

## Saturday, September 6, 2014 SEJ Board Meeting Minutes

Hilton New Orleans Riverside, Two Poydras Street, New Orleans, LA

### Board members present:

Imelda Abano

Ashley Ahearn

Jennifer Bogo

Jeff Burnside

Jim Detjen, Founding President

Christy George

Lizzie Grossman

Don Hopey, Board President 2013-14

Robert McClure

Susan Moran

Meaghan Parker, Associate Rep.

Dave Poulson, Academic Rep.

Mark Schleifstein, 2014 Conference Chair

Kate Sheppard

Roger Witherspoon

### Board members absent:

Douglas Fischer, Future Sites Chair

### Staff Present:

Beth Parke, SEJ Executive Director

Jay Letto, Conference manager

### Members present:

Jim Bruggers

Carolyn Whetzel

Meeting called to order at 2:27pm CDT by outgoing president Don Hopey.

The first order of business was a toast of Henry McKenna 10-year-old bourbon to 2014 Conference Chair Mark Schleifstein.

### Approval of Minutes

Moved by Witherspoon, seconded by McClure, and approved unanimously

## **Election results and Election of Officers**

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Grossman and Susan Moran were elected, and Roger Witherspoon was re-elected.

Jeff Burnside was elected president by acclamation (Schleifstein moved, McClure seconded);

Jennifer Bogo was elected Vice- President for Programs by acclamation (Burnside moved, Witherspoon seconded);

Kate Sheppard was elected Vice-President for Membership after a spirited debate;

Don Hopey was elected Treasurer by acclamation (McClure moved, Ahearn seconded);

Christy George was elected Secretary by acclamation (McClure moved, Bogo seconded).

## **Board Meetings, committees, housekeeping**

After a brief discussion, the board agreed to meet in January 2015 in Washington. D.C., with the Woodward Wilson [Center] again graciously hosting the board meeting and another “Energy and Environment Year Ahead” event.

The spring meeting is likely to be held again in Sacramento, California, in order to energize fundraising for the 2016 conference.

The board is also going to meet virtually in November to keep up momentum on critical program activity.

Burnside and Parke explained to new board members about standing committee and task force assignments.

## **Old Business**

Brief discussion of merging the SEJ-Talk and the SEJ-Freelance list-servs resulted in the decision to continue with two separate lists. List-wrangler Schleifstein said he is inclined to lift the prohibition on attachments. Board members agreed to keep an eye out for interesting conversations and send people on Freelance to Talk, and vice-versa.

## **Budget**

Parke: we can count on \$200,000 in direct expenses for the 2015 Oklahoma conference. Sacramento 2016 will require strong fundraising, but “There’s gold in them thar hills.”

She’ll prep new board members about SEJ 3.0 strategic planning exercise; SEJ’s “quadruple bottom line” approach to spending; SEJ fundraising goals, revenue sources

both restricted and unrestricted gifts from foundations, individuals, direct income, and other allowable sources such as grant-making government agencies and annual interest from SEJ's endowment fund. SEJ does not accept any corporate conference "sponsors."

New Orleans conference will yield about \$130,000 in registrations and another \$70-80,000 in exhibitors fees.

Burnside: How did foundation funders Pew and Walton react?

Parke: Wednesday night was a fantastic start. We'll track metrics on the number of attendees, tours, and news stories the conference generates.

### **Conference – New Orleans and beyond**

Brief discussion about the history of independent hospitality receptions and coffee breaks, and SEJ's decision to help coordinate what companies and advocacy groups were already doing. The key is the need for transparency with member journalists so that the decision to eat and drink at potential sources' events is theirs.

More conference discussion and ideas for next year:

- put coffee inside the exhibitors' booths area;
- have exhibitors host the coffee breaks/snacks;
- "storify" the conference;
- set up a student reporting site;
- waive student fees (university hosts do get numerous student fees paid).

Burnside, Letto and Parke discuss plans for Oklahoma conference planning, including a November staff site visit and meetings with Gaylord Journalism school leaders. Norman, OK dates are October 7-11, 2015.

Letto details partners and themes: the Native American Journalists Association and the National Weather Center are based at the University of Oklahoma campus in Norman. Potential topics and tracks include Native issues, wild weather, food and agriculture, oil and gas, and more. Foundations are big on food right now.

Parke discussed Sacramento 2016. Capital Public Radio will co-sponsor the conference like the model pioneered by the Chattanooga Free Press-Times in 2013. CPR can serve as top management for us and fundraise from corporate sources SEJ cannot. UC Davis has already pledged \$50,000 and will co-host along with CPR. Like Chattanooga, this will be a leap of faith for us, but a safe one.

2017 is wide open. Under consideration: George Washington University – which has a relatively new sustainability institute - as lead host for a DC-area conference; Cornell for an Ithaca/Syracuse conference; Boston; the University of Alabama/Huntsville; Seattle

with a faint [possibility] of the University of Washington after personnel changes as well as Western Washington University, which has an environmental school.

Bogo: partner with other DC universities?

Schleifstein: talk to Frank Sesno at GWU.

Abano: was on a tour with a GWU rep who was very impressed with the NOLA conference structure and content, and he asked others their impression of GWU.

(Guests Bruggers and Whetzel leave at 3:57)

### **SEJ's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – February 14, 2015**

Task Force will include: Burnside, George, Hopey, Letto and Sheppard.

Hopey: We need to invite all founding SEJ members to OK.

Letto: the Saturday night party will be the celebration? We can also have a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary track on the history of the environmental movement. Include Phil Shabecoff.

Parker: could meet with founders in DC, such as Bud Ward, Noel Grove, Bob Engelman.

Poulson: enlist members who are environmental history experts (like Bill Kovarik), and Bill Cronon at UW in Madison.

McClure: look at the SEJ 3.0 consultants' report about where the organization is going, and whether we're about environmental journalism or environmental journalists.

Parke: Look at the "vulnerables:" new people, young people, people of color.

Ahearn: how activist we seem today. A lot of people 2-3 years ago saw us as pushing agendas.

Grossman: as we collected pledge cards, there were a number from first-time conference attendees and new members.

Letto: I'm absolutely certain we'll hear everything on the annual conference evaluations – one thing and the exact opposite.

McClure moves to adjourn, Burnside seconds.

**Meeting adjourned at 4:05 CDT.**