

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING  
OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB**

**May 8, 2009**

**Myron Belkind, NPC Secretary**

President Donna Leinwand called the meeting to order at 12:20 p.m. More than 100 members were in attendance as extra tables were rolled in to consider two hot-button issues: approval of the Club's first-ever five-year strategic plan and a discussion on the new all-day Saturday operations in the Fourth Estate Restaurant.

The Minutes of the Jan. 16, 2009 General Membership Meeting were approved unanimously.

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

President's Leinwand said the Club had "three really good months" financially for the first quarter of the year with the cutting of costs and increased efficiencies. She also cited an "absolutely amazing array of speakers and programs" including two Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, former presidents Marti Ahtisaari of Finland and F. W. de Klerk of South Africa; outstanding professional development programs including a Journalists' Boot Camp last weekend, for which she complimented committee chair Susan Heavey; "incredible" training classes conducted through the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library, with compliments to Julie Schoo and Beth Shankle, and courses focusing on the Freedom of Information Act and other press issues organized by the Freedom of Press Committee with the Reporters' Committee for Freedom of the Press.

**STRATEGIC PLAN APPROVED**

With applause for past president Jerry Zremski and other Club members and staff who worked for more than two years on the Strategic Plan, members unanimously approved the 23-page blueprint for the future called "Preserving and Growing the World's Leading Professional Organization for Journalists." During the half-hour discussion about the plan, members spoke in favor of the proposal to add a third representative of the Affiliate/Associate members to the Board of Governors.

A number of Club members also favored giving the Affiliate/Associate members on the Board voting rights except on issues that relate solely to journalists. “Nothing within the plan precludes this from happening,” said Zremski, who chaired the Strategic Planning Committee.

Tony Culley-Foster called the Strategic Plan “a blueprint for success.” President Leinwand said the plan is “a living document that will be reviewed every year. Members can suggest amendments and changes.” The plan was adopted unanimously by a voice vote after being duly proposed and seconded.

## **TREASURER’S REPORT**

Treasurer Keith Hill gave specifics on the first quarter financial results: the Club had a profit of \$459,676 for this period, 188 percent better than last year; March was the best month so far this year and the second best month ever; and, based on the profit figures from the first quarter, the Club is on track to be set aside \$1.25 million in reserves by July 1.

Nevertheless, both Leinwand and Hill cautioned that the Club needed to be ready to face what Hill described as the “undynamic duo” of July and August, the Club’s traditionally difficult months, with combined losses of about \$600,000 forecast for the two-month period. “Despite the good first quarter numbers, we are still in a recession and, at this point, we can’t see what business will be like between now and the end of the year,” Hill said. “We are in calm waters now, but we could be in for a very bumpy ride.”

In response to a question from Marshall Cohen, Hill said the Club’s revenue breakdown is: membership dues, 12%; members’ spending, 8%; and 80% from catering, the Broadcast Operations Center and room rentals.

Bob Weiner suggested the Club consider a “summer sale” such as 50% off at the restaurants and satellite services.

## **MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

Membership Secretary Mark Hamrick, in a written report delivered by the president in his absence owing to a work commitment, said that “despite the recession and contraction in journalism, the Club’s membership numbers remain surprisingly firm.”

He said total membership as of the beginning of May was 3,461, compared to 3,612 a year ago. Total new members this year are 193, compared to 110 for the same period last year. Hamrick's reported added: "We have seen some resignations and suspensions recently due in part to organizations ceasing to pay for their employees, but recruitment is up strongly over a year ago. Retention has been generally firm, due in part to aggressive efforts by the staff contacting those at risk of leaving." Hamrick said a major recruitment event---called "Bring a Friend"---would take place on Thursday, September 10, at 7 p.m. A separate recruitment reception targeting international members is planned for Monday evening, June 1, to coincide with the opening of a photo exhibit on "Faces of South Asia."

## **SATURDAY OPERATIONS**

The discussion on the new all-day Saturday operations dominated most of the second half of the membership meeting.

Introducing the discussion, President Leinwand said that efforts had been made since the end of 2007 to boost numbers in the Reliable Source on Saturdays including her forming a "Books & Brunch" Club that meets once a month, with 18-20 members attending. But she said the numbers of those using the Reliable Source, including the bar area, were still "very, very low."

Instead of considering closing the Club on Saturdays, which had been mentioned as a possibility in the past, she said the Board, by a vote of 11-1, opted to shift all operations to the Fourth Estate.

"In an ideal world, we would have both restaurants (the Reliable Source and the Fourth Estate) opened on Saturdays, but we had to make a sacrifice to maintain Saturday operations and we chose to close the Reliable Source," she said.

She said that having the Fourth Estate opened as well for dinner on Saturdays would hopefully prove financially beneficial to the Club as it was a popular night out for dining. She said that the Fourth Estate was sold out when it opened for a trial on Valentine's Day, a Saturday night this year. She also said a members' bar area would be set up in the Winners' Room adjoining the Fourth Estate.

Those who opposed the closing of the Reliable Source made these points:

Rod Kuckro said the decision to close the Reliable Source on Saturdays “is another example of the Board taking away Members’ services for non-members.” He said the Reliable Source is “important for members to have a sanctuary. You are closing a private space.” He urged the Board to reconsider its decision. “A bar is a bar. The Winners Room is not a bar,” he said.

Past president Arthur Wiese said that basing a decision to open the Fourth Estate on the sell-out dinner for Valentines Day was “an illegitimate sample as all restaurants are full on Valentine’s Day.” He said the Club should be kept a “private club and not be opened to non-members,” who are allowed to make reservations in the Fourth Estate restaurant.

Llewellyn King said: “We are moving to a five-day-a-week Club.”

Ric Hedlund said he believed the Board resolution in favor of all-day Saturday operations was “illegal” because it did not specifically mention closure of the Reliable Source.

Leinwand said it was the “legislative intent” of the resolution that the Saturday operations would be based in the Fourth Estate from brunch through dinner.

Several speakers commended Leinwand for seeking to maintain the Club being opened all day Saturday instead of just at brunch and urged members to “give a try” to the new Saturday operations. In response to a question, Leinwand reaffirmed that the fitness center and the computer work area that now closes when the Club does at 4pm on Saturdays would remain open until the evening in view of the Fourth Estate being opened for dinner.

Past president Gil Klein said, “The Board has found a compromise to keep the Club open on Saturdays including dinner. Let’s see how it works.”

Several other members made similar comments that complimented Leinwand for trying to find a way to keep the Club open on Saturdays and for seeking an improved financial performance at the same time by opening the Fourth Estate for dinner.

“Let’s give it a shot,” said Suzanne Struglinski. “Our industry is changing. I have faith in the staff and those making decisions. Let’s give it a try.”

Karrye Braxton, who said she had been touched how members had embraced her as a new member when she would come to the Reliable Source bar on Saturdays, said she favored a trial period for the new arrangements.

Leinwand thanked her for the suggestion of a trial period and promised to report back to the membership at its next General Membership Meeting in early October.

She said the Board would review the results of the new Saturday operations on a regular basis and added: “I can promise we will look at all our operations and will make decisions in the best interests of the membership,”

The General Membership Meeting adjourned at 2:29 p.m.