

NAJA Walks The Talk For Free Press; Promotes Indian Cultural Literacy Among The Mainstream Press

NAJA continued
from front page

of the race but not that the information had been available before the newscast's first installment.

"Is there anything sacred in the mainstream press that is similar to what we call sacred?" Nobody had an answer.

~ Minnie Two Shoes

"They picked and chose what they wanted to air," said Arviso. "I think they (students) were used by certain individuals to promote their own personal political agenda, and that's not right. NAJA shouldn't be doing that."

"I think the whole thing was a learning process," said Monet, "a tremendous lesson for the girls. It's one thing to learn to shoot a camera and put a microphone on, but you can't teach ethics sitting in the classroom until you are presented with an issue. It's valuable not only for students but for a working newsroom, coming up with a decision and standing by that decision."

This 21st Annual Convention for NAJA called, "A Free Press; A Free People," hosted in Lincoln by the Winnebago (also called, Ho-Chunk) Tribe of Nebraska, brought hundreds of Native journalists to discuss the topics of the title on many levels.

With some 600 Indian newspapers and newsletters publishing regularly across the country, "The bigger challenge in Indian Country is ownership," said Associated Press (AP) writer John Shurr. "We can't have a true free press if Tribal government restricts the flow of information."

Dan Agent (Cherokee/Choctaw), Editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, recalled how before his paper was set free, it did an investigation into Tribal leadership corruption that resulted in himself and his whole staff being fired.

"You're not really serving the people if you don't have a free press," he said.

"It's about how much courage a person has," said Ronnie Washines, of the Yakama Nation. "So much of

On March 20 on the Red Lake Reservation, a Tribal youth took 10 lives including his own in a tragic school shooting. Jourdain said that he "drew on the advice of the Elders" when he inherited "one of the worst tragedies in Indian Country." He was torn between protecting Tribal members in their grief and providing access for a mostly mainstream press. Many members of that press, he said, "showed a simple lack of common courtesy."

"They wanted the emotions (of the people) and when they couldn't get it, then they attacked our sovereignty and demonized the boy." At the same time, he added, "We saw many good things happen (in the aftermath of the shootings) and many good people."

In another session, Minnie Two Shoes put the problem in another

scholarships split among Hispanic, Asian and Black journalist associations while offering nothing in scholarships to NAJA members.

"NAJA has not been terribly successful at reaching out to major broadcasters," said Lewerenz. "We haven't built the sort of long-term relationships that others have."

Each of the other organizations were supportive of NAJA as soon as the announcement was made, according to Lewerenz, but on the question of unity where it counts, there was apparently no discussion among the other UNITY members about turning down the scholarships unless Indians also were included.

"That is not something I could ask them to do," said Lewerenz. Mae Cheng, President of UNITY, felt the same way. "Certainly, it wasn't UNITY's decision to make who would turn down the money. UNITY didn't get anything (from CNN) either."

Lewerenz added that he didn't think that NAJA would turn down the money either, if the situation were reversed.

"It put us in a very difficult position," said UNITY's Cheng, "because the money was very significant for the work of the other three groups."

"We selected organizations that we have the most extensive relationships with," said Krista Robinson, spokeswoman for Turner Broadcasting, parent company of CNN, who was not at liberty to

talk about the discussions that went into the decision, though she did say that the NAJA group was not simply overlooked.

"Certainly, we are having conversations with the Native American Journalists Association," she added. "We're hoping to develop a stronger relationship."

In fact, CNN has supported NAJA's annual conferences with \$15,000 in each of the last four years, said Lewerenz.

"The process of building a relationship takes place over years," said Lewerenz.

"Long term, it's extraordinarily important to get more Natives in broadcasting," he said.

Still, Cheng could not think of a single instance, inside of journalism or out, where one minority organization stood up for another at some cost to itself.

Grand Ronde Paper Honored

Photojournalist and Tribal member Toby McClary won a third place in the Best Photo/Feature/Multiple Print category. Graphic Designer and Tribal member Justin Phillips won a second place in the Best Layout/Design category for tabloid-sized papers.

Smoke Signals won five awards for the year. Former staffer Peta Tinda (Nakoda) won a third place in the Best Photo/Sports Single category, a second for Best News Writing and a third for Best Feature Writing among bimonthly publications. ■



Award Winning — Photojournalist Toby McClary, Graphic Designer Justin Phillips, Tribal Councilman Chris Mercier and Staff Writer Ron Karten hold up this year's NAJA awards that took place in Lincoln, Nebraska August 10-14. *Smoke Signals* staff won five awards for layout, photography and writing.

particularly when a press is free but uninformed about its subject, as much of the mainstream press is about Indian culture and affairs, according to Jack Marsh, Executive Director of the Vermillion, South Dakota-based Freedom Forum. "What is the intersection of free press and traditional values?" he asked.

The Red Lake Experience

The question hit hardest during the session, "Ethical and Cultural Considerations in Covering Native Communities Under Siege." Speakers included Floyd Jourdain, Chairman of the Red Lake Chippewa Nation.

In a private interview, NAJA outgoing President Dan Lewerenz (Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska), a Wyoming-based Administrative Correspondent for AP, discussed CNN's recent gift of more than \$1 million worth of



Public Television — On Saturday, August 13, a Town Hall Meeting was held to debate the issues of Indian Gaming. The meeting was recorded and later televised by Nebraska Education Television.

By Chris Mercier,
Tribal Council member

Whenever you go to somewhere tropical and hot, Hawaii or Thailand for example, there is this feeling and smell that blast you in the face upon leaving the air-conditioned airport. What is first noticed is the heat.

That was the last thing I expected to feel stepping out onto the street in Lincoln, Nebraska. But that is what I, and every other attendee of the 21st Annual Native American Journalists Association Conference, had to deal with from August 11-14. We all got used to it, I think.

Really, it wasn't that bad. Yet I have to admit at being surprised. I hardly expected a city-size sauna, but rather wind, rain, and thunderstorms. Lincoln had those too.

Downtown Lincoln is a showcase for early 20th century red brick buildings, with wide sidewalks that in more crowded cities could be used as streets.

Only two blocks from the convention center lay the famous Historic Haymarket District, revamped for tourism, and quite pretty. Many of its old brick warehouses now house gifts shops, coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and surprisingly, breweries. Inside all are spacious, high-ceiling gathering areas. Overall, Lincoln, Nebraska seems pretty cool for a mid-Western city.

I guess it has to be, given that the University of Nebraska seems to be a focal point for the entire city. Driving in from the airport, one can hardly miss Memorial Stadium, presently undergoing some expansions. The mighty structure juts out from the ground, easily the first building you notice. I can see why other college football teams must be intimidated.

Cornhusker football is virtually a religion, I am told my first day there. I'm told also the streets are empty during autumn Saturdays. I am really not

surprised.

That a huge student body exists in Lincoln is evident as walking around the streets, I begin to feel old. While having dinner with the *Smoke Signals* staff at a nearby pizzeria, I can't help but point out that of the five or six dozen people in the restaurant, at least on this floor, we are clearly the oldest. And I'm only 30!

Thankfully, while charming, Lincoln doesn't offer many distractions from the



Historic Haymarket Landmark
In Lincoln, Nebraska

reason I am here, which is the NAJA Conference and a theme this year that any wannabe journalist could not resist, "A Free Press; A Free People."

The first morning, August 12, to really kick off the conference begins with a panel of speakers to discuss the merits of journalistic liberty, "Elements of a Free Press."

One of the most fascinating speakers was John Shurr of the Associated Press, who shared his experiences in dealing with a battle to establish a Freedom of Information law for the Cherokee Nation. He also spoke on the free press theme, offering that the best way for Tribes to establish a free press is to work it into their Tribal Constitutions.

Paul DeMain Presses His Case Against Peltier

By Ron Karten

Paul DeMain, Managing Editor and CEO of the Wisconsin-based *News from Indian Country*, invited *Smoke Signals* Editor, Brent Merrill, and myself, along with AP Reporter Carson Walker and *USA Today* Reporter Matt Kelly, both of whom have written about Peltier and the Pine Ridge murders, for the latest naming of a witness against Peltier.

Bernie Lafferty is the sister of Darlene Kamook Nichols, the only other source that DeMain had so far named to say that she heard Leonard Peltier brag about killing an FBI agent on the Pine Ridge reservation on June 26, 1975.

On the tape recorded interview with Lafferty, dated March 9, 2001 and conducted by an unnamed interviewer, Lafferty responded to questions about Peltier's alleged admission. Up to this point, only Kamook Nichols had said publicly that Peltier bragged about killing an agent.

The interview was conducted solely to gain "her perspective," said DeMain.

Lafferty described how Peltier held his hands up, like somebody was holding a gun on him, to show what the FBI agent was doing.

The interviewer asked: "And (then) Leonard had his finger or his hand like cocked into a gun?"

"Uh huh," said Lafferty. Yeah? Is that how you remember it?" asked the interviewer.

"Emmm, I can't remember all that..." Like Kamook, Lafferty re-

"Leonard asked me to marry him every time we saw each other," said Lafferty, and another: "I didn't think he (Peltier) could do that (the killing) to anybody, an Indian person, any-



Debate — Paul DeMain, left, responds to a question from *Smoke Signals* staffer Ron Karten as AP Reporter Carson Walker looks on.

membered Peltier implicating himself.

"I really didn't even want to know, you know," said Lafferty, "because now I have to live with that — knowing, for the rest of my life, you know. And I'd rather have not even ever known."

Pulled from the transcript that appears on the "Justice for Anna Mae and Ray" website (www.jfamr.net/doc/), but in notes made of the taped interview heard at NAJA were two other statements in particular:

At the same time that Lafferty implicates Peltier as the shooter, she also remembered his human side.

way," she said.

She also said that she never discussed the alleged admission with Anna Mae Pictou-Aquash, who she said also was there. "I can't remember (her reaction)," said Lafferty. "I just, I think mostly because of how I reacted myself."

DeMain also addressed the *Smoke Signals* story. "You've lined up four white guys against me," he said. "Where are the Lakota voices?"

He also took *Smoke Signals* to task for reporting that homicides on the reservation during the 1973-75 period far exceeded the rate in Detroit, then

that is in actuality 25 years old.

We were given a glimpse of two documentaries in the making chronicling differing versions of Indian gaming and the effect on Tribes. One told the story of the Pachanga Tribe, with the subsequent rush of new enrollees once prosperity arrived. The other, quite chilling, illustrated the split in the Seneca Nation over gaming, one that ultimately led to violence (It is called "Casino Nation" if you are interested).

The "Town Hall" show boasted a panel that admittedly wasn't very balanced, but each and every guest, from the professor/pundit, to the council member, to the economic development specialist, to the Methodist Reverend, had their own views. While the Reverend had his share of input into the discussion, calling gambling "cannibalistic" and lacking in morals, ultimately the show was stolen by Kurt Luger, a economic developer from South Dakota, who pointed out that Indian gaming, at only a couple of decades old, is still in its infancy, and needs time to develop and fix the flaws.

The show ended on a friendly note, though Luger and the Reverend were clearly no less at odds than at the beginning. Luger made a prediction that as a council member I could appreciate. The next big thing, he said, is joint business ventures between Tribes.

That show happened on our last day, prior to the awards banquet, where once again "Smoke Signals" walked off with an armload of plaques. Fortunately, I was finally given an answer as to why Lincoln was so hot and muggy. In a news sequence created and recorded by the resident Native student journalists, a weather anchor attributed the sauna-like atmosphere to a rare situation she called "monsoon conditions." ■