

New Institute and JAWS Can Work Collaboratively

Q and A with Pam Johnson

Kay Mills: Pam, you were on the first Journalism & Women Symposium board in the late 1980s, which look like halcyon days for journalism from the contemporary point of view. We have lived through many changes in almost 20 years and many of us have taken some blows to the psyche. Before we talk about the Reynolds Institute, tell me what career path you imagined for yourself then and what you've done since.

Pam Johnson: I worked in newsrooms for 32 years. I loved bringing the stories of the community to readers. Like almost everyone in the news business, I've seen change, led change, and turned career corners amid change. I was at the *Kansas City Star* in the late '70s as it went from employee ownership to Capital Cities ownership. I left in late 1988 just ahead of the merger of *the Star* and the *Kansas City Times*.

Change was in the air when I arrived in Phoenix in 1989 to take on my first managing editor post, leading the *Phoenix Gazette* – an afternoon newspaper. The *Gazette* and the morning *Arizona Republic* were owned by the Pulliam family. Soon we went from family to public ownership. Over the next 11 years, we merged the *Gazette* and *Arizona Republic* newsrooms, ceased publication of the afternoon newspaper and eliminated 60 newsroom positions. Eventually I was executive editor and senior vice president/news at the *Republic*. In 2000, Central Newspapers, our corporate owners, sold the *Republic* to Gannett. Then Poynter had an opening in its leadership and management group in early 2001. It was great timing. Three years later Missouri announced the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation gift of \$31 million for a journalism institute, and I sought the position of executive director. I am an alum of the school and I was excited about the promise of the institute to shape the journalism of the future.

Q: What attracted you to this job?

A: I have a long history with the J-.School and I credit it with starting me off well as I entered the news business. It was Dean Mills, though, who got me involved in the school in the 90s. When he described the institute to me, I knew I wanted to be involved.

Q: How might the technology that institute scholars will be using especially help JAWS members?

A: We can make sense of the technology and media landscape through our research and faculty expertise. Understanding what is happening around us is a crucial first

step. In our Futures Lab and Demonstration Center we can develop and test new ideas for how they best use technology to improve journalistic methods. We can create an atmosphere where students, faculty, citizens and professionals work together on projects and products for the industry.

Q: How can JAWS, which was born at the University of Missouri and which has its institutional home there, work as an organization with the institute on any projects?

A: One part of the institute's mission is to close the gap between citizens and journalists, which is important to our democracy. The second part is to use technology to innovate and broaden journalistic methods. JAWS might consider identifying an issue or project that fits with the institute's interests. We would be glad to talk to JAWS representatives about ideas and procedures. Here is one example of a project idea that fits us: We partner with APME on a credibility online project that will bring journalists and citizens together – very relevant to our mission.

Q: Individual JAWS members may want to apply for the Reynolds Fellows program. What kind of projects will you be looking for? Should JAWS members who are thinking of applying have a problem in mind that they think technology could help solve or should they be farther along and be seeking an interchange of ideas to improve the solution they've already envisioned?

A: We want fellows' projects that will give the industry, journalism and citizens solutions, tools, innovations to succeed in this changing environment. We are working on the materials now that will be distributed early this fall for the first class of fellows that will come to the campus in the fall of 2008. These are nine-month residential fellowships with a generous stipend. Watch for the application details. My best advice is to spend time now to sharpen that great idea you have to contribute to the future of journalism.

Q: I don't think either of us, at those first board meetings, ever dreamed we'd be working with Web sites or have our own Web site or even what a Web site would be. Looking ahead, what's the wildest dream you have for something coming out of the institute?

A: Headline: "Student invents reporter notebook with pencil – tools designed to be used in 2010 on the street and face to face with interviewees." Seriously, I think the best thing that could happen would be that the institute helped lead the charge to restore respect and understanding of journalism and its role in democracy. That's the toughest challenge we all face. The technology gadgets are the easy part.