

# POST GUILD UNIT forum



Local 32035 The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild

March 9, 2005

## Guild Panel Discusses Diversity in the Post Newsroom

"Why are we still here?" radio host Joe Madison asked a panel of speakers gathered at Metro AME Church around the corner from The Washington Post Feb 10 to discuss hiring, promotion, retention, salary disparity, and assignments at the paper.

And "What are YOU going to do?" he asked the 40 or so Guild members gathered to discuss the decades-old dilemma of how to get The Washington Post newsroom to fairly hire, promote, pay, and assign women and minorities.



l to r: Richard Prince, Spencer Hsu, Anna Lopez, Steven King, Joe Madison

The Kerner Commission report in 1968 cited failures in the media's coverage of minority communities as one cause of that year's riots. Seven Post reporters filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1972 (and met at the same Metro AME Church to discuss it). Former Executive Editor Ben Bradlee commissioned a newsroom survey on diversity in 1986. The Guild filed an EEOC complaint in 1989. A commission named for and chaired by current Post Ombudsman Michael Getler issued a critical report in 1993. And yet hiring and wage discrimination are still big problems. A memo that the Diversity Committee of Minority Journalists delivered to Executive Editor Len Downie last November argued that the recommendations of the Getler report have gone unfulfilled.

A report by the UNITY Journalists of Color convention last summer, available at [unityjournalists.org/dcdiversity.pdf](http://unityjournalists.org/dcdiversity.pdf), looked at diversity issues at the Post and at the Washington bureaus of other newspapers and news services. UNITY found that the Post, which has 43.2 percent of people of color in its circulation area, has 8.7 percent journalists of color covering Washington for its national desk. That's four people out of 46. The Post's 8.7 percent compares to 29 percent at the Washington bureau of Knight Ridder, 28 percent at Gannett, and 18 percent at the Boston Globe.

Panelists commented that at the Post, there is a brief moment of progress following each flair-up of this issue, followed by poor follow-through from management, complacency from workers, and a failure to institutionalize specific requirements for change.

The latest flair-up was sparked by the Post's failure to promote long-tenured Eugene Robinson, the AME for Style, who is an African-American, to the position of Managing Editor. (see PANEL page 2)

## Guild Unit Elects Officers, Prepares for Contract Campaign

On January 25, Guild members met at Metro AME Church and later, at the Guild office to elect unit officers for the next two year term and act on bargaining campaign recommendations of the January 13 Leadership Workshop. The following unit officers were re-elected:

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Darlene Meyer, Co-Chair, Commercial  
Rick Weiss, Co-Chair, News  
Joanna Millhouse, Vice Chair, Commercial, Day  
Andreia Douglas, Vice Chair, Commercial, Night  
Ann Gerhart, Vice Chair, News, Day  
Keith Sinzinger, Vice Chair, Night  
Robin Groom, Secretary

Please congratulate our officers and thank them for volunteering their time and effort.

During the meeting we also requested volunteers for three very important committees:

Equal Employment Opportunity Committee - a committee that will address race (see ELECTS page 2)

Post Members Win Front Page and Guild Service Awards; Listing on Page 2

## Welcome New and Returning Members

Patterson Clark	Melina Mara
Neil Collins	Eric Weiss
Rita Coopersmith	Griff Witte
Joe Holley	Michelle Gaven

# POST GUILD UNIT

*Panel (Continued from page 1)*

On December 1, 40 newsroom employees met with Executive Editor Len Downie, new Managing Editor Phil Bennett, and Deputy Managing Editor Milton Coleman. The Diversity Committee had drafted the seven page memo in November, which laid out their concerns and recommendations. Their argument focused on the need to appeal to the residents of the circulation area. They cited focus groups from last fall in which minority residents "delivered a clear message: We do not see ourselves reflected in the pages of the Washington Post." In the memo and on the panel much of the discussion focused on the Post's failures with regard to training, promoting, and retaining minority reporters, two of whom leave the Post each year for every three hired, according to the panelists.

As a result of the December meeting, Post management agreed to meet again by March 1 and to have a plan of action by June 1. Madison suggested that Martin Luther King Jr. would have called this "the paralysis of analysis" and asked those present why it had to take six months to get started. He asked all those present, "What will you do if, on March 1, the Post had done nothing?"

Madison described a campaign undertaken in the 1980's after the Post Sunday Magazine featured on the cover a threatening black male and the cover line "Murder, Drugs, and the Rap Star". Inside there was a second negative story about black people. Many African-American readers of the Post were offended. A community coalition led by WOL radio owner and host Cathy Hughes boycotted the Post Magazine, collecting and dumping hundreds of copies of the magazine every Sunday on the steps of the Post. After 13 weeks, the Post's editor and publisher went on The Cathy Hughes Show, apologized, and recast the Post Magazine.

--abridged, David Swanson, ILCA

## Front Page, Guild Service Honorees

Distinguished National News Reporting: Rick Weiss  
"Data Quality Law Is Nemesis of Regulation"

Distinguished Sports Reporting: Steve Fainaru  
"Stadium" Series; Steven Goff, Honorable  
Mention, "The Emergence of a Prodigy"

Distinguished International News Reporting:  
Scott Higham, Sewell Chan, Scott Wilson, Dana  
Priest, Joe Stephens, Josh White, Christian Daven-  
port, Jackie Spinner, Margot Williams  
"Abu Graib" Series

Distinguished Sports Photography: John McDonnell  
"Fumble"

Distinguished Illustration Design: Randy Mays  
"What Makes a Neighborhood Kid Friendly" and  
"Scared? You Can Fight Back on Taxes"

Distinguished Guild Unit Publication: Rick Weiss  
"Merit Pay at the Washington Post" Series

Frank C. Porter Memorial Award for Distinguished Labor  
and Business Reporting, Honorable Mention,  
Griff Witte, Jonathan Krim, Alec Klein,  
Greg Schneider, "\$17 an Hour" Series

Guild Service Award for Customer Service Professional,  
Ann Marie Ditchey

Join our honorees at the Front Page and Guild  
Service Reception and Awards Ceremony on  
Monday, March 28, at 6:30 pm in the lobby of the  
AFL-CIO Building, 815 16th St, NW

## *Elects (continued from page 1)*

and gender issues with management.

Bargaining Committee - a committee that formulates  
contract proposals based upon issues raised by the  
membership and negotiates the contract with man-  
agement.

Mobilizing and Recruitment Committee - a com-  
mittee that informs members of Guild issues, plans  
actions in support of Guild initiatives, and recruits  
new members to the Guild.

If you would like to serve on one of these committees,  
please email Tiffany Harris at [tharris@wbng.org](mailto:tharris@wbng.org).

The meeting included discussion about the theme of  
the bargaining campaign. A gift certificate to the  
restaurant of choice was offered for the best theme.  
Rick Weiss won the contest with "No Worker Left  
Behind." In lieu of receiving the gift certificate, Rick  
decided to donate the money to the Youngstown  
Vindicator Guild Strike Support Fund. The Vindicator  
employees are tired of wage freezes and conces-  
sions in health care benefits. Vindicator workers,  
members of Local 11 of the Newspaper Guild, went  
on strike November 16. The Vindicator is a daily  
newspaper covering northeastern Ohio and western  
Pennsylvania. Local 11 represents reporters, photogra-  
phers, copy editors, circulation managers, delivery driv-  
ers and advertising salespeople.

The meeting ended with an announcement that the Guild  
is offering a \$50 gift certificate for the best graphic to  
accompany the theme "No Worker Left Behind."



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# The Guided Ear

Apparently it isn't enough that for many at The Post, their key strokes, phone usage and bathroom breaks are monitored. Now, open wide! Because management is looking inside your mouth to see what you're chewing. Yes, when it comes to eating food at your desk, a new memo spells out for employees what's in and what's out.

Perhaps the Ear's interest here is biased. The Ear, of course, is close to the mouth. We share certain concerns, not to mention a direct connection that few appreciate except when taking off or landing. But the Ear thinks Centrex manager Georgie Solomon went too far when, on Feb. 22, she sent a memo to all Centrex operators inexplicably declaring that it is okay to eat donuts at your work station, but not mashed potatoes. Cheetos are okay, but not peas. Trail mix is acceptable, but not chicken. Candy, yes. Sandwich, no.

Employees who received the memo — which included a helpful list of 18 "accepted" snacks, including crackers, peanuts, cupcakes, pretzels, Poptarts and cheetos — said they knew of no particular incident that may have triggered the new rule. Solomon recently gained the formal title of "manager," sources noted, and perhaps felt she needed to "flex."

The Ear, which knows something about noise, can only wonder why "entree foods" (as the memo says) are banned from Centrex workstations while crispier and noisier "snacks" are allowed. Perhaps Solomon should write a followup memo reminding operators that snacks consumed at work stations "shall be chewed with the mouth closed." And while we're at it, the Ear favors a limit on burps. Thank you for your cooperation.

## Excess Vacation Deadline Looms

Only eight months remain before our labor contract expires — and with it, any remaining hours of vacation owed to you in the "Excess" category. After Nov. 7 any remaining vacation time in the Excess category on your pay stub will no longer be available for use as vacation time, and will be paid out at 33 cents for every dollar of value. In other words, the time for procrastinating is over. Use it or lose it. And don't start feeling sorry for your supervisors. The Guild highly recommends you take advantage of whatever vacation time is owed you before it disappears.

Here's how to decide which vacation hours to use first:

1) Look at a recent pay stub to see how many hours of vacation you have accumulated in each of three columns: Current, Deferred and Excess.

2) If you have zero hours of vacation in both the Deferred and Excess columns, you need not read any further. You are not at risk of losing any accumulated vacation.

3) If you have hours in Deferred but not in Excess, look at your pay stub near the Messages section and find your Leave Accrual Date. That is the date on which any hours in your Deferred column will expire and disappear. To use them, file as VAC on your time card. Don't worry about your Current hours. On your Leave Accrual Date, any hours remaining in your Current vacation column will spill into your (as of that day, empty) Deferred column, where they will be good for one more year while you start to accumulate new hours in your newly empty Current account.

4) If you have hours in both Deferred and Excess, you have some serious vacationing to do. Your Excess hours will expire on Nov. 7, and your Deferred hours will expire on your Leave Accrual Date, which is shown on your pay stub near the Messages section. If you cannot use both categories, you may want to use up Deferred instead of Excess, since you will at least get some money for expiring Excess hours but expiring Deferred hours will simply disappear. On your time card, mark VAX to spend down your Excess hours and VAC to spend down your Deferred hours.

## Guild Secures Reimbursements

If you were one of the unfortunate staffers who had 2004 expenses rejected because you filed late, we have good news: You can—and WILL—be reimbursed. Post management initially sent out notices informing several staffers they had missed the filing deadlines and would not receive reimbursement for expenses incurred during 2004. After a meeting between Guild representatives and Shirley Carswell, Post management agreed that employees are entitled to full reimbursement for all legitimate expenses. If you were denied—or have not filed all expense requests for last year—please refile or get them in ASAP.

Thanks to our existing Guild contract, employees must be reimbursed for all expenses. At the same time, the Guild recognize it is difficult for managers to balance the company books if they cannot keep up with expenses. As employees, we share in the responsibility to keep the Post economy running smoothly, so the Guild urges all staffers to file expense reports as quickly as possible. It means you get your money faster and the Post can keep track of its spending more accurately.

And don't forget, everyone is entitled to cash advances, so individual employees need not float large sums for our well-heeled employer. We are interested in hearing from you about how the expense system can be improved at the Post. Please keep your complaints, comments and good ideas coming.