



*AI, Social Media and First Amendment:*

## Challenges ahead for FAN

**By Angela Smith, Texas**  
**NFPW FAN Co-Director**

Thanks to the rapidly evolving intersections of artificial intelligence, social media regulation and First Amendment law, the media landscape is experiencing a profound shift, the likes not seen since the rise of the internet.

For media professionals, understanding the dynamics of what is happening is crucial – not just for legal compliance but for reporting accuracy, newsroom operation and the future of public discourse.

The most immediate set of challenges stems from deepfake proliferation and AI-generated content. At a

time when public trust in the media is at a dramatic low, these technologies threaten to further erode the trust in authentic reporting and visual evidence, especially during election cycles, including the upcoming midterms.

Some states already have attempted to enact laws

targeting political deepfakes, but courts have blocked several as overly broad restrictions on speech. Where the legal line is ultimately drawn – between satire and deception, between protected expression and unlawful interference – will determine what

kinds of synthetic media can circulate freely online. For journalists, these decisions will affect workflow regarding

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## First Amendment maintains democracy

To protect individual rights, the framers of the United States Constitution added 10 amendments three years after the Constitution was ratified. These amendments are collectively named the Bill of Rights.

The First Amendment is the most important in maintaining democratic government:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

The first part reflects the framers' experience with the long history of religious strife in Europe. They realized that

religious discord can be explosive and cause tremendous disruption in politics. It would be doubly so if one religious sect were favored over all others. So, they ensured that federal government cannot interfere in the citizens' practice of their religion.

The freedoms of speech, press, assembly and the right to petition the government and seek redress of grievances proclaim that citizens have the right to call the government to account. Freedom of speech and press allows citizens to communicate their ideas verbally and in writing, while freedom of assembly lets them publicly express a common interest.

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## President's Message: *First Amendment struggles*

By Debbie Miller  
NFPW President

Happy New Year, everyone!

This particular president's message in our First Amendment-focused AGENDA comes to you from two perspectives.

I'm grateful to be part of an organization championing the First Amendment, and I encourage you to read the excellent related content in this issue. Thank you, Cathy, for your tireless efforts in putting it all together.

The other perspective I bring to this message is that of a journalism educator and student media adviser whose email inbox is frequently filled with notes about other advisers and their student journalists facing increased challenges as they exercise their First Amendment rights.

Here's a quick example: In the last quarter of 2025, an adviser in Indiana was fired after his students pushed back on administrative directives to restrict content in their student newspaper (a homecoming edition without news stories, for example). On the same day in October that Jim Rodenbush was let go, he had already picked up a university car to drive to a national conference (MediaFest 2025) in Washington, D.C. He made it to the conference, as did some of his students. Attendees had the opportunity to lend their support and to cheer wildly for his award-winning students. Unfortunately, his experience and that of his students are not unique in the student media community.

University of Central Oklahoma administrators cited

budget cuts as the reason for eliminating the print edition of The Vista. However, the administrators then refused to accept private donations to cover the costs, according to the Student Press Law Center. Students at that university started their own independent newspaper. In Alabama, two student magazines were halted by their university in December because of the school's interpretation of federal anti-diversity guidelines. A fundraising campaign of which NFPW's own Meredith Cummings was a significant part netted \$25,000 in three days to support Alice and Nineteen Fifty-Six student journalists.

I'm giving a snapshot of these situations, but if you're reading this, please know that the First Amendment struggle is real. If you have a high school or college student media adviser in your circle of friends or acquaintances, please offer a kind word. Better yet, ask how you can support student journalism in your community.

And here's a final note for the new year: Thank you for the trust you have placed in me and the rest of the board. We meet monthly via Zoom to conduct the business of the organization, and we encourage you to let us know what's on your mind. We want our organization to thrive, but it takes all of us to make that happen.

Two things you can do to support our organization this month are to renew your membership for 2026 (if the final days of 2025 proved overwhelming) and to enter our professional contest. Remember, the early deadline (Jan. 21) is coming up soon. The contest not only gives our members a chance to shine; it also helps support NFPW's operations. To be somewhat cliché, it's a win-win.

Write on, everyone!

### *The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.**

# Challenges ahead . . .

*(Continued from page 1)*

verification, fact-checking resources and standards regarding evidence used in reporting stories — especially sensitive ones.

A second major issue centers on a 1996 law, Section 230, which shields online platforms from liability for most third-party content posted by their users and also protects them from liability for removing content they consider objectionable. As lawmakers consider limiting Section 230 protections for generative AI, courts may soon rule that platforms or publishers using AI tools can be held legally responsible for material produced by algorithms.

This has major implications for newsrooms that use AI for drafting stories, headlines, summaries, or social distribution. If AI-generated text or visuals are treated as “publisher speech,” editors will face new legal exposures in areas such as defamation, misinformation, and copyright. Media organizations may need to develop new editorial standards related to the use and disclosure of AI tools.

A third battleground involves government pressure on social platforms to curb misinformation. Recent lawsuits claim that federal agencies’ efforts to curb or remove false or harmful content amount to unconstitutional censorship. If the Supreme Court narrows the government’s ability to communicate with platforms, this will influence the environment in which journalists and media professionals operate to gather information. If platforms are legally

constrained from responding to government warnings, public health crises, election integrity, and national security threats could become more difficult to address. This will, in turn, shape how newsrooms source, verify, and place in proper context fast-moving online narratives.

Of equal consequence is the fate of state “platform neutrality” laws that try to restrict how social media sites moderate or curate content. Such laws challenge platforms’ editorial discretion — discretion that parallels the rights long held by news organizations themselves. If states can dictate what content platforms carry or suppress, that principle will likely lead to further debate regarding what information people can see and which apps or services, e.g., search engines, can be accessed by users.

Finally, the surge in AI-driven bots and synthetic accounts will blur the boundary between audience and machine. Journalists will increasingly interact with automated sources, fabricated personas, and coordinated influence campaigns. Transparency rules requiring bots to identify themselves could help, but they also raise First Amendment questions about compelled speech.

For those in the media sector, these fights collectively point toward a future where verification becomes harder, legal risk is higher, platform dynamics become more volatile, and an increasingly fragile public trust deteriorates even further. Meanwhile, synthetic and deepfake content will continue to grow exponentially.

The future is here, whether we like it or not.

# Maintaining democracy . . .

*(Continued from page 1)*

The right to petition allows citizens to point out to the government where it did not follow the law and to seek changes, as well as damages for such missteps.

Of course, there are limits to these freedoms. One may not force the tenets of his or her religion on those who do not observe those beliefs. Harmful speech, such as yelling “fire” in a crowded room, is not protected, nor is a written lie that causes harm. As well, gatherings must be peaceful. Destruction of the property of others is not

protected by the First Amendment.

“Liberty is to faction [political parties or movements] what air is to fire, a nutriment without which it instantly expires,” said James Madison, the principal framer of the Constitution.

“But it could not be less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, because it nourishes faction, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency.”

# FOIA signed into law by President Johnson 60 years ago

By Marsha Shuler, Louisiana  
NFPW FAN Co-Director

It took a lot of perseverance, but former California congressman John Moss finally won passage of the federal Freedom of Information Act in 1966. Six congressional sessions over some 12 years later, FOIA became the law of the land. President Lyndon Johnson signed the act into law on Independence Day 60 years ago this year.

Today, the United States and all 50 states have laws that guarantee public access to government records. The laws are intended to provide transparency in the operations of government and are important to keep its agencies and officials accountable to the public.

As Moss did back then, supporters of public records laws continue to persevere in fighting the roadblocks to access that keep cropping up — delays in filling public records requests, excessive fees charged, denials that can lead to expensive litigation. Recently, an independent journalist in Michigan was told by Grand Blanc Township it would cost her \$100,000 to fill her public records request involving the firing and rehiring of a local fire chief. She planned to appeal.

Then, there are the constant, and often successful, attempts to exempt more and more from public view.

In Louisiana, for instance, new laws broaden the exemption for records containing "advisory opinions, recommendations and deliberations that are part of the policy making process," and to allow local government to shield records related to business or economic development negotiations for up to two years.

Another new law restricts public records requests to Louisiana residents and requires proof of residency via a government-issued ID.

The latest attacks on FOIA have come as government officials have decided that the public doesn't need access to information widely available via websites.

As a result of executive orders issued by President Donald Trump, the federal government removed some public health data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website so it could be revamped to limit the collection and sharing of demographic information related to gender, sexual orientation, racial equity and diversity, equity and inclusion. It wasn't an isolated event. Across federal agencies, datasets have been altered,

made harder to access or taken offline. Some would impact public health monitoring, disaster planning and community accountability.

The Washington State Medical Society (WSMS) sued. The resulting settlement required the Department of Health and Human Services to restore more than 100 public health datasets and webpages, including those of the CDC, the National Institute of Health and the Food and Drug Administration.

"This was trusted health information that vanished in a blink of an eye, resources that, among other things, physicians rely on to manage patients' health conditions and overall care," wrote Dr. John Bramhall, WSMS president of the Washington State Medical Society.

On the state level, Louisiana recently enacted a law under which hundreds of officials will be able to sue private citizens, businesses and government entities if, after they are asked, do not remove basic biographical information about them from the Internet. Thirty-eight other states have adopted laws in response to some high-profile attacks on judges and other politicians. But Louisiana's goes much further.

Judges and retired judges were already covered. Now, Louisiana law wraps in current and former statewide elected officials, state legislators, Public Service Commissioners, current and retired district attorneys and investigators, their spouses, children and other dependents living with them.

The information covered includes home addresses, telephone numbers, personal emails, marital records, birth dates, schools, daycare, places of worship, employment location of spouses, children and dependents. Some of the information is already available on public access sites.

First Amendment lawyer Scott Sternberg called it "wildly unconstitutional." He said it infringes on citizens' First Amendment rights and will lead to frivolous lawsuits.

"Effectively, the Louisiana Legislature has decided to criminalize the publication of a church birthday calendar, the mortgage documents required by federal law, birth announcements, engagement party RSVP websites and traffic tickets," he wrote.

The law goes into effect in February.



# X fine is ‘first salvo’ in DSA war against free speech

By Buffy Gilfoil  
Colorado Press Women

The Trump administration, in its early days, dismantled the formalized government censorship of digital communication in full force during the Biden years.



Buffy Gilfoil

But on December 5, 2025, the European Commission fined X \$140 million for not following the transparency rules of the Digital Services Act (DSA). Journalist Matt Taibbi explained how censorship could again gain a foothold in the U.S., while Attorney Jonathan Turley called the fine

the “first salvo” in a war on free speech.

Taibbi was among the Twitter Files journalists who discovered and disclosed what they called the Censorship Industrial Complex. These independent reporters found that U.S. government officials worked with university-based, quasi-governmental organizations to censor information, especially during the Covid lockdowns.

On his second inauguration day, President Trump issued an Executive Order “Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Censorship.”

The following month, Vice President J.D. Vance admonished European officials for restricting free speech. Biden officials were replaced with Trump officials and government-funded organizations that carried out speech restrictions were defunded and depopulated.

Meanwhile, the anti-free speech movement has thrived in Europe.

In a Dec. 6 essay, Taibbi wrote:

— “The number of organizations dedicated to monitoring free speech is far bigger than we initially thought.”

— “Trump’s second term started off on a semi-hopeful note on speech,” but “the Trump administration has since been beset with its own speech controversies...”

— “Germany provides the template for a two-pronged effort.” It involves “a giant complex of organizations” monitoring online speech, as well as “a whole layer of raids and confiscation of people’s computers and things like that. It’s not just losing your X account.”

Taibbi wrote, “The concept of a society where multitudes of idea police descend from different directions into academia, media, social media, publishing and broadcasting may not sound so foreign, since an informal version of the same thing exists in the United States.”

According to Turley, the EU has waged an “aggressive campaign against U.S. companies and figures who refuse to yield to its expansive censorship demands,” but “this is the first fine under the DSA, and the DSA and the EU acknowledged that it will lay the foundation for additional penalties to come to force companies to comply with EU ‘values’ on free speech.”

Turley wrote, “This is just the first salvo in a war some of us have warned is coming. We cannot be passive at this moment.”

X had 60 days to comply with the demands of the European Commission to avoid the fine.

*Buffy Gilfoil, a 45-year member of Colorado Press Women, has worked as a newspaper reporter, magazine editor and publicist for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. She has also taught journalism at the high school and college levels and now publishes a Substack magazine titled “The Curious Watchdog.” It focuses mainly on free speech online.*

Armed with weapons and a search warrant, three Berlin police came in November to the German apartment of American C.J. Hopkins, author of three “The Rise of the New Normal Reich,” and confiscated his computer.

The EU Digital Services Act (DSA) raises significant concerns regarding free speech, as it imposes broad content moderation requirements that could lead to censorship and the suppression of lawful expression. “Distributing and promoting my book in Germany is a crime, at least according to the district prosecutor,” Hopkins explained. *Photo by Konigubu*



# NFPW: Make plans for Sunshine Week

By Marsha Shuler, Louisiana  
NFPW FAN Co-Director

Sunshine Week is just around the corner, and it's time for NFPW, its affiliates and members to participate in this annual event that underscores First Amendment rights.

Sunshine Week is March 15-21, a time designated for celebrating open government, public information and transparency. It is a non-partisan collaboration of groups in journalism, civic education, government and private sectors aimed at shining the light on the public's right-to-know about the operations of their government.

The 2026 observance is more important than ever as the last year has seen attack after attack on the First Amendment and the public's access to information that impacts their everyday lives and ignores the very foundation on which the United States democracy was founded.

The event coincides with the birthday of John Madison who presented the first version of the Bill of Rights to Congress which included the First Amendment as a founding principle of the United States. Madison, who became president, is lauded for promoting freedom of information and government transparency.

Celebration of Sunshine Week began in 2005 with a mission of urging and spreading awareness around open government and the needed push for "sunshine" in government operations. It is no less important than when it was founded.

As former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said, "Sunshine is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman."

NFPW encourages state affiliates and their members to consider participating in "Sunshine Week" whether it be holding a program to shed light on what's going on with public records in your communities, individual members writing op-eds or letters to the editor on the subject, suggesting editorials and news items.

Information is power so access to it provides power to the people to whom government should be accountable.

According to [Sunshineweek.org](http://Sunshineweek.org), "Sunshine Sunday began in Florida in 2002, led by the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors. National Sunshine Week was launched in 2005 by the American Society of Newspaper Editors with the support of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. In 2019, the American Society of News Editors merged with the Associated Press Media Editors to become the News Leaders Association."



*"This year [1986] marks the 20th anniversary of the enactment by the federal government of the Freedom of Information Act [1966]. On President Madison's birthday, it is particularly fitting that we recognize the value of reasonable access to information in our political process."*

- Ronald Reagan,  
President of the United States of America

From The American Presidency Project, Proclamation 5447 — Freedom of Information Day, 1986, "March 16 is the anniversary of the birth of James Madison, our fourth president and one of the principal figures in the Constitutional Convention. Madison eloquently expressed the guarantees in the Bill of Rights, in particular in the freedoms

of religion, speech, and of the press protected by the First Amendment.

"He understood the value of information in a democratic society, as well as the importance of its free and open dissemination. He believed that through the interaction of the government and its citizens, facilitated by a free press and open access to information, the government could be most responsive to the people it serves. Surely the American experience has proved him right."

# First Amendment stories from members

By Jeanne Ferris  
California Press Women

I joined NFPW in December, and in response to an AGENDA submission email, I took the segment below directly from the Society of Professional Journalists' website regarding the current administration's treatment of journalists and news outlets.



Jeanne Ferris

I am an active member of the SPJ's San Diego Chapter. I am an advocate for a free press, children's rights and Indigenous sustainable solutions for protecting fresh water. And I am an active member of the San Diego Press Club, SPJ and the American Asian Journalists Association. In addition, I serve as brand ambassador for the San Diego International Film Festival. For more stories, please visit [www.jeanneferris.com](http://www.jeanneferris.com).

"The First Amendment and Free Press (are) under direct attack which requires a direct confrontation from all media outlets and foundations upholding this right to public scrutiny and accountability from the White House," the SPJ says on its website.

SPJ has issued a formal letter to the White House expressing deep concern over the Administration's new "media offenders" webpage — an official list that publicly targets individual journalists and news outlets for coverage deemed unfavorable.

"This practice raises serious press-freedom concerns, heightens the risk of harassment or harm to reporters and mirrors tactics used by authoritarian governments abroad. It also undermines the respectful, accountable relationship that should exist between the nation's highest office and the free press.

"SPJ urges the Administration to remove the page immediately and restore a more constructive, democratic approach to engaging with the media.

"SPJ also welcomes the opportunity to meet with President Donald Trump or members of his administration to discuss these concerns and reaffirm the essential role of a free press in our democracy. To read the entire SPJ letter to the White House, go to [www.spj.org](http://www.spj.org).

By Meredith Cummings  
Pennsylvania Press Club

I need your help.

Recently, my alma mater, The University of Alabama, shut down two magazines that represent Black students



Meredith Cummings

and women, citing federal anti-DEIA policy instituted by Attorney General Pam Bondi.

Mike Hiestand, the Student Press Law Center's senior legal counsel, said the suspensions appear to be unlawful viewpoint discrimination.

"At a public university, student media are forums for independent student expression and are protected by the First Amendment," his statement read. "The Supreme Court has made clear that viewpoint discrimination is off-limits, and it's difficult to imagine a more straightforward example than a university openly acknowledging it. By shutting down only the magazines that primarily serve women and Black students — while leaving other publications alone — it looks a lot like they are targeting a particular point of view. The DOJ memo the university cites was aimed at race-exclusive programs that deny access to benefits. These magazines do not exclude anyone; they amplify the voices of communities that have historically been marginalized. That is protected expression, not unlawful discrimination."

I'm from Birmingham. I have a love-hate relationship with my home state because of its history of racism and oppression, but that history is now. I moved to the North three years ago to escape that albatross. Now I clearly see how, when a state exercises oppression in politics and policy, it becomes easy to chalk it up to just "Alabama being Alabama."

But I've had enough.

I am helping the Alabama media alumni non-profit MASTHEAD raise \$25,000 to print two magazines in the spring of 2026 by the former staffs of Alice, the women's lifestyle and fashion magazine, and Nineteen Fifty-Six, the Black culture magazine. With this funding,

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# Stories from members . . .

*(Continued from page 7)*

we will be able to print the magazines at the same scale and quality at which they were produced by the University, while also providing funding for student salaries, workspace and necessary equipment.

I need your help to make this happen. This is the moment for us to step up as an NFPW community and model the society we want to see. We must be allies at a moment when so many voices are being stifled because of government and university overreach.

While this particular case is in Alabama, this is an is-

sue for anyone who believes in the First Amendment. If you would like to help, please donate by clicking on the link below. No amount is too small.

<https://givebutter.com/FoLNOA>

*Meredith Cummings, a member of the Pennsylvania Press Club, is the President of the National Society of News Columnists, an award-winning freelance multimedia journalist for various outlets including The New York Times, The Associated Press and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, where she writes book reviews. She loves the Muppets, geeks out about language and words, and has a PEZ dispenser collection. Reach her @merecummings on all social media.*

## NFPW Code of Ethics

As a professional communicator, I recognize my responsibility to the public which has placed its trust and confidence in my work, and will endeavor to do nothing to abuse this obligation.

With truth as my ultimate goal, I will adhere to the highest standards of professional communication, never consciously misleading reader, viewer or listener; and will avoid any compromise of my objectivity or fairness.

Because I believe that professional communicators must be obligated only to the people's right to know, I affirm that freedom of the press is to be guarded as an inalienable right of the citizens of a free society.

I pledge to use this freedom wisely and to uphold the right of communicators to express unpopular opinions as well as the right to agree with the majority.

A poster for the NFPW Communications Contest. At the top, the letters "NFPW" are in a large, blue, serif font, with a quill pen integrated into the letter "P". Below this, the words "COMMUNICATIONS CONTEST" are written in a white, serif font on a dark blue background. A large, stylized quill pen is drawn diagonally across the center of the poster. In the bottom right corner, the text "DEADLINE: Jan. 21, 2026" is written in a white, serif font. Below that, "FULL CONTEST RULES:" is written in a smaller white font, followed by the URL "www.nfpw.org/professional-contest" in a white, sans-serif font.

**NFPW**

**COMMUNICATIONS CONTEST**

**DEADLINE:**  
**Jan. 21, 2026**

**FULL CONTEST RULES:**  
[www.nfpw.org/professional-contest](http://www.nfpw.org/professional-contest)



## Turning lemons into legislation and learning: Member expanding conversation on property safety into action

By Kathi McCarty  
Colorado Press Women

When most people think about threats to a home, they imagine storms, break-ins or structural issues. Few ever imagine meth contamination, or that residue from a single user could linger on surfaces, fabrics, vents and walls with the potential for devastating health impacts to occupants and expensive costs to property owners.

For me, this reality became heartbreakingly personal.

A temporary tenant left my home contaminated with meth toxins, rendering the property unsafe, unlivable and condemned by Colorado state standards for meth contamination. The financial fallout was compounded when I learned that standard homeowners insurance excludes this type of contamination entirely, and renter policies become void when criminal activity by the tenant causes the damage.

The deeper shock came from discovering how widespread and under-reported these cases truly are.

Once you know the truth, you can't unknow it. And you can't stay quiet. Time to bring this dark topic into a bright light!

I transformed my experience into advocacy, founding the Meth Toxins Awareness Alliance to bring practical education, survivor stories and evidence-based resources to real estate-related professionals, policymakers and the general public.

The year 2023 brought legislative enhancements to existing regulations in Colorado with passing of SB23-148, but there is still much more work to be done. In 2024 I also launched Home Zone Magazine, a platform elevating the voices of families affected and the experts working to prevent future harm.

In just a few years, I have taught 50 continuing-education classes in Colorado, helping professionals recognize early warning signs, understand contamination risks and protect clients with knowledge many never receive in traditional training.



Kathi McCarty

Now, I am expanding that mission again.

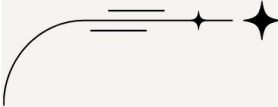
In the first quarter of this year, I will release two new on-demand video course tracks, one for professionals and one for individual property owners helping to make this essential education accessible nationwide. The courses translate my high-impact, CE-eligible curriculum into a flexible digital format designed for all, including organizations, associations, housing authorities, civic groups and anyone responsible for property safety.

Each track includes six foundational modules with practical guidance on prevention, testing, remediation, insurance gaps, health impacts and legal considerations. The goal is to shift the culture of property oversight from reactive cleanup to proactive prevention.

Education is the most powerful tool we have. When property buyers, owners and professionals understand the risks, they can help stop harm before it happens. When property owners understand them, they can protect what matters most."

As an NFPW member since presenting on the President's Panel at the 2025 conference, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to an organization committed to ethical communication, public service and community impact.

I look forward to collaborations that advance environmental health, consumer safety and protection, and safer housing nationwide.



**NFPW Education Fund  
wants to be your charity  
of choice**

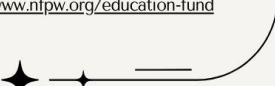


## Remember us

Donating is a great way to honor loved ones and support high school journalists and communicators.

**NFPW**  
NFPW Education Fund, a 501(c3) organization  
140B Purcellville Gateway Drive  
Suite 120  
Purcellville, VA 20132

<https://www.nfpw.org/education-fund>



# NFPW COMMUNICATIONS CONTEST

**DEADLINE:** Jan. 21, 2026

Full Contest Rules:  
[www.nfpw.org/professional-contest](http://www.nfpw.org/professional-contest)



# Jan. 21 deadline for NFPW Communications Contest

## *Director lists tips for filling out forms, requirements for eligibility to enter*

By Helen Sheffield Plotkin, Arkansas  
NFPW Professional Contest Director

Entries are arriving daily for the 2026 NFPW Professional Communications Contest. The deadline clock is ticking, but you still have time to submit your best work from 2025. Submit your entries by the Jan. 21, 2026, early deadline and avoid a \$25 one-time late entry fee on your first entry.

Check out the Categories and Requirements document to pick the best categories for your entries. Be sure your entries meet the requirements for each category and review the "Judges will Consider" paragraph to learn what judges will be looking for in the winning entries.

### Entry Form Tips:

1. The personal information on your entry form is used to contact you about any issues with your entry that can be fixed before judging begins and to notify award winners when the contest ends. If any of your information changes before the national awards presentation in late September, please contact NFPW and your affiliate contest director to update your record.
2. The name used on your entry form is what will be printed on any award certificate you receive.
3. DO NOT put the headlines or titles of your entries in ALL CAPS.

### Membership Requirements

NFPW's communications contest begins at the state level where affiliate contest directors manage the competition. Each affiliate sets its own contest membership requirements. Some require affiliate and national membership to enter their contest. Others accept entries from members and non-members, usually offering lower entry fees to members.

One membership requirement applies across the board: First-place winners at the state level are eligible to compete in the national round ONLY if they are members of NFPW. First-place state winners who are not current NFPW members are given a few days to join NFPW be-

fore the national round of judging begins. **March 25, 2026, is the deadline for state and at-large first-place winners and their co-entrants to join NFPW** if they wish to compete in the national contest.

**Reminder:** NFPW's membership year runs from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. If you joined NFPW in March 2025, your membership expired on Dec. 31, 2025, and your first-place state-level entries will not be eligible for the national contest unless you renew by March 25, 2026.

### Involve Young Communicators

The NFPW Education Fund sponsors a highly competitive High School Communications Contest and the Professional Communications Contest includes a section of Collegiate/Education categories. Please encourage young writers, editors, photographers and other students interested in expanding their communications skills to enter these contests to receive recognition for their outstanding work and feedback from our expert judges.

### About the Professional Contest

Work must be published between Jan. 1, 2025 and Dec. 31, 2025.

Submit your entries before the **early deadline** at noon (in your time zone) on Jan. 21, 2026, and save yourself a one-time \$25 late processing fee. **Book entries** are due at noon on Feb. 4. **Final deadline** for all non-book contest entries is noon on Feb. 18.

### About the High School Contest

Student work published between Feb. 15, 2025 and Feb. 14, 2026 is eligible for entry. The High School Communications Contest **deadline** is noon on Feb. 18.

### Questions?

Please direct questions to your affiliate contest director or NFPW Professional Contest Director Helen S. Plotkin at [professionalcontest@nfpw.org](mailto:professionalcontest@nfpw.org) or NFPW High School Contest Director Teri Ehresman at [highschoolcontest@nfpw.org](mailto:highschoolcontest@nfpw.org).

For more information about NFPW's communications contests go to [www.nfpw.org](http://www.nfpw.org) and pull down from "Contests" in the top navigation bar to select the Professional or the High School contest page.



# Time is now to begin working on COA nominations

Dear NFPW affiliate presidents and state COA directors,

I'm honored to again be this year's chairperson for NFPW's Communicator of Achievement (COA) award, and I'm giving you important information for your 2026 COA nomination.

As you know, the Communicator of Achievement award is the highest honor bestowed by NFPW upon those members who have distinguished themselves within and beyond their field. The recipient, chosen from nominees selected by state affiliates from around the country, is recognized for exceptional achievement in the communications field, as well as service to NFPW and to the community.

The COA Award winner and the runner-up will be announced at the Communicator of Achievement Award Banquet during NFPW's annual conference, scheduled for September 24-26 at the Turf Valley Resort in Ellicott City, Maryland. Each nominee is featured in NFPW's AGENDA newsletter prior to the conference and spotlighted at the awards banquet.

**Nominations are open! National COA entries are due on or before Monday, April 13, 2026. Be sure to name your state COA in time to give your nominee**

**lead time to complete and send the entry form and nomination packet.**

Visit [www.nfpw.org/coa](http://www.nfpw.org/coa) [[nfpw.org](http://nfpw.org)] to find the complete rules for submitting a nomination (including an explanation of judging criteria), the format and content of the nomination packet for your affiliate COA, and submission and fee information. (If something is not yet updated, it will be shortly!) If you worked on a nomination last year, you'll see everything is essentially the same.

**Again, the deadline for nominations is April 13, 2026.** (Following last year's change, I made sure the COA deadline is a few weeks later than the deadline for the national communications contest, while still working around Easter and the challenge of getting everything judged once schools are out.)

Don't miss this opportunity to recognize one of your accomplished affiliate members in this special way, and make sure your affiliate is represented at the banquet!

The COA page should have all the information you and your state COA will need for the national nomination – but of course, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [kstensrud@bell.bank](mailto:kstensrud@bell.bank).

I look forward to seeing your state's nomination for the NFPW COA!

**Coming sooner than you think.  
Start planning now for NFPW 2026 Conference  
in Maryland**





# *APW member retires from influential career in agriculture*

**By Angie Faller**  
**Arkansas Press Women**

Arkansas Press Women is proud to congratulate longtime member and former president Mary Hightower on her retirement from the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, where she has served with distinction as chief communications officer.

Hightower officially retired Jan. 2, marking the culmination of an influential career that shaped agricultural communications in Arkansas for nearly three decades.

Hightower joined Arkansas Press Women in 1999 and quickly became a cornerstone of the organization. She served two terms as APW president from 2009 to 2013, guiding the group through a key digital transition of its annual communications contest, an innovation that became the model for NFPW. She also served as APW's communications contest manager from 2012 to 2015, providing leadership that strengthened the organization's statewide impact.

In 2023, APW recognized Hightower as the state's Communicator of Achievement award winner, the organization's highest honor.

Through her work at the Division of Agriculture, she elevated agriculture as an essential part of Arkansas life by delivering clear, research-based information to the public. Under her leadership, the division's news and outreach capabilities expanded significantly, giving Arkansans access to timely stories, expert insights, and meaningful coverage of agricultural issues.



**Dr. Deacue Fields (left), vice president for agriculture, presents Mary Hightower, chief communications officer, with an award commemorating her retirement. Photo courtesy of the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture**

"Mary's dedication to excellence has shaped not only the Division of Agriculture but also countless communicators across our state," APW President Angie Faller said. "She leads with integrity, generosity, and an unwavering commitment to good journalism. Arkansas Press Women is deeply grateful for her service, her mentorship, and her lasting contributions to our profession. We congratulate her on a remarkable career and wish her the very best in retirement."

Hightower's career in communications began long before her tenure at the Division of Agriculture. She joined the Cooperative Extension Service in 1996 after nine years with the Associated Press, primarily in Little Rock. Her career later took her

to Boca Raton, Florida, where she rose from account supervisor to vice president of strategy at a public relations firm. She returned to Arkansas in 2007 to continue her work with the Cooperative Extension Service, eventually becoming director of communications services for the Division of Agriculture in 2014 and chief communications officer in 2019.

Throughout her career, Hightower has been known not only for her expertise but also for her generous mentorship. Former interns and colleagues credit her with shaping their professional paths and setting a standard of excellence. Her leadership, mentorship and dedication to public service will continue to influence the field for years to come.

**Send AGENDA submissions to [cathykoon1952@gmail.com](mailto:cathykoon1952@gmail.com)**

**The next issue comes out in early April.**

**Deadline for content is March 10.**

# Member inspires international action for women in arts

## Story by FF2 Media

In June 2002, a Chicago-based writer named Jan Lisa Huttner became enraged by an article she was reading in



Jan Lisa Huttner

The New York Times.

Jan had never heard of the “Celluloid Ceiling” before, but she immediately realized the devastating impact the underrepresentation of women in the film industry had, not just on women filmmakers, but on women in audiences everywhere.

So, she did something she had never done before; she wrote a letter to the editor of The Times.

When The Times published it, a movement began which is now known as International SWANs (iSWANs).

iSWANs is dedicated to empowering women artists. This year we are celebrating our 21st Birthday. Learn how SWAN as the acronym for “Support Women Artists Now” came to be.

Jan, who joined NFPW last year as a member of Media Network Idaho, reached out to her friends in the American Association of University Women (AAUW-Illinois) and the response was immediate. Two years later, AAUW-Illinois announced the birth of its new WITASWAN project (Women in the Audience Supporting Women Artist Now). Jan, as the newly appointed director of College & University Relations, spent the next two years traveling from campus to campus in Illinois, spreading the word.

With Marla Kim Bensiger (president of AAUW-Illinois) and Linda Henning-Cohen (program vice president) providing the funding, Jan’s advocacy took root. She encouraged people to think of art as a dyadic relationship: women in the audience need women to create works of art that speak to their experience as women, and women artists need women in the audience to show up, support and amplify their work. Jan encouraged women to think of WITASWAN as the vehicle for a win/win relationship.

In 2007, the AAUW-Illinois Board invited Martha Richards (executive director of WomenArts) to do a joint program with Jan. Together, Jan and Martha began to picture something grand: a global celebration of women artists. Their dream became a reality in 2008, with the

launch of the first International SWAN Day.

Under Martha’s leadership, thousands of SWAN Day events were held in 36 different countries from 2008 to 2020, including film screenings, gallery crawls, music concerts and panel discussions. Each gathering helped push the world a little closer to gender equality in the arts.

In 2012, Jan relocated to Brooklyn and launched a new blog called FF2 Media ([www.ff2media.com](http://www.ff2media.com)). She created a team of women (mostly students and recent college graduates), dedicated to reviewing every film directed and/or written by women that opened in Manhattan, week after week after week. Their commitment ensured women filmmakers were seen, heard, and remembered. Then came March 2020.

COVID brought the art world to a halt. Women artists faced even greater challenges than ever before, but Jan and the FF2 Media team didn’t retreat, they evolved. FF2 Media expanded to embrace all expressions of women’s artistic endeavors in five (often overlapping) categories: Applied Arts, Cinema Arts, Literary Arts, Performing Arts, and Visual Arts.

Virtual events sprang up: a 50th anniversary tribute to Lady Sings the Blues, an International Women’s Day Q&A for The Power of the Dog, a Zoom tour of NYC painter L.C. Armstrong’s studio, a conversation with Canadian folk group Germaine and even a celebration of Queen Anne Boleyn’s legacy. Meanwhile, Martha retired, stepping back from her role as executive director of WomenArts, and Jan moved back into a leadership role.

As the world reopened, in-person events returned. In 2023, the 15th Annual NYC SWAN Day returned to the stage with short films and a Q&A featuring Academy Award-nominated actress Estelle Parsons.

In 2024, SWAN Day marked its Sweet 16 by honoring the legacy of painter Margaret Keane, best known for her haunting “Big Eyes” portraits.

And in 2025, the 17th annual celebration honored Demi Moore for her transformative role in Coralie Fargeat’s 2024 film The Substance.

What began as an audacious letter became an international movement championing one truth: when women in the audience support women artists, everyone benefits.

## Affiliate and Member News . . .



Attendees participate in a news literacy course to learn how to spot false information and how to identify good journalistic practices. Photo courtesy of Olivia McMurrey.

### Alabama Media Professionals By Olivia McMurrey News Literacy Chair

AMP's News Literacy Committee led an interactive presentation for about 20 older adults in October through the Greater Birmingham Chapter of the University of Alabama's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI).

"Your presentation today for OLLI was all we could have wanted and more!" Nancy Ekberg, an OLLI program coordinator, wrote in an email to the committee following the presentation. "You gave us so much valuable information. We desperately need tools to travel through the morass of material that confronts us daily. Thank you for providing the guides we need."

The committee taught one of four classes that were part of the OLLI course, "The Assault on Information: Examining Journalism, Education, News Literacy and Legal Implications."

During the news literacy class, participants practiced verifying the

accuracy of content as well as identifying standards-based journalism and misinformation. They also watched demonstrations of how AI platforms can be used to generate fake photos and videos based on real ones. The class even tried this out when they took a photo of the students, uploaded it to an AI platform and asked it to create a video in which the participants stood up and started dancing.

### New Mexico Press Women

Ruth E. Thaler-Carter is the new COA director for NMPW.

She recently published an article for the Upstate (New York) Gardeners' Journal, about becoming a gardener as a result of her recent move to New Mexico (<https://585mag.com/magazines/a-gardener-is-born-and-blossoms/?site=upstate-gardeners-journal>).

In December, she published a post, *Becoming My Cat*, for the Cat Writers' Association blog (<https://catwriters.com/the-benefits-of-becoming-my-cat/>), did her first-ever

reading of a work in progress, about the U.S. Army program to provide medical education, for the South-West Writers and presented a session about freelancing for the same group.

### Pennsylvania Press Club

R. Thomas Berner marked 2025 with two retirements. He stepped down as PPC vice president, and he retired as associate editor of State College Magazine for which he will freelance as a writer and photographer.

Berner, who helps manage the affiliate's high school contest that drew more than 200 entries in 2025, also remains active as a photographer in the Farmland Preservation Artists of Central Pennsylvania.

PPC Vice President Stephanie Longo traveled in late October to Manchester, United Kingdom, after accepting an invitation to make a presentation at the International Place Branding Association. Using information included in her doctoral dissertation, Longo focused on defining a new type of place consumer, focusing on ancestral travelers. She is currently an assistant professor of corporate communication at Penn State Scranton.

Lini S. Kadaba's debut novel, *Leftovers After Life*, is due out in 2026 from Blydyn Square Books in Kenilworth, New Jersey. The literary fiction story is about middle-aged Neena confronting the fractured bond with her mother. When her mother utters her final, shocking

*(Continued on page 16)*



## Affiliate and Member News . . .

*(Continued from page 15)*

word before dying, Neena is left reeling. Now, faced with the daunting task of cleaning out her parents' Philadelphia-area condo, Neena begins to sift through boxes of belongings, each item stirring memories and long-buried tensions. She is forced to face the past — and a family secret — and the ways history repeats itself.

Feel free to check out this PPC member's author website, [www.LiniSKadaba.com](http://www.LiniSKadaba.com) or follow her at @LiniSKadaba on X.



**Marsha Shuler, center, receives a plaque from Jay Dardenne, Louisiana commissioner of Administration, and Madelyn Lamb, left, Shuler's sister and an NFPW member. Photo courtesy of Marsha Shuler.**

### Louisiana Press Women

Former NFPW president Marsha Shuler has been inducted into the Louisiana Political Hall of Fame in recognition of her decades of reporting on state government and politics.

The Hall of Fame said her reporting "earned her a reputation for insight and dedication."

Shuler served as president of the National Federation of Press Women during a 2007-09 term.

Shuler spent most of her career in the State Capitol bureau of The Advocate in Baton Rouge. She covered the administrations of seven Louisiana governors as well as legislative sessions dating back to the mid-1970s. Her beats included state departments and agencies ranging from health care to ethics, social services, the state budget and corrections.

After leaving The Advocate, Shuler became policy manager for Louisiana's Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne.

She started her career at The Shreveport Times where she worked as an intern while attending Centenary College. She was editor of the campus newspaper - The Conglomerate. She went to work full-time at the newspaper upon graduation. Before leaving Shreveport for the job in Baton Rouge she also taught a class in mass communications at her alma mater.

With NFPW, she helped found its First Amendment Network which keeps members abreast of what's happening at the federal and state levels on press freedom issues, including public records and open meetings.

### Arkansas Press Women

#### By Josie Lenora

Little Rock Public Radio is wrapping up the first chapter of a big investigative project.

Two Little Rock Public Radio reporters, Josie Lenora and Maggie Ryan, are working on an anthology news podcast for the station. This

year, Lenora received the first APW mini-grant, which is helping fund the show.

The podcast is called Track One. The first season is about libraries, while the second is a deep dive into Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, though they want to keep the exact details under wraps. Lenora is the host, lead writer and showrunner on Track One, while Ryan serves as her executive producer and fact-checker. When she got the grant, Lenora used the money to pay Ryan.

"You can't really fact check your own work," Lenora said. "So, Maggie was doing a lot of free labor for me. Her contributions are brilliant, and she's spent hours making sure each word is true. I am so happy I could pay her."

Lenora is the politics and government reporter at LRPR, while Ryan is the All Things Considered host. Both women attended Hendrix College, but not at the same time. Lenora found Ryan after combing through names of graduating Hendrix students with journalism experience.

"That is not a decision I will ever regret," Lenora said. "She's a public media natural."

Lenora has wanted to make a podcast for the station since she started as an intern and wanted to make narrative radio since she first heard *This American Life*, as a child. The premise of Track One echoes the format of her favorite podcasts: Bear Brook from NHPR, Slate's *Slow Burn*, the New Yorker's *In The Dark* and WBUR's *Motive*. These are shows

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# Affiliate and Member News . . .

*(Continued from page 16)*

with in-depth reporting, but also make for a good listening experience.

The best long-form podcasts take months if not years to make. Lenora researches, writes and edits the final product, while Ryan checks for accuracy and gives feedback and edits. Every sentence and paragraph in the final product comes after careful kneading of both the audio and script.

Season One should be finished soon, while Season Two is in the deep research phase. Production on Season One has slowed because the story hasn't fully wrapped. Lenora is waiting for an event to happen, before she can stamp her approval on the final episode.

In the meantime, Lenora and Ryan are excited to eventually share the investigative project with the public, and grateful to the Little Rock Public Radio team for their support.

## *A new way to build future of local news*

**Colorado Press Women**  
**By Laura Frank**

Across Colorado, an experiment is underway. It's called MATCH Lab — Media, Academia and Talent Collaborating to Help — and it's reimagining how local journalism can not only survive, but thrive.

MATCH Lab is a project of the Colorado News Collaborative (COLab), a nonprofit that unites nearly 200 news outlets statewide to strengthen local journalism through

shared resources, collaborative reporting and innovation.

MATCH Lab brings together three powerful forces: local newsrooms, college students and professors, and certified business mentors from SCORE. Together, they form teams that take on the real-world challenges news outlets face — from rebuilding advertising systems and launching social media strategies to creating new tools for community engagement.

For the newsrooms, it's a way to get critical help they otherwise couldn't afford. For the students, it's a way to gain hands-on experience solving problems that matter. And for mentors and educators, it's a chance to guide the next generation while helping sustain a vital public service.

In its first pilots at the University of Denver, MATCH Lab has already shown what's possible. One team helped a group of ethnic-media publishers reopen dormant advertising relationships, opening the door to new revenue that will support more community stories. Another helped a local news outlet streamline its social media process — cutting post time by 90 percent, reaching younger readers and building a new revenue stream.

Behind all of this is a simple belief: when communities, educators and journalists work together, everyone benefits. MATCH Lab is making that belief real by building lasting relationships between Colorado colleges and local news outlets — con-

nections that can continue long after a single academic term ends.

As someone who has spent my career telling stories that hold power to account and give voice to everyday Coloradans, I know how hard it has become for local journalists to do their jobs. MATCH Lab is about giving them something too often missing in today's news landscape: capacity, creativity and community.

It's still early, but the promise is clear — a new model for strengthening local news from the ground up, one collaboration at a time.

*Laura Frank is the Wolzien Visiting Professor of the Practice at the University of Denver and executive director of the Colorado News Collaborative (COLab), which works with nearly 200 news outlets statewide. A Denver native and longtime investigative journalist, she co-founded the Institute for Nonprofit News, led the first merger between a nonprofit news outlet and public media network, and has been recognized nationally for her work to strengthen local news. She is a state-only member of Colorado Press Women.*

## **New Mexico Press Women**

Nominations are open for 2026 NMPW Communicator of Achievement.

Members and colleagues of New Mexico Press Women (NMPW) are invited to nominate members for the 2026 Communicator of Achievement (COA) award, to be presented at the MPW conference May 1–2, 2026.

Criteria for selection:

Nominees must be living members, in good standing for at least

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# Affiliate and Member News . . .

(Continued from page 17)

two years in the NMPW affiliate and the National Federation of Press Women (NFPW). Nominees are graded as follows:

**Professional achievement: 50%** — high professional qualifications and achievements in their areas of communications.

**Community service: 20%** — have made some impact on the world beyond their profession — some contribution to humanity.

**NFPW service: 15%** — have been active in the national organization, such as NFPW volunteering, giving presentations at NFPW conferences, or other activities deemed by the judges to have been of service to NFPW.

**State affiliate service: 15%** — have made a definite and important contribution to NMPW.

Members may self-nominate. Nominators will receive a packet to complete for consideration. Judges are from outside New Mexico to ensure impartiality.

There will be one recipient. Previous nominees may be nominated

again, as long as not a national COA winner.

Deadline: February 15, 2026

For a nomination packet or more information, contact Ruth E. Thaler-Carter, 2026 NMPW COA Director, at [www.Ruth@writerruth.com](mailto:www.Ruth@writerruth.com).

## Forwarded by NFPW Headquarters Lisa Volz, Executive Director

I hope you're well. I'm reaching out on behalf of the 2026 World Press Photo Contest, which is now open for entries with a winning prize of \$11,650, and this year the organization is actively encouraging more U.S. photojournalists to participate. As one of the most respected journalistic communities representing women, your society's support in spreading the word to your photography members could make a meaningful difference.

The contest is *free to enter*, open to all professional photojournalists and documentary photographers, and submissions are accepted until Jan. 17. Despite the extraordinary depth of talent in the U.S., American photographers have historically been underrepresented in the contest's

final selections, something the organization hopes to change by ensuring more voices and stories from this region are seen.

World Press Photo remains one of the most influential platforms for global visual journalism. Beyond recognition, participating photographers gain:

- Inclusion in an exhibition that travels to 60+ locations worldwide
- Publication on World Press Photo's platforms reaching 2+ million followers
- A feature in the annual World Press Photo Yearbook (published by HENI)
- Cash prizes, including €1,000 (US\$1,164) for category winners and €10,000 (US\$11,650) for Photo of the Year
- FUJIFILM GFX cameras and lenses for the top winners

An invitation to the winners' event in Amsterdam

Regional winners will be announced in April and global winners in April 2026.

To enter, go to:

<https://www.worldpressphoto.org/contest/>

**News articles and briefs about NFPW affiliates and members should be emailed to AGENDA Editor Cathy Koon at [cathykoon1952@gmail.com](mailto:cathykoon1952@gmail.com).**

**Photos are always welcome.**

**Be sure to include your name, affiliate and length of membership with your stories and photographs.**

**Obituaries should be forwarded to**

**Amy Geiszler-Jones at [algj64@sbcglobal.net](mailto:algj64@sbcglobal.net)**

## *In Remembrance . . .*

### **Francine Pappadis Friedman Illinois**

Francine Pappadis Friedman died Dec. 12, 2025.

For more than two decades, she served as president of Francine Friedman Associates, LLC, a full-service fundraising and communications consulting firm dedicated to strengthening nonprofit organizations.



Through her counsel, she guided hospitals, museums, social service agencies, arts institutions, educational and religious organizations — more than 50 clients in all — helping them grow through strategic planning, board and staff development, feasibility studies, annual campaigns, and special events.

Her communications expertise shaped compelling direct mail appeals, annual reports, newsletters, brochures, case statements, press releases, and speeches for CEOs, media personalities and community leaders.

Francine's career spanned 35 years in development and communications, including 25 years as Chief Development Officer for four nonprofit organizations. Her work was marked by creativity, rigor and a deep commitment to advancing missions that served communities.

Francine was a gifted writer and teacher. A former English and journalism instructor, she published fiction and nonfiction in outlets such as Story Quarterly and Greek Circle.

She contributed essays, reviews, and blog posts — including as a guest blogger for the American Writers Museum — and brought her keen eye to theater criticism.

Her memoir, *MATCHDOTBOMB: A Midlife Journey through Internet Dating*, earned two first-place awards for nonfiction in 2008 from the Illinois Women's Press Association and NFPW.

Francine's legacy lives on in the nonprofits she strengthened, the words she wrote, and the countless lives she touched with her wisdom, humor, and generosity.

### **Barbara Batie Nebraska**

Barbara Jo Bierman Batie died at home with family at her side on her favorite holiday, Dec. 25, 2025.

She was born Sept. 9, 1958, at Norfolk, Nebraska. She was raised on a small crop and dairy farm outside Battle Creek, Nebraska.



As a child she was active in Madison County 4-H, cooking, sewing, showing her dairy cows and competing in 4-H demonstrations and song contests.

After graduating high school in 1976, she attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in Home Economics and Journalism. While a student, she served as the Nebraska Dairy Princess for one year and was a Homecoming candidate in 1978.

In 1980 she became a representative from the United States to

West Germany for the International Farm Youth Exchange, now called IFYE, for six months staying on seven farms across West Germany.

Upon returning to Nebraska, her first job was at the Tri-City Tribune where she met her future husband at her first interview, although they didn't date for several years. During her career as a journalist, she wrote articles and a personal column for many newspapers and magazines, including the Tri-City Tribune, Lexington Clipper-Herald, Cozad Local, Norfolk Daily News, North Platte Telegraph, Scottsbluff Star Herald and the Midwest Messenger. She also wrote and prepared the presentations for the Lexington and the Cozad Chambers of Commerce Farm Families of the Year for many years.

She and her husband Don lived and farmed on his family's farm north of Lexington until her death. She was active in Trinity Lutheran Church of Lexington, serving in many roles in the church and LWML both locally and districtwide.

Barb was also heavily involved in many organizations in Lexington and across the United States, Lexington Business and Professional Women, Nebraska Press Women, NFPW, Dawson County and Nebraska Farm Bureau, Nebraska IFYE Alumni, Nebraska Environmental Quality Council, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Women's Leadership Network, Nebraska Council of Alumni Ambassadors, Nebraska Ag Builders, Nebraska Agricultural Hall of Fame, IFYE Association of the USA and Nebraska Sesquicentennial Commission to name a few.





Just a thought . . .

## By Cathy Koon, Idaho AGENDA Editor

Journalists are no strangers to stress. Ours is one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, and now we face the distrust of a population that once held us in esteem.

Our numbers are dwindling, and we have had to rethink our motives and our methods.

But our guiding star remains intact, despite the many attacks against it. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution defines our purpose and our path forward.

Whether you are a reporter, a public relations specialist, a freelance writer or an online blogger, vlogger or show host, as a member of NFPW, you have pledged to uphold and defend the ideals of free speech and a free press. How do you do that in this era of armchair experts who think their cellphones somehow give them authority or license to post anything about anyone and call it news?

We stand up. We speak out. We call out the liars and the purveyors of misinformation. We start in our personal lives by being truthful and unafraid to speak out. We start small and build momentum. We join with others to share the truth.

We lead by example. We remind people that free speech isn't just a right guaranteed by a 250-year-old document. It is our responsibility, everyday, to live by the principles set forth in that document. We don't lie. We don't defame. We don't ignore the threats to our free speech, free press, freedom to worship and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. We stand tall and make ourselves heard.

Colorado landscapes are breathtaking and varied, from high desert to tall mountains, rich farmland, majestic canyons and wild rivers. My son and his then-wife took me to Garden of the Gods for a hike. I couldn't keep up with them and the dog so I dawdled along, taking photos of the amazing rock formations. I even managed to catch a bunny that didn't rabbit while I shot him with my camera.



# NFPW Leadership Directory

## 2025-27 ELECTED OFFICERS

### President:

Debbie Miller, Arkansas

### Vice President:

Cathy Petrini, Virginia and D.C.

### Secretary:

Kristin Netterstrom Higgins, Arkansas

### Treasurer:

Karen Stensrud, North Dakota

### Immediate Past President:

Julie Campbell, Virginia

## APPOINTED BOARD

### Communicator of Achievement Director:

Karen Stensrud, North Dakota

### FAN Co-Directors:

Marsha Shuler, Louisiana

Angela Smith, Texas

### Historian:

Amy Geiszler-Jones, Kansas

### Assistant Historian:

Unfilled

### Hospitality and Protocol:

Gay Porter DeNileon, Colorado

### Parliamentarian:

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### POPPS President:

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### High School Contest Director:

Teri Ehresman, Idaho

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Meg Hunt, South Carolina

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Cathy Koon, Idaho

### Publications Assistant:

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### Web Director:

Lisa Volz, NFPW Headquarters

### 2026 Conference Committee:

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Valerie Ormond

Cathy Petrini

Cynthia Price

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NFPW Board

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- Half / Page  $8.250 \times 5.175 = \$30$
- Half / Page  $4.063 \times 10.637 = \$30$
- Quarter / Page  $8.250 \times 2.476 = \$15$
- Quarter / Page  $4.064 \times 5.2 = \$15$
- 1/8 / Page  $1.875 \times 10.563 = \$10$
- 1/8 / Page  $4.075 \times 2.476 = \$10$

Discounts are available for multiple runs of the same ad.

## NFPW Headquarters

Lisa Volz, Executive Director  
140B Purcellville Gateway Drive  
Suite 120  
Purcellville, VA 20132  
Phone: 571-295-5900  
[info@nfpw.org](mailto:info@nfpw.org)

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- Ads must be submitted in JPEG format, camera ready.
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- Payment must be made at time of submission.
- Payment by check should be sent to NFPW Headquarters, 140B Purcellville Gateway Drive, Suite 120, Purcellville, VA 20132.
- Payment can be made by credit card over the phone (571) 295-5900.