

News Ethics

KEZI lacks time to correct all mistakes;
R-G editor indicts paper's practices.

It's hard for KEZI-TV to find enough time in its 30-minute news broadcast to run all the corrections it should and a top *Register-Guard* editor is "terrified" at omissions in the paper's coverage.

That's the news from a panel on "Ethical Challenges to Journalism" sponsored by the local chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists at the UO May 5.

"God knows we make more mistakes than I'd say a newspaper does," said KEZI-TV news director Alan Beck. But he said that in a 30-minute newscast, "It's hard to find time to correct them all." Beck then looked around at the lecture hall of about 100 journalists and journalism students and added, "Don't quote me on that."

"An engaging sociopath that's good at lying," Godbold said, "can take people for a long, long ride."

Beck said he has to guard against some young TV news reporters who "start to stage things" in response to pressure for compelling video. If you do that "you begin to hack away at your credibility."

Beck said he also struggles with the move toward softer, more entertainment-oriented TV news. "You have to hold the line."

With only a half-hour minus commercials, TV news is necessarily "broad but not very deep," Beck said. "When people tell me that 'I get all my news from TV,' it horrifies me as a news director," he said.

Beck said he's seen surveys showing that a

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-Alan Beck, KEZI-TV

Register-Guard Associate Editor Jim Godbold announced that he had a "blistering indictment of the R-G's practices" in failing to cover the diversity of the community. "The *Register-Guard* believes the people who read the paper are the people who are in the paper," Godbold said. "On a given day, I am terrified by the size of that omitted population."

The panel discussion focused on recent scandals around journalists who made up stories at the *New York Times* and *USA Today*.

Godbold said journalists at the R-G believed such a scandal couldn't happen at their smaller paper because a reader, colleague or a source would complain. "Someone would blow the whistle."

Unlike larger papers, "The size of *The Register-Guard* provides for a lot of interaction" both inside and outside the paper, Godbold said.

Beck agreed that the "appalling" made up stories would be harder to do at a smaller news organization where people talk to each other more.

But *Seattle Times* executive editor Michael Fancher, the third panelist, said, "I don't think there is an editor in the country that would flat out say that couldn't happen at their paper."

Fancher said editors depend on trusting that their reporters aren't making up stories. "We're really vulnerable to the trustworthiness of every individual."

Godbold apologized for implying that a similar scandal wasn't possible at his paper. "Of course it's possible anywhere."

Godbold said papers were very vulnerable to reporters who flat make up their stories.

large number of people get all their news from watching Leno and Letterman and other "talk, entertainment spin crap" shows. "It's incredible," he said.

Panelists responded to a question of how ownership of local media affects coverage. KEZI is owned by the Chambers family, which also owns Chambers Construction and donates to pro-development local candidates. *The Register-Guard's* Baker family also owns one of the area's larger development companies.

Beck said he regularly consults on KEZI news coverage with Scott Chambers. "He can steer me in a way to the community that can help me," Beck said, adding, the Chambers owners "become great sources of information."

Godbold said, "Every publisher has sacred cows and blind spots and tender spots and issues they're afraid of." Godbold said when he was news editor, he tried to encourage the Baker family to allow stories about such sensitive topics as their own business deals. He said he'd ask the owners, "You don't want to see it in *Eugene Weekly* before you see it in *The Register-Guard* do you?"

Godbold said, "I've never ever been told not to do a story." But he admitted in response to a question that the R-G didn't cover some labor stories about a recent contract dispute. The owners had decided, "We're not going to discuss our labor negotiations on the pages of the paper."

Fancher provided this advice about newspaper sacred cows: "They make great hamburger."

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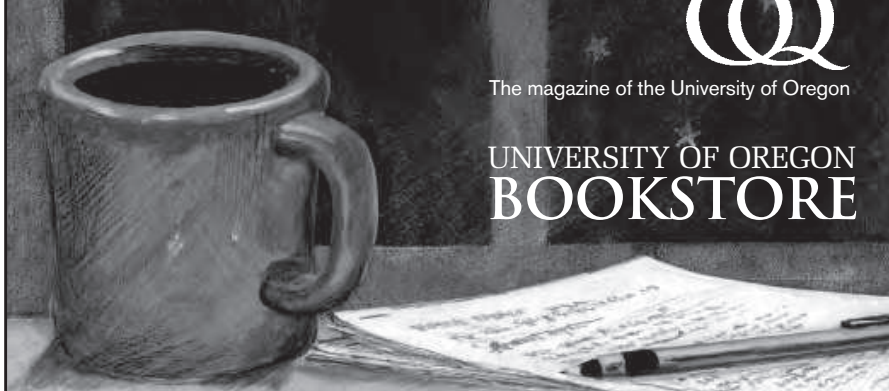
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Eugene Weekly • 1251 Lincoln Street • Eugene, OR 97401 • 541.484.0519 • fax 541-484-4044