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Kuglin selected as fifth inductee into Open Government Hall of Fame

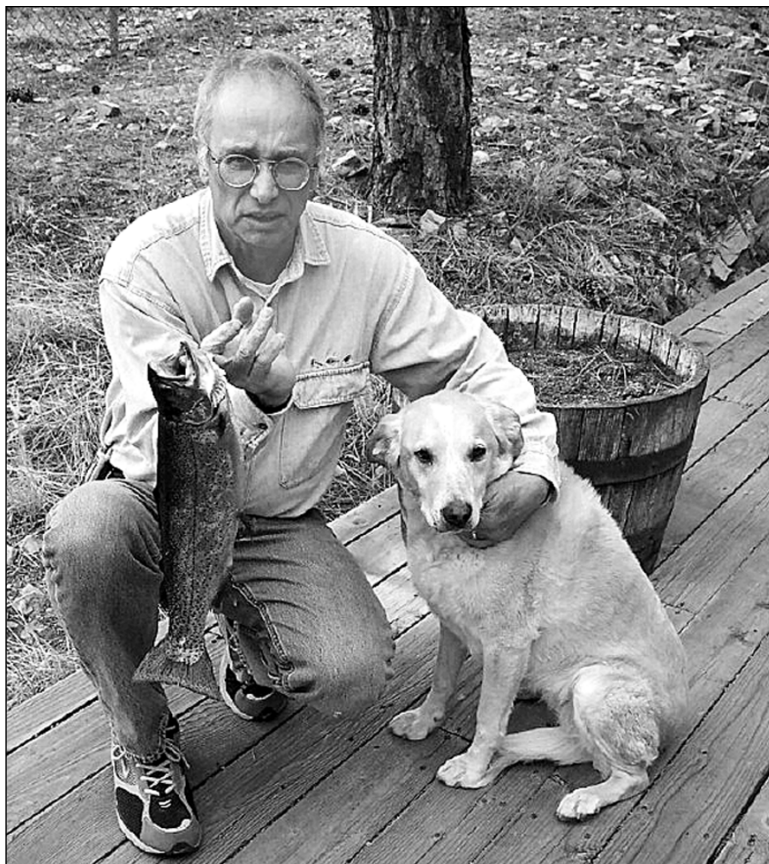
By Ian Marquand

John Kuglin wanted to leave journalism with little fanfare. Instead, he's been hailed as a hero — twice.

The latest came in May, when SPJ and the National FOI Coalition selected him as the fifth inductee into the Heroes of the 50 States: The State Open Government Hall of Fame.

At the dawn of 2005, Kuglin entered his 43rd year as a journalist and was about to begin his 21st as *The Associated Press* Chief of Bureau for Montana. (He also had Wyoming added to his territory July 2004.) In addition, he had served for more than 16 years as chairman of the nonprofit Montana Freedom of Information Hotline and 10 years as an officer in SPJ's Montana Pro Chapter. In 1994, he was the first recipient of the "Montana Free Press Award" presented by the University of Montana's Schools of Law and Journalism. In 2000, the Montana American Civil Liberties Union presented him with the "Jeannette Rankin Civil Liberties Award."

On Feb. 25, Kuglin convened the



John Kuglin, and his dog Pepper, show off a rainbow trout Kuglin caught while fly fishing on the Missouri River in Montana. Kuglin was on vacation earlier this year in Wisconsin when he learned that he had been selected to the Heroes of the 50 States: The State Open Government Hall of Fame.

Photo courtesy of John Kuglin

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Oregon chapter FOI campaign goes national

By Marta Neilson

Michael Wolf has advice for journalism students.

"Get out while you can."

Vanity Fair's media critic spoke at a panel on media criticism at SPJ's national convention in New York City last year.

Journalism is a fish that stinks from the head down, Wolfe told students.

Save yourselves. Change your majors. Greed and stupidity rule the media at every level.

"No!" said Nat Hentoff.

The Village Voice columnist pounded his fist on the table. There's still a lot that is noble and worthwhile in the press, he said.

"Tom Henderson and members of the Oregon SPJ chapter are doing great

things in the service of the First Amendment," Hentoff added.

For Oregon SPJ, it was like their "Do you Feel Safer in the Dark" campaign was being blessed by the pope. More so, really. Hentoff is widely considered the leading First Amendment journalist in the nation.

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annual meeting of the Hotline's board and announced that he would retire from *the AP* — and all professional-related activities — in three days.

"When it's time to retire, you know. You really do," he said. "Nothing lasts forever, and you shouldn't overstay your welcome."

The news stunned those who heard it. But if Kuglin had intended to fade away quietly, his peers had other ideas. Three weeks after his announcement, a lengthy profile honored Kuglin in Montana newspapers as a featured part of the state's observance of "Sunshine Sunday." Then in May, SPJ and the National FOI Coalition announced that he would be inducted into Heroes of the 50 States: The State Open Government Hall of Fame.

Although his fellow FOI Hotline board members had whispered about nominating Kuglin for the award the previous year, his retirement provided the final motivation. A nomination packet was assembled quickly to meet an impending deadline. Then in early May, word came that Kuglin was selected as the 2005 inductee.

John was in the midst of a long fishing vacation in Wisconsin when he received the news a few days before the official presentation in Santa Fe, N.M.

"I don't know what to say," he said after hearing the news. "I'm deeply honored."

Getting to New Mexico to receive the honor in person proved to be impossible for a variety of reasons. One of which was the desire to keep the award secret as long as possible. Kuglin was notified while on vacation in Wisconsin just a couple days before he ceremony. So, the presenters had to make do with a tape of the telephone conversation. But later, Montana journalists and friends schemed to surprise John again, this time with a dinner in Helena. Here, he received the physical symbol of his induction — a flame-shaped engraved Lucite trophy.

"It's embarrassing. It really was a big sur-

prise," he said of the dual recognitions, noting with a chuckle that "anti-secrecy awards are very secret."

Kuglin's status as a hero of FOI has been well-earned in Montana. In 1987, 15 years after Montana's new constitution established public access to government records and meetings, problems remained. They often found their way to Kuglin's door at *the AP* in Helena.

"I kept getting calls from people — a weekly paper or a broadcaster — thinking I was a lawyer or something, and very often my advice was to call an attorney," he said.

Kuglin believed journalists should have a place to call and get immediate and accurate advice on FOI matters. So, he gathered leaders of the state's newspaper and broadcasters associations, the University of Montana Journalism School and SPJ to create a statewide telephone hotline. The

group obtained \$3,000 in seed money from SPJ and set about creating a nonprofit corporation, drafting bylaws, hiring a law firm and putting in place the mechanism for ongoing fundraising.

In 1988, the Montana FOI Hotline Inc. opened for business.

"Journalists — broadcasters, SPJ, print — can take a great deal of satisfaction with how they pulled together, which hasn't happened in every state," Kuglin said. "They formed a coalition. They've coughed up a lot of

money for litigation, and we've preserved access to government and for the First Amendment in this state."

Kuglin's own belief in FOI litigation was strengthened in 1989. Newly elected Gov. Stan Stephens was embroiled in a governance dispute with Montana's Board of Public Education. Early that year, the board held a conference call, and when the subject of a potential lawsuit against the governor came up, the presiding officer demanded that *the AP's* state-house reporter leave the room. The officer cited a provision in Montana's open meetings law that allowed closures for "litigation strategy."

"I just got mad," Kuglin said. "I was just outraged."

Almost immediately, he began lining up

Heroes of the 50 States: The State Open Government Hall of Fame

The hall of fame was created in 2003 as a means to honor people who have made lasting contributions to FOI at state and local levels. Its creators wanted a permanent place of recognition similar to the national "FOIA Hall of Fame," which has honored people instrumental in the creation, updating and preservation of the federal Freedom of Information Act.

The announcement of inductees to The State Open Government Hall of Fame is made each spring during the joint conference of SPJ's "Project Sunshine" and the NFOIC. It's designed to be a surprise to the inductee; hence, only two of the five current inductees actually have learned of their honor in person.

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Zelinski named first Archibald intern

The Archibald Communications Internship was awarded this year for the first time.

The internship provides a junior- or senior-year journalism student who is concentrating in communications with an opportunity to become involved in the marketing functions of a national organization.

Andrea Zelinski, a senior at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, was the inaugural intern. Andrea has served as editor-in-chief of her student newspaper, *The Independent*, for more than two years.

"This was a great opportunity to put my various talents to use. For the first time, I was able to put my love for journalism and marketing together, like pieces of a puzzle," Zelinski said.

During her eight-week internship, Zelinski created strategic marketing plans to increase submissions to the Sigma Delta Chi awards. She also worked to publicize the 2005 SPJ Convention and National Journalism Conference, which will be Oct. 16-18 in Las Vegas.

"This experience took me past the cases I read in books to application at the office. It was an experience to not only make a plan, but execute it. I did everything from designing posters to writing organizations for donations. I really got to see the project past the point of analysis," said Zelinski.



ANDREA ZELINSKI

Zelinski will graduate in the spring of 2006 with a major in marketing and minors in mass media and English.

The internship is made possible through a generous bequest from the estate of Fred I. Archibald, a longtime Maryland newspaperman. The internship is funded through the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation. ■

Hall

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co-plaintiffs to challenge the litigation exemption in court. Eventually, the Montana Supreme Court ruled the litigation exemption applied only to lawsuits between public and private entities and not to disputes between public entities.

Since then, various media coalitions have gone to court to force the release of documents, ranging from disciplinary reports against state prison guards to an investigation into a car crash that killed Montana's House majority leader and led to charges against a top aide to the governor. Legislative party caucuses and policy discussions among college and university presidents have been opened to

journalists and the public. Government policies restricting access have been overturned. The state's shield law for journalists has been upheld. Court proceedings have been kept open, despite intense pressure to close them. In virtually every case, the media have prevailed, usually with Kuglin's AP Montana Bureau as one of the plaintiffs.

"You have to watch your back all the time," he said, shifting attention away from himself. "It's a great satisfaction that the media in this state recognize how important it is and fight every single day for access to government because that really is our lifeblood in the media. If we don't have information, we're dead in the water. The public is, too."

Ian Marquand is President of SPJ's Montana Pro Chapter. In February, he was elected chair of the Montana Freedom of Information Hotline.

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Founded in 1961, the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation is dedicated to ensuring that those who carry on the tradition of a free press are prepared for the challenge. Its goal is to support the educational programs of the Society of Professional Journalists and to serve the professional needs of journalists and students pursuing careers in journalism.