

Media accountable, critic says

By Michele Stangel
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Journalists must understand that the First Amendment is what allows journalism to really serve the public. *The Washington Post's* ombudsman said Tuesday at the University.

"Let's remind ourselves that the whole purpose of the Bill of Rights has to do with the citizens of the United States," Joann Byrd said. "It wasn't written so *The Register Guard* or the *Oregonian* or *The Washington Post* could do what the journalists there want to do. It was written for the whole American public."

Byrd, a 1964 University graduate, spoke during the 17th annual Ruhl Lecture at the University Tuesday. She is the ombudsman for *The Washington Post*, which means that she evaluates the newspaper's news coverage and deals with customer complaints.

Her 30-plus years as a journalist inspired her to try to convince the audience that journalists are abusing the First Amendment by holding it responsible for what they do when they exploit its license to dismiss criticism from the pub-

lic. Journalists are accountable to the public; they need to be open about their rationale and respect a different view of how they carry out their responsibilities, instead of stonewalling critics, Byrd said.

"We are the key to the public's exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship," she said. "If the people who read our paper can't hold us accountable, then I guess it's true that newspapers are the only institution in society accountable to no one."

Byrd said journalists abuse the freedom of the press every time they think that it is a command to apply no judgment, or they use it as a shield or act as if outsiders have no right to question what they do.

"As long as we say that we are doing this on the public's behalf, as long as we claim all the access and freedom that come to us under the First Amendment, then we are obligated to say exactly how we came to do whatever we did," Byrd said.

Byrd said the public does not trust journalists to be thoughtful about what they do because they see journalists as part of a political class, the rulers of an oli-

garchy that has replaced democ-

rary. "There is a broad belief that journalists have our own agenda and we don't know or particularly want to know what's on the minds of people who aren't journalists or journalists' sources," Byrd said.


Byrd said that if there is much more erosion journalists will lose their reason for being: the First Amendment can't save journalists from being abandoned by the people who no longer trust their promise to serve them.

"When people think we are in this for ourselves, they see mistakes as evidence of conspiracy or sloth or worse: the general decline of an endeavor that now kisses off its own ideals," Byrd said.

When people complain about the media they usually challenge the fact that journalists exercise their right to freedom of the press, Byrd said.

"We do deserve the First Amendment if we take seriously the interests of the people we serve," Byrd said. "If we respect our readers as people who deserve to ask. And as people who deserve the right answers."

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MEETINGS

Asian- and Pacific-American Student Union will meet today at 5 p.m. in EMU Room 29. Executives will meet at 4 p.m. For more information, call 346-9315.

IFC will meet for a budget hearing today at 3:30 p.m. in Room 244 Gilbert. For more information, call 346-3749.

Japanese Student Organization will meet today at 4:30 p.m. in Room 142 Straub. For more information, call 687-1682.

Unwanted Sexual Behavior Task Force will meet today from 12:30 to 2 p.m. in the EMU Board Room. For more information, call 346-3105.

MISCELLANEOUS

Vietnamese Student Association will have nominations and elections tonight at 7 in the Smith Hall Lounge. For more information, call 346-8490.

Jewish Student Union will present Professor Mickey Rothbart tonight at 7 in Room 100 Willamette.

Outdoor Program will present the noon video "Gorillas: The Narrows of the Green" today at 12:30 p.m. in the EMU Outdoor Program room. For more information, call 346-4365.

Alpha Lambda Delta/Phi Eta Sigma will have an ice cream social tonight at 6:30 at Farrell's Ice Cream Parlour and Restaurant. For more information, call 346-8377.

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Group accepting more clients

The Women, Infants, Children Nutrition Program of Eugene's Family Resources has openings for eligible clients.

The resource group is funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help cover the costs of food and provide nutrition education and referrals to low-income and medically and nutritionally at-risk pregnant women and children.

For more information, contact WIC at 687-1253.

Bijou seeks artist

The Bijou Theater is offering a yearlong free movie pass to the person who can design a T-shirt to promote the theater.

Entries should be presented to Louise at the Bijou, at 492 E. 13th Ave., by May 31. Call 686-2458 for more details.

EDITOR

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newspaper," Gazlay said.

Berg said he decided to run for the editor position because he believed he could provide student employees in the news department with practical experience and inspiration.

"I feel I owe the *Emerald*," he

said.

During Berg's year as the *Emerald* editor-in-chief, he doesn't plan on making many structural changes.

However, he said he will continue the *Emerald's* "quality" amount of campus coverage.

Berg said he encourages non-journalism students to write for the paper, whether through arti-

cles, letters or commentaries. He said he'll be willing to talk to people next year with a complaint, a suggestion or those "who just like to talk."

A number of issues will remain big stories next year in the *Emerald*, Berg said. These issues include 1990's Ballot Measure 5, the property tax limiting measure, multiculturalism and safety.

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