

# For journalists, 2014 was the worst and best of times

By JOHN S. PERRY  
EO Media Group

The year just concluded was not good to journalism. Consider:

At least 60 members of our profession were killed in the line of duty. Seventeen died covering the fighting in Syria. Five in Iraq and five in the Ukraine. Four in Gaza. Three each in Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Paraguay. Many were targeted for murder. Most died in combat, while covering war or civil unrest. Two suffered a horrible public death, beheaded by Islamic radicals. The new year got off to a horrific start with the deadly shooting at a French newspaper.



John Perry

Other journalists were jailed or exiled. A dozen reporters and photographers were arrested and jailed while covering the riots in Ferguson, Mo. Three journalists have been locked up in Egypt for a year on trumped-up terrorism charges. Seven are jailed in Turkey. Forty-two have been exiled, one-third from Syria.

Law enforcement targeted us. *New York Times* reporter James Risen was threatened with jail time for refusing to testify about sources he used for stories on Iraq's nuclear weapons program. Fox News reporter James Rosen was named a "co-conspirator" in another national security leak case. Meanwhile, the FBI was forced to admit it had planted a fake story in the *Seattle Times* as part of a sting operation.

And we did it to ourselves. *Rolling Stone* magazine published a gripping story about a violent gang rape at the University of Virginia. The story reaffirmed an accepted narrative about a culture of rape at colleges and fraternities. However, the *Washington Post* found several problems with the alleged claims and *Rolling Stone* later admitted it did not perform basic fact-checking. Not to be outdone, *New York Magazine* gave us a 17-year-old who amassed \$72 million by playing the stock market. The entire story is untrue.

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Against that backdrop, however, there were excellent examples in 2014 of what journalists do best: uncover that which is hidden from the public and promote change. Some national, state and local examples:

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**View impaired in any significant way, and I would consider almost any further impairment significant. In fact, I would favor having some comparatively recent impairments, such as Columbia House, removed. I'd like the warehouses to relocate, too; there is no commercial need for them to be alongside the river, where they are a severe impairment of our valuable and marketable river view. I suspect, however, that they play an important role in our local economy, so, perhaps it is better**



AP Photo/Francois Mori

A girl kneels besides candles before the start of the solidarity demonstration in Paris, Thursday, mourning 12 people slain at a Paris newspaper.



AP Photo/Gosia Wozniacka

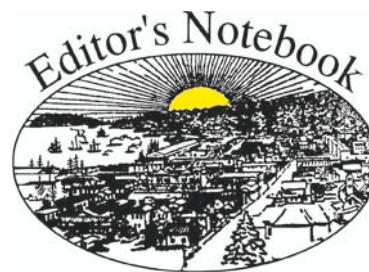
Cylvia Hayes, fiancée of Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, speaks at a news conference in Portland Oct. 9.

**The deadly VA.** It's difficult to truly shock Americans anymore. Yet, there was an audible shudder when CNN reported that at least 40 veterans died while waiting for care at Veterans Health Administration facilities in Arizona. The CNN investigation revealed widespread delays in treatment throughout the VA system and identified administrators who covered it up. The revelations triggered a series of investigations — some criminal — and prodded Congress and the president into action.

Oregon's first lady.

*Willamette Week* blew the lid off the governor's fiancée, revealing how Cylvia Hayes used her notoriety and government access for personal gain. As other newspapers and our Capital Bureau joined the investigation, we learned about her hidden marriage, an alleged marijuana-growing operation and how the governor's office bent the rules to accommodate her. More revelations are coming in 2015.

**Mentally ill behind bars.** The *Daily Astorian* examined how our criminal justice system tries to cope with the growing number



of mentally ill people behind bars. Reporters also kept a sharp focus on financial and management problems at the Port of Astoria, breaking news of efforts to wrest control of the commission from voters to the governor.

**No stroll in this park.** The *Chinook Observer* gave its readers an unvarnished look behind the scenes at a problematic Long Beach trailer park. Reporter Natalie St. John interviewed residents and scoured title documents and reports by police and code enforcement officers. What emerged was a portrait of a netherworld of decaying cabins and dubious management. Like any good piece of investigative journalism, it triggered a rather unkind response from one of the subjects: "Please know that I think you are a bunch of idiots!"

**Bridging the divide.** The *Capital Press* published "Rural Oregon, meet Portland" Reporter Eric Mortenson explained why what Portlanders think matters to farmers and ranchers across the state. The article also dispelled misconceptions Portlanders have about Oregon agriculture.

**Finding solutions.** The South County Community Food Bank had to move and estimates approached \$100,000. Nancy McCarthy, editor of the *Seaside Signal* and *Cannon Beach Gazette*, suggested that

the school district donate two portable schoolrooms. It did and then volunteers stepped forward to move the buildings. The food bank reopened this month.

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Producing stories like these is expensive and time-consuming. It requires owners who firmly believe newspapers should be operated as civic institutions devoted to the community. And it takes editors, reporters and photographers with natural curiosity, talent and fearlessness.

Our company — its 11 newspapers, 20 websites and 200 employees — enters the new year determined to provide our readers with more journalism, not less. While other papers are decreasing their news coverage and staffing, we will provide more — using our printed newspapers, websites and other forms of communication. We've also joined forces with another family-owned newspaper company, Pamplin Media, to create a three-person Capitol Bureau to keep you informed about the Legislature and state government agencies.

EO Media Group can only be as successful as the communities we serve. So, here's wishing all of you a safe, happy and prosperous new year.

*John S. Perry is chief operating officer for EO Media Group, parent company of The Daily Astorian. While he is responsible for companywide business operations, Perry spent half of his 40-year career as a reporter and editor. He still considers himself a journalist at heart.*

## Open forum

### Livability

While I agree with the reported expressions of skepticism on the part of some who attended the public forum Jan. 6 at the Holiday Inn Express, where the topic was the Bridge Vista phase of the city of Astoria Riverfront Vision Plan ("It's all about the view," *The Daily Astorian*, Jan. 7), I urge caution against knee-jerk opposition to changing the status quo.

I would not want to see the river

view impaired in any significant way, and I would consider almost any further impairment significant. In fact, I would favor having some comparatively recent impairments, such as Columbia House, removed. I'd like the warehouses to relocate, too; there is no commercial need for them to be alongside the river, where they are a severe impairment of our valuable and marketable river view. I suspect, however, that they play an important role in our local economy, so, perhaps it is better

that they should be here than in, say, Warrenton. Alas.

I think all or most development that may occur in lower Uniontown should be in keeping with existing iconic structures there, such as the old Finnish Meat Market building, the sauna and even Mary Todd's Workers Bar & Grill, Suomi Hall and the Triangle Tavern, too.

Much of the rest of the area along Marine Drive and Bond Street (budget motels, the warehouses, fast food out-

lets and repurposed homes and retail fronts that want for loving care) is neglected or unimaginatively maintained. I think the impact of this for people arriving in Astoria from the south is that of an eyesore.

As a property owner in the area, I would like very much to see improvements and new development aimed at upgrading the appearance, the livability and, very importantly in my view, the real property value of the area.

Property values in the area took a

huge hit in the Great Recession and they have yet to recover. I would hope that improving the appearance and livability of my neighborhood would have a positive impact on our quality of life and our quality of investment, while maintaining both the river view, at no less than it is now, and some of the gritty reality that has long distinguished, so to speak, this part of dear old Astoria.

PAUL HAIST  
Astoria



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