



# NEW ENGLAND NEWS FORUM

New England News Forum  
Journalism Program  
108 Bartlett Hall  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst MA 01003  
voice: 413-577-4370  
email: mail@newenglandnews.org  
web: www.newenglandnews.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 2, 2007

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:  
Bill Densmore, (cell) 413-458-8001



*From left: Boylan, Brandon, Blais, McDermott*

## ON MAY 24, FOUR EXPERTS TO DISCUSS AND SHARE CHANGES IN NEWS AT COMMUNITY LEVEL; FIRST AREA "CIVIC LIBRARY LISTENING" EVENT

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. – Sweeping changes in the technology and economics of news that create new opportunities for building community are the topic when the New England News Forum holds first Western New England ["Civic News Library Listening Series"](#) event Thurs., May 24 at the Springfield City Library.

The 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. event is free and public and will include a Q&A session during which the audience can share ideas and initiatives at local community building. The session is entitled: "Restoring Media Trust: The News Revolution -- What Does It Mean to Your Community?"

Among expert speakers will be James Boylan, founding editor of the Columbia Journalism Review, Heather Brandon, author of the "Urban Compass" blog that highlights Springfield, Pulitzer Prize-winner writer Madeleine Blais of the UMass Amherst journalism program and Larry McDermott, publisher of *The Republican*, Springfield's daily newspaper.

"Our Civic News Library Listening Series puts media experts together with active citizens for directed discussion and informal dialogue," says Bill Densmore, director of the News Forum. "With blogging, citizens news gathers and the emergence of simple video and audio tools, the lines between commercial journalism and citizen activism are blurring. We're helping define the new relationships."

The Civic News Library Listening Series, which begins with a similar event May 17 at the Boston Public Library, is supported by a grant from the Massachusetts Foundation on the Humanities. The New England News Forum is supported by a [grant](#) from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Internet technology is dramatically changing the financing and formatting of the news, profoundly affecting participatory democracy and community, and eroding public trust in the media. Existing news organizations, citizens and "bloggers" are experimenting with new forms.

The New England News Forum (NENF) is inaugurating the "Civic News Library Listening Series," to help understand these changes. In Springfield, and Boston, and then throughout New England during 2007 and 2008, the NENF will enlist libraries, local media organizations and active citizens in a series of "town meetings."

These evening events will typically involve several discussion leaders and then an explicit period of "listening" to citizens express concerns about the news. They will often be videotaped for research.

## ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

**Larry McDermott** is publisher and CEO of *The Republican* and the *Sunday Republican*, which publishes dailies and weeklies and the area's only Spanish-language newspaper around Springfield, Mass. A journalist for more than 30 years, McDermott was with The Associated Press for 18 years as reporter, bureau chief and executive in Arkansas, Michigan and New York City. He joined Advance Publications (*The Republican's* owner) in 1988 as editor of its Michigan papers, moving to Springfield as executive editor in 1991 and publisher/CEO in 1999. McDermott has battled public officials to gain access to information the newspaper sought and has been awarded the New England Newspapers Association First Amendment award twice in the past three years. McDermott serves as co-chairman of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's judiciary-media committee. He's a member of the Hampden County Literacy Cabinet and president of the Massachusetts Newspaper Publishers Association.

**Heather Brandon** is a writer and photographer for Urban Compass, a blog covering community news, personal viewpoints and civic issues in Springfield, Mass, on a volunteer basis, and hosted by valleyadvocate.com. She has over 10 years of self-publishing and Web experience as editor of "One," a young adult 'zine she founded in 1996. She later co-edited "On the Front Lines," a book compilation of feature articles. She founded and directed The Parenting Project, a Springfield-based family support network, before turning to blogging about city life as community building. She holds a B.A. in Growth and Structure of Cities from Bryn Mawr College, and won the department's Bolton Prize upon graduating for her thesis work on downtown Pittsburgh. In 2006, Urban Compass won the American Planning Association state chapter's Outstanding Media Award. She lives in Springfield.

**Jim Boylan** was the founding editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* [when it began in 1961](#) and is professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where he taught journalism and history from 1979 to 1991. He was previously a member of the journalism faculty at Columbia (1957-1979). He is editor of an anthology drawn from Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, and was a Pulitzer Prize juror. He has written many articles and several books including: "Pulitzer's School: Columbia University's School of Journalism, 1903-2003" (2003), "Revolutionary Lives: Anna Strunsky & William English Walling" (1999), "The New Deal Coalition and the Election of 1946" (1982), and "The World and the 20's: The Golden Years of New York's Legendary Newspaper." (1973). Boylan lives in Stonington, Conn.

**Madeleine Blais** is a prize-winning writer and book author who teaches the literature of journalism, memoir and advanced nonfiction writing at UMass Amherst. She earned Pulitzer Prize in 1980 for "Zepp's Last Stand," a story in the *Miami Herald* magazine about a veteran dishonorably discharged for pacifism in World War I who in his elder years won conversion of his dishonorable discharge to honorable. Before turning to teaching, Blais also worked at *The Boston Globe* and *The Trenton Times*, and published articles major national newspapers. Her books include "Uphill Walkers: Portrait of a Family" (2001), about her single-parent childhood in Granby; "In These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle" (1995), the story of the Amherst Lady Hurricanes girl's high school basketball team (which was a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist in nonfiction); and "The Heart Is an Instrument: Portraits in Journalism" (1992), a collection of her newspaper writing. Blais, a graduate of The College of New Rochelle, lives in Amherst.

## ABOUT THE NEW ENGLAND NEWS FORUM

[The New England News Forum](#) (NENF) is a collaboration among news professionals, citizen journalists, educators and the public to promote vigorous, trusted, accountable journalism – and accountable government. It aims to increase public trust and deepen public understanding of the news media by promoting the practice of trusted, thorough, and accountable journalism. NENF is a member organization based with the journalism program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and funded by a seed grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. It launched to the public on April 7 with a conference in Lowell, Mass. entitled: "[The New\(s\) England Revolution: From Politics to Courtroom to Classroom.](#)" NENF is an independent resource, which can help, define, research, advise -- and hopefully strengthen and expand -- the relationship between news producers and news consumers. Its website offers journalists, web-news entrepreneurs and active citizens a place to engage in discussion, to share and resolve disagreements over media issues such as privacy, coverage, access, accuracy, bias and emphasis.

For more information, contact the New England News Forum at UMass Amherst by phone at (413) 577-4370 or email to [mail@newenglandnews.org](mailto:mail@newenglandnews.org) or go to the website, <http://www.newenglandnews.org>

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*Editors: Higher resolution photos of speakers available at: <http://www.mediagiraffe.org/library>*