

Students share \$5,000 from Press Council

Students in Campbell River, Powell River and Duncan all came up winners in the 2008 B.C. Press Council/B.C. & Yukon Community Newspaper high school essay contest.

Winners were Rianna Dorsay, Campbell River; Andy Rice Powell River, and Peter Scheiber of Duncan. They shared \$5,000 in scholarship money.

In another annual scholarship program, the Press Council gives \$1,000 to the winner of its Investigative Journalism competition.

Students were required to write an essay about, "How can community newspapers utilize their websites to better serve and engage their young readers?"

Judging was on originality and creativity, writing ability (including spelling and grammar) and content, including demonstrating a knowledge of the community newspaper industry.

First place winner Rianna Dorsay won \$5,000, Andy Rice won \$3,500; and third-place winner Peter Scheiber was awarded \$1,500.

Forty-four entries were received from which 11 finalists were drawn.

Rianna suggested newspapers list scholarship information and job opportunities for students on their websites; Andy thought that by using their technology skills young people could contribute directly to newspaper websites. Peter added a new dimension by suggesting that newspaper websites be tied directly to the community they serve.

Judges said the entries were well thought out and well-written.

Press Council model under review

The new information age has prompted the Press Council to review the way it does business.

Member newspaper news websites and blogs are not presently part of the Press Council mandate, but some callers are saying they should be.

During 2009 the Press Council will review the electronic news landscape and look at how it, or parts of it, might fit with its current role.

Recommendations emerging from the study will be put before member newspapers for their consideration.

Press Council Code of Practice

Newspapers are a vital and essential part of a free and democratic society, as history has shown time and again. That's why the Press Council created the Code of Practice—to encourage the highest professional and ethical standards of journalism, and in the belief that vigilant self-regulation is the hallmark of a free and responsible press.

Accordingly, in considering complaints against the press, the Council will have regard for these guidelines:

Accuracy -A newspaper's first duty is to provide the public with accurate information. Newspapers should correct inaccuracies promptly.

Opportunity to reply -Newspapers should give individuals and organizations a fair and timely opportunity to reply to inaccuracies when the issue is of significant importance or when reasonably called for.

Privacy -Newspapers should strive to balance an individual's desire for privacy with the requirements of a free press. Privacy concerns, therefore, must not unduly inhibit newspapers from publishing material or making inquiries about an individual's private life when it can be shown that these are, or are reasonably believed to be, in the public interest.

Comment and fact -Newspapers should defend their hard-won right to exercise the widest possible latitude in expressing opinion, no matter how controversial or unpopular the opinion may be, and to give columnists, editorial cartoonists and others the same latitude in expressing personal opinion. However, newspapers and journalists shall strive to avoid expressing comment and conjecture as established fact.

Misrepresentation -Newspapers and journalists should use straightforward means to obtain information and photographs. The use of subterfuge is only acceptable when the material sought after is in the public interest and can not be obtained by any other means.

Discrimination -Unless the information is directly relevant to the news story or opinion column, newspapers should avoid publishing material which encourages discrimination on the grounds of race, color, ancestry, gender, religion, material status, physical or mental disability, age or sexual orientation.

News photographs -With the advent of technologies that make image manipulation possible, newspapers will take care to publish news photographs that are fair and accurate representations of reality. Any technical manipulation of a news photo that could mislead readers should be duly noted in the newspaper.

Interviewing or photographing children -Journalists should approach assignments involving children with due regard for the well-being of the child or children

Sexual assault victims -Newspapers should not identify child victims of sexual assault without the consent of the child's parents or guardian. In the case of adults, newspapers should consider if the identity of adult victims, even if they want to be identified, is in the public interest.

Financial journalism -Journalists should not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication.

Newspapers are free to support financially any political party they choose. However, if such a financial donation is made close to or during an election campaign the newspaper is reporting on, disclosure must be made in the newspaper during the campaign.

Confidential sources -Journalists have a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information.

Accountability -When the Press Council adjudicates a complaint against a newspaper, the newspaper concerned shall promptly publish the full text of the decision.

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VANCOUVER PUBLIC FORUM

'Old and new' debate future of news

It was old-school reporting versus citizen journalism as traditional newspapers went head-to-head recently with the new kids on the information block, in a spirited debate on a timely subject:

The Future of News: How Much Control Does the Public Have?

The first in a cross-Canada series of national dialogues presented by the Canadian Media Research Consortium, the Future of News forum was co-sponsored by the B.C. Press Council and attracted a wide-ranging audience of journalists, students and news junkies to the Robson Square Media Centre in Vancouver on Sept. 22.

In her opening remarks, CMRC president Donna Logan, a seasoned print and broadcast journalist and founding director of the UBC School of Journalism, noted the profound sea change facing traditional media in the face of tightening budgets, advancing technology and the growing popularity of web-based citizen journalism, in which members of the public can write and record news and opinion on Internet information sites such as the Drudge Report, the Huffington Post and Vancouver-based NowPublic.

Logan presented CMRC data, collected in a 2003 survey and revisited this year, on what Canadians think of their media, including consumer habits on news consumption, the impact of

technology and issues of trust and quality.

She said CMRC's recent data found that there is a general decline in the interest in news and downward trending on perception issues such as accuracy, fairness and balance, bias and the independence of journalists and journalistic organizations.

The Internet has become the information source of choice for many, said Logan, because it's free, convenient, timely and inclusive.

"It's often said that the Internet is the great leveller," said Logan. "It allows the public to have more of a role."

NowPublic co-founder Michael Tippett, sharing the stage with veteran Canadian newspaper editor Vivienne Sosnowski and moderator Ian Hanomansing of CBC-TV, agreed.

Calling his three-year-old website the "largest news organization in the world," with 700 stories a day, two million readers a month and 130,000 "reporters" in 160 countries, Tippett described NowPublic.com as a "crowd-sourced" news network featuring real-time stories and photographs filed when they happen by members of the public.

"I think it's important to think about news as a conversation," said Tippett. "People are experts — they just don't work in newsrooms."

(Continued on page 2, see *Untrained citizens*)

Moderator
CBC-TV news anchor Ian Hanomansing, center, with NowPublic.com founder Michael Tippett and veteran Canadian newspaper editor Vivienne Sosnowski

-Michael Bednar photos

Untrained citizens a concern

(Continued from page 1)

Sosnowski acknowledged the value of Internet accessibility, but expressed concern about untrained, unpaid citizens doing the work of professionals.

“Journalism protects democracy, protects citizens’ rights,” she said.

The danger, she said, is that if newspaper readership declines because readers are turning to the Internet, then traditional newsrooms will be forced to tighten budgets and the kind of journalism that makes governments accountable, that affects societal change, will suffer.

“It’s the seriousness of the news that is so important to our survival,” said Sosnowski. “How do we get that from websites? Where do we go to find out how to fix the problems in this world?”

Meanwhile, as the debate on how we define and deliver news continues, there comes yet another study that suggests the death of the newspaper has been greatly exaggerated.

The Canadian Internet Project, in findings released Sept. 24, reports that despite the growing belief that the Internet is “siphoning” readers from traditional print and broadcast media, the web is actually being used by Canadians as just one of many sources to augment their daily news fix.

While Internet usage is increasing, the study found, Canadians continue to trust existing media and continue to watch television, listen to the radio and read newspapers, the frequency of the latter actually increasing to 4.4 from four hours per week, on a regular basis.

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News talk/
There was
lots of
dialogue
between the
audience
and
panelists



Human rights dismissal costs B.C. Press Council \$6,000

The B.C. Press Council can add to the “long line” of interferences by Canadian human rights tribunals cited by Rory Leishman (see story p-3).

A racial discrimination complaint against the B.C. Press Council was dismissed in June after the council refused to proceed with a complaint on the basis it had been filed by a third party.

Kevin Ward, a member of a First Nation, complained to the Press Council about a story in the Richmond News that told how a native food fishery on the Fraser River was permitted despite dwindling sockeye salmon stocks while non-native commercial fishermen were not permitted to fish. Following the third-party ruling by the Press Council, Mr. Ward complained to the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal that the decision not to hear his complaint was discriminatory.

Under the Press Council’s Code of Practice, third-party complaints will only be heard where the complaint raises a significant issue of press ethics or a prima facie breach of the code. The Press Council maintained the story did not affect Mr. Ward because he was not a member of the First Nation mentioned in the story.

Even though the complaint was later dismissed, the Press Council paid \$6,000 in legal fees to defend itself while the complainant paid nothing.

The tribunal ruling said the Press Council decision to not proceed with Mr. Ward’s complaint was not based on

his race or color and that he failed to set out facts to support his assertion that the Press Council complaints procedure was flawed.

About the Press Council

The B.C. Press Council was established in 1983 in response to a call by the federal government-appointed Kent Commission for regulation of the newspaper industry.

The publishers of founding newspapers the Penticton Herald, Victoria Times Colonist, Vancouver Sun, The Province and the Alberni Valley Times saw self-regulation as a better option.

The Press Council has a responsibility to preserve the freedom of the press within British Columbia and to ensure the maintenance of the highest journalistic standards, while at the same time serving as a forum for those who may have a complaint against the press.

It is funded by the newspaper industry and its authority rests on the willingness of the publishers and editors to respect the Council’s views, to adhere voluntarily to ethical standards and to admit mistakes publicly.

The Council is a not-for-profit society with a constitution and bylaws.

Complaint procedures are spelled out on the Press Council website at www.bcpresscouncil.org.

Press freedom under human rights attack

(Freedom of expression is at the core of what the Press Council does. We reprint this article which provides a context for some recent developments that affect newspapers and other media throughout Canada).

By Rory Leighman, London Free Press

The decision of the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal to investigate *Maclean’s* magazine for publishing an article that some Muslims have found offensive is just the latest in a long line of violations by Canada’s so-called human rights tribunals of the historic rights of Canadians to freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

Mohamed Elmasry, National President of the Canadian Islamic Congress, initiated the attack on *Maclean’s* by the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal with a formal complaint in which he claims that the magazine exposed “Muslims to hatred and contempt due to their religion” by publishing an excerpt from Mark Steyn’s best-selling book, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*. Elmasry contends that: “Under the British Columbia Human Rights Code, publication of material of the nature described above is prohibited and clearly exceeds the scope of free speech.”

In a recent editorial on the *Maclean’s* affair aptly entitled “B.C. hate provision should be excised,” *the Globe and Mail* suggested that Steyn may well have underestimated the forces of assimilation and integration for Muslim immigrants, “but then again he may be right.”

What will Elmasry and the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal do now? Initiate an investigation of the *Globe* and every newspaper which dares to suggest that Steyn might be right about the perils posed by radical Islam?

It’s not only newspapers and magazines that are threatened by human rights censors. Libraries and bookstores could be next.

After all, if it is illegal under some of Canada’s human rights laws to publish just an excerpt from Steyn’s book, it must be an even greater violation of these misbegotten human rights codes to make his entire book available to the Canadian public.

Furthermore, it’s not just Muslims who are using Canada’s human rights tribunals to suppress viewpoints they find offen-

sive. The Canadian Human Rights Commission is currently investigating Toronto-based *Catholic Insight* magazine at the request of a reader in Edmonton who charges that the magazine violated the ban on “hate literature” in section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Code in a number of articles that simply uphold the universal and constant teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality.

This *Catholic Insight* inquisition began in February 2007. The niche magazine has already run up a crushing \$20,000 in legal bills in what looks like a vain attempt to defend itself against a Commission that has never lost a case in a tribunal hearing on a section 13 complaint.

Meanwhile, a human rights panel in Alberta has ruled that Stephen Boissoin, an automobile-parts manager and erstwhile Baptist minister, violated the province’s human rights code with a letter to the editor of the *Red Deer Advocate* in which he denounced teachings on homosexuality in the public schools. The panel has ordered Boissoin to make a public apology and pay \$5,000 in damages to the complainant, Darren Lund, a heterosexual professor at the University of Calgary who was offended by Boissoin’s letter.

The *Red Deer Advocate* has apologized for publishing the offending letter to the editor. Boissoin is appealing the panel’s ruling to the courts.

Referring to the *Maclean’s* case, the *Globe and Mail* has suggested that the censorship powers in section 7 of the British Columbia Human Rights Code “should be struck down by a court, if not by the tribunal.” But surely it’s elected legislators, not judges, who should eliminate the oppressive powers of Canada’s human rights tribunals.

In January, Liberal MP Keith Martin introduced a private member’s bill to abolish at least the censorship provisions in section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Rory Leishman is an award-winning former full-time editorial writer and columnist at the London Free Press and has taught courses at the University of Western Ontario on Canadian federalism, Quebec politics and introductory political theory.