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Audio Transcript

Episode 221 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with Mike Blinder

Publication date: Monday January 29, 2024



E&P REPORTS VODCAST EditorandPublisher.com/Vodcasts



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Episode Sponsor 

[Hussman announces \\$100k in prizes for the best in fair and impartial reporting.](#)

In this episode of “E&P Reports,” we chat with WHECO Media CEO Walter E. Hussman, Jr. about his fourth generational family commitment to supporting fairness in journalistic reporting and how those tenets have motivated their family foundation to offer \$100,000 in cash prizes to recolonize the best in fair, impartial and objective news reporting.



[music]

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0:00:00.0 Announcer: This is E&P reports, a vodcast from Editor and Publisher magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

0:00:19.5 Mike Blinder: Greetings once again, Mike Blinder, publisher, E&P Magazine. As always, we urge you if you're listening on a podcast platform to follow us. If you're watching on the YouTube channel, please subscribe below, hit the bell to the right, and you'll get an update each and every time we upload a new episode of this weekly vodcast series dedicated to news publishing E&P reports. My guest is an old... Can I call you a friend, Walter?

0:00:45.7 Walter Hussman: Absolutely.

0:00:46.8 MB: I was gonna say old friend, but that's an awful thing to say at our age. I mean...

0:00:50.7 WH: Long time friend.

0:00:51.4 MB: Long... Thank you. That's better. Walter Edward Hussman Jr. The reason I know that is your official name is you have a Wikipedia page, sir. I do not, but they they deem you that special.

[laughter]

0:01:01.9 WH: Oh, okay.

0:01:04.3 MB: Has your birthdate, I will not mention it, but anybody can go there. But let me see how they describe you. You can tell me if they have got you all wrong. You're an American news publisher, check. Chairman of WEHCO Media check, publisher of Arkansas, Democrat-Gazette in Little Rock. I assume you still have that title, sir.

0:01:22.4 WH: No, actually I don't. I resigned stepped down about a year ago, and now my daughter, Eliza Hussman Gaines is the publisher.

0:01:28.0 MB: Somebody has to get that to Wikipedia quick, sir.

[laughter]

0:01:33.4 MB: 'Cause God forbid she doesn't get the present she deserves. You've earned your bachelor's in journalism at the University of North Carolina School of Journalism, which we're gonna be talking about 'cause that's a big part of the story. You have your master's from Columbia University. You worked as a reporter at Forbes. I didn't know that. Is that true? Wow.

0:01:51.3 WH: Yeah. That was a great experience. I loved it.



0:01:54.8 MB: And then you later became your father's administrative assistant. The general manager of the Camden News, moved to Hot Springs, became vice president, general manager of the Palmer Newspapers, which eventually was acquired by WEHCO. Is that right?

0:02:06.1 WH: Yeah. Really it was WEHCO, I mean, the Palmer Newspapers that was named from my grandfather, CE Palmer. And actually WEHCO was the name my dad came up with, and it just became the name for... Although we still use the name Palmer Newspapers too. It's just it's not a corporate entity, but it was the five papers my grandfather assembled during the 1909 to 1920s.

0:02:31.2 MB: Wow. What an honor to work there. They list three of your... I'm sure, 1000s of awards. The first one they list, I'm very honored, is the 2008 cover of E&P Magazine. You are our publisher of the year, then. I was not running the shop then. But we are showing your cover now to our audience, just because we still have it. 2012, you were inducted to the Arkansas Business Hall of Fame, in 2014, you were inducted into the North Carolina Media and Journalism Hall of Fame. There's a tie in between you and your alma mater, right? I mean, 'cause the School of Media and journalism is now named after your family.

0:03:08.6 WH: That's right. Yeah. That happened in 2019.

0:03:11.7 MB: That's quite an honor. The Hussman School of Journalism and Media according... They also have a Wikipedia.

[laughter]

0:03:17.1 WH: Right.

0:03:18.1 MB: They call it the J School. But here's what I found fascinating. 24 of the school's former students and faculty members have won or been part of 28 Pulitzer Prizes. Did you know that?

0:03:29.8 WH: Yeah. North Carolina, when I was in journalism school there from '64 to '68, it was one of the top journalism schools in the country. It still is. They really pride themselves on something they should, and that is, there's a student competition every year called the Hearst Awards. And the Hearst Awards are kind of considered on, well, almost like the Pulitzer Prizes of student journalism. It's opened to all accredited journalism schools in the country, and quite a few of them compete. University of Missouri and University of North Carolina a lot of Arizona State, North Carolina has won that award eight of the last nine years. And that's students, and of course the faculty has really helped the students, but the students really get the credit for that.

0:04:24.6 MB: We're gonna dive into what you and the school are up to and the very exciting announcement. I think we're the first to release it on this program. And we'll get to that on the backside of this message.

0:04:34.1 Announcer: This episode of E&P reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital Formerly TownNews. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry



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0:05:38.8 MB: So, Walter, the first I heard of this is when one of my staffers was taking an ad placement from you personally for E&P. This is amazing. If I may read it. And I don't know if this is the final copy, but this is the first annual \$100,000 of awards for news reporting. And I love what you do here. You reference Adolph Ochs. That is a name that many in the industry know from the New York Times, from 1896 to 1935. He was at the Times, but before that, he was publisher of the Chattanooga Times. Now, I don't know if how many people have dived into the history week where that's where he penned the phrase that's still on the masthead there, correct? To give the news impartially without fear or favor.

0:06:22.9 WH: It is. We acquired the Chattanooga Times, 25 years ago in 1999. And yes, we still have that phrase on the front page of the Chattanooga Times. It's called the Chattanooga Times Free Press, 'cause it merged after paper the free Press. But yeah, we love that phrase. I think it really just says it all and under 10 words. And so yeah.

0:06:50.1 MB: Well this is obviously near and dear to you because I believe you're coughing up or through your foundation \$100,000. That's four \$25,000 awards for the most fair, impartial, objective news reporting that has the courage to not fear and the discipline to not favor. These are your exact words in the ad you're posting in E&P and you're honoring this for 2023, and the deadline is coming up soon, March 1st. Do I have that right, sir?

0:07:20.3 WH: You've got that exactly right. Yes.

0:07:22.3 MB: Why is this near and dear to you? Why do you feel a need to offer a prize that's larger than a Pulitzer \$25,000 four divisions, print, broadcast, cable and digital? And you are taking all entries now for a month to award these four amazing prizes for impartiality. Why has this struck a nerve with you? Give us a little bit more info on that.

0:07:46.6 WH: Well, a couple of reasons. Number one, there's really not a journalism award specifically for this. The closest we found is a great award, that was done by the Taylor family that owned the Boston Globe for over a 100 years. And it's given through the Neiman Foundation for fair reporting. It just says fair. And then of course, that's what we're after too. Fair, impartial, objective. We think those are all fairly synonymous. And those are, I think those are, I can't remember maybe \$5000 or \$10,000 awards. Anyway, so, but we became rather dismayed, and I think this may have had something to do with the 2016 election when Trump was elected. And of course he was very difficult to do... Talking about the press being the enemy of the people and everything.

0:08:36.3 WH: And so you could start to see, the perception of the public was that the press was not



being, objective, impartial, fair in news reporting. And so in 2017, we decided, well we need to let our readers know, our subscribers know that we still believe in impartiality and objectivity and fair reporting. So I thought, What is the best way to let our readers know that? And so what I did is I've drafted seven short paragraphs, and it was called a Statement of Core Values. And it just says what this organization stands for. And so we spelled out there, what some of our key principles were, impartiality, keeping news and opinion completely separate. Sometimes we think we know what the story is gonna be, but once we start digging into it, it turns out to be something quite different. So you need to approach articles with an open mind, because you might discover maybe the story is slightly different than you thought. Anyway, we spelled all those out and we started publishing those, every day in each of our now 11 newspapers, I think it was 10 then. And we immediately started hearing from readers and they said, Wow, we're glad to see somebody is telling us what their journalistic standards are. Another person said, Now we know how to hold you accountable. And I thought, exactly, exactly, exactly.

0:10:09.7 MB: What I love is the last paragraph. And of course, if you're listing on Spotify or Apple, now go to the exact page, the landing page 'cause there's a link to these core values. A newspaper has five constituencies. Do you mind if I read this?

0:10:25.6 WH: Oh, yeah, yeah.

0:10:25.7 MB: First, it's readers, then advertisers, then employees, then creditors, then shareholders, no offense, Walter, that's the exact opposite of some of the corporations now that manage some very stately, iconic titles that have been around for centuries. Do you agree?

0:10:44.2 WH: Yeah, I agree. And I can't take credit for that statement. That statement was from my father.

0:10:48.4 MB: Your father.

0:10:49.3 WH: And, it was so interesting. He told me that, and I thought about it, and I used it. As a publisher for 48 years, a lot of times we would confront really difficult situations. How do we deal with this? And if you'd go back to that ordering of constituents, the problem would sort itself out. And newspapers and news organizations are very unusual organization typically. And I went to business school and got an MBA. You usually put shareholders first. And that's typically what businesses do. It just doesn't work that well in news organizations. You got to put your customers first, mainly your readers first, and then your advertisers. And if you do that, in the long run, the shareholders will do quite well.

0:11:41.7 MB: Well, you've trademarked now a name, the Center for Integrity in New Reporting.

0:11:50.0 WH: In News Reporting.

0:11:50.1 MB: News Reporting. The Center for Integrity of News Reporting, that is the official entity giving this award. I Googled. It doesn't exist yet. I mean, this is just launched. And will that be part of the university or a separate entity? How are you doing this?



0:12:03.6 WH: We don't know, yet actually. We just wanted to create this name because we thought it was a good name. And we think actually having a center, whether it's virtual or whether it's affiliated with a university or a journalism school or whatever, it could play an important role because the public wants to know what they can trust in news. And I have so many people that asked me, Where can I go to get really objective, fair, straight news? And because so many places now they go to one source and they get one side and they go to another source and they get a different side. And so, I think we would like this center to be the reliable source of what is good news standards and what are good news articles, what are fair, objective, impartial news articles.

0:13:00.5 WH: And so really, we don't have a board of trustees yet. We're gonna have a board of trustees.

[laughter]

0:13:07.6 WH: This may be a 501 [c] [3]. We don't know whether will be that or not, or if we get affiliated with a university, maybe people can make their donations through the university, but earmark it for this center. We just decided to move now because we wanted to go ahead and give these awards for 2023. And we thought that was important as a first step.

0:13:31.1 MB: Let me say this again. This is the inaugural/first annual \$100,000 of awards for news reporting. It's to give the news impartially without fear or favor. You're using that famous phrase from Adolph Ochs. And it is basically an award for the most fair, impartial, objective news reporting that has the... Here's your quote, has the courage to not fear and the discipline to not favor. It's \$100,000 total of awards, 25,000 for the best in print media, 25,000 for the best in broadcast, 25,000 for the best in cable, 25,000 for the best digital only media that shows it's... I guess, truthful, unfair, unbiased news reporting. It will be in association with the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media. If you want some more information, you can simply email journalismawards@unc.edu. That's journalismawards@unc.edu.

0:14:33.7 MB: To enter, there's an entry page, and it's at journalismawards.unc.edu. Once again, journalismawards.unc.edu. Well, Walter you keep making news and everyone, and we are always honored at E&P that you make sure we're one of the first to present it. Thank you. And thank you for making the time. I know how busy you are for getting on this program, and thank you for your commitment to fair and balanced journalism. I mean, fair and balanced journalism, I should say, because we both know how important that is to the industry. Thanks for your valuable time, sir.

0:15:07.4 WH: Thank you. Appreciate it.

[music]