

Do your research before covering courts

As we head into summer, it's a time that newspapers have young interns in the office learning to be journalists, as well as new, young staff members, fresh out of college, who are similarly putting to use their "book learning." And, of course, any time of the year you may have new employees who have never worked for a newspaper before in their lives. And it's your job to train these folks to do their job, do it well, not make mistakes and do the best they can to represent your publication in your local community.

When you are looking for resources relating to Missouri courts and covering Missouri government, you should remember the materials made available to you through your membership in Missouri Press Association and all the other resources made available to you through various entities. I've talked about these before, but this is just a reminder to you that these fabulous materials are at your fingertips via your computer. These lists should be kept where your reporters can review them periodically because they will help your staff do the best job possible.

Obviously, one of the best resources for reporters covering public bodies is the Sunshine Law section of the Attorney General's website at ago.mo.gov/missouri-law/sunshine-law.

Besides containing a ready reference to the law, it also contains some frequently-asked questions and an-

swers relating to a basic understanding of the law.

That page also contains a link to the site where citizens (including reporters) can file their Sunshine Law complaints. A few reporters have indicated that these complaints have been noted and action taken in response. Never hesitate to make a formal complaint to the Attorney General's office.

The Missouri Bar also is a resource of significant helpful material to young reporters, all compiled at its resource center at <http://www.mobar.org/mediacenter/>. Three key media resource books can be found there. The News Reporters Handbook, published by the Missouri Press-Bar Commission, is a compendium of information on the court system in Missouri, including chapters on criminal courts, civil courts and juvenile courts. It outlines information on special kinds of lawsuits, discusses how opinions are issued, and contains special chapters relating to libel and invasion of privacy litigation. A related glossary defined a number of terms used in the courts and legal pleadings

so journalists can better explain to their readers what has happened in court.

And a third book, the Media Law Handbook, published by the Missouri Bar Media Law Committee, not only covers using cameras in the courtroom, libel and privacy issues and sunshine law issues, but also addresses the reporter's privilege to protect

sources in the gathering of information, internet publishing and other technical media issues. All of these books are tools a new reporter will need to refer to regularly when covering the court process.

Young reporters covering court proceedings not only need to know the "language" of the courts but also understand proper behavior in the courtroom. Two new videos are available to reporters from the Press-Bar Commission to help in this training process. They can be found on the Missouri Press' website at the bottom of the Links page at <http://mopress.com/links/>.

A wealth of information is also available in a series of podcasts made by Missouri Press which are posted at <http://mopress.com/podcasts/> under the Services and Programs tab. Information on legal notice publication issues is located in the Guide to Public Notices which is found on the page tabbed Public Notices <http://mopress.com/public-notices/> at the top of the Missouri Press website.

Materials on the national level can be found at the National Freedom of Information Center's website at <https://www.nfoic.org/foi-center>.

Other special interest websites of importance to Missouri journalists are the websites of the Missouri House of Representatives <https://house.mo.gov/>, the Missouri Senate at <https://www.senate.mo.gov/>, the State Secretary of State's website at <https://www.sos.mo.gov/> and the State Treasurer's website at <https://treasurer.mo.gov/>. All of these contain information a young reporter will find helpful on a daily basis.

Thanks for all you do to train the young reporters in our state for the future of our industry!

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