



Iowa Newspaper Association Bulletin

www.INAnews.com

Anxiety about secrecy led us to go to court

RANDY EVANS

IOWA FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COUNCIL

In 2017, the Iowa Legislature responded to concerns from Gov. Terry Branstad and amended Iowa law to ensure when government employees are forced out of their jobs the reasons must be made public and not shrouded in secrecy.

The goal was commendable. The governor was right. People deserve to be told “why.” It is called public accountability.

Since then, the transparency promised six years ago has diminished.

Since then, government employers have been more interested in avoiding embarrassment or uncomfortable questions.

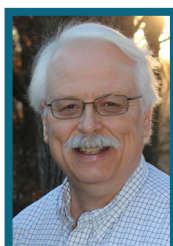
Since then, government has been less interested in informing the people of Iowa in whose name government exists and operates.

Last week, the nonprofit organization I lead stepped up to try to stem this tide of secrecy-over-transparency. The Iowa Freedom of Information Council and I sued the Centerville school board, challenging the legality of its closed meeting in February that ended a two-month suspension of the Centerville High School guidance counselor and baseball coach.

Ryan Hodges was placed on leave around Dec. 1 last year following allegations of inappropriate behavior with a minor. School officials refused in December and again in February to share with the public the nature of Hodges’ actions. They refused to say whether the investigation found the allegations to be true or whether the investigation found no factual basis for the accusations.

School officials claimed they were not required to make public any of those details because Hodges submitted what they insisted was a voluntary resignation.

Our interest in the Centerville case is not motivated by some prurient interest in the details of what he is accused of engaging in with more than



Randy Evans

just one female student. Our concerns come from a belief residents of the Centerville district, the people who pay the taxes and sent their kids and grandkids to the schools there, deserve to know what went on at Centerville High School.

They deserve to know how their elected school board and the district’s administrators responded to the allegations brought to their attention by female students during the two-month investigation. The public deserves to know what outside investigators learned about allegations of predatory behavior by Hodges.

They deserve to know why, after Hodges had been on administrative leave for two months, he was allowed to depart without any “documented reasons and rationale” being made public about the sudden end of his employment, a disclosure the Branstad-era amendment added to the public records law.

They deserve to know why, if the allegations against Hodges were baseless, he was not allowed to return to work with his name cleared. They deserve to know why, if the allegations against Hodges were true, the school board did not begin the firing process. After all, the taxpayers had been continuing to pay his full salary and provide insurance for the two months he was not allowed to work during the investigation.

And equally important, potential future employers deserve to know what baggage Hodges might bring to a new school district after being accused of violating parental trust — and possibly Iowa law, too.

Such baggage has not always been easily knowable for prospective employers, or the public. Consider the case of Cody LaKose.

He was arrested in March at Regina High School in Iowa City, where he was a teacher. The criminal charges involve allegations, backed up with cellphone text messages, that LaKose groomed and then had an ongoing sexual relationship with an underage female student at Central DeWitt High School in 2017.

LaKose taught there from 2010 until December 2018, when he abruptly resigned in the middle of his contract. He and the Central DeWitt district signed an agreement to resolve “all issues arising out of LaKose’s employment with the district.”

Just as with Ryan Hodges in Centerville, Central DeWitt officials never provided details about LaKose’s

SECRECY - cont. on page 6

CALENDAR of EVENTS

MEETINGS

INA, INF, INA Services
Company Board Meetings
July 21, 2023

WEBINARS

Covering Opioid Lawsuit
Settlements in Your
Community
May 25, 2023

New Business
Development Secrets
June 15, 2023

meeting minutes

Iowa Newspaper Foundation | Convention Program Committee
May 5, 2023



INF Convention Program Committee Meeting Minutes

The Iowa Newspaper Foundation Convention and Program Committee met at 1:00 p.m. via Zoom. Those present were Sara Konrad Baranowski, Cedar Rapids Gazette; Debbie Anselm; Davenport Quad-City Times and Chris Rhoades, Enterprise Publishing. Jana Shepherd, INF was also present. Additional ideas submitted by committee members not present Emily Barske, Des Moines Business Record; Zack Kucharski, Cedar Rapids Gazette and Randy Cauthron, Spencer Daily Reporter.

Items discussed:

A. The committee discussed the following potential session topics.

1. Digital/Technology:
 - a. Effective Newsletter strategies
 - b. ChatGPT- spotting the fake and how to source
2. Editorial
 - a. Handling difficult interviews
 - b. Using data from the web
 - c. Making FOI requests
 - d. Training citizen journalists
 - e. Writing and photo coaching
 - f. ABC's of Modern News and Sports Writing
 - g. ABC's of photography
 - h. Covering Crime

B. The committee discussed the following potential speakers.

- Ken Paulson
- Joy Mayer, Trusting News
- Debie Durham, IEDA
- Jill Geisler, author of Work Happy
- Dave Herrell, Visit Quad Cities
- Dr. Ladrina Wilson, Iman Consulting
- Matt Waite, University of Nebraska
- Jeff Johnson, Iowa State Alumni Association
- Beth Shelton, Girls Scouts of Greater Iowa
- Reynolds Cramer, CEO of Fareway
- Kelly McBride, Poynter

The meeting was adjourned at 2:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jana Shepherd

REMINDER: The Bulletin will be published every other week after Memorial Day.

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WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT

Visit www.onlinemediacampus.com to register today!



How to Report on Addiction

MAY 25 FROM 1-2 P.M.

IN THIS WEBINAR...

Addiction is a complicated disease that affects every community in America. In their work to cover this complex issue, members of the press can inadvertently perpetuate problematic narratives about drug use and addiction that can increase stigma and discrimination towards people with active addiction, in treatment, or in recovery.

In this hour-long training, Reporting on Addiction will help reporters and editors build their knowledge of the science of addiction, its medical definition and how the brain disease works. Then, we take a deeper look at how addiction stigma manifests in news publications, and translate the science into tips for better reporting – from pitch to publication – that you can use today.

ABOUT THE PRESENTERS...

Jonathan JK Stoltman is co-director of Reporting on Addiction and Director of the Opioid Policy Institute. In 2019, he completed his PhD in Lifespan Developmental Psychology from West Virginia University and has worked as a researcher focusing on opioid addiction treatment for the past decade. Jonathan's academic work has appeared in leading journals and at national conferences. Their current work focuses on addiction stigma, the media, and digital approaches to addiction



treatment.

Ashton Marra is the co-director of Reporting on Addiction and the executive editor of its founding partner 100 Days in Appalachia, a 2021 national Edward R. Murrow award-winning nonprofit digital publication. There, she oversees the work of a team of editors, contributors and reporters across Appalachia to create content by Appalachians for Appalachians. Ashton is also a teaching assistant professor in the West Virginia University Reed College of Media, where she teaches news writing, video storytelling and community-focused journalism. She's spent more than a decade working as a professional journalist for both public media and commercial news outlets, on local, statewide and national platforms, including NPR and ABC News.

Covering Opioid Lawsuit Settlements in Your Community

JUNE 15 FROM 1-2 P.M.

IN THIS WEBINAR...

In 2023, one of the biggest stories journalists across the country will be covering is the millions of dollars being distributed from settlements of lawsuits against opioid manufacturers, distributors and pharmacies. These are dollars that city, county, and/or state policymakers will be charged with spending to mitigate the harms of the opioid epidemic in communities big and small. But this story won't come and go. Over the next 18 years, local journalists will be tasked with covering how the money is spent and holding their community leaders accountable for their choices.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER...

Jonathan JK Stoltman is co-director of Reporting on Addiction and Director of the Opioid Policy Institute. In 2019, he completed his PhD in Lifespan Developmental Psychology from West Virginia University and has



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Do you know where your fire extinguishers are?

JOHN FOUST
GREENSBORO, NC

We all want to take care of our advertisers and coworkers. Well, there's no better way to do that than to help them stay safe in the workplace. There are some simple things we can do to accomplish this.

Some years ago, I attended a series of meetings at a large company which had a number of offices in the area. In each of the meetings – whether attended by 10 people or 50 people – someone opened the meeting with a brief safety announcement. Typically, he or she pointed out the fire alarm locations, how to exit the building if the alarm sounded, where to assemble in the parking lot for instructions, etc. Everyone took the information seriously, and it was easy to see that employees were accustomed to starting their meetings that way.

I remember thinking that it was an impressive way to begin any kind of get-together. After all, in a sizable meeting room, most employees may not be as familiar with those details as they would be in their individual work areas. And visitors like me may have never been to that building before. As a result of those brief presentations, everyone felt safer and more confident. I know I did.

THIS LIST CAN BE A GOOD PLACE TO START:

1. Designate a safety officer. This person will open meetings or prepare someone else to open meetings. The officer should check all safety equipment, alarms and door locks, then prepare a standard script to be read before each gathering. Better yet, designate a safety team, perhaps with representatives from several departments. Give them the authority to interrupt any meeting or conversation for any safety reason they see fit.
2. Keep all alarms and sprinklers up-to-date.

3. Post exit diagrams around the building. Clearly mark “you are here.”
4. Place fire extinguishers in appropriate places. Let everyone know their locations. Keep them updated and learn how to use them.
5. Call in the experts. This is too important to handle in casual discussions. Invite police officers and fire department officials to do walk-throughs and make recommendations. In a sad commentary on today's world, ask them to map a plan for what to do if an armed person is in the building.
6. Safety meetings. Safety and inspection requirements inevitably vary from area to area. In addition to the standard meeting announcements mentioned here, it's important to keep these issues top-of-mind with employees. In view of our specialization in advertising, we all know the importance of repetition in the business of marketing communication. Safety messages should be repeated enough for everyone in the building to have them memorized.
7. Make a copy of this list – or find a better one. Offer it to your advertisers, vendors, friends and family members.

The slogan “Safety is Job Number One” applies to every industry, not just those that involve dangerous equipment, technology and materials. And it applies to everyone along the way, from front-line team members to road warriors to the corporate offices.

John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com

Continue supporting public notice

Thank you to all Publishers, General Managers, Editors, and friends of INA for their work—calling, emailing and visiting with Senators during session. Your efforts truly made a significant difference in our successful efforts this year. We encourage you to continue supporting the cause to keep awareness strong.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Be sure to upload your newspaper to <http://newzgroup.com/>
- Your newspaper's website should have a prominent link to Public Notices on your homepage.
- Promote IowaNotices.org with house ads in each of your publications. Visit <https://inanews.com/resources/public-notice-resources/public-notice-ads/> to download.
- Please continue to reach out and build relationships with your Senators and Representatives between now and January 2024. Those conversations provide

the foundation for our ability to connect and communicate with them during session.

PUBLIC NOTICES ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO THE PEOPLE OF IOWA.

Our democracy depends on an informed citizenry and newspapers continue to have a vital role in providing necessary information to the public.

- Public notices depend on an independent third party such as a newspaper. The government cannot be in charge of holding the government accountable.
- The public must be able to verify that the notice was not altered once published.
- Each month, 84% of Iowans read local newspaper in print or digital, and 77% of Iowans read public notices in newspapers. Additionally, the Iowa Newspaper Association manages and maintains a public notice site at www.iowanotices.org at no cost to government or taxpayers.

FREE MEMBER EXCHANGE

▼ HELP WANTED

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR. Make an impact that makes a difference in your own backyard. As the Editorial Director for decorahnews.com, you will craft digital news content that directly benefits neighbors around you in Decorah and Winneshiek county. Ego not required, however creativity and collaboration are a must. Our Editorial Director guides reporting staff, ensures accuracy, clarity, and fact. You'll collaborate with our technology partners to shape digital content that is both beautiful and informative, while also contributing 1-2 locally-reported articles per day. As one of the primary contacts to the community, our Editorial Director is highly respected, valued, and trusted both inside and outside of our organization.

ABOUT YOU

You should apply for our Editorial Director role if you:

- Have a good eye for identifying hard news leads and opportunities in and around Decorah, IA
- Enjoy building and nurturing a strong list of news sources
- Hold leaders accountable by coverage of city, county, and school board actions, conversations, and meetings
- Observe needed improvement in the digital news you consume
- Understand the strength of high school and local college sports; experience is preferred
- Can balance multiple projects with varying deadlines
- Enjoy and understand how web analytics point to actions to deploy for stronger audience engagement
- Craft journalism by supplementing stories with photography and/or videography; skills are a huge plus
- Have 3+ years of experience writing for digital and/or print news publications and/or magazines
- Ideally have experience as a strong reporter or an assistant editor
- 1-2 years of experience directly coaching writers in a distributed-workforce or remote-team environment a plus
- Earned your Bachelor's degree in Journalism, Communications, Marketing or related field
- Have mastered AP style

WHY JOIN decorahnews.com

We're doubling down on local journalism. We're hungry to tell the stories that Decorah and northeast Iowa crave to read. All the good stuff and sometimes the bad stuff, too. We are a talented team telling stories about bluffs, churches, school busses, high school and local college football, pizza places, beer hangouts, beauties of nature, and stories that hold all accountable. We are decorahnews.com.

Sound like fun? Join us and make your impact telling stories in your own backyard. Join the fun. We are hiring our next Editorial Director. Are you ready to learn more?

To apply, please send your resume and cover letter to Lon Haenel at Lonmhaenel@gmail.com.

SENIOR STAFF WRITER. Business Publications Corporation (BPC), an award-winning media and communications company, is seeking a full-time journalist to cover business news in Greater Des Moines for the Business Record, our flagship division. The right candidate will join our experienced staff to lead the Business

Record's coverage of the people, issues and trends affecting the business community as the region continues to grow and transform. This reporter's primary focuses will include real estate, development and local government; the role will also encompass producing a variety of business stories.

The position requires a strong writer who can develop a beat and write in-depth analysis pieces on a variety of business topics for our weekly print edition, website, e-newsletters and specialty magazines. This person must function with a great deal of autonomy, building sources on their beats and managing their story schedules.

This person is also given freedom to generate a majority of their own story ideas. The ideal candidate must also be able to report and write daily business news items quickly and efficiently for our website and be able to keep a daily pulse on the community.

Previous business writing experience is a plus; however, it is not a requirement. The candidate must have a solid foundation in AP style, the principles of journalism and have a desire to represent the Business Record at a large number of community events and network with the community both in person, virtually and via social media. In addition, this person must have comfort leading panel discussions in front of an audience.

Basic photography skills, video production experience and the ability to help our organization move forward in the digital world are major pluses, but not required.

Management experience, project management and editing skills are not required, but the role has the flexibility to be adapted to utilize skills of this nature.

A passion for the Des Moines and Iowa, and a desire to tell the story of our communities is a priority.

Visit <https://recruiting.paylocity.com/Recruiting/Jobs/Details/1287240> to apply. Please include a cover letter with your resume.

▼ FOR SALE

FOR SALE: Successful weekly newspaper operation in northeast Nebraska for sale in the range of \$300,000. We are 22 minutes from Sioux City IA. Call Publisher at 402-755-2643

FOR SALE: Must go by May 1 - either to you or the scrapper. Two ERCM NewsMatic Mako CTP units, each with its own Glunz & Jensen in-line processor. Both used through November 2022, and continually maintained since. Approximately 4,800 ECO LCV 28 x 23.0626 x .008 Southern Litho plates. Plate punch and plate bender. Price: \$9,600 and you haul it all away. Also, Goss Community roll carts and spacers - make an offer. Call the Spencer Daily Reporter at 712-262-6610 or Brad at 641-430-1023.

WANTED: Old Apple Laser Writer printer. Laser Writer 16/600 or Laser Writer Pro, working or parts. Call the Don at the Avoca Journal Herald 402-681-4763.

View and submit ads on the Internet at www.INAnews.com. Students and professionals may also submit their resumés for online viewing.

There is no charge for most of these ads. They are a free service to INA active (newspaper) members only.



Iowa Newspaper Association

Bulletin

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Summer Media Experience for High School Students

The Iowa Newspaper Foundation (INF) is excited to be a part of a program specifically targeting the next generation of Iowa newspaper professionals. The INF has partnered with Media Now and Drake University to offer an in-depth media experience for Iowa high school students.



Media Now at Drake University in Des Moines provides students and advisers the chance to immerse themselves in a three-night, four-day journalism workshop. Participants engage in hands-on projects and showcase them in a campus-wide awards ceremony to cap off the week. *It is an awesome opportunity to deep dive into an area of interest and hone journalism skills. No matter what level students arrive with, they will leave ready to take on the next!*

The camp will be held July 10-13. Registration information can be found at www.medianow.press.

If you know of a high school student with an interest in journalism, please encourage them to apply! The Iowa Newspaper Foundation is offering a limited number of scholarships available to students in need. Please contact Jana Shepherd at jshepherd@inanews.com or 515-422-9051 if you have questions regarding the scholarships.

If your student is looking for the perfect amount of fun mixed in with upskilling your journalism experience, this is it. Field trips and hands-on practice with award-winning professional journalists and advisers are all in one space focused on moving students to the next level.

MEMBER EXCHANGE - cont. from page 5

The name of the newspaper in the ad must be the same as published in the current INA Directory.

If you are trying to help an employee relocate, please send us the ad information on your letterhead, rather than having the employee write us. We will not run ads for persons living in a member's town without first clearing the ad with the publisher.

Please have copy to the INA office no later than noon on Monday. The INA will make the determination of whether an ad qualifies for free or paid publication. If payment for an ad is not enclosed with the ad, the INA will require payment in advance before the ad will be published.

Ads for products or services which could be marketed for a profit may be published for a fee of \$10 per insertion, paid in advance, with a 40-word maximum.

Recruitment (help wanted) ads for positions in states other than Iowa may be published for a fee of \$25 per insertion, with a 100-word maximum.

For more information, contact Cicely Gordon at cgordon@inanews.com.

SECRECY - cont. from page 1

conduct or what those issues were.

Instead, Central DeWitt continued to pay LaKose and provide him with insurance benefits for the remainder of the school year. The district also agreed to provide him with "mutually agreeable letters of reference" he could present to prospective employers.

The Central DeWitt district did not report his sudden resignation, or the background leading to it, to the Iowa teaching licensing board. Having a license in good standing — and the absence of transparency about his departure — allowed LaKose to obtain teaching jobs in the Cedar Rapids schools and then at Regina High School.

The opaqueness about LaKose's departure shows what can occur when secrecy wins out over transparency — and when school officials are more concerned about getting a problem employee out of their district and less concerned about the potential for the person committing misconduct somewhere else in the future.

A footnote to the LaKose case should outrage parents everywhere:

While Central DeWitt Superintendent Dan Peterson insisted he could not say what LaKose did that led to his resignation, after LaKose's arrest in Iowa City Peterson posted the criminal complaint filed against the former employee on the school district's website. That posting included the name of the girl who went to police last year when she was worried LaKose might try to take advantage of students in another district the way he took advantage of her.

It is hard to understand why the superintendent chose to share that detail. But it should not be hard to understand why there is a need for more transparency about resignations that are not strictly voluntary.

Randy Evans, the executive director of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, can be reached at IowaFOICouncil@gmail.com.