

News Council fishes for notice with carp campaign

The Minnesota News Council is banking on the public's familiarity with cartoonist and carp aficionado Richard Guindon to make more people aware of its services.

Guindon, a Detroit Free Press cartoonist who once worked for the Minneapolis Star, was the artist for a news council public service advertisement being distributed to newspapers throughout the state this summer. The campaign will expand to 15 billboards in the Twin Cities this fall.

The promotional ads show an attentive carp listening to the troubles of a bespectacled man with a headline underneath asking, "Want to carp about the Media? Tell the Minnesota News Council."

By using Guindon, the council hopes "to just let more people know that the council exists," said executive director Tom Patterson. "Within the media, we tend to be very well known. But if you ask most people about the council, they wouldn't know anything about it."

The Minnesota News Council, founded in 1971 to hear complaints against newspapers in the state, was later expanded to include broadcast media. It is an independent organization whose 24 volunteer members are equally split between the public and the media.

The council examines citizen complaints of news media inaccuracy, unfairness or unethical conduct. The council, if it decides to hear a case, determines if the complaint is valid and issues a ruling, but it has no legal power to penalize or assess sanctions against the media.

In the last three years, the number of complaints received by the council has declined steadily. It received 100 in 1981 and about 90 in 1982, Patterson said. Last year, it received about 70.

"We're not consciously trying to raise the number of complaints," Patterson said. But he noted that past promotional campaigns didn't seem to register with the public, partly because the ads often were not carried by the media whose members are asked to run them as a public service.

"Our strength lies in the fact that newspapers are willing to have us hear complaints that they can't adjudicate themselves," Patterson says. "Our real future is going to lie in how well we're known to the public."

Patterson hopes that in addition to increasing public awareness, the campaign will also catch the eye of its financial supporters. "When we do appeal to foundations and corporations for support, the more they know about us, the more willing they are to give."



Marketing

Steve Massey



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Bloomington-based Naegele Outdoor Advertising is donating the billboard space — worth about \$6000 — for the fall drive while Guindon donated his artwork, Patterson said. The council may still have to spend about \$1,500 to print and place the billboard ads if it is unable to find any more sponsors.

Naegele's Searcy Thompson said the company typically sets aside about 10 percent of its billboard space each month for public service ads. She said it was too early to tell where the council billboards will appear but plans call for eight to be in the Minneapolis area and seven in St. Paul.