

'Good television' used as excuse for bad journalism

OUR OPINION: KVAL and KMTR made a poor decision in collaboration with Eugene police

Journalism has become America's favorite fall guy for all of the country's ills.

It's no wonder. When the line between *Hard Copy* and *The CBS Evening News* seems to grow fainter by the week, media consumers begin to question if professional communicators know the meaning of the word "ethics."

Television journalists receive the most intense scrutiny because they are seen by more people and presumably have a greater impact on public perception. They are also most likely to cross the lines of journalistic integrity and good taste because they compete for ratings with Rosanne reruns.

Local TV news is not exempt from that pressure.

During the police sting operation in the Whiteaker neighborhood this month, the city's Rapid Deployment Unit set out to make dozens of drug-dealing and prostitution arrests. In an attempt to "raise public awareness" and garner public support, the department offered Eugene's media vehicles the opportunity to participate: as decoys.

Mark Miller of KVAL-TV and Kathy Randall of KMTR-TV posed as a drug buyer and a prostitute respectively, while the RDU caught their interactions with would-be law breakers on film — film that found its way to the top story on both news programs.

Journalists maintain their integrity by being impartial observers of, rather than actors in the news. In addition, it is generally consid-

ered unethical for any media professional to misrepresent him or herself to news sources.

On both counts, KVAL and KMTR disregarded these standards. They defended their decision by saying that they were acting in the best interest of the community and that it was "good television."

They're right. It was good television; it was just bad journalism.

The story would have been equally compelling if the stations would have filmed undercover officers nailing drug dealers and johns. Miller and Randall didn't need to be on the street doing the officers' jobs. It was gratuitous.

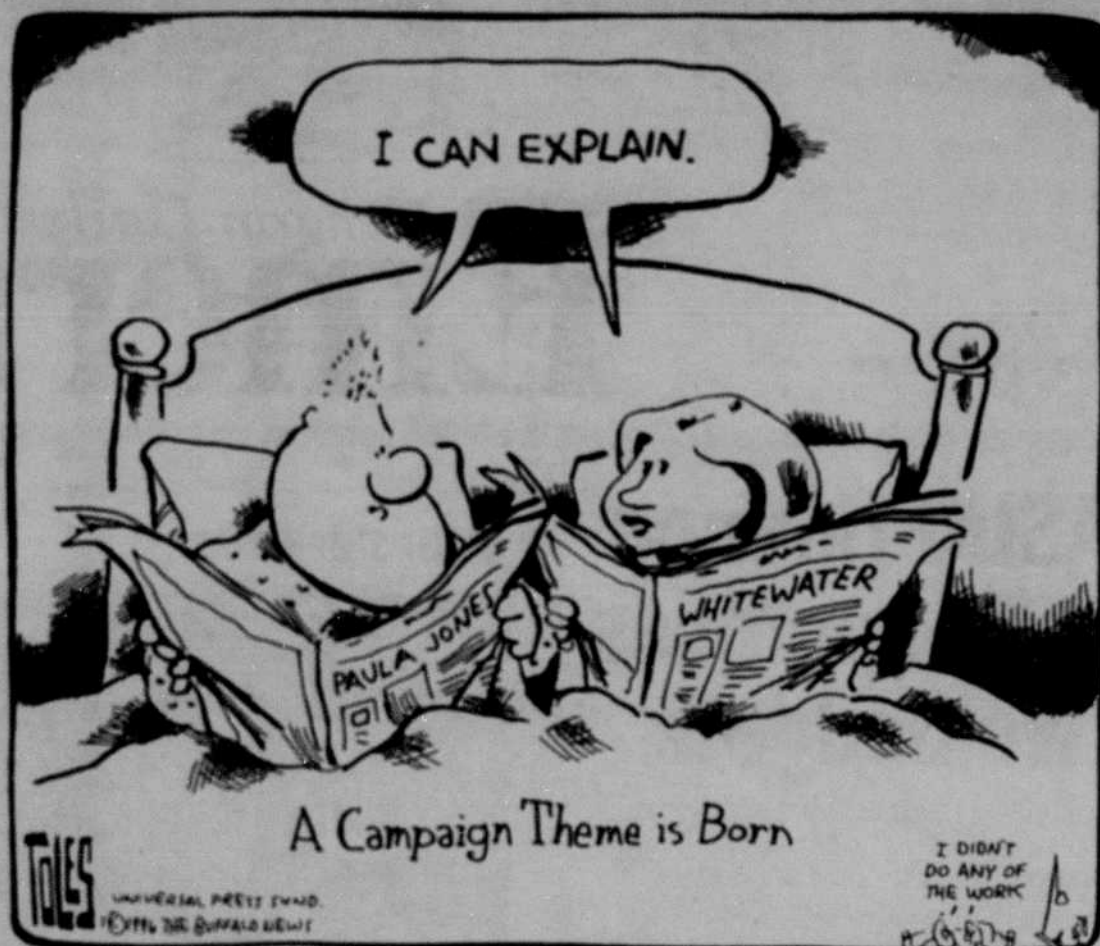
Any city's media outlets "serve the public" best as watchdogs of every public occurrence within that environment. They "serve the public" by providing it with coverage of the day's events without intentional or perceived bias.

Thus, even if KVAL and KMTR (or Randall and Miller) say they will be impartial when covering negative stories about the police department, whether they can or not is irrelevant.

The public perceives that the city's media and public safety department are in cahoots, and they wonder if the news they're getting from these two stations is accurate and truthful.

In the end, this is a minor infraction. And as an isolated incident, it's not that big of a deal.

But it seems that the more these little lines get crossed, the easier it becomes to step over big ones. Bit by bit, TV news starts to look more like *Cops*, until one day all we'll have is "good television." And no news.



LETTERS

Don't vote; un-vote

I cannot vote for either Democrat Ron Wyden or Republican Gordon Smith in the upcoming U.S. Senate election.

Sadly for Oregonians, both Senate candidates lack qualities necessary to carry the state and the country into the next millennium — qualities such as courage, integrity, world vision and independence from special-interest groups.

The U.S. Senate is constitutionally empowered to ratify treaties with other countries and confirm presidential appointees overseas. Yet we have no knowledge of the candidates positions on important issues such as proliferation of nuclear weapons, the political-economic struggles in the Middle East and how they confront American interests in the region.

In addition, the voters have little or no understanding of how Smith or Wyden might approach critical domestic issues of urban decay, drug violence and affordable housing.

Therefore, I strongly urge my fellow Oregonians to return their ballots without voting for either candidate. In doing so, we will exercise our franchise without endorsing the choices before us. I call this process "un-vote."

So, let's un-vote and be really counted.

M. Reza Behnam, Ph.D.
Eugene

Corrupt burgers

Your health may suffer; deserving students may not finish college; grandparents' medical costs may push them into poverty; rainforests may disappear; and wildlife species may vanish if you eat hamburgers.

The cattle lobby helps elect legislators who trash programs protecting the environment and kill programs not benefiting the wealthy. By not helping finance the cattle lobby, the "Hamburger Rebellion" (people not eating

hamburger) aids programs helping the less-fortunate, the environment and good health.

The "Hamburger Rebellion" opposes the "Sagebrush Rebellion" (a movement initiated by Western ranchers to block range-land reform and to block a raise in grazing fees on our public lands by gaining control of the land.)

If Congress gives ranchers our public lands by turning control over to the states and countries or passes laws to prevent fair-grazing fees and prevents regulation to protect the land from overgrazing, the effect is the same. Ranchers, who control most rural county governments and many state governments, will control land that should belong to all Americans.

In the wild, predators prey on the young, old and infirm — not unlike wealthy congressmen selecting budget-cut victims. In a civilized society, shouldn't lawmakers behave differently?

In the courts (and in lawmaking bodies), wealth may circumvent truth and justice, but enough people saying "no" to hamburgers may counter greed's triumph.

Greed has no conscience. Do you?

James Griffin
Fallon, Nevada

Not just a career

The *Oregon Commentator's* Farrah Bostick felt slighted by the *ODE's* Lori Bettineski (*ODE*, Jan. 10). Bettineski disrespected the *Commentator* and the *Voice*; she said they don't offer the career potential found at the *Emerald* (*ODE*, Dec. 4).

If we were attuned to the huge investments of the right, we'd realize the career potential in the rightist campus publications (see Dinesh D'Souza, etc.). Also, for business, a portfolio might be as important as the mention of some school paper on one's resumé.

Both Bettineski and Bostick

claim careerist credentials; neither mentions the University's leftist publication.

Perhaps with *The Student Insurgent*, it is obvious that careerism is not the top priority. But as media monopolies merge and cut employee expenses with the assistance of new technologies, they narrow the journalistic career path. Therefore, and among other reasons, J-schoolers as well as the rest of us should be concerned with the creation of inclusive socioeconomic opportunities.

One joins a leftist publication not just because of what it can do for oneself, but for what it can contribute to society as well.

As for credentials, editors at *Against the Current*, *Crossroads* and *Infusion* magazines have worked for *The Student Insurgent*.

Our writers have appeared in publications as diverse as the *Monthly Review*, an independent socialist magazine from New York, to *Just Out*, the lesbian and gay newsmagazine from Portland. Their most significant credential of all, however, is their commitment to fundamental social change that benefits all people.

They who belittle this quest support the status quo.

Chris Brady
The Student Insurgent

LETTERS POLICY

The *Oregon Daily Emerald* will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.

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