

eChaser

Society of Professional Journalists,
Fort Worth Professional Chapter

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JUNE 2018 • [Back Issues](#) • [Photo Archive](#)

INFORMING THE NORTH TEXAS JOURNALISM / COMMUNICATOR WORKFORCE



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IT'S DIRECTOR ELECTIONS TIME.

REVISIT THE [SPJ MISSION STATEMENT](#).

GIVE SERVING ON THE BOARD SOME THOUGHT.

YOU'RE NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER.

MEMBERS, WATCH YOUR INBOX FOR DETAILS.

Required reading.

This isn't exactly how I planned to end my years at the Star-Telegram, but so be it. I am among the seven editors who were laid off recently. It has been quite a ride, more than 32 years long, and I'm sorry to see it end.

I stayed away from the newsroom my last two weeks. I did go up and clean out my desks — yes, I had two of them loaded with stuff — when there were not a lot of people around. It was just too damn painful to say goodbye to everyone I've come to know and love up there.

I can honestly say that working at the Star-Telegram has been an honor. Without my job — and I've done just about everything at the paper over the years — I wouldn't have had the experiences of a lifetime.

I got to cover three national political conventions and was the first S-T reporter to arrive in Oklahoma City after the bombing. I experienced a Spielbergian moment on a dark country road during the Branch Davidian siege; I can still see the TV satellite trucks and bright lights shining on the compound.

One of the first projects I did for the Star-Telegram was on the Texas prison system, a series that sent me to prisons in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. It was an eye-opening experience for me, one I wouldn't have had without the Star-Telegram.

Same thing goes for the series on the broken indigent legal defense system I did with **Linda P. Campbell** and **Jeff Claassen**. I'm proud of those stories. But I'm even more thrilled that I got to grow so close to my colleagues while we did it. My life is far richer because the S-T let me do the story.

The Star-Telegram has done some good work in the past, a lot of it not by me. It had a great run recently, despite the inner turmoil. Just think Las Vegas Trail and **Lee Williams**, **Jeff Caplan**, **Deanna Boyd**, **Diane Smith** and **Mitch Mitchell**. Most of them are still there, pounding their keyboards. I want to thank them and everyone who made my life richer at the Star-Telegram — especially you, **Annabelle**.

But I especially want to thank my wife, **Sandy**, my colleague and best friend. My life, and the paper's, is far richer because of you.

I hope to see you all again soon.

— Max Baker

For a preview of the newspaper industry's coming death, turn your gaze to Colorado, where the withering and emaciated Denver Post finds itself rolling in profits. The Post's controlling owner, "vulture capitalist" **Randall Smith**, has become journalism's No. 1 villain for having cheapened and starved not just its Denver paper but many of the titles — including the St. Paul Pioneer Press, San Jose Mercury News and Orange County Register — that his firm, Alden Global Capital, operates through the Digital First Media chain.

At the Post, Smith's firm cut the newsroom from 184 journalists to 99 between 2012 and 2017, Bloomberg News' **Joe Nocera** writes. Over the same time, Smith's Pottstown Mercury fell from 73 journoes to 10 while its Norristown Times-Herald went from 45 to 12. And the cuts just keep coming.

For newspaper lovers, the cuts have been a disaster. Journalists and citizens have rebelled against the Alden cutbacks to no effect. The Post's editorial page editor resigned recently after writing an editorial calling on its owners to sell. The editorial page editor at the chain's Boulder Daily Camera just got sacked for self-publishing a critique of his owners, and a fund has been established to fund the journalism of Posties who have been let go. Employees from several of the chain's newspapers even took their complaints to Manhattan, where they demonstrated outside Smith's offices to demand that he either invest in his papers or sell them to somebody who will.

But why on earth should Smith sell? Alden's newspapers recorded nearly \$160 million in profits during fiscal year 2017, analyst **Ken Doctor** reported in a comprehensive piece recently at NeimanLab. The chain's 17 percent operating margin makes it one of the industry's best performers.

Over seven years, Alden doubled profits in its Bay Area News Group newspapers, another home to cutbacks. At the Pioneer Press, where its staff is down to 60, the paper produced a \$10 million profit at a 13 percent margin. [More here.](#)

— Jack Shafer, politico.com

Next at [Fort Worth SPJ](#) ...

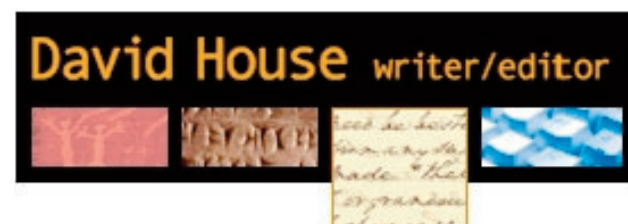
No meeting in June, but there's talk of holding the July social in the Bishop Arts District (road trip!) to engage the Dallas j-crowd. Stay tuned.

QUICK HITS

- GFW PRSA monthly luncheon, "The Sky Is Falling! ... or Is It? How to know when you're in a crisis and what to do if you are," with **Ruth Fitzgibbons**, principal at Richards Partners — Wednesday, June 13, Colonial Country Club. [Info.](#)
- Writers Guild of Texas monthly program, WGT Summer Series, Part 1: "James Patterson Teaches Writing." **Jennifer Smith** will lead a two-part summer series with hands-on exercises from the No. 1 New York Times bestselling author; from Patterson's lessons, Smith will guide individual and small group writing exercises to provide insight into the book writing process. — 7 p.m. Monday, June 18, Richardson Public Library. [Info.](#)
- DFW Writers Conference — June 9-10, Hurst Conference Center. [Info.](#)
- Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference — July 20-22. [Info.](#)
- Communication & Media Camp 2018 — July 23-27, UT Arlington. Area students grades 9-12 explore careers and get hands-on experience with journalism, public relations, ads, design, web and photo. Includes five days of meals and training; scholarships available. [Info.](#)
- Meetups: [North Texas Editors](#) ... [Bedford Science Fiction Writing](#) ... [DFW Self-Publishing Group](#) ... [GFW Writers](#) ... [Writers Anonymous – Support and Education](#) ... [Fort Worth Chapter – Nonfiction Authors Association](#) ... [Kidlit Critique](#) ... [Trinity Arts Writers Workshop](#) ... [The Writer's Critique](#) ... [Lonestar Sci Fi, Horror, and Fantasy Fans](#) ... [20BooksTo50k - Michael Anderle](#) ... [Fort Worth Area Journalists Meetup](#) ... [The DFW Bloggers Classroom](#)

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Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference Factual & fun & all in the same story

Keynote powerhouses **Diana B. Henriques**, **Lindy West** and **Christopher Goffard** will headline the 14th annual Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference — "Are You Not Entertained? Real Stories, Real People, Real Storytelling" — July 20-22 at the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine.



Henriques, primarily a financial journalist, wrote "The Wizard of Lies: Bernie Madoff and The Death of Trust," which grew out of her work as lead reporter of The New York Times' coverage of the 2008 arrest of **Madoff**, founder of a respected Wall Street brokerage firm and operator of a multibillion-dollar Ponzi scheme.



West is a contributing essayist for The New York Times and the author of a memoir, "Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman." She formerly wrote a weekly political column for The Guardian, and her essays on body image, feminism, popular culture and social justice have been featured on "This American Life" on NPR and in Cosmopolitan, GQ, the blog Jezebel and The Stranger, a newspaper in Seattle.



from top, from left ...
• Diana B. Henriques
• Lindy West
• Jemele Hill
• Christopher Goffard
• Vanessa Grigoriadis
• Alfredo Corchado
• Stephen Rodrick

Los Angeles Times feature writer Goffard received positive feedback last fall for "Dirty John," a six-installment podcast that he created to supplement his series in the Times.

"Dirty John" has been downloaded more than 10 million times; it tells the story of con man **John Meehan** and the victims left in his path during decades of deception. Goffard has twice been a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing, and he shared the newspaper's 2011 Pulitzer for public service as part of a staff exposing corruption in the small city of Bell, Cal.

Other conference speakers include:

- **Jemele Hill**, chief correspondent and senior columnist for "The Undeclared," ESPN's content initiative exploring the intersections of sports, race and culture. An award-winning sports writer, Hill has been a national columnist for espn.com and a sports columnist for the Orlando Sentinel, and she covered Michigan State football for the Detroit Free Press.
- **Alfredo Corchado**, Mexico City bureau chief of The Dallas Morning News, who specializes in covering the U.S.-Mexico border and drug cartels, organized crime and corruption among police and government officials.
- **Vanessa Grigoriadis**, contributing writer to The New York Times Magazine and Vanity Fair and author of "Blurred Lines: Rethinking Sex, Power, and Consent on Campus," an exploration of the emerging culture around campus sexual assault.
- **Stephen Rodrick**, also a contributing writer to The New York Times Magazine and a writer for Rolling Stone. Rodrick writes mostly about politics, film and sports, often following his subjects around for months before beginning an article.

All things Mayborn conference are [here](#). Co-director **Neil Foote**, foote@unt.edu, can answer your questions.



The Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference has been packing the hall for 13 years.

GET A JOB

Village Tech Schools, an open-enrollment, public charter school serving grades PK-12 in Cedar Hill, is moving just up the road to Duncanville and seeks a communications coordinator to start the fall. Position is part time this summer and transitions to full time Sept. 1. Info at employment@villagetechschoos.org. ... Ever wanted to help start a brand new media outlet? A group in Ellis County wants to fill several editorial positions — editor, reporters, content manager — for a new media company to cover hyper-local community news in a new way. Send UTA Shorthorn ex **Shelly Conlon** a message and she'll connect you to the right people. [Details](#). ... The Democrat and Chronicle in Rochester, N.Y., seeks to hire two recent college graduates for paid digital-media fellowships to examine urban education issues of relevance to the Rochester City School District. Duties include developing mobile storytelling content focused on public education and creating strategies to engage audiences using "public-powered" digital tools, social media and in-person activities. The six-month Time to Educate fellowships may be extended, depending on funding and performance. [Details](#). ... Condé Nast's social news desk seeks an ambitious, organized and creative visuals fellow for its New York office. The ideal candidate will have a passion for pop culture, social media and quality visuals, as the position involves sourcing art for projects across several Condé Nast brands. [Details](#).

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Takeaways from design guru **Broc Sears**' session on ad layouts at the Texas Center for Community Journalism's advertising copywriting and design workshop last month at TCU:

- Have one goal.
- Write like you talk.
- Use "we" and "our," "you" and "your"
- Contractions are fine.
- Avoid jargon and buzz words.
- Cut the fat. Keep the meat. Make the message clear and easy to find.
- Read the copy out loud. Does it sound natural? Is there a rhythm that propels the reader?

Always remember what an ad does.

Headline: Gets attention. Captures the imagination.

Subhead: Sets the hook. Transitions to text.

Body: Delivers key selling points.

Be creative with special offers and calls to action.

You need a tracking mechanism, and don't forget contact information and any disclaimers.

— Kay Pirtle

The Dallas County Jail books about 67,000 people every year, a population roughly equal to that of the Houston suburb Missouri City. The conveyor belt driving Dallas County's hulking jail complex, the seventh largest in the country, operates in a courtroom deep inside the Lew Sterrett Justice Center downtown. That's where magistrates hold around-the-clock hearings to determine bail. On any given day, about 70 percent of the jail's roughly 5,000 inmates are there because they can't afford the price tag placed on their pretrial freedom. Arrestees say that before they enter bail hearings, jailers warn them that the price could increase if they talk without permission. The hearings often last fewer than 60 seconds. Though the bail hearings have serious ramifications for defendants, they are largely conducted in secret. [Details](#). ... The Victoria Advocate has filed a lawsuit asserting that the Calhoun Port Authority broke the Texas open meetings law in hiring former Congressman Blake Farenthold as a lobbyist. "Few rights of the public are as important as the right to knowledge about how their government spends taxpayer funds and manages the public's business. This suit is to vindicate those rights and reaffirm ... that sunshine is indeed the best disinfectant," according to the lawsuit filed by the newspaper's attorney, **John Griffin**. The suit came almost two weeks after a May 9 public meeting in which the port authority's executive director, **Charles Hausmann**, and board members discussed Farenthold's hiring. [Details](#). ... The public must have access to information about how taxpayer money is spent and other basic government data, transparency advocates said May 17 at a forum organized by state Rep. **Todd Hunter** of Corpus Christi. "This isn't partisan," Hunter told the audience at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. He noted that while many people say they favor transparency, some leaders allow special interests to quash open government legislation. "It's no longer time to talk. It's time to walk," he said. "It's time to stand up." Hunter called the Corpus Christi discussion a starting point for the 2019 legislative session and the passage of "significant, real changes in the law." [Details](#). ... The Texas Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit May 11 in which a couple said The Dallas Morning News defamed them when it published a column disclosing their decision to omit information about their teenage son's suicide from a paid obituary. **John** and **Mary Ann Tatum**, whose 17-year-old son shot himself, sued the News and now-retired Metro columnist **Steve Blow** in 2011 over allegations that the column accused the couple of lying about their son's death. The 2010 column, "Shrouding suicide leaves its danger unaddressed," urged the public to talk more openly about suicide. Without naming the Tatums, Blow quoted from the obituary, which said the teen died from injuries sustained in a car accident, and wrote that suicide remains "cloaked in such secrecy, if not outright deception." [Details](#).

PEOPLE & PLACES

Star-Telegram staffers in April won a Showcase Silver Award from the Headliners Foundation of Texas for their work on "Life on Las Vegas Trail: Drugs, Guns, Abuse — and a Sliver of Hope." The project led to discoveries of significant poverty, child abuse and drugs in the Las Vegas Trail neighborhood in western Fort Worth. The Star-Telegram sounded the alarm for needed change, which quickly began coming to the area through police surveillance, donations and community building. The Texas Tribune's **Jay Root** received the Headliners Foundation's highest honor, the Showcase Gold Award for Enterprise and Innovation in Journalism, for his series, "Woo-hoo: Trouble at TABC." This is the fifth year for the awards competition, which pays \$2,000 for the top prize. The foundation judged a record 64 entries; winners and other entries can be viewed [here](#).

OVER & OUT | [John Dycus](#), Fort Worth SPJ

Follow-up on the item last month about the U.S. Commerce Department imposing a 22.16 percent import tariff on Canadian newsprint. **Paul Tash**, chairman and CEO of the Tampa Bay Times, said the [tariffs will make publishing even harder](#). "Prices will go up. Jobs will be lost," he said. "Important stories will go uncovered." A coalition has formed — STOPP, or Stop Tariffs on Printers and Publishers — to fight proposed countervailing duties and anti-dumping duties on imports of Canadian uncoated groundwood papers including newsprint and other papers. [More here](#).

SPJ Factoids. Three top figures at The Denver Post, including its former owner, resigned May 4 amid budget and staff cuts made by the newspaper's hedge fund owners. [Read about those who stepped down](#). There's more. [Newsonomics](#): "Everything I believe about the news business is being violated" at The Denver Post, and [The most visible battle over local news](#) is taking place in Denver. ... [Tronc media company agreed May 6](#) to recognize unions to represent journalists in negotiations at its Chicago-area publications, including the Chicago Tribune. Earlier this year, Tronc was defeated in a federally overseen [labor vote at the Los Angeles Times](#). ... The White House Correspondents' Association dinner this year left the internet in a dither. President **Trump's** absence for the second year in a row and [comedian Michelle Wolf's off-color performance](#) left many people wondering if the dinner should continue. Washington Post columnist **Margaret Sullivan** says it should be canceled altogether. Even though aspects have been controversial for decades, now the WHCA is thinking about changing the format and tone for future dinners. More agreement seemed to be reached on WHCA president **Margaret Talev's address at the dinner**: "An attack on any journalist is an attack on us all." ... World Press Freedom Day was May 3. [See where the United States ranks in this year's World Press Freedom Index](#).

Caught my eye. [Thin-film solar 'wallpaper' is light, flexible, can be taped on any surface](#). ... [Simple, inexpensive method creates energy-harvesting wooden floors](#). ... [Flapping wind turbine mimics hummingbirds to produce clean energy](#).

Closing words: "Writing poems is not a career but a lifetime of looking into, and listening to, how words see." — poet **Philip Booth**, who also said, "I think survival is at stake for all of us all the time. ... Every poem, every work of art, everything that is well done, well made, well said, generously given, adds to our chances of survival." ... " 'Think as I think,' said a man, 'or you are abominably wicked; you are a toad.' And after I thought of it, I said, 'I will, then, be a toad.'" — **Stephen Crane**

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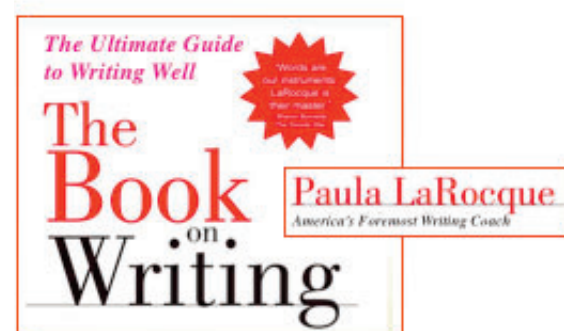
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"There is no greater agony than carrying an untold story."
 — Maya Angelou

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