Shine on this week

“It’s Your Right to Know” is the theme for this year’s Sunshine Week, which started Sunday and continues through Saturday, March 17. APA members join the American Society of News Editors and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press in the annual national celebration of access to public information.

“Freedom of information is a cornerstone of democracy, enlightening and empowering people to play an active role in their government at all levels. It helps keep public officials honest, makes government more efficient and provides a check against abuse of power,” said Ashley Wimberley, APA executive director. “This week we need to lead our communities in celebrating the power of FOIA.”

Ways to celebrate include highlighting the importance of openness through ads, stories, editorials, columns and cartoons. APA has developed a state-specific ad available for members to run throughout the week. Both black and white and color ads are available in two sizes – 3 column by 5.5 inches and 5 column by 7.5 inches.

Members can download the ad from the APA website on Ad Clearinghouse in a folder named 2018 Sunshine Week or email Wimberley at ashley@arkansaspress.org and the ads will be emailed directly to them.

Let the sun shine
A Special Guest Editorial for Sunshine Week

By Sonny Albarado

Give light and the people will find their own way.
– Motto of the former E.W. Scripps newspaper chain

Since the early days of our Republic, the press has played a key role in informing the citizenry of the actions of their government – local, state and national – and empowered people to act on that information.

Since then, federal, state and local laws have expanded the ability of citizens – and the press, on their behalf – to gain access to the information that politicians and government officials use to make decisions that affect the lives of their constituents.

This includes access to meetings of public officials as well as documents in a government agency’s possession.

These statutes are generally known as freedom of information laws, or Sunshine Laws because of the belief that sunlight is a powerful disinfectant against corruption and skulduggery.

Arkansas’ Freedom of Information Act turned 50 in 2017 and is one of the strongest public records/open meetings laws in the nation.

Despite recent amendments that weakened it, the Arkansas FOIA remains one of the best tools available to pry lose information from sometimes reluctant officials that citizens need to stay informed and to feel empowered to act in their best interest.

This week – the 13th annual observance of national Sunshine Week – offers citizens and public officials an opportunity to reflect on how freedom of information laws help everyone be better informed and why such laws are essential to our experiment with democracy.

Launched in 2005 by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (now the American Society of News Editors), Sunshine Week coincides with the March 16 birthday of James Madison, father of the U.S. Constitution and an author of the Bill of Rights.

The importance of Arkansas’ FOIA can be seen in a quick review of articles and opinion pieces in just one newspaper over a three-month span. Between December 12 and March 12, about 50 articles in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette dealt with freedom of information issues.

Without the state Freedom of Information Act, Arkansans might not know about:

• Questions about the relationship between the taxpayer-funded University of Arkansas and the nonprofit Razorback Foundation, which claims that the FOIA doesn’t apply to it.
• An Arkansan’s failed efforts to get emails and other documents regarding his interactions with a state trooper that led to the man’s arrest and loss of his permit to carry a concealed weapon.
• The Mansfield mayor’s accusation that members of the city council violated the open-meetings part of the FOIA by plotting via text messages to strip him of his authority.
• Faulkner County’s dysfunctional Office of Emergency Management.
• Articles using the federal FOIA allowed people to learn that an Environmental Protection Agency Superfund Task Force kept no records of its deliberations and that a former
APA advertising conference underway

The APA ad conference kicked off this afternoon at the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute on Petit Jean Mountain with keynote speaker Kelly Wirges presenting ideas on “Developing a Competitive Multi-Media Advantage.” The conference will continue through tomorrow, concluding with the annual APA Better Newspaper Advertising Awards luncheon.

Let the sun shine

Continued from page 1

CEO of a payday lending firm is seeking the top job at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, an agency that once sought to severely limit payday lenders.

Some of these issues might seem arcane or of little consequence to you, but the FOIA also guards your right to know what your police department is doing, where crime occurs most frequently and whether your fire department is properly funded. The law also lets you find out about property values in your neighborhood and whether your school board is performing its job.

In other words, freedom of information laws protect your right to know what your government – the people you elected and the people they appoint and hire – is doing in your name and to you and for you.

Unfortunately, the Arkansas FOIA came under direct attack in 2017. By the end of the year’s legislative session, universities gained the power to keep secret the size of their police forces, the names and salaries of officers and other matters related to security. Legislators pretty much allowed public schools to hide all information about security.

One legislator said there are some things that should be kept secret because of the dangerous times we live in, because “bad actors” will seek advantage to do harm.

It’s unfortunate that fear is closing the door to the sunshine that the FOIA provides.

But it’s not all gloomy. As legislators last year put the brakes on some truly awful bills that would have gutted the FOIA even more, they created a task force to study our half-century old law to determine where it might need to be updated to reflect the rapid-fire, ubiquitous information age we live in.

There’s hope that this task force, composed of legislators, lawyers, journalists and transparency advocates, will come up with good suggestions for improving the law rather than further hobbling it.

Albarado heads the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette’s investigative team and has been Arkansas’ Sunshine Week chair since 2015.

He is a member of the Arkansas Press Association’s Freedom of Information Coalition and of the Society of Professional Journalist’s FOI Committee.

Cagle receives award for ‘It Can Wait’ editorial contest

Tasia Cagle, a senior from Van Buren High School, recently received the 2018 “It Can Wait” Editorial Contest award from the Arkansas Newspaper Foundation (ANF) and AT&T Arkansas. Tasia’s compelling editorial about the dangers of texting and driving was selected as the best in the state.

In celebration of the award, ANF and AT&T planned a special day in Little Rock starting with a tour of the Arkansas State Capitol led by Rep. Charlene Fite. Gov. Asa Hutchinson, Speaker of the House Jeremy Gillam and Sen. Terry Rice also visited with Tasia and thanked her for her strong editorial message that has the potential to influence the habits of teens and save lives in the future.

Tasia received a check from ANF board president Frank Fellone, ANF Executive Director Karen Brown and AT&T Arkansas representative Melinda Faubel at a ceremony at the Arkansas Press Association headquarters. Later, she toured the Clinton Presidential Center. Accompanying Tasia in Little Rock was her high school journalism teacher, Payton Allen.


Industry Quote of the Week

“Before the internet, displays of newspapers and magazines featured well-known brands. No one mistook the National Enquirer for the Philadelphia Inquirer. The internet often feels like a mass of pages ripped out of publications and scattered randomly on the floor.”

– L. Gordon Crovitz, Wall Street Journal

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Arkansas Publisher Weekly 2

March 15, 2018
Arkansas Business experiencing all-time subscription high

Paid subscriptions of Arkansas Business are at an all-time high. Publisher Mitch Bettis credits two initiatives that began in May of 2017 with steady paid subscription increases for the statewide business weekly.

Bettis could think of three possible reasons for a slight downturn of paid subscriptions he observed in June of 2016 -- attrition from business people who were retiring, less interest in the content mix of the publication or subscribers who let their subscriptions lapse and used only the free online product.

“We decided to test the third reason,” Bettis said. “In the 11 months that followed, we took a long look at how readers consumed our content. We have about 1.8 million unique users of our online product and we wanted to continue to collect substantial online revenue. But at the same time, we wanted to protect the value of our print product.”

The first program implemented was to embargo the popular “Whispers” column, cover features and other selected stories so that only print subscribers could read those stories for the first week after they were published. The subscribers were emailed a link to read the embargoed stories online as well as in the printed publication.

Then Arkansas Business used analytics to identify 15,000 super users – heavy users of their online product. They deployed a metering system so that after a certain amount of free views, the super users were asked to subscribe before receiving content. There was one payment option – a 12-month subscription for the full price of $64.95.

“For the super users, they see a lot of content every week and some determine that the volume of information is important enough for them to pay to continue to receive it,” Bettis said. “For those who are not super users, but want to see embargoed content, the choice to subscribe is more like a point of sale purchase of a desired item.”

He expected new subscribers to be about 50/50 as a result of these two programs. He was surprised when 80 percent of the new subscriptions came through the embargo program.

Rather than a big bump in the beginning with subscriptions tapering off, he has seen a steady increase of around 10 percent per month in the past 10 months. Bettis is watching to see if the renewal rates continue to increase as the program moves into its second year.

“This process has confirmed that our content is strong. That reinvigorated our newsroom and, in turn, our advertising sales department,” said Bettis. “It has been a reaffirmation that consumers are thirsting for unique content they can’t get anywhere else, something that can be applied by community newspapers who focus on local content.”

ANF internship applications due next week

The deadline to apply for Arkansas Newspaper Foundation (ANF) interns this summer is March 20. Two additional internships are still available, with The Walnut Ridge Times Dispatch and Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette already signed up to host interns.

All divisions of newspaper careers are welcome, including advertising, online journalism and graphic arts. Internships will be awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis to those applicants showing professional promise.

“ANF provides $1,500 in matching funds to the host newspapers, with the newspapers providing $1,500 in salary for the interns,” said Karen Brown, ANF executive director.

Those eligible are journalism majors or recent high school graduates interested in print advertising, reporting or other newspaper-related careers, who are enrolled in accredited colleges and universities. Other students may be pre-approved by a host newspaper.

For more information, contact arknnewspaperfoundation@gmail.com or go to the Foundation tab at the APA website, www.arkansaspress.org.

New Addition? Let Us Know!

We want to know about your new hires, retires and promotions!

Send your staffing changes to info@arkansaspress.org to be updated online and included in our weekly bulletin and monthly newsletter.

Arkansas Business Publishing Group

Photo courtesy of Greg Henderson.
Former Arkansas newspaper editor inducted in Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame

Former editor of the Weekly Vista in Bella Vista, Tom Throne, was recently named to the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame. Throne was one of three 2018 inductees. Throne was nominated for the Hall of Fame by Kansas Press Association President Doug Anstaet. Hallmark Integrated Media President Gene Hall and former McPherson Sentinel Publisher Gary Mehl.

“I’m very humbled, and I’m pretty proud of that,” Throne said in a Weekly Vista interview. “It’s a nice honor.” He attributed it, in part, to being surrounded by good staff.

Throne began his career in 1972 as a photographer with the Junction City Daily Union in central Kansas where he worked as a reporter, associate managing editor and editor. He left in 1980 to manage the newsroom staff and write for the Maryville Daily Forum. He covered the 1981 murder of Ken Rex McElroy, an unsolved killing that drew attention from throughout the country, while at the Daily Forum.

From there, Throne went to the McPherson Sentinel where he managed a 5,500-circulation paper that was published six days a week. The paper won awards for local reporting, photography, feature writing and design during his tenure. Promoted to general manager of American Publishing Company in 1989, he assumed responsibilities for several more papers in the area.

In 1998 he left for the Leavenworth Times before going full circle in 2005 to return to the Junction City Daily Union as its general manager. A few years later, Throne moved to Northwest Arkansas and temporarily left the newspaper business before becoming editor of the Weekly Vista, where he retired in 2016. He and his wife Pam live in Bentonville.

“I’m glad I worked in the news industry, because the work matters in a lot of ways,” he said. “Reporters are like local historians. When someone wants to know what happened in the past, decades from now, they’ll be digging through old newspaper records.”

Former Arkansas journalist authors first book

Longtime Arkansas journalist Kyle Mooty, now the editor/manager of The Enterprise (Ala.) Ledger and general manager of the Eufaula (Ala.) Tribune, has authored his first book. New Set of Downs, published by Outskirts Press, is a book about Johnny Dyess, who walked on and won two national championships at Alabama under legendary coach Paul “Bear” Bryant. His uncle, Marlin “Scooter” Dyess, played on Bryant’s first Alabama team in 1958 and wrote the foreword for the book.

Johnny Dyess enjoyed success on the gridiron and seemingly had it all going for him as he returned home following his football glory days. However, he fell into the dark world of drugs, eventually graduating to cooking methamphetamine. He was told the life expectancy of a meth cook was six years. Johnny said he didn’t have the heart to tell the man he had been doing so for 12 years. Trips to dangerous drug warehouses in Atlanta, and having arrests and felony charges pile up had Johnny facing almost certain prison time, but a life restoration in his most bitter college rival Auburn’s backyard, followed by rehab work at Times Square Church in New York City helped Johnny regain his faith and purpose in life. Today, a fully pardoned Johnny Dyess coaches at his high school alma mater in Elba, Ala., and speaks to churches, schools and a variety of clubs and organizations all across the south.

Mooty has won 82 editorial awards in 38 years in the media business across several states, including stints at the Northwest Arkansas Times, Northwest Arkansas Business Journal, and the Madison County Record in Arkansas.

Writer offers suggestions for diverse news sources

Jennifer Peters of the News Media Alliance says finding people to talk to her has always been the hardest part of being a writer. Reasons vary – people don’t want to talk to a particular publication, don’t trust journalists in general or don’t feel qualified to discuss a topic.

She suggests the following to diversify your sources:

- SheSource.org – SheSource helps journalists connect with women who are experts in a multitude of fields. There are more than 1,300 expert sources in the SheSource database. Each woman has demonstrated expertise on her subjects as well as shown that she has some experience working with the media.

- Help A Reporter Out (HARO) – HARO helps connect writers to sources who want to tell their story or share their insights. The resource is free for journalists, but sources can pay to use the service and up their chances of getting media placement through keyword alerts and early access to reporters’ source requests.

- Think Tanks – If there’s a subject or region, there’s a think tank that works on the topic. The University of Pennsylvania library system keeps a list of worldwide think tanks available on its website for anyone to access, and it will give you a good idea of what’s out there and how to reach them.

- Nonprofits – A web search will turn up hundreds of options, but you can use charity watchdog sites to find reputable nonprofits related to your topic. Groups like GuideStar, Charity Navigator and Charity Watch, as well as journalism group ProPublica, all rate charities based on their financials and the work they do.

- Social Media – If you’re looking for local voices in an area you don’t live in or need to find an expert who may not be part of a think tank or another sourcing tool, try social media. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn can be also useful in finding new voices to add to your stories.
Judges Needed!

Help judge the Louisiana Press Association Better Newspaper Contest

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**Categories Include:**
- News, Feature & Sports Writing,
- Advertising, Photography,
- Print Quality & Design

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All judging will be online

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**Deadline to Sign-Up is March 16**

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Louisiana Better Newspapers Judging Sign-Up

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