

MEDIA GIRAFFE Project

*Innovation for democracy;
Standing above the crowd*

<http://www.mediagiraffe.org>

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OCTOBER UPDATE

Dear Media Giraffe Friend:

Whether as an advisor, donor, intern, or researcher, thank-you for your contribution to The Media Giraffe Project. Your support—and the assistance of the journalism faculty, interns and administration at the University of Massachusetts Amherst—is essential.¹ It has been an exciting summer and fall, full of developments in the media world and here at UMass. In this update we outline the problem, our mission, the research, communication and education work underway or planned, the attention it's receiving and our need for additional funding.

THE PROBLEM

Much of the public has “attention deficit” for news about civic affairs – in part because of less leisure time and more entertainment choices. Changes in the financing and incentives of our nation’s media institutions have left them less able “watchdogs” of government, institutions and social trends. This may lead to de-facto secret government. There are thousands fewer reporters in the United States than two decades ago. The network news audience is declining, and research shows less and less airtime devoted to stories about politics and public policy. Newspapers are failing to attract or retain younger readers. All these trends threaten effective democracy and compassionate communities. The traditional media are unsure of what to do. What’s needed is public research and examples of ways to re-engage citizens and recharge media – identifying promising technology, business models and relationships.

OUR MISSION

Uniquely, the Media Giraffe Project takes a people rather than policy approach to the problem and focuses on solutions rather than problems. Our mission is to find and spotlight above-the-crowd individuals (“giraffes”) making innovative, sustainable use of media (old and new) to foster participatory democracy and community. We’re showing how citizens can use giraffe-inspired ideas to read, hear, watch . . . or create . . . media that engage and inform critical public policy issues. In the process, our Media Giraffe Project research interns — likely future journalists or media professionals — are being introduced to critical future-of-democracy issues such as reaching new audiences, keeping government accountable, and involving citizens in media creation.

¹ -- We acknowledge the help of [The Giraffe Heroes Project](#), of Langley, Wash., for supporting our use of the “sticking-their-necks-out” concept in the media environment.

SCOUTING REPORT

From Maine to Texas and Minnesota to California, we are spotlighting media giraffe stories for our website, book, film documentary, conference, and curricula. Even as mainstream media struggle to maintain a commitment to public service, the gap is being filled by new technologies, new approaches and new constituencies. They offer templates for change. We have found prospective giraffe candidates enthusiastic about the Internet's power to reach new audiences and share information. They are passionate about enabling and contributing to the public dialog. And they are finding support for doing so among other citizens. *The Media Giraffe Project is making their stories visible; their work replicable and usable.*

Some examples . . .

In Camden, Maine, *Richard Anderson's* family and colleagues at VillageSoup.com have been so successful at making their community-focused web service the principal source of news and business information for the Midcoast region that after four years, they started two weekly newspapers to supplement it.

In San Antonio, *Deanne Cuellar* and the Texas Media Empowerment Project are helping the city's mainstream media better represent and connect with a fast-growing Spanish-speaking community.

In the **San Francisco Bay area**, we interviewed:

- *Sandy Close* of Pacific News Service, which monitors and supports ethnic and youth media . . .
- *Meena Trott*, co-founder of Six Apart, the Internet's No. 2 "blog hosting" service . . .
- *Craig Newmark*, founder of Craig's List, which is revolutionizing local information through free online classifieds as well as looking at delivering news . . .
- *Dori Maynard* of the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, which is teaching media executives how to understand and cover diverse communities . . .
- *Brewster Kahle* of The Internet Archives, which is becoming the "Library of Congress" for digital information . . .
- *Barry Parr* of the Coastsider, a pioneering community-news web log, and . . .
- *John McManus* of Grade the News at San Jose State University, which has developed a prototype in the Bay Area for measuring the quality of print and broadcast news outlets.

In Minneapolis, we interviewed:

- Lawyer *John Hinderaker*, a once youthful radical turned conservative political blogger . . .
- Producer *Mike Skoler*, who has begun the "Public Insight Journalism" project at Minnesota Public Radio . . .

- Deputy editor *Nancy Barnes*, who told us about the “Experience Newspaper” project at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* ...
- Pioneering video blogger *Chuck Olsen*, who outlined the growing power of simple online video, rather than words, to influence politics and culture ...
- Retired executive *Ron Graham*, who told us how the Minnesota News Council changes the practice of journalism through moderated public oversight ...
- Former social worker *Griff Wigley*, who explained how volunteers sustain the Northfield [Minn.] Online local news site ...
- *Deb Flemming*, about why she quit her job as a daily newspaper editor rather than lay off more reporters ...
- *Walter Kuckes*, who talked about why he travels all over Minnesota making courthouse law libraries more accessible to the public.

THREE-PHASE PROJECT

Our three-year, three-phase effort involves research, communication, and education.

- Our initial web profiles database is part of a first-phase objective to gather and publicize research on up to 300 prospective media giraffes. A giraffe website user will understand *why* the giraffe is motivated to foster democracy and community and *how* consumers can either replicate or use his or her service.
- Through a book, documentary film, and a June 2006 conference, we’ll communicate the stories of 20 to 30 of the most-motivating and effective giraffes. We expect the book will become a “must read” in schools of journalism and mass communication, as well as in business schools. We’ve lined up two potential publishers. Filmmaker [Mary Mazzio](#) will select seven of the giraffes for more extensive filming and interviewing focused on their inspiration and motivation to succeed.
- Finally, with workshops, talks, and school curricula, we will educate — working with these premier giraffes — to show how citizens can use their ideas to support, enjoy and create media that advance participatory democracy and community.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Here are some highlights and results of our activity to focus attention on innovators inside and outside mainstream media:

- RESEARCH -- Eight UMass undergraduate interns are working this fall on giraffe profiles and four summer interns from UMass and Williams College created over 150 profiles. Search their work at <http://www.mediagiraffe.org/profiles> . We have identified more than 265 potential giraffes. Much work needs to be done to profile them all and capture best practices. For an example list of giraffes, see: <http://www.newshare.com/giraffe/working.pdf> . . . A fifth intern, Emily Cohane-Mann, from United World College-USA, updated our web site with scores of annotations and extracts about giraffe-style media innovation.

- **OUTREACH** -- The project is already attracting notice. Profiled giraffes such as [Griff Wigley](#) are starting to pass the word around. Susan Mernit, a respected consultant to the news industry, took note of our website in a [July report to her readers](#), as [did Leonard Witt](#) of Kennesaw State University. *On October 17, we'll make our first public announcement of the project.*
- **EXPERTISE** – MGP has been recognized for contributing expertise on the future of journalism. As one of 40 invited participants, Bill Densmore attended and wrote a story on the Annenberg Trust at Sunnyland's "Commission on the Role of the Press and Democracy," held July 12-14 at the University of Pennsylvania. You [can read it online](#) at: http://newshare.typepad.com/newshare/2005/06/forty_authors_s.html. Densmore was also invited to serve as an advisor to [Newstrust.NET](#), a non-profit effort to create a quality-rating service for news. Densmore also joined the board of the [Action Coalition for Media Education](#), which promotes independent media making and media literacy curricula.
- **ADVISORS/DIVERSITY** -- [Dr. Sarah McCarthy](#) of the University of Illinois School of Education joined our advisory board. Sarah's family background in media ownership, and her professional focus on understanding how students learn, are ideal sources of wisdom for the third-phase MGP goal — teaching smart media consumption and creation. Dr. McCarthy's appointment is part of our effort to diversify our advisory board by including representatives from education and from diverse communities not well served by mainstream media.
- **FUNDING** -- Funding from individual donors launched the MGP in April. UMass Amherst has invested in the promise of the Media Giraffe Project with pilot funding for travel and interns. We are working closely with the campus Development Office to pursue a number of potential sources of foundation support for our three-year plan. *Our most critical next step is to involve individuals like you to demonstrate to foundation funders sincere and enthusiastic public interest.*

THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

The media landscape is changing quickly. An increasingly under-informed electorate needs to be told about the many emerging methods for engaging in political and civic affairs. Our website is now doing this. But critical work cannot continue without your support. We are raising funds to:

- Undertake an additional 20 onsite giraffe interviews
- Complete the book manuscript
- Organize the June 29-July 2, 2006 conference at UMass Amherst
- Begin the documentary film
- Begin curriculum development

Please take a moment now, while this report is still in front of you, to make a gift in support of this work. Send a check as noted below. Or go to <http://www.umass.edu/development/> and click on the “give now” link at the top center of the page. After entering your gift amount and address information, you see a “Gift Designation” page. Type “Media Giraffe Project” in the [Other\subcategory] box.

Thank you for helping us find and celebrate individuals working to keep media a bulwark of America’s self-governance. With your help, we are creating a critical, timely, and regularly updated resource, one that features how-to-answers for citizens, journalists, and “citizen-journalists” who want to revitalize participatory democracy and community.

With appreciation,



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EMBEDDED (non-visible) LINKS IN THIS LETTER:

Media Giraffe Project advisors

http://www.mediagiraffe.org/artman/publish/article_210.shtml

About filmmaker Mary Mazzio

<http://www.50eggs.com/about.html>

“Village Soup”, Camden, Maine, giraffe profile

<http://www.mediagiraffe.org/profiles/index.php?action=profile&id=98>

List of 25 “example” prospective giraffes:

<http://www.newshare.com/giraffe/working.pdf>

Draft “Giraffe Attributes”

http://www.mediagiraffe.org/artman/publish/article_189.shtml

Newstrust

http://www.newstrust.net/about/about_us.htm

Action Coalition for Media Education

<http://www.acmecoalition.org/page.cfm?ID=83>

The MGP mission

http://www.mediagiraffe.org/artman/publish/article_188.shtml

Online references to the MGP:

http://wileyandassociates.com/2005_09_01_archive.html#112600822193387839

<http://susanmernit.blogspot.com/2005/07/media-giraffe.html>

<http://pjnet.org/weblogs/pjnettoday/archives/000604.html>

Our advisors: Taking the lead in the giraffe search

Last updated: July 14, 2005

http://www.mediagiraffe.org/artman/publish/article_210.shtml

Anyone [can recommend](#) the work of an individual for “media giraffe” spotlighting. The following individuals (listed alphabetically) are among a rotating group of advisors helping to refine giraffe “attributes.” They serve as lead scouts in the giraffe hunt.

[Peter K. Bhatia](#), executive editor, *The Oregonian* (Portland, Ore.); past-president, [American Society of Newspapers Editors](#).

[Dan Gillmor](#), founder Grass Roots Media, Inc., former high-tech columnist, *San Jose Mercury-News*.

[John A. Graham](#), president, [The Giraffe Heroes Project](#) of Whidbey Island, Wash. U.S. diplomat for 15 years in Libya, Viet Nam, NATO, advisor to U.S. Sen. John Glenn; author of book, "Outdoor Leadership." Veteran mountain climber.

[Ellen Hume](#), senior research fellow, Univ. of Mass.-Boston; former White House correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal* and former executive director, Shorenstein Center at Harvard University's JFK School.

[Dorothy Kidd](#), assistant professor, media studies, University of San Francisco.

[Larry Kramer](#), CEO, digital media, CBS-Viacom, founder of MarketWatch, former senior editor roles at both the *San Francisco Examiner* and *Washington Post*.

[Mary Mazzio](#), independent filmmaker and former attorney, Luce Fellow, directed/produced *A Hero for Daisy*, *Lemonade Stories*, and *Apple Pie*.

[Sarah McCarthey](#), professor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, education school, former owner, *Salt Lake City Tribune*.

[Heath Meriwether](#), retired publisher, *Detroit Free Press*; former executive editor of *The Miami Herald* and board member, American Press Institute.

[Andrew Nachison](#), director, The Media Center at the American Press Institute.

[Mari Castañeda Paredes](#), professor, Univ. of Mass. Amherst Dept. of Communication, specialization in Hispanic broadcast media and new-media development.

[Jan Schaffer](#), director, J-Lab, Institute for Interactive Journalism and the New Voices Project, Univ. of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism

[Norman Sims](#), journalism professor, UMass Amherst, former UPI reporter; expert on literary journalism.