

POLAR BEAR



Fall, 2000

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Greetings news hunters,

I trust everyone had a productive summer.

The Alaska Press Board met Sept. 8 for the first time after the summer break. I would like to update everyone on what we are doing, what we are planning and some issues of concern we are facing.

Among other things, a board committee has been working on a rewrite of the press club's bylaws, a project we began last year but were unable to finish. The intention is that sometime this fall, we will publish proposed revisions to the bylaws in the Polar Bear and ask for comments.

After a comment period and any necessary further revisions, a new set of bylaws will be published and a mechanism set for a vote of the general membership at next year's J-Week.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The bylaws are seriously out of date. They do not reflect the current structure of the board, for one thing, and haven't for several years. The new laws will correct that. On the other hand, the revisions likely won't mess with the basic concepts of the club. Comments will be welcomed and are, in fact, encouraged.

Committees have been set up to handle various responsibilities for running next year's contest and J-Week affair. The scheduled dates are April 19, 20 and 21. The Regal again will host the seminars, but we're moving the banquet to a location near the airport — the Alaska Aviation Museum — so we won't have to mess with the parking hassle around the Fourth Avenue Theater.

Any ideas the general membership may have on who we might bring in as guest presenters next year will be greatly appreciated. Simply notify committee members Ellen Lockyer, Lynn Snifka or Eric Burkett, or any of the board members and that information will reach the right ears.

We hope to iron out some of the problems we ran into last fall in getting contest rules out in a timely manner. We think we have the mailing list problem licked. The contest rules will get another look-see, but we don't expect any major revisions.

Rhonda McBride has taken over the editing of the Polar Bear. I'm sure she will welcome submissions from anyone, so if you haven't got writer's cramp — or block — and you have something to say, fire away. The Polar Bear is your forum.

There are some other issues that need discussing.

In the past couple of years, members of the news gathering community or their families have been struck with cancer. Natalie Phillips is recovering nicely from treatment last I heard. Sally Kabisch, wife of ADN's Tom Kizzia, was stricken earlier this year. In both cases, the board has voted to contribute a little money to funds to help defray their expenses. However, discussions surrounding decisions about making those donations has made it abundantly clear that the Press Club is not set up to do this sort of thing.

see **PRESIDENT**, p. 10

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Editor's Column

From the controversy over a Fairbanks anchorman's school board seat to the KNBA lawsuit settlement, this fall edition of the Polar Bear tackles some meaty issues.

And while it's been fun putting together my first issue of the Alaska Press Club's newsletter, it's really made me appreciate the hard work of others who have taken their turns editing this newsletter — most recently, Jolie Lewis, who left the state to travel — and Sherry Simpson, who is now the Press Club's secretary.

After two years of working with Journalism Week, I look forward to serving the Press Club in a different way. Ellen Lockyer and Lynne Snifka, our two vice presidents, are this year's Journalism Week coordinators. They bring a lot of fresh energy and excitement to the job, which will help draw more participation.

And J-Week is such a deal. Every year it costs the Alaska Press Club an average of \$15,000 to put on this first class event. In recent years, admission has been free for Press Club members.

Over the years, we've had notables like NBC's Bob Dotson, Wall Street Journal correspondent Bob Ortega and NPR Voice Coach Sora Newman. Alaska is the big draw for them to come to J-Week. And it should be for us. It's the one event of the year that brings Rural and Urban journalists together.

As reporters we are covering a state like no other — and a young state, at that. I've talked about this often with Francine Taylor, who heads up the Alaska Moving Images Preservation Association, which collects and archives film, video and audio tapes. Francine says her job has impressed upon her what a privilege it is to be a journalist in Alaska right now. Other states have already had their formative period of growth. But here in Alaska, we're in the midst of a defining era. And we mustn't forget that today's news is tomorrow's history.

Our stories are really like no other in the American experience. This really hit me a few years ago, when I was channel surfing in Phoenix on a visit to my in-laws. I was mainly trying to see what a former colleague of mine was up to. We had worked together as cub reporters years ago, and now he was bigtime in Phoenix. I, on the other hand, was working in Bethel, Alaska at the time, worlds away from Phoenix, and I'm not just talking about the distance.

That day, my old colleague's station was promoting his story heavily — a story about why pajamas made with fire retardant material would not burn as fast as plain old cotton p.j.'s. The other big story of the day — why water was the ultimate low calorie drink. I felt a wave of disappointment. Those stories seemed so trivial compared to the life and death dramas I was covering in Bethel — missing snow machiners, failed salmon runs and homes in danger of falling into the Kuskokwim River.

I'll admit it. Many times I've questioned taking the road less traveled. I'm sure some of you veteran Alaska journalists, who have shared newsrooms with reporters who have gone on to the likes of the Seattle Times, National Public Radio or NBC Dateline, occasionally wonder what might have been if you had jumped on the express way.

I hope reading future editions of the Polar Bear will be a validating experience for you — and make you feel like you made the right choice, to stay and tell the stories that can only be found in Alaska, stories that make a real difference in people's lives. Our listeners, viewers and readers really need us to tell their stories, especially those who live in places where you pay seven dollars for a box of stale cereal and wonder when or if the the salmon will ever come back. As Rural and Urban journalists, we must work together to truly serve our listeners, viewers and readers.

In upcoming issues, I hope you will feel inspired to share your war stories and your insights into covering issues unique to Alaska. Looking forward to sharing the adventure with you.

— Rhonda McBride

Issues: Ethics & Conflicts of Interest

Local journalists see Burrows hire as conflict of interest

Reprint from The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

September 3, 2000, by Nancy Tarnai, Staff Writer

The announcement that a local television station hired a professional advertiser and school board member as an evening news anchor has been greeted with alarm by a local association of journalists.

Bill Burrows, owner of Burrows Advertising and a seven-year member of the Fairbanks-North Star Borough School Board, will begin anchoring the news for KFXF Channel 7 and KXD Channel 13 this week.

John McWhorter, president of the local chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, was dismayed. In a letter to J.P. Hoff, general manager of KFXF, McWhorter wrote that hiring Burrows as a newscaster is a grave mistake, presenting an enormous conflict of interest.

"We believe most viewers will see a local politician who may ... inject his views into news content," McWhorter said. He went on to suggest that KFXF hire a professional, trained journalist. "Journalists are charged with maintaining that public trust," he wrote.

In a telephone interview, McWhorter said, "Look at the (television) talent in Fairbanks. You don't see anybody who started as a journalist. You have actors hosting the news and they are acting as journalists."

Kyle Niederpruem, national president of SPJ, said a politician who works as a news broadcaster is "just ripe for conflict."

She added, "I'm not sure of the logic of hiring a school board member, but it's not the right thing to do. It gets really messy. If that happened here, that TV station would be run out on a rail." Niederpruem lives in Indianapolis.

Burrows said the perceived conflict can be managed. "People have to have a job. That should have no bearing on public service. This is a small town. There are all kinds of other conflicts if you look," he said. He said he will not read school board issues on the air. Burrows, who studied broadcasting briefly at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, has worked at local television stations periodically since 1978. "I always enjoyed doing it," he said.

Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio-Television News Directors Association in Washington, D.C., said her organization encourages its members to avoid conflicts of interest.

When an anchor holds a public office, "it would be very difficult to report objectively," Cochran said. "You might become a subject of the news yourself. It's difficult to report on your own activities or those of an institution you're part of."

At Fairbanks' KTVF Channel 11, General Manager Bill Wright said he would discourage anyone in public office from applying for a newscaster position. And, even though his station uses part-time anchors who work full-time elsewhere, the anchors try to avoid reading news items that involve their employers. "It would be a major stumbling block to do that with public officials," he said.

Bill St. Pierre, president of Tanana Valley Television (owner of channels 7 and 13), said he sees no conflict with Burrows being an elected official. "It wouldn't even be a conflict if he presents a story about the school board," St. Pierre said. "This is really goofy," he added.

"Journalists aren't in any position to claim superior ethical standards," St. Pierre said. "Most people try to do their best. I certainly don't see where there's any

change in that, having Bill Burrows doing our news."

St. Pierre said his company hired Burrows because he is an experienced presenter who is articulate on the air. "He has been around the business a long time," St. Pierre said. "We have a fairly young staff and he has a lot of experience. He's going to drive this news team to be better and better. He likes things done right."

This situation is not new to Fairbanks, St. Pierre pointed out. "The mayor (former Mayor Bill Wally) was on the radio for years and being mayor seems to be more influential than a school board member. People should appreciate folks like him (Burrows) being willing to serve."

Alaska news managers look at Burrows controversy

Eileen Floyd

News Director, KTVA-TV
Anchorage

While KTVA has a policy for outside employment, the only reference to conflict of interest in written policy is that outside employment cannot have an adverse impact on the company. While that is the written policy, it has been my experience that any time a reporter/anchor has contemplated an additional job or even community advisory boards, they have checked with management as to whether it would present a conflict of interest issue. As far as the Bill Burrows case in Fairbanks, I feel Tanana Valley Television is standing atop a slippery slope. Not only is Burrows a member of the local school board, he is also the owner of an advertising firm. In my view, Tanana Valley Television would be making a mistake to hire an anchor holding one of those positions, let alone someone who holds both of those positions in a community. The whole situation reeks of conflict of interest and will seriously damage the credibility of the newscasts of those stations.

see MANAGERS, next page



Bill Burrows. (photo courtesy of Fairbanks Daily News-Miner.)

A Case For The Non-Journalist TV Anchor

by Bill Burrows

I am not a professional journalist. But I play one on TV. And some real professional journalists don't like it one bit.

Last month, after a 16 year absence, I returned to the TV anchor desk, reading news for the CBS and FOX affiliates in Fairbanks. The event should not have been newsworthy but for the fact that I am also a member of the school board. Local journalists (including at least one at the above-mentioned stations) objected, saying it was a conflict of interest. I don't want to spend much time debating this point, since I almost agree with it. But it's not my conflict! That distinction belongs to the owner and management of the stations that hired me. (However, we will try to avoid any real conflict by leaving the chore of reading any school board stories to my co-anchor.)

“Television newscasts are produced for the primary purpose of attracting an audience and selling advertising. Actually, newspapers exist for the same reason...”

I should also point out that the other station has similar conflicts. One of their anchors works for the University of Alaska - Fairbanks, the other for Alaska Communications Systems. What really interests me is the ancillary charge that it is somehow wrong for people who are not “trained” journalists to be hired as TV news anchors. I think it stems from a basic misunderstanding of the nature of commercial television news.

Television newscasts are produced for the primary purpose of attracting an audience and selling advertising. Actually, newspa-

pers exist for the same reason. The difference is you don't have to look at or listen to a newspaper reporter. But people who work on-camera must be reasonably attractive (or at least not grotesquely unattractive), have pleasant voices and be able to read. TV reporters who have these qualities generally don't apply for jobs in places like Fairbanks; they aim higher. The ones with real talent get better paying jobs in larger markets or in good stepping-stone towns near big markets where they can get seen.

So what does that leave for poor little Fairbanks? We get average to good report-

MANAGERS, from previous page

Carol Rich

Journalism Professor, University of Alaska Anchorage

Journalism is that kind of career where you have to make ethical decisions. And if you are, for example, on the school board, you can't be unbiased and fairly reporting on education. You have a vested interest. So you make a choice, you take this job, and you give up your school board position. Or if you take the job and don't cover stories about education, your credibility may still suffer. Standards are standards. People doubt the industry itself. This isn't about one journalist, but it affects the entire profession.

I think protecting credibility is not only a responsibility of the journalist, but also the management — to recognize that's a problem. Whether management knows something about journalism or not, these people have bought into the business. They're hiring people. It's their obligation to find out something about this business. And that means finding out something about the ethical values and the rules. When it comes to conflict of interest, whether they have journalistic background or not is irrelevant. You don't go ahead and buy a bicycle shop and never find out anything about bicycles, just because you own the shop.

John Tracy

News Director, KTUU-TV, Anchorage

We have a written policy precluding anchors and full-time news employees from participating in television “commercials.” It seems to me this policy alone would prevent someone like Mr. Burrows from anchoring one of our newscasts.

I've never imagined the need for a written policy about having a public office holder on air as a staff member. I never imagined that such a thing would be allowed, regardless of market size. That you have an owner of a television station in the market who can't see ANY conflict of interest is remarkable.

While I appreciate the difficulty of finding qualified people in small markets, journalists in every market have been forced to make choices. And they do. They know they cannot be a journalist and sell cars. They know they cannot be an anchor and run for mayor. If a journalist wants to run for public office, and they have, they know they have to quit their job. While I am not casting doubt on Mr. Burrows' ability to remain objective, or even avoid school board stories, it's not his ability or intent that's in question. It's a perception in the public's eye, that a journalist cannot objectively report on the public's interest while he's feeding at the public trough. And I don't just mean monetarily. You do not only question the mo-

tives of an elected official when delivering the news, but you must also be wary of any influence on elected office that a person gains by being on television every night.

David Hulen

City Editor, Anchorage Daily News

We have a newsroom policy regarding political activity that's pretty simple. Except for voting, it's not allowed. The policy reads, in part: “We prohibit any active political involvement by editorial department staffers. This includes monetary or in-kind contributions to candidates, serving on honorary committees, offering testimonials, appearing in advertisements or signing petitions. This policy also includes expressions of support like bumper stickers, yard signs, lapel pins and the like.” This applies to full-time employees as well as freelancers and contributors. There's also a company-wide policy prohibiting any outside activity that creates a conflict of interest, including political involvement by non-newsroom staffers. Employees are asked to check with their department head before taking a second job. That said, the company encourages employees to be involved in the community. ADN staffers have served on non-political volunteer boards and so forth, although we try to be careful about conflicts and appearances of conflict there as well.

ers who need to either polish their on-camera skills...or consider a career in print.

Enter the non-journalist anchor. Remember, the TV station is still trying to attract an audience and sell advertising. So why not hire a part-time talent who is making a living doing something else and happens to be good at presenting news to a television audience? Not only does this make their newscast look more professional, but the viewer gets to hear and see the news accurately reported. This may be the most important point. Accuracy in the news is not just controlled by the reporter and editor or news director. It is also affected by people like printers, proofreaders, switchers, audio engineers and anchors. I would think that so-called professional journalists would be more upset to have a good story, meticulously researched, reported and written by one of your brethren, butchered on the air by an inept anchor. It's not hard for a few misspoken words or incorrectly inflected phrases to completely change the meaning and intent of a story. Whereas a skilled, experienced, talented broadcaster will make sure that the audience is seeing and hearing what the reporter intended for them to see and hear. And if the anchor is really good, when necessary, he/she can even adlib corrections to syntax and grammar to make the story more understandable and interesting.

Above and beyond the on-camera skill of a professional, non-journalist broadcaster, there are other assets that have value that may have nothing to do with journalism. That is to say, training in journalism isn't the only way to learn some of what makes a good anchor. In my case, for example, my seven years on the school board, (two as board president) have given me an incredible depth of knowledge and understanding of local and state politics.

So before we get too high and mighty about what it means to be a professional journalist, let's give a little credit to the professional broadcaster who may be every bit as highly trained and skilled, just in a different discipline—or maybe several different disciplines. And who plays an important role in maintaining the overall professionalism of television journalism.

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Bill Burrows is the owner of Burrows Advertising in Fairbanks, a member the Fairbanks North Star School District Board of Education and, in his spare time, co-anchor of CBS Prime News on KXD Channel 13 and The FOX 7 News on KFXF Channel 7.

Society of Professional Journalists
Farthest North Professional Chapter
PO Box 75012
Fairbanks, AK 99707

August 22, 2000

Mr. J.P. Hoff
Station Manager
KFXF-TV
3650 Braddock St
Fairbanks, AK 99701

Dear Mr. Hoff:

We understand that you plan to hire a prominent advertising man and elected school board member to co-host your nightly newscast. After consulting with fellow members of the local Society of Professional Journalists chapter, we believe that such a hire is a bad idea and ask that you reconsider this decision. Let me explain why:

While journalism is most certainly a business, it also holds a unique position of stewarding the public's trust. Journalists are charged with maintaining that public trust and we work hard to build and maintain our credibility among viewers, listeners and readers. Credibility is our only asset. It is also the most difficult asset to develop and once lost, is hard to regain.

By hiring a school board member as a newscaster, you open your business up to an enormous conflict of interest. While some viewers may see a smooth "news reader," we believe most viewers will see a local politician who may inject his views into news content.

During our recent conversation, you offered assurances that the host won't have any influence over story content and will avoid reading stories about school affairs. But one of SPJ's main tenets is to avoid even perceived conflicts of interest and this hire clearly crosses the line.

Voters always list education as among their top concerns. Residents spend tens of millions of dollars each year paying to educate their children and it's not hard to imagine that an occasional story may be critical of the school district, its management or its board members. To have a former board president and current board member serving as an announcer severely damages the ability of any newsroom to maintain an arm's length, independent relationship with the educational institutions it covers.

There is also a matter of fairness among board members. As people who seek voter support, by allowing one member nightly access to the airwaves, other members may feel your organization is playing favorites.

In the end, we believe you will lose public support for your news products and the loss of viewers will impede your ability to reach the goal you seek, increased profitability.

It is for these reasons that we suggest you find another person to host your newscasts. We suggest you hire a professional, trained journalist, one who takes to heart SPJ's code of ethics.

SPJ is a national organization representing 15,000 members. Together we've worked hard to develop a code that serves the interest of media owners, employees and the citizens we serve. I've included it for your review.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please call me at 474-5085.

Sincerely,

John McWhorter
President, Farthest North Chapter, SPJ

Society of Professional Journalists' letter of concern

*For more SPJ's Code of Ethics
and more ethics sources, check
out SPJ's website at
www.spj.org*

A Newsroom Revolt

Timeline

March 1

Nellie Moore and D'Anne Hamilton are suspended from their jobs at Anchorage public radio station KNBA, FM 90.3. KNBA is operated by Koahnic, a non-profit arm of the CIRI Native Corporation. Moore was KNBA's National Program Manager and host-producer of National Native News. Hamilton was in charge of Koahnic's training programs. Moore and Hamilton claim they were disciplined in a dispute over journalistic ethics. The two said they protested management's plans to use corporate sponsors as regular co-hosts for "Pathways," a public affairs program under development. Management said it legally couldn't discuss why Moore and Hamilton were suspended, because it was a personnel matter. Management did dispute the charge that journalistic ethics were at stake and said it had taken steps to address the journalists' concerns, a claim the reporters said was false.

March 2

Four KNBA newsroom staffers — Len Anderson, Veronica Iya, Lori Townsend and Washington D.C. Correspondent Lisa Nurnberger — walk off the job in a show of support.

March 3

The Alaska branch of the Society of Professional Journalists, the "Farthest North Chapter," sends Koahnic management a letter in support of the exiled journalists.

March 4

The Alaska Press Club board narrowly approves a letter asking the Koahnic Board to consider bringing in outside ethics experts to assist in resolving the dispute.

Editor's Note

When a dispute erupted between KNBA management and its news department this spring, it rocked Alaska's journalism community, pitting long time friends and colleagues against each other, much like children in a family break-up. But amid the shouting matches and e-mail wars, there was one thing everyone seemed to agree upon — that Alaska's newsrooms and the managers of newspapers, TV and radio stations need more training in ethics. Where do you draw the line between what constitutes a breach of ethics and a communication breakdown? Perhaps the lesson here is that the two are mutually dependent on each other — that the dialogue over ethics needs to begin long before there's a crisis. The Polar Bear hopes to address this need in future issues.

Interview: KNBA

Jaclyn Sallee, CEO, Koahnic Broadcasting

Polar Bear: What can you tell us about the settlement?

Jaclyn Sallee: The terms of the settlement are confidential, but we are satisfied with the outcome and believe that it's fair. And we're both happy to have this dispute behind us and have this happen, not through an arbitration proceeding, but between both parties.

Polar Bear: For the rest of us who are wondering how can something like this can be prevented from happening again, is it a sealed chapter?

Jaclyn Sallee: I've been advised not to talk about the specifics of what happened and those things that led up to our settlement, but I can tell you at Koahnic we definitely have seen areas improve. And one of those areas is with any new program in development. We work more closely than ever with our managers in looking at every area of making that decision, which includes looking at staffing issues — who's going to be hosting that, looking at the finances, how the program fits into our mission, whether it would be attractive to our listeners and how it fits into our format. Those are all issues we've looked at in the past, and I can say they're looked at more carefully with a fine tooth comb.

We're also looking at how fast we grow. Since we were incorporated in 1992, and with the first staff being hired in 1995, we've seen tremendous growth. We've gone from seven employees to 32 employees today. We've had a tremendous growth spurt in both the need for facilities and in making sure that everybody is communicating. And our facility itself doesn't allow for a lot of communication, because we're in two different buildings. And in one of those, we're on four different floors. So we are working very hard to improve communication at Koahnic.

Polar Bear: So how did this growth contribute to the problems you had with your news department?

Jaclyn Sallee: Our growth is something that we've been dealing with and we're taking a look very closely at what we've been doing in the past. We've just been very successful in programs we're providing to the community. And more and more Native stations throughout the country are looking to Koahnic to produce more, so trying to keep up with that demand has created a lot of demands on the staff.

Polar Bear: Since the lawsuit, have you revamped your ethics policies?

Jaclyn Sallee: We've never denied there should be an ethics policy. And one is in development for Koahnic as we speak.

Polar Bear: What's the process for development of this ethics policy?

Jaclyn Sallee: Nellie Moore and D'Anne Hamilton were working on an ethics policy before they left. We have a committee of staff that is working on drafting one. It will be presented to the board of directors.

Polar Bear: You've said you were unhappy with the Press Club's role



Protesters picket KNBA.

Exiled journalists blaze new trail

Interview: Native Voice Communications

Nellie Moore, Former KNBA News Director

Polar Bear: One of the things you said early on was that you wanted an apology from KNBA. But in the settlement, both sides agreed to admit to no wrong doing. So why did you settle without the apology?

Nellie Moore: Because we knew that wasn't going to be possible.

Polar Bear: Now that you've settled, we'll never really know what happened between the newsroom and management at KNBA.

Nellie Moore: Yes, in that way it's kind of a hollow victory.

Polar Bear: We know that under the terms of the agreement you and KNBA reached, you can't disclose the amount of the settlement, but maybe you can tell us what this settlement means to you.

Nellie Moore: It was a financial settlement. D'Anne Hamilton and I were the only people in the lawsuit, so what we did was dedicate the majority of the money to Native Voice Communications and then divided the rest among the seven people who left Koahnic.

Polar Bear: Six of you formed a new company, Native Voice Communications, shortly after you were fired. What kinds of work have you been able to do as an independent news company?

Nellie Moore: We did statewide live broadcast of the ANILCA panel, which was a huge success. All the major (public radio) stations carried it. We also taped-delayed a broadcast of a contaminants panel at the Anchorage Museum, which had to do with northern contaminants and Native people. We had underwriting from the Alaska Conservation Alliance. And now we're working on AFN. We're going to do a daily half-hour wrap-up of the convention.

Polar Bear: Can your new company survive on just projects alone?

Nellie Moore: Actually things are picking up. We're starting to get calls from people asking us to do work. Everybody's been able to hang in there. It hasn't been easy for some.

Polar Bear: It is in many ways unprecedented to have a whole newsroom walk off.

Nellie Moore: When I really thought about that was when we signed the settlement agreement. It really showed the strength of the people. It was a very tough time. A lot of them had faced eviction. We all kind of pitched in to make things work. You have to make a decision about whether you're going to pay your rent or buy food tomorrow.

Polar Bear: Now that you're out there having to generate underwriting for your company's projects, how do you handle keeping the news separate from the fundraising side, which was the issue you raised in your dispute with Koahnic?

Nellie Moore: Actually, Veronica Iya does that. She goes out and does the fundraising. None of our news staff has been out there doing that. We've met with different groups that have asked us to do projects. But we haven't actually gone out asking for money.

see MOORE, p. 8



"New Beginning." D'Anne Hamilton, Nellie Moore, Lori Townsend and Sharon McConnell launch Native Voice Communications.

Timeline, cont.

March 5

Koahnic's Board of Directors fires Moore and Hamilton and orders their colleagues to return to work or be fired. Sharon McConnell, the host of the nationally syndicated *Native Wellness Edition*, asks to be released from her contract with KNBA. McConnell tells the board the loss of Nellie Moore and her staff would jeopardize the quality of the program. The board later agrees to release McConnell from her contract.

March 21

The fired journalists form their own company, *Native Voice Communications*, headquartered at McConnell's private company, *Blueberry Productions*.

March 10

Civil Rights Attorney Bob Wagstaff agrees to represent Moore and Hamilton pro bono and files a lawsuit against Koahnic.

April 15

Kyle Neiderpruem, national president of the *Society of Professional Journalists*, announces SPJ's support for the ousted KNBA journalists at *Journalism Week*. SPJ contributes \$1,000 to their legal fund.

April 7

After much discussion about the proper role of the Press Club, Press Club board members agree to draft an open letter to the media expressing concern over the firing of the KNBA journalists. The letter was sent to Anchorage-area newspapers. The vote: 6 yes, 3 no, 1 abstention.

September 5

Koahnic and the fired journalists reach an out-of-court settlement. Neither party admits wrong doing. Terms of the settlement are confidential.

October 5

Nellie Moore and D'Anne Hamilton receive a settlement from Koahnic. They divide it amongst themselves and five colleagues. A portion is reserved to capitalize their new company, "*Native Voice Communications*."

SALLEE, from p. 6

in this dispute.

Jaclyn Sallee: I've been disappointed with the Alaska Press Club. I served on the board of directors. I was a volunteer with the Alaska Press Club for several years. The Press Club was involved with trying to get a mediator, not that that was a bad thing. But I was trying to get a meeting of the Alaska Press Club Board of directors for several weeks and that was not forthcoming. And instead, what we were presented with was a letter to the board of directors that was printed in the Anchorage Press. I would just think that the Press Club would deal with our request for a meeting and at that time hear what our side of the story was.

***Polar Bear:* Do you ever envision working with Native Voice Communications?**

Jaclyn Sallee: I don't really have any comment on that right now. It's something that could come up and I don't have a closed mind towards that.

***Polar Bear:* Will that be a problem out there, with both of you competing for projects?**

Jaclyn Sallee: I can only tell you from Koahnic's position. We work very hard at raising money. It takes a lot of work to raise community support — to raise money from corporations, foundations, governments, state and federal entities. I think we're going to continue to be successful.

***Polar Bear:* How has the lawsuit affected fund raising?**

Jaclyn Sallee: Actually we saw an increase in the amount of individual membership dollars from the fall to the spring drive. Also our listenership has increased. There has never been any instance in which I have directed the news staff, either previously, or to this day, or in the future, will I ever tell the news department what they should be reporting on a daily basis. What we are working on as managers are the decisions made in new program development. Bernadette Chato, who is our new National News Director, is part of our management team and improved communication is something that has definitely occurred between administration and our news department.

Also, we had our art auction in March. We're going to be donating a portion of those proceeds to the Doyon Morris Thompson foundation. This fund provides educational scholarships. Also the Native American Music awards announced that KNBA is among five stations in the country that have been nominated as one of the best Native American radio stations.

MOORE, from p. 7

***Polar Bear:* KNBA isn't the only public broadcasting outlet, where the news department has clashed with management. News staffers at KAKM-Channel 7 recently had a dispute with management about airing an interview with Ralph Nader. With these growing tensions between news and management, do you think independent news organizations like Native Voice Communications are the wave of the future?**

Nellie Moore: It's a question that's going to come more and more in the forefront. You hear it all the time, people talking about major corporations taking over ownership of huge news groups. That kind of total control. I think we are going to see it more and more in public radio, because people are so concerned about where the next dollar is coming from. And budgets are getting slashed more and more, so public radio and television are going out into the private sector. And now public radio is going to face another huge round of devastating cuts. One that comes to mind immediately — they're losing transponder space that they had under an old contract, which is up for renewal. And you know it's not going to be at the same generous rate as before. People are going to be hurting bad, so we need to look at alternatives to cutting costs, to continue to deliver a product without that pressure to satisfy a marketing department. Marketing departments are very essential. But once you start having the marketing department dictating to the news department, well that's a whole can of worms and nobody wants to open it.

***Polar Bear:* Independent producers of news and public affairs programming is not completely unprecedented in public radio. You do have some national programs that are produced independently.**

Nellie Moore: Yeah, there are. And a lot of them go after grants. And go after large corporations for grants. For us in particular, that's going to be really difficult. We're not going to use traditional delivery. We're going to use the Internet. We're going to use MP3, which is high quality audio.

Radio is going to have to wake up to the fact that times are changing, the old satellite beamer costs a heck of a lot more than hooking up to the Internet.

***Polar Bear:* We're seeing the number of journalists in Alaska shrink rather than grow. Do you think we'll see more companies like yours?**

Nellie Moore: I just don't know. I just don't see Anchorage in a growth mode. It's a little frightening. We're just getting more and more of the lower paying jobs, and you just can't support a lot of newsrooms. I mean look, we're down to one newspaper.

***Polar Bear:* Given the shortage of money, is there enough to keep two Native news organizations going?**

Nellie Moore: It's a problem. There was one comment we got, "There's already Native America Calling, why do we need something else?" As though there isn't already NBC, CBS and four hundred others. In a lot of ways the attitude about Native news is, "Well, you only need one of them." But I don't agree with that at all.

***Polar Bear:* Aside from the struggles of not being based within a radio station, what are the benefits of being on your own?**

Nellie Moore: For one thing, it gives talented people a chance to shine. You're not going through several layers of approval. Generally we discuss something and decide how to go about it, and then just do it. It allows a lot more room for creativity. In some ways it's been very good. In some ways it's not so good. Someone at some time has to take a leadership role.

***Polar Bear:* Do you foresee a day when KNBA will carry your programming?**

Nellie Moore: I would hope so. KSKA took our programs and they're a major Anchorage market station. I really can't speak for them, but anything we produce is available. We've had really positive feedback from the stations that have taken our programs. We're very interested in being a player in Alaska. We're all Alaskans and we see this as our home and really want to pursue our livelihood here. I hope that we can fit in somewhere.



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What Now?

Turning the page on the Koahnic incident bares new challenges for Native-controlled Public Broadcasting

Analysis by Steve Heimel

Editor's note: Steve Heimel is the Alaska Public Radio Network's senior reporter and morning news host. He is also a volunteer disc jockey at KNBA and refused to participate in station pledge drives until the matter was resolved.

Just about everybody is glad to see this struggle end. The tensions it created were not helping anybody. Now those involved can move on and get to work. Among the outcomes is the fact that we now have two Native broadcast entities in Anchorage instead of one. Some will argue that there are only resources for one. Time could prove that true. The implications may be larger, however, for areas other than Anchorage—places where journalists are less insulated from media management.

For Koahnic, the challenge is to prove that it is worthy of the trust and hope of all Alaska Natives that it can continue to further the cause of Native-controlled public broadcasting for ALL Natives — the rural and the urban, the traditional and the assimilated, the tribal and the corporate, the youth and the elders.

For Nellie Moore, D'Anne Hamilton and the others at Native Voice Communications, the challenge is to forge into the new technology to create and market viable Native radio programming and media products on a shoestring.

Koahnic won't have the shoestring problem. It is getting plenty of grant money which it is supposed to use to make itself a worthwhile tool. It is supposed to create radio that means something to the Native population in Anchorage, and, it hopes, statewide. It is supposed to meaningfully train Native youth in media skills and to actually build the first steps of a career ladder for them. This is heavy lifting, and it is to be expected that some force will be involved. Hopefully, Koahnic's management and board have learned to be careful with that force.

The way both sides respond to their challenges should continue to be of concern to Alaska journalists. First, because it involves the first people of this land, and they deserve fair access to Alaska's news media. But the Koahnic fight is also of concern because of the implications for Bush journalism. As Native tribes and corporations come to control media in their communities, they have the responsibility to ensure the editorial integrity of those media.

Native tribes and corporations that come to own media outlets should not get the notion that they can control the content of the news. If they want public relations, that's fine, but it ain't news. News people have to be able to report the truth, even if it makes some corporate executive or his relatives look bad. This has been a problem for decades now all over Indian country. Theoretically, Alaska Natives and their corporate system are supposed to be finding a better way.

If Koahnic wants to be a leader in Native-controlled media in this state, it must explore this ethical frontier, rather than perpetuate the kind of abuses we've seen all over Indian country and at times in Bush Alaska. Its board can't just leave everything to its CEO. It has a responsibility to see to it that personnel and journalistic ethics policies are put in place to allow its news staff to do its job with integrity.

###

Steve Heimel at work. (Photo by Jim Paulin)



Calendar of Events

Thursday, Nov. 2

*Alaska Press Women's Luncheon. 11:30 a.m.
Golden Lion Restaurant.*

Friday, Nov. 3.

*Press Club Board
Teleconference. 1 p.m.*

Friday, Dec. 1

*Press Club Board
Teleconference, 1 p.m.*

Thursday, Dec. 7

*Alaska Press Women's Luncheon. 11:30 a.m.
Golden Lion Restaurant.
Speaker: Alaska mystery
writer Dana Stabenow.*

Friday, Jan. 12

Press Club Contest Deadline

Thurs. - Sat., April 19-21

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That Vision Thing...

Allen Baker, Treasurer, Alaska Press Club

Editor's Note: The following was an e-mail from Allen Baker in an ongoing dialogue with Alaska Press Club board members about the club's mission.

Our first priority, I think, is what we've put most of our energy into over the last few years. That's J-Week, which really does provide excellent workshops and training for journalists, as well as a gathering point and time

for us to see each other and ponder where our industry is going.

Put in a more general way, I think we should be working hardest on professional training and seminars.

The contest provides a way for people to match their work against that of others across the state, and I think it is a worthy endeavor, even aside from providing the cash to pay for J-Week. So we should say we want to recognize and reward excellence and public service by our members and others in the field of journalism.

One other area where we've had an impact is in pushing to keep meetings and records open. A few years ago, the Legislature tried to water down the law in response to complaints from local officials (Legislators, as we all know, choose to do all their real work away from the public eye.). Larry Campbell was our leader at the time, and while the law did get weakened, it was not as bad as the original draft. I also did some work on a later administrative code to address access to computer records. Dean Fosdick has set up a Freedom of Information Foundation for the state we can tap into.

Again boiling it down, I think we stand firmly behind the public's right to know what goes on in government, eager to strengthen the protections our state law provides, and ready to assist reporters across the state when public officials and employees try to withhold information.

The Polar Bear provides a link between us that I think could be strengthened, perhaps even as we streamline it toward electronic delivery. (This is not to put down the fine work that's been done by Polar Bear editors in the past.) When Fred Pearce broached the idea of electronic delivery a few years ago to save postage, I thought it was a bad idea. Now, paradoxically, I believe we can get people to pay more attention to this publication by putting it in people's computer instead of on their cluttered desks. I think the layout could be changed dramatically with the new format, streamlining what has been quite a task for those who've tackled it.

Over the last few months, I've been on a discussion list for the Wire Service Guild, where people bring up issues and other folks chime in with their thoughts and experiences. Topics have run from typical union grievances and contract questions to postings of jobs, to how to deal with the credit union and health insurance people, to discounts on Dell computers offered to AP employees.

I think the board discussion that's ensued from my earlier message shows the potential of this medium. I think it has helped to get us moving forward, and I hope we continue to communicate between meetings, hopefully broadening the discussion list to include others who want to pitch in.

An electronic forum like that, coupled with the Web page APC board member Sonya Senkowski is creating, could give us an opportunity to trade ideas across the state in ways we've not tapped before.

So I think we want to build links between members so they can help each other with professional and workplace issues.

Beyond that. I think we're into the ad hoc realm. We could sponsor writing workshops occasionally, and maybe even try to organize a swing around the state by a writing or reporting or broadcasting coach, with the news outlets footing the bulk of the bill but someone in the club perhaps doing the organizing.

I doubt that we have the numbers or organizing talent to do a regular lunch gathering with

speakers and so on. But maybe there's enough support to restart the brown bag lunch deal we did at UAA a few years ago. Anchorage members would be the ones to decide and organize that.

Some sort of student mentoring or other support for the folks in training is a possibility. Again, I suspect that could be organized locally but we could lend some support. Don't ask me what form that would take. I'd like to see us reach out beyond the board for our committees, but the amount of energy and time people can contribute is limited, and it seems most of the folks willing to work do end up on the board. (That's not to ignore the aid of former board members such as Larry Campbell and John Woodbury who have pitched in well after their board service ended.)

The most important thing we can do is make board service fulfilling, and also pitch in to help the folks who take on the big tasks on the contest and J-Week and the Polar Bear so we don't burn everybody out.

###

PRESIDENT, from p. 1

I would like to hear comments about whether it should do so in the future, and if so, how do we set up that kind of fund and decide who is eligible and who is not. That question alone should give us all pause about creating an emergency fund, but such things are not impossible if we choose to do it. That will be a decision of the general membership, however. During discussion of the donation, some board members, Allen Baker for one, expressed serious reservations. Contact him if you wish to discuss his concerns in detail.

Beyond an emergency fund, others suggested the club consider a fund from which small grants might be made that could be used for career development, such as helping a reporter or photographer take a course, attend a seminar, or bring an expert to their locale. It is worth considering, but again, it would take a diversion of limited funds to create that kind of account.

I encourage all of you to give these issues a little thought. With the writing of updated bylaws, we have a chance to redefine who and what we are as an organization. Feel free to e-mail or call me at any time except Wednesdays — that's deadline.

Peace, Hal

It's high noon, but no showdown on Alaska airwaves

The Anchorage television market just moved up a notch in rankings to the nation's 154th market, with 130,800 viewers. Despite the growth in market size, Anchorage apparently isn't big enough to support a noon television newscast.

As of September, Anchorage's NBC affiliate, KTUU-Channel 2 dropped "News @ Noon." The show had only been on the air for nine months. Earlier this year, CBS affiliate KTVA - Channel 11 dropped its noon program. KTVA was the first to bring a televised noon newscast to Anchorage.

KTUU News Director John Tracy said the move was determined by the bottom line.

"It appears that Anchorage has not reached the critical mass of viewers at noon necessary to attract the advertising support for a noon newscast," Tracy said. "The problem is, it is just as expensive to produce that newscast as it is any other time slot."

KTVA cancelled its noon show on April 21.

"It was not an easy decision to reach," said KTVA News Director

Eileen Floyd, "But it became a question of resources and where best to allocate them." Floyd said the station wanted to put more emphasis on its 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. newscasts. In August, KTVA did launch a five-minute news update. "This allows us a window of opportunity during the day to inform viewers of any breaking news and new developments on stories we are following," Floyd said.

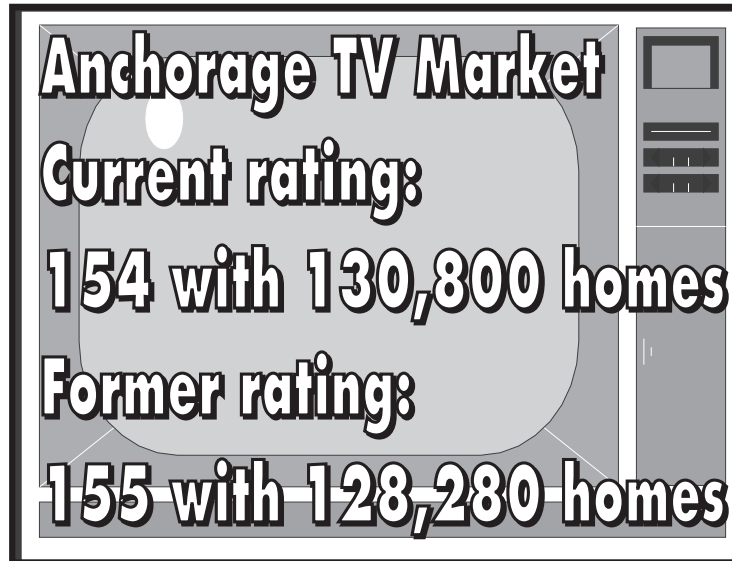
KTUU is replacing its noon newscast with updates and putting more emphasis on its website for breaking news during the day. Even so, Tracy says the loss of noon news is a setback for the market.

"If your station's reputation is built on a strong news team, I believe it's important that you have a presence at what has become a 'traditional' news slot on

local television," said Tracy. "To give it up sends the wrong message to your viewers and staff."

Public Radio listeners also lost their noon newscast. Due to budget constraints, the Alaska Public Radio Network stopped producing its statewide five-minute noon update in September.

###



Alaska public radio reporter remembered

The Chilkat Valley News contributed to this report.

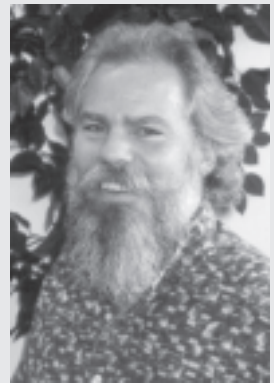
Dave Reimer was an example of what makes public radio unique in Alaska. Due to the shortage of journalists willing to work remote communities, people who don't have traditional backgrounds in journalism wind up doing the news. And surprise. They bring a refreshing sound and perspective to the airwaves, but perhaps the best lesson Dave taught his fellow reporters was that you didn't have to give up your joie de vivre.

Reimer, 48, died in September after having a heart attack on the dance floor of the Red Onion Saloon in Skagway.



"Play 'Misty' for me." Dave Reimer at the piano. (photos by Rhonda McBride.)

Reimer served as news director at KHNS in Haines from 1997 to 1999, before moving to Skagway last year to assume the radio station's Skagway news reporter job. He left news last spring to work as an actor at one of Skagway's most popular visitor attractions, the Gold Rush Trail camp. Fellow actor Jon Koonz said Reimer was the attraction's most popular actor. "We've had a lot of performers there. Dave was the warmest, most liked guy. He probably got more hugs from visitors than anyone out there."



Dave Reimer

Reimer lived in Alaska approximately 20 years, moving to Anchorage from Lake Tahoe, California to work in video production and acting. He also developed the persona of Z.Z. the Clown, performing for children at fundraisers, fairs and private parties.

Editors note: Whether with kids or fellow reporters, Reimer could be counted upon to be the life of the party. He gave my piano one good work-out when he was in town a few years ago for a journalism workshop.

Wanted!

**Your ideas for
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