

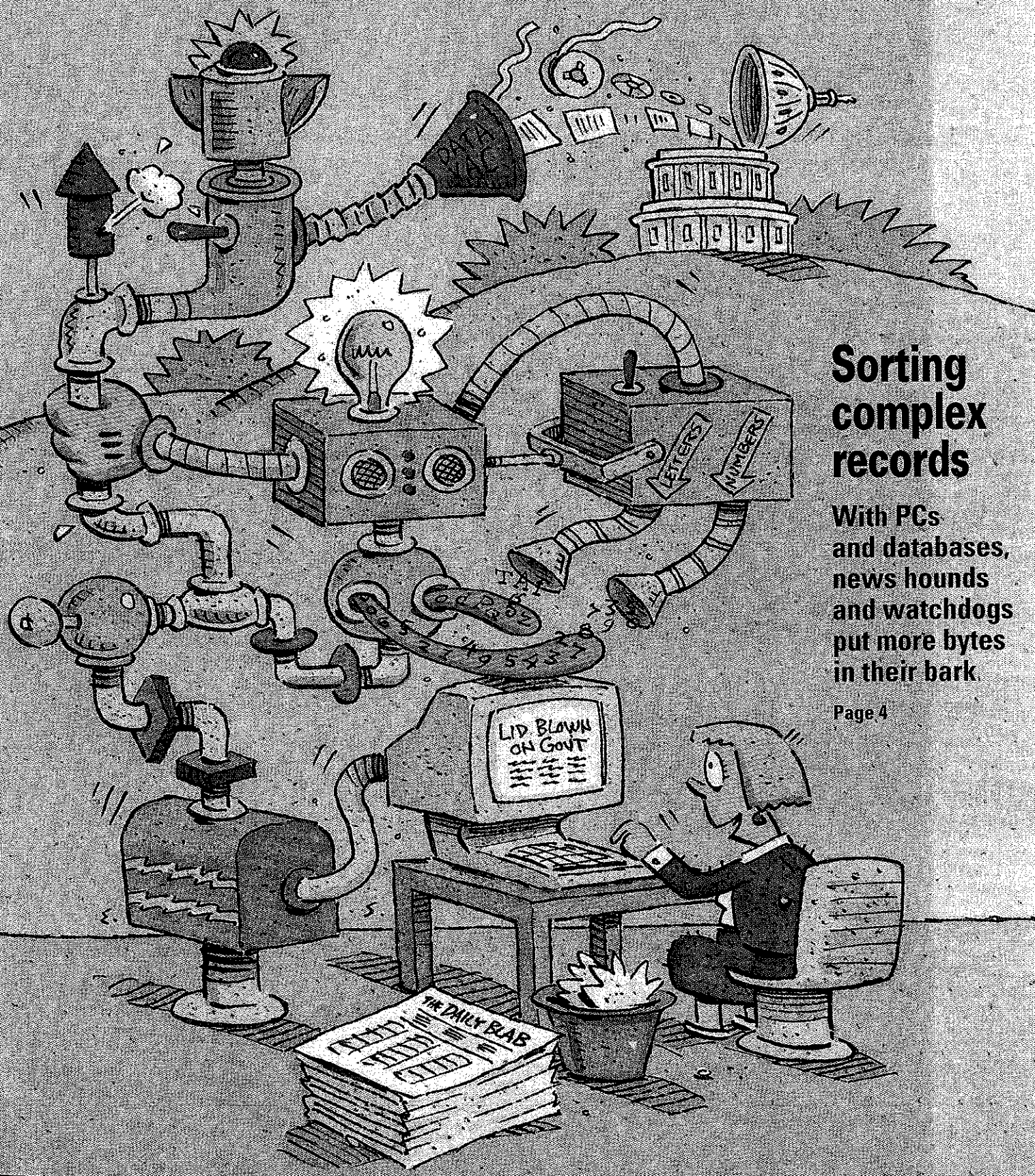


THE FREEDOM

SEPTEMBER 1993

FORUM

A PUBLICATION ABOUT FREE PRESS, FREE SPEECH AND FREE SPIRIT



Sorting complex records

With PCs and databases, news hounds and watchdogs put more bytes in their bark

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The Freedom Forum magazine, published six times a year, focuses on topics relating to the media and the First Amendment. The magazine is edited by senior staff of Freedom Forum International Inc., a 58-year-old foundation formerly known as the Gannett Foundation.

The Foundation and the magazine are non-partisan and financially independent. They are supported entirely by an endowment established by Frank E. Gannett in 1935. The endowment has grown to more than \$720 million in diversified, managed assets. The Freedom Forum supports two major operating programs: The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University, New York City; and The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn.

Other activities include: journalism education and professional programs; support for minority journalism students and education; and free-press initiatives in Eastern and Central Europe and exchanges, internships and fellowships in Asia, Latin America and other regions around the world.

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COMMENTARY

'Precision journalism' grows up in '90s

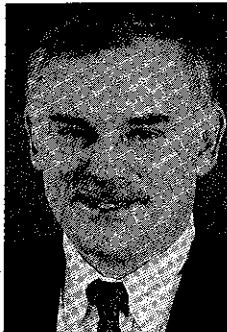
Philip Meyer waited more than 20 years for the revolution that is only now evident in America's newsrooms — the harnessing of the computer to cover the news.

It was during the Detroit riot of 1967 that Meyer and his colleagues at the *Detroit Free Press* first used survey research, computer analysis and other techniques of social researchers to investigate what happened and why. Later, he wrote a book urging reporters to use these tools and create their own databases to extend the reach of journalism. He titled the book "Precision Journalism."

Several news organizations took up Meyer's challenge and used the new techniques to explore everything from racial tensions to judges' sentencing patterns. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* and other newspapers won Pulitzer Prizes for their efforts.

Still, precision journalism never quite caught on. Editors regarded it as too expensive and impractical. Meyer himself left newspaper work for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he shared his ideas with students and served as a consultant to newspapers.

In the 1980s, electronic news-gathering suddenly was in vogue, largely because of Elliot Jaspin of *The Providence Journal*, who used computer analysis in searching public



Everette E. Dennis is executive director of The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University in New York City and is a vice president of The Freedom Forum.

records. Jaspin received a fellowship at The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, as Meyer had before him, and invented the software NineTrack Express, which lets PCs easily access data stored on mainframe-computer tape.

Jaspin later founded the Missouri Institute

for Computer-Assisted Reporting at the University of Missouri. Programs at Arizona State University, the University of North Carolina, Indiana University, Syracuse University and other schools also spread the news about the burgeoning field.

Today, computer-assisted reporting is gaining currency because it can offer fuller information for stories than simple shoe leather and ingenuity. Reporters are demonstrating daily that using the computer to gather and analyze information improves journalism at low cost.

Much of the work involves reporters manipulating existing databases rather than assembling their own. It falls short of Phil Meyer's hopes in "Precision Journalism." Yet few journalists would argue that harnessing the computer is not practical or cost-effective.

Computer-assisted reporting isn't simply a technique to be learned, but the first step in a process that will lead to more systematic and more powerful reporting. The result is, and will continue to be, good journalism. □



JEFF STAHLER FOR THE FREEDOM FORUM

Free speech

"In the two years that I have been researching my own life and writing about the 17 wars that I have covered, it seems to me that journalists today have never been in more danger

nor have they been more important."

— **Peter Arnett**, CNN international correspondent, at a forum on war correspondents in peril.

"We must reclaim freedom for the jobless, the homeless, the aged, the sick and the poor, because until the disenfranchised in our society are free, we will never move forward as a nation."

— **Christopher Montgomery**, Project Excellence scholar, on "What Freedom Means to Me."

— **Christopher Montgomery**, Project Excellence scholar, on "What Freedom Means to Me."

"Balanced journalism is a concept that is not widely embraced over there by any side. They want you to tell their side of the story, and if you don't, you might as well forget about using your neutrality and your objectivity as a shield. You better buy a thicker flak jacket and a better helmet."

— **USA TODAY** reporter **Tom Squitieri**, on covering the conflict in Bosnia.

"It's ironic for those of us who work in the media to accept as we do that television advertising works. We also believe that television can educate. But when it comes to anti-social messages, we somehow draw back and say, 'Well, we don't think in that area that television really works.'"

— **Milton Chen**, director of the Center for Education and Lifelong Learning at KQED-TV in San Francisco, on TV violence and the First Amendment.



Mandela with Adam Clayton Powell III, a fellow at The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center.

Nelson Mandela says freedom vital in upcoming South Africa elections

As political leaders half a world away set April 27, 1994, for the first multiracial election in South Africa, Nelson Mandela was at The Freedom Forum describing the political prospects for his country.

"Each political party — whether we agree with it or not — should be free to converse [its] point of a view.

...That is the essence of democracy," he told an audience of about 200 people in July.

"South Africa belongs to all people, black or white," he said. "That argument is the most explicit, the most devastating attack on all forms of racism."

Jailed in 1964 for his activities to overthrow the white-minority government

and its apartheid system of racial separation, Mandela was released in 1989 to see apartheid being dismantled. As elections draw near, Mandela envisions a South Africa with a bill of rights that protects "certain fundamental freedoms" and an independent court "which will be impartial, nonracial, nonsexist."

But media barriers to democracy remain. Television in South Africa long has been a propaganda tool of the white minority government, he said, and South African newspapers are controlled by three white-owned corporations. A black alternative press is struggling to survive, Mandela said. □

Newsroom work sparks classroom changes

Journalism professor Regina Colston plans significant curriculum changes at Alabama A&M University this fall to help her students compete with graduates from mainstream schools.

"I will have the opportunity to empower students with new skills," Colston said of the techniques she learned in writing, editing and technology during her Freedom Forum fellowship at *The Oakland Tribune* this summer. Colston was one of five journalism educators at historically black colleges and universities who won Freedom Forum fellowships at *The Oakland Tribune* or *The (Nashville) Tennessean*. The fellows wrote and edited articles for the newspapers and attended classes on journalism skills.

Colston had submitted a journalism curriculum for the fall. But "I'm going to revise that curriculum, to make some changes in the writing, editing, grammar and management courses." □



Regina Colston

Journalists fill fall line-up in Author Series

Get the inside story from people on the inside at The Freedom Forum Author Series in Arlington, Va. At the monthly forum, authors discuss their books and answer questions from an audience.

The fall schedule:

Sept. 21: Tom Rosenstiel, *Los Angeles Times* media writer. His book, "Strange Bedfellows," examines the effect television had on the 1992 presidential campaign.

Oct. 5: Terry Anderson, former hostage, Associated Press Middle East correspondent and Media Studies Center fellow. His book, "Den of Lions," describes his journey as a journalist and how the years as a prisoner changed him.

Nov. 16: Susan Stamborg, National Public Radio special correspondent. Her book, "Talk," highlights interviews she conducted as host of NPR's news magazine, "All Things Considered," for 14 years.

Past speakers

Their books cover a range of topics, but the authors have a common interest: dedication to free press, free speech and free spirit.

The series began last winter with Jack Nelson's "Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews." Nelson is Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*. Other forums have included authors such as columnist Carl Rowan; former National Endowment for the Arts chairman John Frohnmayer; and former Dukakis presidential campaign press secretary Patricia O'Brien.

For more information about The Freedom Forum Author Series, please call 703/284-2826. □

Harnessing computers to cover the news

Computer-assisted reporting proves its story power, even wows Hollywood

Baltimore Sun reporter Annie Reed got an idea for a story as she drove away from her parents' Christmas party last year.

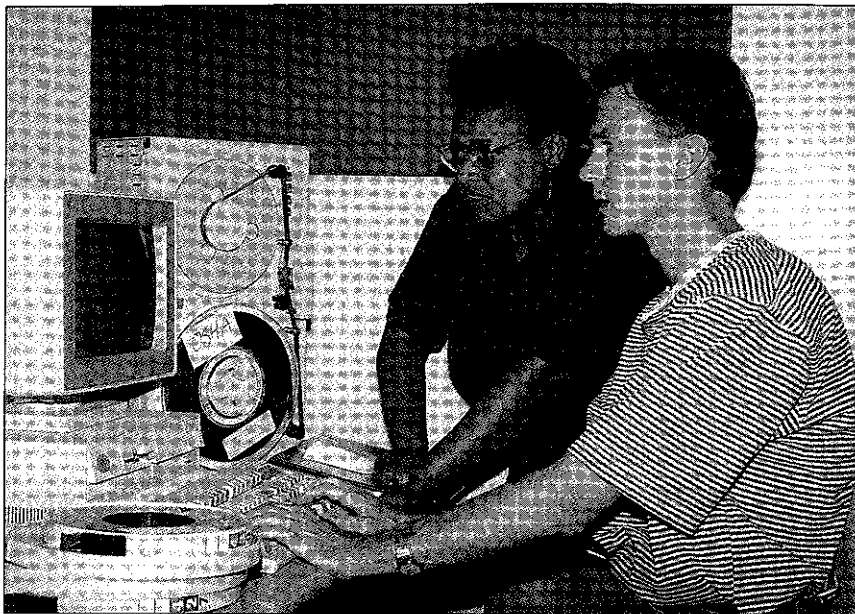
She was listening to a radio talk show when an earnest Seattle boy named Jonah called, wishing for a new wife for his sad, widowed dad, Sam. Their tale of love found and lost aroused Reed's stray-kitten sympathy as well as her news-hound instincts. She would write a story on call-in shows, she told her editor.

An "I'm a reporter" call to the show yielded the boy's phone number. A call to the number revealed the last name Baldwin on an answering-machine greeting. At her newsroom PC, Reed searched a national news article database for "Samuel Baldwin." In seconds, more than 200 listings came up on screen. Narrowing the search to "Samuel Baldwin, Jonah Baldwin" uncovered a newspaper obituary for Margaret Baldwin, Chicago. The key words "Samuel Baldwin, Chicago" produced four matches and their occupations. She whittled the list to one Sam Baldwin, architect, then sent a private investigator to find him in Seattle.

With her computer-culled information, Reed was able to contact Baldwin. But when the two met atop the Empire State Building, writing her story became the last thing on her mind.

Those final details aside, Reed's use of databases is a textbook demonstration of computer-assisted reporting. You can see it anytime at your local movie theater in the summer hit, "Sleepless in Seattle."

Computer-assisted reporting is the



Nom Twala, a staffer at Investigative Reporters and Editors, helps Michael Smith, a University of Missouri journalism student, call up OSHA data on a personal computer from nine-track tape at the university's journalism lab.

umbrella term for journalism that harnesses a computer's click-swift analytical power to decipher data and ferret out facts from banks of information. The technology offers the promise of more timely, more accurate and more complete stories than were previously possible. And far from being film-world fiction, PC-powered journalism is a fact in a small but growing number of news operations.

Journalists armed with computers can fish out megabytes of raw information upstream of spin doctors and press releases, sort it, study it and come to their own conclusions. Computers also enable reporters to tackle stories that once were impractical — even impossible — to do. Some examples:

— *U.S. News & World Report* documented a whopping 31% increase in campaign contributions from health-care interests to key congressmen in 1992. The reason: influence buying before congressional debate of national health-care reform. Two million records were researched.

— *The Washington Times* highlighted the hidden problem of child sexual abuse by hundreds of Boy Scout leaders nationwide by typing tens of thousands of court documents and internal Boy Scout correspondence into a computer and analyzing the data.

— *USA TODAY* uncovered evidence that the national war on drugs was racist. African-Americans were four times as likely to be arrested on drug charges as whites, even though they used drugs at about the same rate. The source: 320,000 records from the FBI

Uniform Crime Report and 1990 census data for 3,000 U.S. cities.

Driving the rise in computer-assisted journalism is the steady computerization of American society.

"What's happened over the last 10 years is that the government has increasingly used computers to manage its operations, so there's been an enormous transfer of data to electronic form. ... You need a computer to get at it," said Elliot Jaspin, systems editor for Cox Newspapers and a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, who founded the Missouri Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting (MICAR) at the University of Missouri in 1989.

Beth Marchak, computer projects editor for *The Washington Times*, said the arrival of the Clinton administration spawned an openness toward new technology. "There's a whole wave of young people coming into town saying, 'Gawd, we don't even have voice mail at the White House,'" she said. President Clinton recently signed into law a requirement that the *Congressional*

Three newspaper setups for computer-assisted reporting



■ **Circulation:** 264,000 mornings; 335,000 Sundays.

■ **Hardware:** One Macintosh IIcx with 1.2 gigabyte of memory; one 386 IBM-compatible PC with 1 gigabyte of memory; Vax system; CD-ROM reader.

■ **Software:** Microsoft FoxBASE and FoxPro, database software.

■ **On-line:** Dialog, DataTimes, Nexis/Lexis, Internet, on-line magazines, some county and federal court bulletin boards; DataQuick for California property records.

■ **Circulation:** 146,000 mornings; 189,000 Sundays.

■ **Hardware:** 20 IBM-compatible 486 PCs connected via Novell network; two nine-track tape readers; CD-ROM reader; DAT drive.

■ **Software:** Microsoft FoxPro, database software; NineTrack Express, mainframe-to-PC conversion software; Lotus 1-2-3, spreadsheet software; SPSS, statistics software; SmartText, hypertext software; DataStorm Procomm, networking software; Microsoft Visual Basic, programming software; MapInfo, data-mapping software.

■ **On-line:** Dialog, DataTimes, Nexis/Lexis, Burrelle's, Internet, CompuServe, some county government mainframes; Avcom, aviation bulletin board.

■ **Circulation:** 48,000 evenings; 52,000 Sundays.

■ **Hardware:** Four IBM-compatible 386 PCs; one Macintosh PC; one nine-track tape reader through Lansing bureau of Newhouse Newspapers.

■ **Software:** Microsoft Works, integrated spreadsheet, database, word processing, drawing and modem software; Borland Paradox, database software.

■ **On-line:** PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) for U.S. District Court, U.S. Bankruptcy Court and the Department of Justice; Internet.

JEFF DIONISE

Record and the *Federal Register* be available on-line.

Barriers in the newsroom

Many journalists are tuned in to the technology trend. A 1992-93 Freedom Forum survey of newspaper newsroom training needs found that computer and database work ranked fourth in professional skills — behind writing, reporting and editing — that journalists most wanted to develop.

Still, journalists who even occasionally use computers and databases are

the exceptions in their newsrooms, and their news operations are the exceptions in the industry. Some myths seem to be discouraging more of them from embracing computer-assisted reporting:

■ **Myth: It's expensive.** It can be, but it doesn't have to be. Many projects require only a good PC and spreadsheet software, as little as \$2,000 new. *The Washington Times'* Marchak researched her Boy Scouts story on a Macintosh shared by her systems department.

Data can come in myriad formats — nine-track tape, CD-ROM and on-line —

that call for sophisticated hardware. But equipment and expertise can be borrowed at low cost elsewhere, perhaps a local university. For its early database stories, USA TODAY conducted seminars for students at the University of Maryland School of Journalism in exchange for mainframe computer time, according to Special Projects Editor Larry Sanders.

Data often must be bought, for example, to cover government expenses. But information your newspaper already publishes regularly — zoning variances, accidents and obituaries, for example — can provide rich fodder for local stories if compiled and analyzed.

"Even the individual reporter on a 6-year-old computer with borrowed software can do good work," said Bill Dedman, who won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing racial bias among Atlanta mortgage lenders in a database project for the *Journal and Constitution*. "There's no \$50,000 barrier you have to get over."

■ **Myth: It's only for large news operations.**

Definitely not. Drive — not size — determines success in computer-assisted reporting. Craig Doremus is half of the full-time reporting staff of the *Sunday Sun-Journal* in Lewiston, Maine. Yet he has used his PC to tell readers that Maine

Continued on page 6

Mobile program to teach high-tech reporting skills

A new program will bring expert training in computer-assisted reporting right to your newsroom.

By calling Investigative Reporters and Editors, newsroom managers will be able to schedule a traveling tutor to train staffers in-house. The program will serve news organizations, journalism schools and press associations.

A \$221,000 Freedom Forum grant covered most of the program's start-up costs. Host organizations will be charged according to size.

The mobile training program will be up and running in early 1994. IRE, working with the Missouri Institute for Computer-Assisted

Reporting, estimates that it will conduct 100 to 200 days of training during the first year. They hope to teach computer-assisted reporting to about 10,000 journalists, educators and students over five years.

If you can't wait until 1994, IRE and the *Raleigh News & Observer* are sponsoring a three-day workshop with hands-on training in computer-assisted reporting. Dates: Oct. 21-24. Cost: \$125.

For information on the mobile training program or the October workshop, write or call IRE, 100 Neff Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, (314) 882-2042.

Continued from page 5

leads New England in new jobs, but lags in incomes; and that one of the two big area hospitals was charging on average \$1,500 more per patient than the other. He recently borrowed a local professor's statistical analysis of PAC money in state legislative races — "impenetrable stuff," he said — and made it palatable to the public.

"You don't need to analyze millions and millions of records to really do something substantial," he said. "You don't have to have a Ph.D. or thousands of dollars' worth of equipment."

■ **Myth: It's only useful for long-term projects.** Yes, computer-assisted reporting is great for investigative stories. But it can be a godsend for reporters on deadline.

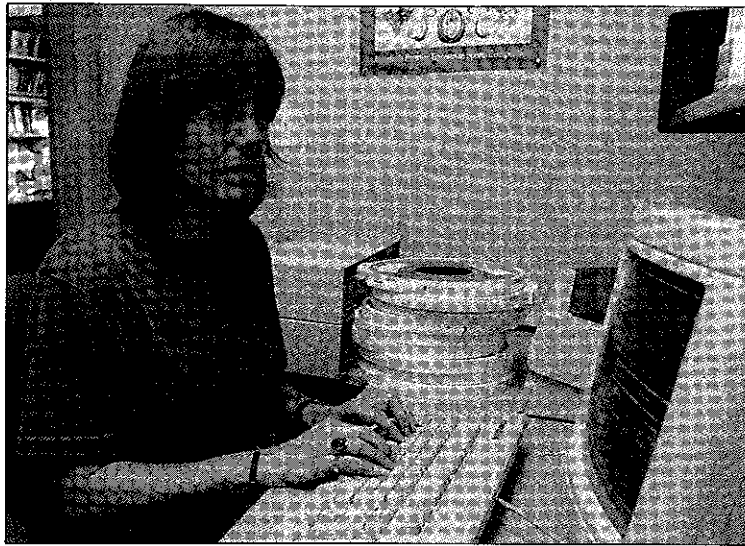
"Let's say you hear that Jesse Jackson is running for mayor of Washington. Does he own property in the District of Columbia? The records office has been closed for three hours, but you can find out because your computer can access their database," Dedman said. "Or there's a shooting. Does the person have a gun permit? A store goes out of business. Has the owner filed for bankruptcy?" Journalists with computers can get the answers, and quickly, if they have a direct link to the city or county database, as some newsrooms do.

■ **Myth: It's a magic story fountain.**

Computer-assisted reporting is still reporting, and sound journalism practices apply. Databases don't produce stories any easier than paper records do unless you start with an idea. "Stories are still not about numbers," Marchak said. "If numbers can't tell you something about the human condition, the story ain't worth doing."

There also are no guarantees that the data is accurate. "I always spot-check. I'm always thinking what could go wrong," said Penny Loeb, an associate editor at *U.S. News & World Report*.

Jaspin, who developed nine-track tape-to-PC software as a fellow at The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, added, "Computers don't make a bad reporter into a good reporter. What they do is make a good reporter better.



Penny Loeb, associate editor at *U.S. News & World Report*, analyzes data at her personal computer. As a reporter at *New York Newsday* in 1991, Loeb used computers to reveal that New York City property owners were not notified about \$275 million in overpaid taxes.

What they allow a bad reporter to do is make bigger mistakes faster."

Journalists who want electronic data from government agencies usually will become party to a tug of war over the Freedom of Information Act or state sunshine laws. Dave Davis, a reporter for *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, said, "In my experience as a reporter for 10 years, usually it's like pulling teeth to get information from the government."

Davis and partner Ted Wendling were shocked, however, when the Nuclear Regulatory Commission let them tap into its in-house computer network last year. That unprecedented access led the reporters to write a series on victims of botched radiation therapy, including the worst radiation tragedy in

The brain work of designing the project was far more painstaking.

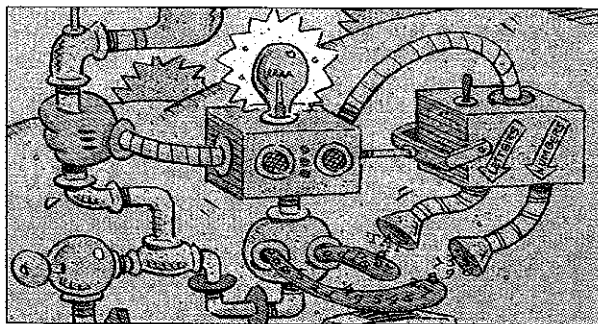
Jaspin, a 22-year journalism veteran who sets up computer-assisted reporting at Cox newspapers, scoffs at the assumption that older reporters are unwilling or unable to ride the database wave. "I've run into younger reporters who oppose electricity," he said.

"It's more of a mind set than a technical or even financial limitation," Doremus said. "People have to get comfortable working with computers. I don't think that's the case yet."

Mobile training

Even journalists won over by the power of computer-assisted reporting may be unsure how to begin. A practical way to start is through training, which has been available through organizations such as MICAR and Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE). Sessions are infrequent, however, and often cost more time and money than many managers are willing to spend on just one or two staffers. They also mean reporters are out of the office for days at a time.

To overcome those obstacles, MICAR, IRE and The Freedom Forum have teamed up to bring database training into newsrooms. (Box, page 5). A traveling tutor, toting perhaps a dozen laptop computers, will visit news operations, press associations and even journalism schools on demand to train people on the spot in the skills they want. Most of the program's start-up costs were paid by a \$221,000 Freedom Forum grant. Details still are being worked out, but costs to host sites will vary according



modern medicine. Their stories slammed the NRC for lax oversight. They also made Davis and Wendling 1993 Pulitzer Prize finalists.

"I wish more government agencies would take the NRC's cooperation as an example," Davis said. He surmised that by opening its database, the NRC saved the pain of processing hundreds of FOIA requests.

■ **Myth: It's difficult to learn and do.** Not true. But computers, like any tool, require instruction and practice. Many journalists have taught themselves. USA TODAY's Sanders said he and his staff learned by doing what reporters do best — asking lots of questions. Maine's Doremus read common self-help computer books. "They are easier to understand than the software manuals," he said.

Dedman's award-winning mortgage story was his first database project. Yet the computer analysis, assisted by two university researchers, was the easiest part of the work, he said.

And the (Pulitzer) winner is ... computer-assisted reporting

It's been more than 20 years since journalists began tapping into government databases or building their own data banks. But computer-assisted journalism only recently has begun to take off. For five years in a row, reporters have won Pulitzer Prizes for stories based on computer-assisted reporting, according to Bill Dedman, a free-lance journalist and IRE director.

Dedman won in 1989 for an Atlanta *Journal and Constitution* series exposing racism in mortgage lending by Atlanta banks and savings and loans. Pulitzer-winning stories that followed:

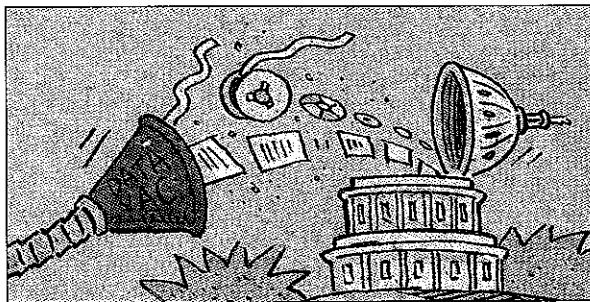
1990: Lou Kilzer and Chris Ison, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, uncovered an arson scheme in St. Paul involving firefighters.

1991: Joseph Hallinan and Susan Headden, *The Indianapolis Star*, reported on medical malpractice in Indiana.

1992: Jeff Taylor and Mike McGraw, *The Kansas City Star*, showed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to be undermined by fraud, waste and favoritism toward powerful food lobbies.

1993: *The Miami Herald* staff covered Hurricane Andrew and discovered that, among other factors, lax building codes contributed to the devastation.

Also in 1993, all three Pulitzer finalists in investigative reporting relied on government databases:



■ Dave Davis and Ted Wendling, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, investigated stories of victims of botched radiation therapy and blamed lax oversight by federal agencies.

Method: Went on-line with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission internal database. Used CD-ROM from NRC containing radiation dosage errors at hospitals nationwide.

■ Terry Ganey, Michael Sorkin and Louis Rose, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, found that attorneys who contributed to Missouri Attorney General William Webster's campaign fund won larger workers' compensation settlements for their clients.

Method: Obtained nine-track tape of injury claims from the state Division of Workers' Compensation and matched the information with newspaper's database of Webster's campaign finance-disclosure reports.

■ James Heaney, *The Buffalo News*, identified slumlords and Housing Court leniency toward them as major causes of the decline of Buffalo's inner city and working-class neighborhoods.

Method: Built database from nine-track tapes containing summaries of Buffalo Housing Court cases and tracked landlords most often in court and streets with most code violations. Used data from Census Bureau's American Housing Surveys and from *News* survey of housing officials to compare conditions in eight cities similar to Buffalo.

to the size of the news organization. Sessions will be offered starting in early 1994.

"We'll have a broad menu that's flexible," said IRE board member Dedman, a former fellow at The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center. Dedman likened the new program to the work of Methodist circuit riders of the 1800s who preached from town to town in communities without ministers.

Training will be tailored for each organization. Subjects could range from spreadsheet skills for suburban reporters to downloading nine-track tape for investigative reporters to data mapping for graphics artists. Sessions can last as long as a month and accommodate any number of journalists at once, offering unbeatable bang for the buck.

Curricula are being designed now, said *U.S. News'* Loeb, an IRE board member. Jaspin predicted the program will be "a rousing success" based on interest shown at IRE conferences on computer-assisted reporting. Loeb said that a Cincinnati television station already has asked to be the first training site.

Through the grant, IRE also expects to offer journalists three other benefits:

a computer bulletin board through which reporters and journalism associations around the world can share information; free telephone advice on computer-assisted journalism projects and problems; and a library of popular databases that journalists may access or purchase.

A competitive necessity

IRE has shown hundreds of journalists that it can be easier — and more rewarding — to negotiate an electronic labyrinth than to follow a paper trail. MICAR alumni number more than 150 from more than 80 news organizations and several universities. Computer-assisted reporting is even showing up in Hollywood. But what may truly ignite interest in the field is its evolution from a curiosity to a necessity in the new Information Age. Newspapers must wake up soon, Marchak said, "because if they don't, they're going to get kicked in the teeth."

It's already happening in Ohio, sparked in part by the success of the *Dayton Daily News*. "They realized that this was something that gave medium and smaller papers a leg up," said

Cleveland's Davis, who once worked for the *Daily News*. "They realized that they could take on *The Plain Dealer* — a newspaper three times as large — and beat the pants off them."

Reporters skilled in computer-assisted reporting also will bolster their own careers, Loeb said. And minority journalists must embrace the technology or risk losing their hard-won positions, said Retha Hill, a *Washington Post* reporter serving as Freedom Forum professional-in-residence in the Washington, D.C., public schools.

"It's so important for us as black journalists to be aware of these changes and to get the education that we need," she said at the 1993 National Association of Black Journalists convention in Houston. "Those reporters who will be doing the stories that could potentially win a Pulitzer or a major award will be those people who know something about computer-assisted journalism."

Jaspin summed it up best: "A journalist who can't read a reel of magnetic tape is as illiterate as the 15th-century peasant confronted by Gutenberg." □



On Native American team nicknames ...

“If we called them the Blackskins or the Yellowskins or the Whiteskins, they would be raising hell.”

Tim Giago
Publisher,
Indian Country Today

Free minds don't always think alike!



“I don't think that newspapers shouldn't print something because it's offensive to one particular group. Those that do are putting blinders on the truth.”

Michael Gartner
Editor,
The Daily Tribune,
Ames, Iowa

What's in a name? For some, it's more important than any sport, championship or national pastime. To show support, some news organizations have decided to omit all sports team names that might be perceived as racially offensive. Some feel the omission justified. Others see it as a “politically correct inspired” infringement on First Amendment rights. The Freedom Forum decided to bring both teams of thought together for a major league discussion.

That's our role — to provide a forum for the free exchange of opinions and ideas about the media, journalism and free expression. A place where the movers and shapers of society can discuss and debate the issues to help propel all of us toward understanding and change. That is our way of making freedom work for everyone — even if we don't always think alike.