

**MINUTES  
MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS  
JANUARY 19, 2008  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

With President Clint Brewer presiding, the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Society of Professional Journalists was called to order at 9:10 a.m. on Saturday, January 19, 2008, at the offices of The City Paper in Nashville, Tennessee.

**ROLL CALL**

In addition to President Brewer, the following were present for all or portions of the meeting: President-Elect David Aeikens; Secretary-Treasurer Kevin Smith; Vice President, Campus Chapter Affairs Neil Ralston; Immediate Past President Christine Tatum; Director-at-Large Sally Lehrman; Region 7 Director Ron Sylvester; SDX Foundation Secretary and Past SPJ President Irwin Gratz; Executive Director Terry Harper; Associate Executive Director Chris Vachon; and Editor Joe Skeel.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Two items appeared on the consent agenda for the committee's consideration:

- Approval of Executive Committee meeting minutes, October 5, 2007
- Chapter Name Change Request: Queen City Professional to Greater Cincinnati Professional

**Upon proper motion and second, respectively, by Aeikens and Sylvester, the Executive Committee unanimously approved the consent agenda.**

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

Brewer distributed a written report at the meeting. Brewer stated that among his priorities since the convention has been to raise SPJ profile and get committees on track for a productive year. He referenced a communications analysis prepared by Communications Manager Beth King which showed a 15.7% increase in coverage from 2006 to 2007.

**STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE**

Vachon reviewed the goals for the current year along with staff recommendations for implementation. Smith will serve as the board's liaison to the strategic planning process, as well as oversee the Media Credibility section. Skeel will oversee the Press Freedom and Member Connections sections. Vachon will oversee Professional Development and Inclusiveness. Harper will oversee Society Operations.

When discussing the Media Credibility section, it was suggested that the role of Project Watchdog needed better definition and direction.

Where Professional Development is concerned, it was the sense of the committee that SPJ needs to be doing a better job of covering its programs. The idea of transforming the second floor of SPJHQ into a training center was discussed. It was suggested that SPJ seek out a media/technology partner(s) to participate in the transformation. ADA compliance would be a significant factor as there is currently no way to accommodate the disabled getting to the second floor.

Under Society Operations, it was recommended that all committees have action plans each year. It also was suggested that some committees might become "interest sections" rather than standing committees. No specific committees were named as possible candidates to become interest sections. Harper noted that he had put out feelers to gather names for the "scouting committee" being recruited to advise the Society on future needs and changes in the industry.

**ANNUAL REPORTS**

As part of Harper's 2007 evaluation, he was asked to offer recommendations on the annual report process.

In his written report, Harper offered the following recommendations and rationale for each.

**Recommendation 1:** Amend the Bylaws to repeal Article V, Section Four requiring professional chapters to submit an annual report.

**Rationale:** The process of chapter review should be set by board policy, not set in stone by the organization's governing documents. Reviewing chapters is a matter of process, not governance. Further, the reporting requirement inconsistency that exists between professional and campus chapters will be eliminated.

**Recommendation 2:** Once a month, Regional Directors will make telephone contact with each professional chapter. The staff will develop a simple form to be used to collect key data (membership, finances, programming, requests for assistance, etc.).

**Rationale:** Gathering information on an ongoing basis allows the Society to react in a timely manner if problems exist, as well as to share topical and timely program ideas. Further, it establishes a personal connection between the local chapter and national organization. Regular contact also may spur the chapter on to more activity so it can have more great things to tell the RD the following month. Reports will be sent to the HQ for follow-up (providing resources, updating officer information, getting program details that can be shared). The RD will serve as the conduit; staff will do the legwork when necessary.

**Recommendation 3:** Beginning in 2009, annual reports will be eliminated and replaced with a voluntary awards application.

**Rationale:** Information currently gathered in the annual reports will be gathered throughout the year by RDs. Only those chapters seeking recognition need to submit applications. RDs will still make recommendations for chapters of the year and will be in a better position to make recommendations based upon the ongoing contact and communication. Benefits accruing to award-winning chapters will be similar to those afforded to 4-star chapters.

Further, local chapter leaders already have enough demands placed on their time without the added burden of spending, in some cases, several hours each year completing an annual report. In its place is ongoing contact with national leaders who take a genuine interest in the success of the chapter.

**Recommendation 4:** Beginning in 2009, the star ranking system will be eliminated.

**Rationale:** For the reasons stated above.

It was noted that the above recommendations above apply only to professional chapters.

While the committee was generally supportive of the recommendations, there was some concern expressed that the Society should establish some expectations or reporting requirements of some kind for chapters. It was noted that some regional directors have many more chapters in their regions than others and that SPJ needs to be sensitive when adding or removing job requirements.

**Upon proper motion and second by Tatum and Ralston, respectively, the Executive Committee unanimously endorsed recommendations 1-4 above and will refer them to the full board for its consideration. As part of the motion, the staff is directed to develop some minimum expectations or reporting requirements for professional chapters for the consideration of the full board.**

## **SPRING CONFERENCES**

As part of Harper's 2007 evaluation, he was asked to offer recommendations on regional — now spring — conferences. Harper reported that the senior staff had met a number of times in formulating their recommendations. Three approaches were identified:

— A "Band Aid®" approach which involves little change to the existing structure. Staff is already providing some additional resources to conference coordinators and Regional Directors. Existing resources

will continue to be updated and steps will be taken to ensure that all key players have the information they need to make sound decisions.

— A “fourth and long” approach in which the tradition of spring conferences is eliminated after 2008. Board action will remove the requirement that chapters attend conferences (there is no requirement that conferences be held in the first place). Regions may choose to continue to hold a conference each year. Regional MOE awards will be announced via news release and certificates sent to winners. Regions may choose to hold an event to recognize winners.

— A “TSA” approach that essentially “nationalizes” the regional conferences and makes them the responsibility of the Society’s paid staff. Core curricula will be developed to ensure that a consistent message is being presented nationwide. Topical programs of regional significance will be developed for each conference.

Harper noted that these ideas are those of the staff’s and have not been run by the ad hoc committee of regional directors appointed by Brewer in the fall. Brewer indicated he would forward the Executive Committee’s action to the ad hoc committee for review and comment to the full board.

**Upon proper motion and second by Sylvester and Tatum, respectively, the Executive Committee endorsed the following elements of the staff’s recommendations and directed that they be forwarded to the full board for its consideration:**

— **Beginning in 2009, Spring Conferences are “nationalized” and brought in-house under the direction of the staff and the professional development committee.**

— **Core curricula will be developed each year in accordance with SPJ’s missions and priorities. Topical programming for each region also will be developed in consultation with the Regional Director and/or local SPJ leaders.**

— **SPJ will apply for a grant from the SDX Foundation to fund an additional staff person to coordinate the 12 additional programs, as well as provide much-needed support to existing programs.**

— **2009 marks SPJ’s 100th anniversary, elements of which can be incorporated into each of the 12 regional programs to raise the profile of the Society.**

— **Board action will remove the requirement that chapters attend the Spring Conference in their region which also eliminates an inconsistency because Spring Conferences are not required to be held in the first place.**

— **Regional Mark of Excellence Awards will be announced via news release, posted to the Web site, and awards will be mailed to the winners. A region may choose to host an event at which the awards are presented in person.**

It was recommended by Brewer that as the staff continues to develop these recommendations that the financial implications to regions be considered and that every attempt be made to return any net income to the region.

## **MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

Harper reviewed his written report regarding member recruitment and retention. During his 2007 evaluation, concern was expressed about a perceived precipitous slide in membership numbers. Harper reported that at the start of 2002, SPJ had 8,479 members. At the end of 2008, SPJ had 8,821 members, representing an increase of four percent. At the beginning of Harper’s tenure (March 1, 2002), membership totaled 8,999; as of January 11, 2008, membership totaled 8,926, a decrease of less than one percent. In the intervening six years, the Society has experienced numbers that reached above 10,000, due primarily to a training partnership with IRE that produced hundreds of short-term members, few of whom renewed their membership, even with personal contact by the local chapter.

In 2007, on average, 442 members renewed each month; 398 did not, translating to 4,776 people leaving the organization. SPJ garners about 65 new members each week.

Harper reported that three dues discount programs are available, but require much better promotion:

— **Students: Four years for \$100 for freshman and sophomores**

- Post Graduate: Three years for \$72
- Lifetime: \$1,000

Plans to better promote the latter two are already underway, but the student rate has only been tested at one campus and perhaps a broader promotion might yield better results. Other retention strategies include a monthly survey, better chapter outreach and looking for new ways to connect members.

The membership committee, chaired by John Ensslin of the Rocky Mountain News, is focusing its efforts on retention, as well.

Where recruitment is concerned, a “friends inviting friends” approach is being implemented. Participants in SPJ programs like the Scripps Leadership Institute and the Reporters Institute will be asked to be provided the names of 10 people they think would be good candidates for SPJ membership. With a total 80 participants in these two programs, that provides 800 names of prospects.

As part of its strategic plan, the Society is creating an “ambassadors program” where first-time convention attendees will be identified and invited to attend session at the beginning of the conference where they will meet Scripps graduates, Diversity Fellows, etc. who will serve as a guide to the newcomers. We also will continue to provide complimentary memberships to non-members participating in our training programs and will do a better job of demonstrating the value of SPJ membership immediately, as well as regular, targeted communication during the complimentary membership period.

Chapter building was discussed, as well. There are currently 13 states with no professional chapters. States where efforts are getting underway include Alabama, Georgia (Atlanta Pro is still listed as active, but there is no chapter activity), Iowa, Louisiana, North Carolina and South Carolina. SPJ is going to execute some targeted communications in those states to gauge interest in building general membership as well as creating new chapters.

## **CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

Gratz was on hand in his role as chair of the Centennial Celebration committee. The Society will celebrate its 100th anniversary on April 17, 2009. Aeikens noted that the spring 2009 board meeting will take place that weekend in Greencastle, Ind. Gratz and Harper will work with DePauw University for an appropriate celebration.

## **DART SOCIETY**

Tatum reported that she will begin doing some work on a freelance basis for the Dart Society. According to its Web site, “the Dart Society is a cohort of journalists who have received fellowships and awards from the Dart Center. We are dedicated to promoting sensitive coverage of victims of violence and providing support for journalists who are affected by their work.” The Dart Center will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2009 and Tatum is looking for synergies between the two organizations and to incorporate Dart’s conference into SPJ’s centennial convention. Dart’s participation in the SPJ convention would bring approximately 75 journalists who would not otherwise attend the convention and could provide a track of programming to complement SPJ’s offerings. Harper is to follow up with Miles Mofeit, a colleague of Tatum’s at the Denver Post and Second Vice-President of the Dart Society, in February, following the Dart Society’s next board meeting.

## **NEW IRS FILING REQUIREMENT**

Harper provided an update on a new IRS filing requirement that will require all SPJ chapters with revenue generally under \$25,000 to file an ePostcard annually in order to maintain their exempt status. The IRS has sent letters to SPJ chapters and SPJ also has sent information to chapters to help them comply with the new requirement. The Greater Oregon Pro chapter has made a formal request that the national organization complete these filings on behalf of each of the chapters. Harper recommended against the request stating that not only does the Society not have the manpower to undertake such a task, but that the staff is not in a position to provide the necessary verifications to the IRS. Harper explained that while the final version of the ePostcard has yet to be completed and shared by the IRS, the information being requested was minimal and should not prove difficult for chapters to complete.

**Upon proper motion and second by Smith and Tatum, respectively, the executive committee turned down the request from the Greater Oregon Pro chapter to have the staff complete the ePostcards on behalf of the chapters.**

## **ETHICS BOOK**

The committee discussed a progress report submitted by Fred Brown on the fourth edition of “Doing Ethics in Journalism.” According to the report, new to the fourth edition are:

- 20 new case studies, many of them contributed by members of the ethics committee. Sara Stone and her students were especially prolific, and there also are contributions from Irwin Gratz, Adrian Uribarri and Nerissa Young, all shepherded into being by Andy Schotz.
- About 100 pages of new and updated material from the previous text. Among the additions: an incredibly condensed 5-page primer on the history and theories of ethics, several ethics columns from Quill and a new format Brown developed for analyzing ethics cases.
- In other words, about 150 pages of new material, or roughly 55,000 words.

Brown indicated that there is still much work to be done, much of which is painstaking and time consuming. He provided a lengthy “to do” list.

The executive committee noted that the following things needed to happen:

- Editors need to be identified
- SPJ needs to decide upon its publishing model
- Run everything by legal counsel to ensure due diligence

## **DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION**

Tatum reported that the Denver Post is coordinating events surrounding the Democratic National Convention to be held in Denver later in 2008. A large media event is being hosted by the Denver Post in advance of the convention and SPJ should be involved. Tatum said she had spoken to SDX Foundation President Steve Geimann providing a small grant — \$5,000 — toward the event. It would be a non-partisan affair. It was suggested that if such a project was undertaken in Denver that a similar project should be undertaken in Minneapolis with the Republican National Convention. The discussion ended with no action being taken or proposed.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The committee determined that its next meeting would take place on Saturday, June 21, 2008, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the committee, Brewer declared the meeting adjourned at 4:03 p.m. on Saturday, January 19, 2008.