

the nib

Published for members of Eastern Canada's Farm Writers Association
Summer 2006

Here's what you'll find inside this issue:

- Highlights from the winter photo seminar
- Writing great science stories with Jacob Berkowitz
- New ag communications diploma program at Guelph
- Volunteer for 2007 CFWF in Ontario
- Niblets

Jane Robinson

Nib Editor

jane.robinson@adfarmonline.com

Prez says

Over the last year, we have been working at expanding our reach to members who live outside of south-central Ontario. As the Eastern Canada farm writers' chapter, we have members from south-western and eastern Ontario right out into the Maritimes. Our geographic locations create diversity, but also present one of our biggest challenges.

First webinar for farm writers

Last month, we introduced our first professional development seminar delivered in a web format. Our guest speaker was in front of a live audience of farm writers in Ottawa. At the same time, another group was gathered at the brand new media centre in Guelph's AgriCentre, watching the presentation on the big screen. Other farm writers scattered across Ontario were logged in from the comforts of their own homes – following the goings-on via computer and firing questions through their keyboards.

The webinar concept opens our professional development seminar to more of our members by improving accessibility. This was also the first time we held a seminar outside of our traditional winter months – again, in an effort to offer variety and accommodate flexible schedules. We appreciate the generous support of Galbraith Communications for their webinar expertise and Peter Hannam for letting us experiment with the AgriCentre's new media centre technology.

But, there are downsides to switching to a techie-format for our professional development. One of the great benefits of membership is the camaraderie and the social connections between members. Networking builds careers and builds friendships, and “chatting” online just isn't the same. It also doesn't offer the same opportunities for interacting with the presenters.

It would be great to host “live” professional development seminars in all of our membership regions. But the economic reality is that this is not a viable option without participant numbers. We are, after all, a volunteer organization that depends on sponsorship and membership fees, and we work hard to make sure all of our events are cost effective for everyone.

The whole webinar concept is still a work in progress for ECFWA, but it does offer potential that bears further exploration and experimentation. We will be running another seminar in this style in late fall or early winter to try and work out some of the kinks. We ask for your patience and support, but most importantly, your feedback and ideas.

Please send any suggestions for speakers, topics or seminar format to lilian.schaer@ontariopork.on.ca.

Lilian Schaer
ECFWA President
Ontario Pork

Great photo finish

Just what is a good photograph?

“It has to have the right exposure and good content, but what makes a photo memorable is one that makes an impression and it’s mainly in the lighting,” says photographer Jeff Carroll. Carroll joined fellow photographer Terry Scott White to share some tips with ECFWA at a professional development seminar held earlier this year.

Carroll prefers to use a good reflector to better control existing light than settle for the harsh results often obtained using a built-in flash. For example, photographing people can be tricky if it’s really sunny, so put them in a barn and open the door as a broad, indirect light source for one side of their face and use a reflector to light the other side. You’re looking for light that is indirect and even.

A reflector costs around \$50 and can come in different sizes. It’s typically white on one side and gold on the other to allow you to vary light intensity. The gold side gives warm skin tones. Lighting the subject from the side creates the most intense look as opposed to taking a photo with the light behind you, which will create a flat image. For plants, placing a reflector underneath will enhance their definition.

Another handy tool Carroll suggests for outside shots is a Polaroid filter, which will intensify contrast and eliminate a lot of reflections.

Carroll will often take 45 minutes to set up for animal shots such as pigs. This allows the animals time to get used to you. You’ll need to do some preparation first, like cleaning out the next pen and introducing pigs to the group the day before. Stop feeding them to get a good feeding shot: they need to be hungry, and “you’ve gotta light it,” he says.

Terry Scott White is fairly new to farm photography, and while he still admits to being scared of some farm animals, he brings a wealth of talent to the industry with his insight into human nature. He works hard to make people look like they're enjoying themselves, a difficult task that often makes him feel like a dentist. "In this industry everyone hates having their picture taken!" says Scott White. As a result, he will often use models for his shots, especially if there's a lot of eye contact.

Scott White has done a lot of weddings and will often use a plain backdrop like a wheat field for the bride. Men, he adds, are like big kids so you have to make it a rugged event. He tries to find something for them to do that makes them feel cool and puts them somewhere they can relax, like a backdrop of machinery like cars or trains. To bring out facial expressions, he also often suggests guys pretend they're in a movie like *Reservoir Dogs* where "someone just messed with their family."

Jeff Carroll can be reached at www.carrollphoto.com or www.agstock.com, and Terry Scott White can be found at www.terryscottwhite.com

Karen Dallimore
Words for Hire

Smart science stories capture the passion

We've all heard that good story telling makes for good journalism. Science writer Jacob Berkowitz brought it all to life through his content and delivery to about 25 farm writers earlier this month. Berkowitz played guinea pig, of sorts, as he presented his Internet-based seminar (webinar) on Writing Good Science Stories to live and virtual audiences across Ontario. It was an experiment for ECFWA to broaden the reach of its professional development seminars.

What is science writing?

Berkowitz reviewed three models for science writing, and commented on the overall effectiveness for each.

1. *the translator* – provides direct translation of technical terms into everyday language and writing generally focuses on "dumbing down" scientific content.
2. *science journalist* – digs into more of the journalism than just the scientific discovery, may involve writing about concept/discoveries that scientists don't want to talk about, and ideas that are difficult to understand.
3. *writer* – approaches the science story as "just a writer" and may work harder to capture the human experience of the science. A good writer must draw on all elements – not just the science – that tell the story.

For more than 95% of the population, according to Berkowitz, grade 10 was their last science class. And since facts are only half of it, you must be a story teller. What's often least important to the scientist may be the most important to the writer and the audience.

Berkowitz talked about the concept of being “factually accurate” and not overloading stories with detail that discourages readers from understanding the overall story. Always ask for as much research as possible, but be selective in how much you include.

What is the story?

Berkowitz recommends approaching a story with more than just the facts and asking what the larger story is. The facts might not be *the* story, but you won't know that unless you get beyond them. Ask yourself, am I listening to what the story might be? He looks to broaden the scope of the conversation with questions that dig deeper into the heart of the research. “What's most challenging about your research?” “What has been the response of your peers?”

And to get the researcher's help in simplifying the story, Berkowitz will ask “pretend you've just walked into a kindergarten class, now explain your work to me.”

He also acknowledges that stories sometimes need to start at the end. It's an effective way to shorten a story and keep to the targeted word count, and the end is often the point of contact for the reader to relate to.

Get active

Scientists often speak in passive voice, and Berkowitz cautions against adopting a passive language in science writing. In the scientific world, scientists rarely put themselves in the story, leading to passive language, says Berkowitz. Make the scientist the protagonist in the story so you don't miss an opportunity. The first foothold into a story often involves a person.

To help explain the science, Berkowitz recommends heavy use of analogies and metaphors that can help do the job. He credits science guy Bob McDonald of CBC fame for his effective use of these techniques to make science everyday and understandable. Play an educational role and help people really understand a concept. Analogies and metaphors also prevent the writer from falling back on technical terms because they can't explain a concept.

Words to avoid

When it comes to science writing – perhaps more so for human health and medical writing, than agricultural – Berkowitz reviewed seven words that are so culturally loaded, they should never appear in science stories. Cure. Miracle. Hope. Breakthrough. Promising. Dramatic. Victim. These words have vastly different connotations in science, than for the typical audience. For example, a 5% increase in survival rate with a clinical trial for a cancer drug may be a breakthrough to the oncologist, but would be seriously misleading to label as a hopeful cure to individuals affected by the disease.

Jacob Berkowitz is a writer, journalist and playwright who lives in Almonte, ON. For more information, visit www.jacobberkowitz.com

Jane Robinson
AdFarm

Ag communications diploma program starts in September

North America's first open learning agricultural communications diploma program begins this September at the University of Guelph.

The program, sponsored by the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC), will be delivered through the Office of Open Learning. It combines technical skills and applied theory in journalism, communications and public relations, with a focus on issues specific to the agri-food and environmental sectors.

An international panel of instructors and coaches will lead students through a series of courses designed to enhance knowledge and applied skills in communications theory and practice.

Much of the 16-month program will be delivered on-line, and the distance learning components will be augmented by three on-campus sessions. By being web-based, it can bring in students and teaching professionals from anywhere in the world. And the course design will be accessible and flexible to fit the schedules of working professionals enrolled as students.

In addition to four technical and theory courses, it also includes a project-based internship, where students will have the opportunity to apply their skills within the context of an agricultural workplace.

Support for this program has been provided by a number of industry partners, including Ontario Pork, Pioneer Hi-Bred Limited, Syngenta Crop Protection Canada, GROWMARK Inc., and the Agricultural Adaptation Council.

For more information, visit the program website at www.agcommunications.ca

Owen Roberts
University of Guelph

CFWF 2006 - Manitoba

It's time to register for the **2006 CFWF conference** in Winnipeg, MB – September 14-17, 2006. Early bird fees apply til August 14. If you are interested in the applying for the ECFWA travel bursary, read on.

Every year, ECFWA offers a travel bursary to cover **up to \$500** towards an ECFWA member attending the **CFWF annual conference**. We're looking for applicants for the bursary to attend this year's conference in Winnipeg. The bursary is open to current ECFWA members (2006 membership dues paid) whose employer will not cover the cost of attending the conference, or are self-employed and would be unable to attend without the help of a bursary.

Please note, bursary is paid upon receipt of documented travel expenses *after* the conference. If you'd like to put your name in the hat (yes, that's how we choose!), please send your name, contact info and a short statement about your situation and why the bursary would be helpful for you to: lilian.schaer@ontariopork.on.ca no later than **Monday, July 24, 2006**. The winning name will be drawn on Tuesday, August 1, and all entrants will be notified by email or phone.

CFWF 2007 – Ontario

The **2007 CFWF conference** is coming to Ontario in September 2007. We're looking for volunteers to help on all committees – tours, professional development, hospitality, registration, etc. If you're interested, please contact conference co-chairs Lilian Schaer (lilian.schaer@ontariopork.on.ca) or Kelly Daynard (kdaynard@ofac.org).

Niblets

Congratulations to **Karen Lewis** and **Bernard Tobin** on the healthy arrival of their daughter Gloria Elizabeth Tobin, born June 18, 2006 and weighing 6 pounds, 9 ounces. Congratulations!

Kelly Deeks has left MC Group (and agricultural communications) to work for the town of St Marys. Good luck Kelly!

If you haven't paid your 2006 membership dues, it's time. Not sure...check with secretary-treasurer **Sarah Brown** (sbrown@adculture.com).

Welcome to the following new ECFWA members:

Jeannie Bryson, Quanglo Communications
Andrew Campbell, CKNX Radio
Arthur Churchyard, SPARK
Johnnie-Belinda Cluff, Quanglo Communications
Ian Cumming, Freelancer, *Ontario Farmer*
Marianne Fallis, Ontario Veal
Mary Fearon
Jennifer Mitchell, Ontario Pork
Tammy Oswick-Kearney, 4-H Ontario
John Phair, *Voice of the Farmer*
Richard Phillips
Katrina Simmons, 20/20 Studios
Kim Waalderbos, SPARK

ECFWA 2006/07 executive

President: Lilian Schaer, Ontario Pork, lilian.schaer@ontariopork.on.ca

Vice President: Kelly Daynard, Ontario Farm Animal Council, kdaynard@ofac.org

Vice President: Blair Andrews, AgRadio Network, blaira@agradio.ciaccess.com

Secretary Treasurer: Sarah Brown, Adculture, sbrown@adculture.com

Newsletter Editor: Jane Robinson, AdFarm, jane.robinson@adfarmonline.com

Past President: John Greig, Ontario Farmer, jgreig@bowesnet.com

Directors:

Clare Illingworth, Ontario Pork, clare.illingworth@ontariopork.on.ca

Karen Dallimore, Words for Hire, wordsforhire@sympatico.ca

Kristy Nudds, Canadian Poultry, knudds@annexweb.com

Kim Waalderbos, SPARK University of Guelph, kwaalder@uoguelph.ca

The Nib is produced periodically for the members of the Eastern Canada Farm Writers' Association. Editor: Jane Robinson, jane.robinson@adfarmonline.com If you have any comments or suggestions, please forward them to the editor.

www.cfwf.ca