should post them on our website after the contest, along with the results and the judges' comments. As a past winner, I certainly would have liked to hear the judges' comments about my work and my colleagues' work, and I cannot be alone. This also serves the purpose of transparency.

Publicize Winners

We should approach the biggest papers in the state and ask them, as good citizens, to give us a free ad page to advertise the results and thank any relevant parties. We should also approach TV and radio and encourage them to interview winners. Perhaps "Anchorage Edition" or "Alaska Week" could do a program about that year's best stories.

I await your feedback...

More than just a summer job

By Carly Bossert, Peninsula Clarion

Editor's Note: Carly Bossert is a junior at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where she majors in journalism and sociology. This piece was originally printed in the Peninsula Clarion.

It is said the best way to pick a career is to find something you would do for free and then figure out a way to get paid for it—in other words, do what you love.

I've tried to remember a time when I didn't want to spend the rest of my life writing. At different times I would flirt with the idea of doing something else with my life, but in the end, I always ended up right where I began, with pen in hand and a piece of paper in front of me.

When I went away to college, my most daunting task was packing up the crates of stories I had written over the years. Rereading them as I packed, I was generally horrified at the caliber of the pieces I had been so proud of back in the day.

However, I was still determined to make a life of it. While searching for a way to spend my summer off from college, on a whim I decided to send a resume and clips to the Peninsula Clarion, the paper in my hometown of Kenai. I had job-shadowed the editor my freshman year in high school, and I figured there was nothing to lose except a dollar or so for the postage.

Months later, long after I had given up on hearing from the paper, I received a phone call offering an interview and possibly a position. I realized from the outset that an internship, regardless of whether I wrote one story or 50, would teach me more about journalism than any class ever could. I'm not telling anyone anything new when I say hands-on learning, complete with mistakes, is the best way to learn.

The summer did nothing but justify that assumption for me. Without meaning to insult my journalism professors, there is certainly a lot to be said for digging your hands in and getting dirty. My few months at the Clarion have instilled in me a new respect for both the career and the people who sit down and produce copy every day.

Writing under a deadline was something I had never tackled before. I suppose in theory, I had a deadline while writing for my college paper, but a weekly deadline doesn't carry the same pressure.

In journalism school I could never learn how to deal with particularly grumpy readers who took offense to a story. Equally so, I wouldn't have known that I was capable of dealing with them in the first place. I have also learned, if you are right, don't apologize for yourself. But if you are wrong, apologize as sincerely and quickly as possible. A journalist's credibility is one of their biggest assets.

Working at the paper in my small hometown was like returning to teach at the high school I had attended. In a town of our size, if you don't know someone, your sister or mother or friend certainly does. It was rare to be given a lead and not know someone involved in the story. This is a town where people notice the byline.

Even after a few months on the job, I am still in awe when I look at the front page and see my name above an article. The first day I had an article come out, I was standing in the grocery store waiting to get film developed, and I glanced down to see my name for the first time in print. I wanted to grab everyone walking by and make them read it, knowing I had written it. I had butterflies. All because I felt like I was finally a writer. Even if no one else cared, or read the story, I knew it was there, and I knew I was, at that moment, a published journalist.

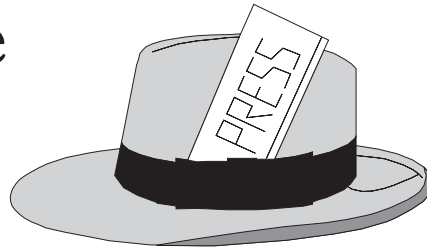
Now that the summer is over, and my bylines are dwindling, I still feel a certain amount of pride just knowing that the little things like the daily briefs and the weather page are there because I am. And, I can go back to college with a newfound wealth of knowledge that no amount of classroom time could ever teach me.

For the experience, I am grateful. I was paranoid that I would hate my job, because if I didn't like it, I wouldn't have a clue what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. A lot was riding on one summer job. Fortunately I wasn't disappointed, in myself, the job or the paper.



J-Week 2002

- April 18-20
- Downtown Marriot
- Anchorage



Questions?
Suggestions?

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