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After a decade of work, study of AP photographers, VJs is a reality

After more than 10 years of work, a professional study to analyze the injuries that Associated Press photographers and videojournalists suffer on the job is a reality.

Many people worked hard to get the study, but Don Ryan of the Portland, Ore., bureau was the driving force. Ryan pushed for the study as the first photo representative for the News Media Guild's Representative Assembly and now as a vice president on the Executive Committee and a bargaining team member.

"It's hard to believe a decade of work is coming to fruition," Ryan said. "I believe the results of this study will give us rock-solid evidence to help us improve the working conditions of AP photographers and VJs."

The real effort for the study began when the Guild received seven years of AP OSHA logs. Ryan and Susie Walsh, a photographer in Washington, D.C., analyzed the numbers and learned they showed photographers, who made up 9 percent of AP's U.S. workforce suffered 39 percent of the reported injuries.

"We suspected that this was just the tip of the iceberg and set out to survey the photographers regarding unreported injuries and a myriad of other problems including stress, equipment and cumulative load-bearing issues," Ryan said.

The 2004-05 bargaining session included an agreement that the AP would pay for a study of such injuries. But the two sides disagreed over the scope and cost of the study and it wasn't until the last contract

negotiations, which ended in February 2009, that the AP agreed to pay \$70,000 for a study.

The study will be conducted at New York University on ergonomic injuries suffered by AP photographers and VJs, who regularly carry 25 pounds to 100 pounds of equipment. The study was scheduled to begin in November and last about 11 months.

Chuck Burton, a photographer in the Charlotte, N.C., bureau, said he carries an estimated 50 pounds of gear from his car about half-mile to the stadium each Sunday that the Carolina Panthers play.

His gear includes: three camera bodies with lenses, along with two extra lenses in the belt packs, a flash, and extra batteries that he keeps on his body during the game. In addition, he brings laptop and editing gear in a backpack.

"I try to go to the gym to strengthen my back and to stretch muscles with yoga so I can carry it all and also sit cross-legged on a basketball court for hours on end," Burton said.

The Guild hopes to develop a program to avoid or minimize injuries caused by the lifting and carrying of heavy equipment. "We hope the results of this study will lay groundwork for future efforts in this area, much as RSI studies have done," Ryan said.

The advisory board for the study includes: Manny Halpern, certified professional ergonomist at NYU; Jason Bronis, AP videojournalist; Rick Bowmer, AP photographer; Ryan; and Sue Gilkey, Hilda Auguste, Santiago Lyon and Stephanie Mullen, all of AP.



Chuck Burton, photographer in Charlotte, N.C., at the game between the Carolina Panthers and the Washington Redskins on Oct. 11, 2009. Burton says this gear, plus laptop and editing equipment, weigh about 50 pounds. Photo by Rick Havner. (More photos, page 2)

Singing for their (farewell) supper



John Hartzell (left) and James Carlson, both former shop stewards in Milwaukee, Wis., perform at their retirement party in August. Hartzell retired after 40 years with The Associated Press and Carlson after 38 years..

The duo performed rousing editions of "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You" and Woody Guthrie's "Union Maid," which includes the chorus "You can't scare me, I'm sticking with the union."

Hartzell's wife, Carmella, took the photo and Carlson's wife, Ellen, helped fire up the crowd.

News Media Guild helps AP journalists in Mexico get union recognition

Associated Press journalists in Mexico have won union recognition and bargaining rights, thanks to the work of the News Media Guild and the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center.

Dozens of AP journalists in Mexico obtained a certification from the Mexican government through STRM, Mexico's strongest and most democratic telecom union. STRM is the National Union of Telephone Workers, which represents more than 50,000 telecom workers in Mexico.

During the campaign, an NMG shop steward worked with the journalists to help them build support for their union. In addition, NMG President Tony Winton met with workers to explain the alliance among the STRM, the CWA and The Newspaper Guild.

"This is a big victory for international organizing within the AP," Winton said. "Every group of AP workers that organizes anywhere in the world

lends strength to our common goal of promoting quality journalism through fair wages and working conditions."

STRM and CWA have worked together on workers' rights, trade, organizing and other issues for many years. STRM is a 'real' union, unlike other Mexican unions, some of which are controlled by employers and do little to voice workers' issues or work for strong contracts.

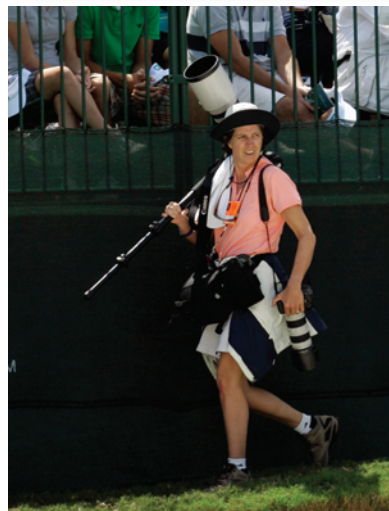
Workers in Mexico, and in nearly every other industrialized country in Latin America and around the world, are many steps ahead of U.S. workers who don't have the right to majority sign up for union recognition. STRM had strong majority support from the workers, but Mexican labor laws permit union recognition and bargaining rights with even less than majority.

Workers now will draft contract proposals for AP.

"We feel we can help steer the ship with our more experienced colleagues to a bright future. We as young union members see the value in membership and we will do our best in bringing new hires into the fold. Our Guild doesn't just get us decent wages in a time where flagging profits are hurting our brethren; it also guarantees quality editorial professionals stay at the AP."

*-- John Mone, new Representative Assembly member
For photos, see page 3.*

Photographers, VJs and their equipment



From top, photographer Sue Ogrocki of the Oklahoma City bureau with some of her equipment. She posed for the shot to try to convince Oklahoma State University to provide more than 18 inches of working room. Hence, the tape measure. Photographer Lynne Sladky of Miami at a golf tournament; and videojournalist Jason Bronis of Atlanta interviews a tourist during 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Bronis is carrying just a small portion of his usual equipment.

WiReport

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NMG NOTEBOOK

Guild scholarship winners announced

The News Media Guild congratulates the winners of this year's Patrick J. Sherlock Scholarship awards. Winners were chosen by lottery for the two \$2,000 awards and one wild card award for \$1,000.

The winners are:

- **Susan Craigmile**, wife of recently laid off technician Jeff Craigmile of Spokane. Susan will study nursing at the Spokane Community College.
- **Janavi Nayak**, wife of newsman Sudhin Thanawala of San Francisco. Janavi will study law at Santa Clara University.
- **Sam Josie**, nephew of newswoman Jennifer King of Washington, won the \$1,000 wild card award. His course of study at the University of Oregon in Eugene is not yet determined.

Birthday grievance settled

The News Media Guild resolved a grievance in which News Media Guild President Tony Winton was denied pay for his birthday during his union leave.

If allowed to stand, the policy would have extended to employees on any kind of leave. The AP originally said a holiday is earned for service last year. If you were off last year, it's not due this year. The union said it had never heard of such a policy and asked if it extended to all holidays. The Guild asked if an employee is not due Christmas this year because he or she was on leave during Christmas last year.

Both this complaint and one received from another staffer were resolved in the staffers' favor.

Notice for special election

A SPECIAL ELECTION WILL BE CONDUCTED to fill the following vacant seats on the News Media Guild's Representative Assembly. Only members in good standing may run or nominate persons for office. The NOMINATING PERIOD opens Nov. 23 and CLOSES Dec. 3, 2009. Candidate acceptance statements are due Dec. 8. Ballots will be mailed no later than Dec. 18, 2009, and must be returned to the Guild's election post office box no later than Jan. 11, the day the Election Committee will retrieve and count the ballots. If only one person is nominated for any vacant office, that person will be declared elected without opposition and no election will be conducted.

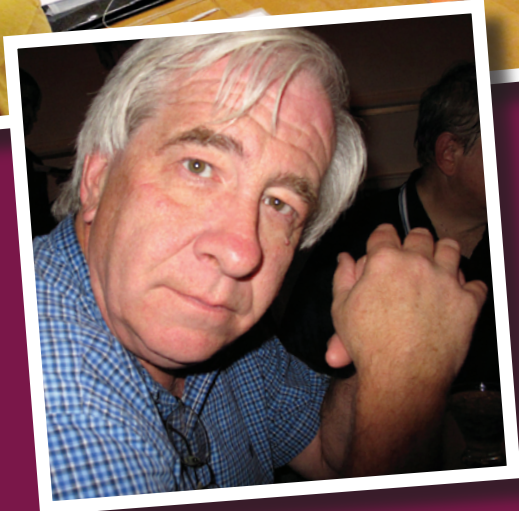
A full copy of the election rules, as well as convenient nomination petition forms, are on the NMG Web site at www.newsmediaguild.org. Questions may also be directed to the News Media Guild office.

The vacant seats are as follows. Alternate delegates serve whenever the main delegate is unable to serve or resigns. Successful candidates will enter office immediately upon election and will serve the remainder of the unexpired term (until Feb. 21, 2011).

- Broadcast News Center alternate _ must work for the AP Broadcast News Center, regardless of location, but *not* for AP Television.
- Television alternate _ must work for AP Television or AP Video, regardless of location.
- Technology at-large 2 delegate _ must be an AP technician.
- New York City editorial alternate _ must be in the AP editorial unit in New York City in classification of newsperson or artist.
- New York City non-editorial alternate _ must work at AP in New York City in classification other than newsperson or artist.
- West alternate _ must be in the AP editorial unit and work in Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, or Nevada.
- Southwest alternate _ must be in the AP editorial unit and work in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma or Texas.
- Photographer alternate _ must be an AP photographer.

CAMPAIGNING: Use of the News Media Guild stationery for campaign literature is prohibited. Upon their request, one campaign statement from each qualified EC, TNG Convention or RA candidate shall be sent with the list of candidates mailed to all branch chairpersons for bulletin board posting. Such statements of no more than 200 words shall arrive at the News Media Guild office no later than the deadline set for candidate acceptance, five days after the close of the nominating period. WiReport shall print these candidate statements, if provided, in all annual elections, and special elections if possible, prior to the mailing of ballots. WiReport stories should strive for equal space or balance about candidates in election stories, and solicit statements, background and photographs from all candidates. The language in this section shall be carried in all election notices, including lists of candidates.

Scenes from the annual Representative Assembly meeting



In these photos, clockwise from top left: Brent Kallestad of AP in Tallahassee with his wife, Kathy; Bobby Johnson of Chicago and NMG bookkeeper Ed Zeltser; Jessica Mintz of Seattle and John Mone of Los Angeles; EFE's Teresa Bouza and Carmen Hulbert of New York; Vin Cherwoo of New York; group shot of the annual Representative Assembly meeting; RA chair Linda Johnson of Trenton, N.J., and David Melendy of Washington, D.C., watch as the entourage for Sen. Edward Kennedy's funeral rounds the Capitol; Alan Sayre of New Orleans; and, at the Executive Committee meeting, NMG administrator Kevin Keane (left to right); Zeltser, NMG President Tony Winton, and first vice president Martha Waggoner; and Larry Margasak of Washington, D.C. (Photos by Don Ryan)

Sick leave policy changes at AP

A new sick leave policy that increases sick leave for new employees but leaves long-service staffers with less time than they had before has taken effect at The Associated Press.

The new plan, which took effect Oct. 1, provides employees with more than three months service and who work at least 15 hours a week with 12 sick days each Jan. 1, plus an additional short-term disability benefit dependent on length of service.

“The Guild wasn’t happy to see some employees lose sick leave, but a review of other sick leave plans among members of The Newspaper Guild showed the new plan at the AP, as improved through bargaining with the News Media Guild, was as good or better than others in TNG,” said Martha Waggoner, chair of the Guild’s bargaining committee last year.

All employees have 12 sick days through year’s end as part of the new plan’s phase-in.

AP selected Liberty Mutual to administer the short-term disability benefit. The short-term disability will apply for absences of seven consecutive calendar days (five consecutive work days) because of illness or injuries. Referred to during bargaining as the “doughnut hole,” absences for shorter periods could leave employees unpaid.

That would happen if an employee doesn’t have five sick days remaining out of the 12 sick days allotted to employees a year. Employees may use vacation, personal days or compensatory time off to fill that period. Employees may also

borrow up to five days of next year’s accrued vacation to get paid.

If a recurrence of the same disability occurs within 90 days of the last disability another seven-day waiting period is waived.

Under the old sick leave policy, a new hire was entitled to two weeks of sick leave during the first two years of service. The new schedule during the first year will provide up to 12 sick days plus one week of pay at 100 percent plus 24 weeks at 60 percent pay. The second year will provide 12 days sick leave plus two weeks at full pay plus 23 weeks at 60 percent pay.

A long service employee could have received one week of full pay plus one week of half pay for each year of service. An employee with 35 years service could have received a benefit of 35 weeks of full pay plus an equal number at half-pay. The new benefit for employees with less than 20 years of service on Dec. 1, 2008, will cap at 25 weeks of full pay in addition to the 12 sick days. Employees with more than 20 years of service before Dec. 1, 2008, could receive one full week of pay for each year of service so an employee with 35 years service would receive 35 weeks of full pay plus the 12 sick days.

New hires will receive one sick day a month after completion of the 90-day eligibility period. If hired on Jan. 1, the employee will be due nine days for the year.

Many other sick leave terms remained unchanged, including a minimum of eight weeks of full pay for pregnancy-related disability.

Important News

- ▶ **Study of photographers, VJs starts**
- ▶ **AP workers in Mexico organize**
- ▶ **EC/RA annual meeting**
- ▶ **Election notice**

WiReport

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Why I Joined The GUILD

By Ben Neary, Cheyenne, Wyo.



I contacted the Guild office on my own and asked how to join the union as soon as I started at AP four years ago. It never crossed my mind not to join.

It’s hard to say why I believe in the union without sounding as though I’m one of those old guys who wants to bend everybody’s ear about how they walked uphill both ways to school back in the day. But some of us really did.

I started at a weekly for \$225 a week and worked for nearly 20 years for various newspapers in New Mexico _ a poor, “right to work,” union-busting state _ before joining AP. I’ve seen a few editors and publishers who could benefit from talking to the Guild’s lawyers and a tough AP negotiating team about how to treat their journalists.

Long before they had the Internet to complain about, publishers were freezing reporters’ pay, ostensibly because of the rising cost of newsprint or whatever else they dreamed up as the excuse de jour. Somehow those pesky newsprint prices and their many other pressing problems never quite

forced them to pawn their Rolexes or stop snapping up little newspapers like pretzel nuggets.

I remember one particular polyester-clad, tassled-loafer-sporting “managing editor” offering this heartfelt nugget of sympathy to a room full of reporters as he announced a wage freeze: “We get 1,000 unsolicited resumes a year. If you can find a better job, I suggest you take it.”

Without the union, you’re completely at the mercy of people like that. And it’s not enough merely to do your job while they cut your pay; the profoundly mediocre expect you to smile, tip your hat and ingratiate yourself while they’re doing it to you. They take it personally if you don’t, and I don’t.

Our AP contract affords us dignity and fair pay. It keeps things professional. It frees us to do our jobs and gives us backup if we need it. These are not things I take for granted. I’m happy to pay for them.