



# NEWSWORTHY Online

THE MINNESOTA NEWS COUNCIL: *Promoting fair, vigorous, and trusted journalism*

December 2007

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

It has been a busy time for the Twin Cities media community: in November, Joel Kramer launched [MinnPost.com](http://MinnPost.com), a nonprofit journalism enterprise; in early December, the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* settled a pending [lawsuit](#); and just last week it was revealed that a local [journalist's phone records were subpoenaed](#) by the St. Paul Police Department. Meanwhile, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, a [libel lawsuit](#) is underway.

The Minnesota News Council is one of four news councils in the United States, and one of several world-wide. Beginning this month, *Newsworthy Online* will feature the work, decisions and other programming of news councils from across the nation and around the world.



[Sarah Bauer](#)

### INTERESTED IN JOINING THE NEWS COUNCIL?

We are currently accepting applications from media and non-media applicants for membership on the hearing panel. Joining the News Council hearing panel is a great opportunity to participate in discussions about media ethics and standards, as well as meet local journalists, professionals and newsmakers.

[Fill out an application today!](#)

## MNC RECEIVED 25% MORE COMPLAINTS IN 2007 THAN 2006

In 2007, the MNC received 71 complaints, an increase of 25% from last year. About 70% of this year's complaints were general objections to the tone or content of news stories. The rest were from individuals who were directly named or alluded to in the media; the News Council examined five of these complaints at public hearings this year.

Allegations of bias, misrepresentation, and lack of coverage have been the most common complaints in November and December.

- A Minneapolis man protested that a picture of him was digitally altered to perpetuate Muslim stereotypes.
- A man in rural Minnesota asserted that newspaper commentary on dwarfism was unfair and offensive.
- A hospitalized man felt it was unfair of a TV station to refuse to air the story after he had allowed a camera crew into his life.

You can read the results of our 2007 public hearings [here](#).

## FEATURED NEWS COUNCIL: WASHINGTON NEWS COUNCIL

### *Washington News Council Reviews Coverage of Local Development Project*

In 2006, Editor Steve Smith from *The Spokesman-Review*, a daily newspaper published in Spokane, WA, asked the Washington News Council (WNC) to conduct an independent, outside audit of the newspaper's performance reporting on a local development project. The project, River Park Square (RPS), is a major downtown Spokane mall whose developer was the Cowles Co. - which also owns and publishes *The Spokesman-Review*. That dual role led to widespread criticism of the newspaper's performance.

It is highly unusual, if not unprecedented, for any American newspaper to ask an outside agency to review and critique its news coverage. The project was jointly funded by the newspaper and the news council, who had the help of a grant from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation.

Some key findings and recommendations:

- The newspaper did not investigate thoroughly in a timely matter and report promptly and forthrightly the financial structure of RPS
- The newspaper suppressed financial information of importance to decision-makers and the public at-large, but potentially unfavorable to developers.
- A news editor overseeing the reporting of a controversial issue involving the owners of the newspaper should not advocate a particular outcome.

Read the Washington News Council's report [here](#).

Read current Editor Steve Smith's response to the WNC recommendations [here](#).

Read former Editor Chris Peck's response to the WNC recommendations [here](#).

## FROM THE DEVELOPMENT OFFICE



Erika Roland

The 2007-2008 income budget for the Minnesota News Council is \$161,180. Our fiscal year ends March 31<sup>st</sup>. We rely greatly upon individual, media and corporate donations.

[We need your urgent support if we are to meet our budget for this year.](#)

In addition to [online donations](#) and donations through the mail, the Minnesota News Council also takes donations of stock. If you are interested in transferring stock, please contact [Erika Roland](#) at 612-339-0030.

### 2008 Hearing Dates

The News Council meets every other month to consider complaints about news coverage. All public hearings begin at 12:15 p.m. Check the [MNC Web site](#) for location information.

- Thursday, January 17, 2008
- Thursday, February 21, 2008
- Thursday, April 17, 2008
- Thursday June 19, 2008
- Thursday, August 21, 2008
- Thursday, October 16, 2008
- Thursday, December 11, 2008

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Questions or comments? E-mail us at [info@news-council.org](mailto:info@news-council.org) or call (612) 341-9357.

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