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The New Jersey Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (NJSPJ) Celebrates 50th Anniversary With Gala Celebration

EDISON, NJ --- The New Jersey Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (NJSPJ) will end a 15-month celebration of its 50th anniversary with a gala dinner on Tuesday, September 14, at the Crowne Plaza, Route 1, in Edison. The dinner, which will feature addresses by past chapter presidents, will begin at 6:30 p.m. with cocktails; there will be a cash bar.

“This celebration marks an important event in the life of our chapter; we've come a long way,” said Barbara S. Reed, NJSPJ’s current president. An associate professor in the School of Communication and Information (SC&I), at Rutgers, the State University, Reed teaches in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies. “I remember munching on cheese and crackers, standing outside at Dow Jones, at my first meeting which was for awards in New Jersey journalism. Now we have more than 100 people attend our luncheons, the most recent at the New Jersey PAC.”

Reed is referring to the NJSPJ’s annual Excellence in Journalism Awards Luncheon. This year it was held on June 13 at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, NJ, and featured Wendy S. Ruderman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter from the Philadelphia Daily News as guest speaker. Ruderman and her colleague and co-prize winner Barbara Laker, won for their exposé of the corruption within an elite narcotics unit of the Philadelphia police department.

However, NJSP’s 50th anniversary celebration actually kicked off a year earlier, at the chapter’s 2009 awards luncheon held on the campus of Rutgers, The State University. Ron Miskoff, a past

president of NJSPJ and currently a lecturer at SC&I, advises an active student chapter which meets regularly at the university.

At the 2009 luncheon, Guy Baehr, past chapter officer and longtime member, noted that it was also 100th anniversary of the parent organization, the national Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). He explained that SPJ was originally “Sigma Delta Chi,” reflecting its roots as a college and professional fraternity established by students at DePauw University in Indiana. The current name was adopted in 1988.

Baehr also pointed out local NJSPJ members who have gained state or national prominence. Among them were Wilson Barto, who went on to serve as editor of both *The Trenton Times* and *The Trentonian*; Hugh N. Boyd, the publisher of *The Home-News* in New Brunswick when it was a family-owned newspaper; William Caldwell, a columnist for *The Record* of Hackensack who was the first New Jersey journalist to win a Pulitzer Prize; and Bernard Kilgore, then president of *The Wall Street Journal* and one of the leaders of a successful effort to reorganize the national organization from a fraternity to a professional organization

“You’ll also notice that all the members are men,” said Baehr, holding up an issue of *Jersey Jottings*, the chapter’s first newsletter . “That’s because it took the national organization until 1969 – 40 years ago – to begin admitting women as members.”

Since then, NJSPJ has had several female presidents, including the current one, Barbara Reed. Chapter board members such as Baehr and Reed are proud of the fact that SPJ’s conversion from fraternity to professional organization helped journalism to be seen as a profession rather than a craft or trade.

“There’d been a lack of national and grassroots journalism organizations to fight for freedom of the press and freedom of information,” said Baehr. “Giving high priority to the sometimes lonely job of defending and expanding the public’s right to a free press is something that’s stayed the same for SPJ since that time, both nationally and here in New Jersey.”

Price of the dinner is \$37 per person. Those interested in attending should contact chapter treasurer Jane R. Primerano at jpdwrite@embarqmail.com. Checks can be sent to 329 Johnsonburg Road P.O. Box 511 Hope, NJ 07844-0511 .

The Society of Professional Journalists is the nation’s most broad-based journalism organization, dedicated to encouraging the free practice of journalism and stimulating high standards of ethical behavior. Founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi, SPJ promotes the free flow of information vital to a well-informed citizenry through the daily work of its nearly 10,000 members; works to inspire and educate current and future journalists through professional development; and protects First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and press through its advocacy effort