

Uplink

January 1997

A newsletter for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

Spy vs. Spy Uplink update

You can run, but you can't hide. This issue of Uplink reveals how to background a subject with on-line and other resources. Neil Reisner of *The Miami Herald*, and formerly NICAR's training director, describes Web resources, commercial services, and data brokers that can make backgrounding easier.

In the Handout of the Month, Jennifer LaFleur of *The San Jose Mercury News*, and a former NICAR training director, shares numerous CD-ROM research resources.

In other stories, Dave Sheingold of the *Westchester Rockland News* examines the excessive burdens that bridges bear, and Scott Glover of the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* takes a fresh look at pawnshops and the criminals – er, clientele they serve.

Also, don't miss the brand-new NashCAR schedule of events on page twelve. And, on page eight, catch up with NICAR and IRE news – including the addition of Sarah Cohen as our new training director.

Inside

CAR Trips
Page 9

Tech Tip
Page 10

On the Internet
Page 1

Calendar
Page 14

Backgrounding

Dig for on-line gold

By Neil Reisner

The Miami (Fla.) Herald

Time was when backgrounding a story subject wasn't for the fainthearted. It meant leafing through sheaves of yellowed clips, poring through dusty volumes, and reviewing sheaves of public records. Only the high-powered investigator with all the time in the world would attempt to deeply background a subject; the ordinary beat reporter working on daily deadlines didn't stand a chance.

Even the privileged reporters who had the time to delve deeply into a subject's past wouldn't go on-line. Resources such as Lexis/Nexis, Dialog, Datatimes, and Dow Jones News Service were too expensive and not available to mere reporters.

Net explosion

The explosion of the Internet and other on-line services has changed all that. Indeed, much of the information that once was available only by combing through books and dusty paper records or by paying hundreds of dollars for high-priced databases now can be obtained for no more than the \$20 monthly it costs to connect with a local Internet provider or the \$9.95 per month subscription to a commercial on-line service such as CompuServe or America On-line.

Don't misunderstand

Clips, Lexis/Nexis, Dialog and hard copy volumes such as "Who's Who in [fill in the blank]" are still invaluable resources that should be used if they are

available. But journalists who want to mine all there is to know about their subjects – or even get basic information on deadline – do well to expand their horizons beyond the stalwarts. All it takes is a couple of on-line connections, ordinary journalistic curiosity, and a sense of adventure.

Assuming you already have a computer, a modem running at a speed no

Continued on page two

On the Internet

Backgrounding sites

By Neil Reisner

The Miami (Fla.) Herald

Several sites provide useful starting points for reporters beginning to background people and businesses on-line.

One of the best is maintained by Nora Paul, the Poynter Institute's ace news researcher: an on-line version of her book "Computer-Assisted Research," that can function as an on-line tutorial.

The URL is: <http://www.poynter.org/poynter/chome.html>

What may surprise many journalists, though, is that there is a whole other profession whose members are as interested in backgrounding people as they are. These are "prospect researchers,"

Continued on page three

Uplink

January 1997

Volume 9, Number 1

A newsletter for the
National Institute for
Computer-Assisted
Reporting

Editor

Brant Houston

brant@nicar.org

Managing Editor

Jo Craven

jo@nicar.org

Assistant Managing Editor

Andrew Lehren

andy@nicar.org

Senior Contributing Editors

Richard Mullins

richard@nicar.org

Staff

Sarah Cohen

Stan Dorsey

Seth Hemmelgarn

Daniel Kim

Justin Mayo

Jody Sowell

John Sullivan

Alistair White

Wallace Winfrey

Copy Editors

Wendy Charron

Marilyn Lehren

Uplink is published every month by the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, 138 Neff Hall Annex Columbia, MO 65211. (573) 882-0684.

Subscription price is \$40 for IRE members, \$60 for nonmembers.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to NICAR.

Send e-mail to

nicar@mucmail

.missouri.edu.

NICAR is a joint effort of Investigative Reporters and Editors and the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

NICAR services include hands-on newsroom training on computer-assisted reporting, special academic and advanced training in data analysis. NICAR is supported by a grant from The Freedom

Forum and other foundations intended to help the institute deliver its services nationwide to news organizations and associations.

Continued from page one:

Digging on-line ...

slower than 28.8 kilobytes per second, a phone line and communication software to let them all talk to one another, you also need:

- An Internet account that provides access to the World Wide Web. This should cost about \$20 monthly through either a national or local Internet Service Provider (ISP) and will let you surf the Web for as many hours as you like, using a Web browser such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Explorer.

- An account with a commercial on-line service such as America Online or CompuServe. America Online recently changed its price to \$19.95 for unlimited access, mirroring most ISPs. CompuServe costs \$9.95 monthly, including five hours of access, with additional hours at \$2.95. CompuServe, especially, has deep research databases and is generally regarded a superior research tool. Either service also provides access to the World Wide Web, but the connections offered by ISPs are often faster and more stable.

- An account with a private data broker such as Database Technologies, CDB Infotek or IRSC, providing on-line access to specific information on individuals, their property holdings, etc. Some services can tell you what kind of car a prospect drives, how much his home and other property is worth, whether she owns an airplane, and more.

The World Wide Web

The World Wide Web has achieved near divine status in the pop-culture consciousness. And the Web likely is the greatest (though least organized) collection of information known to humankind. It's all there — wheat, chaff, and in between — in amounts that rapidly become overwhelming. The trick is to use the Web well, to learn how to focus your Web surfing so that you quickly get close to what you want.

There is a myth that the World Wide Web is the Internet, but it's not. The Internet is simply a worldwide network of interconnected computer networks. Strip away all the hype and the Web is merely a means to navigate the Internet by way of an easy-to-use "point and click" interface. All you really need to know is that you use a "browser" such as Netscape or Microsoft Explorer to move around the Web

and that a Web address looks something like this: <http://www.nicar.org/nashcar>

Known as a "Universal Resource Locator" or "URL," this address directs the Web browser to open a particular Web page; all Web pages have an address that resembles it. In this case, the URL tells the Internet that you want to connect to a World Wide Web (the "www" portion of the URL) site called "nicar.org." At that site, you want to see a directory called "nashcar" and display the page that directory is instructed to load by default. In this case, there is no need to indicate the name of the page; in other cases, the URL would include another layer, perhaps something like "index.html."

Knowing a little bit more about Internet addresses can help a lot.

For example the ".org" in the above address signals that the page is located on a computer connected to a nonprofit organization. The address would end in ".edu" if the site were associated with an educational institution; ".gov" if it's an official government site; ".mil" if it's military; ".net," if the page is on a computer attached to an ISP; and ".com" if it's associated with a business, such as Chrysler, or if the site is maintained on a commercial service such as CompuServe.

This "domain hierarchy" can help you evaluate the quality of the information provided. The data available on a site associated with "www.chrysler.com," for example, is more likely to be official company information than an address pointing to "www.aol.com/~chrysler" (a fictional) Web page on an America Online computer.

What can you find? More than you possibly could imagine.

Web sites will help you locate prospects' addresses and telephone numbers, articles written about them, and the socioeconomics of the neighborhoods where they live. There are Web sites through which you can background the bona fides of doctors and lawyers, where you can get the most recent filings of most publicly held companies and business information on many privately held firms. There are "search engines" that in seconds will let you scan every word on millions of Web pages for references to your subject.

Commercial services

In general, data that can be sold will not be

Continued on page three

Continued from page two:

... for background gold

available for free on the Internet. That means that Lexis/Nexises of the world are not likely to go away. Neither are the America Onlines and CompuServes of the world, where much of the same information is available at lower cost. While AOL provides easy e-mail facilities and access to somewhat wider variety of current publications, CompuServe is generally regarded as a better source for business researchers. Many of its offerings carry surcharges above the basic fee, but are bargains nevertheless.

Among them are:

- Dun & Bradstreet and TRW business profiles.

- Knowledge Index, a subset of Dialog containing more than 100 databases, including many major regional and national newspapers and many professional journals. The service, available nights and weekends for a relatively modest \$21 per hour, is a kind of "poor man's" Dialog.

- The Biography Research Center, providing access to the full range of Marquis Who's Who volumes and more.

- Magazines and newspapers. The Magazine Database searches 250 popular magazines; the Newspaper Archives accesses 55 daily newspapers.

Data brokers

Private data brokers, who electronically compile public records from around the country, can be the mother lode for researchers wanting to find out everything about a prospect.

One of the most popular data brokers is Database Technologies of Pompano Beach, Fla., which offers a service known as Autotrak. While DBT does not offer information as comprehensive as some of the others, the price is right: \$1.50 per minute, with no sign-up or subscription fee. Other brokers, such as CDB Infotek or IRSC, can be more expensive and charge monthly access fees. But they offer more information, up to and including information gathered from state court systems.

How to begin

On-line research will involve a learning curve. Plan on investing some time and money before you get proficient. Surf around for practice, starting with the list of sites in the accompanying article.

Don't throw your books and other resources away. The on-line world is just one more tool researchers have at their disposal. It doesn't replace other sources, it supplements them. Use each as appropriate.

Finally, remember that no single on-line resource will provide everything there is to know about everybody and everything. Remember, too, that information gathered via modem is subject to the same sort of errors as information gathered on paper. Use what you find on-line as a road map, but verify everything.

Most of all, just get out there and dig.

Neil Reisner can be reached by e-mail at neil@nicar.org

For an in-depth look at problems with databases, check out "Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide" by Brant Houston. It can be ordered from NICAR or Investigative Reporters & Editors for \$26 plus shipping. Call (573) 882-2042.

From page one:

On the Internet

the folks who help charities and other nonprofits figure out how much potential donors can afford to give by checking out property records, stock prices, biographies, demographics — records equally useful to journalists.

Here are a few sites maintained by some of the best in that profession that are worth checking out.

- The Internet Prospector, a terrific site maintained by Randy Bunny at the University of Wyoming, with contributions from ace researchers around the country. It includes tutorials: <http://plains.uwyo.edu/~prospect>

- The Prospect Research Page, maintained by the University of Washington's David Lamb: <http://weber.u.washington.edu/~dlamb/research.html>

- Butler University's Prospect Research Home Page, maintained by Martha T. Murphy, director of prospect research there: <http://www.butler.edu/~mmurphy/index.html>

Finding & backgrounding people

Use both the Internet and private data vendors to find out everything from prospects'

Continued on page four

Continued from page one:

Backgrounding ...

Indices and search engines help researchers search huge chunks of the World Wide Web in one fell swoop. An index, such as Yahoo, is a collection of interesting Web sites assembled and maintained by human beings. A search engine, such as Altavista, scans every word on millions of Web pages and presents the addresses of pages meeting user-specified criteria. Always check out the "Help" links to learn how to refine and focus your searches.

- Yahoo: <http://www.yahoo.com>
- Altavista: <http://www.altavista.digital.com>

addresses and phone numbers to the vehicles they drive.

- Yahoo People Search—<http://www.yahoo.com/search/people/>

An all-around good people locator, searchable by name or phone number, that can provide postal and e-mail addresses. Other useful people locators are Switchboard (<http://www.switchboard.com>) and Four11 (<http://www.four11.com>). Clicking on the button marked "People" while on-line with Netscape's toolbar will bring up a page with a number of other useful people-finding sites. Another useful site is WhoWhere (<http://www.whowhere.com>), which combines people- and business-finding links.

- The American Medical Association Physician Locator — <http://www.ama-assn.org/>

Find physician addresses and credentials. From the AMA homepage, click on "AMA Health Insight" and then "Physician Select."

- Martindale-Hubbell Lawyer Locator — <http://www.martindale.com>

The on-line version of the well-thumbed, multi-volume lawyers directory. Find addresses, phone numbers, professional credentials. Westlaw provides similar information through West's Legal Directory: <http://www.wld.com>

- The Biography Research Center

This section of CompuServe (GO BIOGRAPHY), provides access to the full range of Marquis Who's Who volumes and additional similar works. Searches and downloads of full-text articles cost in the area of \$5 each.

Data brokers

Data brokers compile billions of public records on individuals, including information on addresses, former addresses, property, vehicles, professional licenses, neighbors, relatives, court records, and more. Financial records, access to which are restricted under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, ordinarily are not available. The various data brokers have different offerings and different price structures. Some require special software, others use standard communications software or are available via the Internet. When opening an account with a broker, make certain that all information offered is truly public and legally

acquired.

Three of the better known brokers are:

- CDB Infotek, Santa Ana, Calif.: (800) 427-3747

- Database Technologies, Pompano Beach, Fla.: (800) 279-7710

- IRSC, Fullerton, Calif.: (800) 640-4772

Go on-line to do in-depth research on both publicly held and private businesses.

- Hoovers Online — <http://www.hoovers.com>

Search a database of more than 10,000 profiles of companies, both public and private. Free searches provide basic information on companies, with links to additional on-line sources. A \$9.95 per month subscription enables access to more in-depth profiles.

- Dun & Bradstreet, TRW business profiles

These profiles are a way to research thousands of businesses, including officer names, general business information, payment patterns, debts, liens, and judgments, etc. Most information is self-reported and must be considered in that context, but for privately-held companies, these sources often provide the best available information. Both are available on CompuServe. GO DUNS for D&B, GO TRW for TRW. Depending on the profile, prices range from about \$30 to about \$70.

- Security & Exchange Commission/EDGAR — <http://www.sec.gov>

The SEC's EDGAR database enables researchers to search for all SEC documents from publicly traded companies that file electronically. There is a 24-hour delay between the time documents are filed and when they are available via EDGAR. Immediate access is available through private vendors, including EDGAR Online, <http://www.edgar-online.com>, which charges \$9.95 per month.

- Stock Quotes—<http://www.stockmaster.com>

Many services provide on-line stock quotes, usually with a 15- to 20-minute delay. Stockmaster is just one.

News

- *The American Journalism Review*, a journalism trade magazine, maintains a Web site that lists the on-line addresses of hundreds of newspapers, magazines and radio and television stations. The URL is <http://www.ajr.org>. The Yahoo

Continued on page five

Continued from page one: ... on the Internet

Internet index also provides a good list at <http://www.yahoo.com>.

- Some journals permit full-text searching of their archives via their Web sites. For those that don't, try Knowledge Index (GO KI), the Newspaper Archive (GO NEWSARCHIVE), the Magazine Database (GO MAGDB). Downloads of full-text articles cost no more than a couple of dollars each.

Here are some major Web news outlets. Some charge for complete access:

- *The New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com>
- *The Washington Post*: <http://www.washingtonpost.com>
- *The Chicago Tribune*: <http://www.chicago.tribune.com>
- *The Los Angeles Times*: <http://www.latimes.com>
- *The Wall Street Journal*: <http://www.wsj.com>
- *USA Today*: <http://www.usatoday.com>
- MSNBC: <http://www.msnbc.com>
- CNN: <http://www.cnn.com>

General Information

- The U.S. Census Bureau — <http://www.census.gov>

The official source of information on the nation, states, counties, municipalities, even neighborhoods.

- The White House — <http://www.whitehouse.gov>

A gateway to information on the president and all executive-branch departments. See especially "The Interactive Citizens Handbook," which provides links to departments, independent agencies, and more.

- THOMAS: Congress On-line — <http://thomas.loc.gov>

THOMAS (named after Thomas Jefferson) provides links to both houses of Congress. Offerings include bill-tracking and the Congressional Record.

- The CIA World Factbook — <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/pubs.html>

A CIA handbook containing detailed profiles of every country in the world.

- The America Online Reference Desk — <http://www.aol.com/community/channels/reference>

A variety of reference links — dictionaries, thesauri, etc. — put on the Web by the folks at AOL

- MapQuest — <http://www.mapquest.com>

Maps of a neighborhood or a region. Pick the area you want to see and the map will display. Can be printed.

Mailing lists and newsgroups

Internet mailing lists, sometimes known as listservs, allow people interested in a particular topic to talk among themselves via e-mail. The computer administering the list acts as a kind of relay station; any e-mail sent to the list is relayed to anybody who signed up for the list.

- PRSPCT-L is a listserv for prospect researchers that can yield useful tips for journalists, too.

To subscribe, send e-mail to: listserv@bucknell.edu

In the body of the message, type the following: SUBSCRIBE PRSPCT-L

You will receive a message acknowledging your subscription. Make sure to read and keep it; it describes how to post to the list and how to unsubscribe.

To post a message to PRSPCT-L, send it to: prspct-l@bucknell.edu

Note that you post to the list itself, while you subscribe (and unsubscribe) by sending e-mail to the listserv address.

The Internet Prospector is a monthly newsletter developed and distributed by the folks who bring you the prospect research site of the same name. It is posted to the PRSPCT-L mailing list every month. You can also see both the current and past issues at the Internet Prospector Web site, listed above.

- If the subject of a story is on-line, it can be useful to find out what they've been posting in Internet discussions. DejaNews archives the contents of thousands of Internet newsgroups and mailing lists. They're searchable by topic and by name; you can even get a profile of what groups an individual posts to, how many messages he or she originates and how many are responses.

The URL: is <http://www.dejanews.com>

Neil Reisner can be reached by e-mail at neil@nicar.org

The Reporters Network has launched its newly redesigned Web site, announces Bob Sablatura, a reporter at *The Houston (Texas) Chronicle* and network director.

The site includes a Media Directory that allows journalists to control their own listings.

Also included are two bulletin boards, one for news reporters and another for freelance writers. The new boards will carry announcements of job openings, contest entries, published work and other news of interest to journalists.

The URL is: <http://www.reporters.net>

Find it on CD-ROM

This is an excerpt of a handout provided by Jennifer LaFleur at the 1996 IRE National Conference in Providence, R.I. To order the full handout, reference number 490, or to get a list of other conference handouts, call the IRE Resource Center at (573) 882-3364.

By Jennifer LaFleur

San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News

Driving from courthouse to courthouse to dig through documents or ordering various faxes for background information can be minimized today with the many resources available on CD-ROM. Here's a wonderful reference list for CD-ROMs compiled by Jim Derk of the *Evansville Courier*. Jim's handout is available at <http://www.reporter.org> — under the NICAR directory. He also writes a syndicated CD review column for Scripps-Howard. Also, for another great list, check out the list *U.S. News and World Report's* Kathleen Flynn has compiled at <http://www.nando.net/prof/poynter/nd/cdrom.html>.

The list

- **DirectPhone/SelectPhone:** Two/five regional discs containing both 10 million business and 90 million residential listings. DirectPhone can be searched only by name and then limited. SelectPhone can be searched by name, portions of address, telephone number, or type of business. Also, with SelectPhone you can see neighbors on either side and search by SIC code. Unlimited downloads into labels, databases, etc. Updated quarterly. DOS, Windows or Mac on same CD. Price: DirectPhone: \$59; SelectPhone: \$99 They also offer FreePhone, the toll-free numbers on CD-ROM, EuroPages, numbers in Europe, and CanadaPhone, numbers in Canada. Be careful if you buy retail that you get latest version. They offer a next-edition upgrade free. Contact: ProCD, (800) 237-6625

- **11 Million Businesses Phone Directory:** One disc containing business listings that can be searched by company name and phone number. Updated annually. Price: \$79. Disk becomes unreadable one year from installation and you can look up 5,000 businesses. Contact: American Business Information, (800) 555-5666.

- **1.1 Million Health & Medical Industry Reference Directory:** One disc listing everything from physicians to health clubs that can be searched by name, type of business, professional specialty, ZIP code, city or state. Look-up limit 5,000. Price: \$49 (list) Contact: American Business Information, (800) 555-5666.

- **The North American Facsimile Book.**

The fax numbers of nearly every man, woman and corporation on the continent. Crummy interface and no documentation, but for \$89 can't be beat. Contains 150,000 fax numbers. DOS/Mac Contact: Quanta Press, (612) 379-3956.

- **Military Personnel/Base Locator:** Contains more than 128,000 service people and civilian employees culled from the Dept. of Defense phone books. The more important you are in the military, the more likely you are to be in this database. Also includes locator and background on all military installations around the world, more than 1,000 of them, plus the base's official phone directory. Also on the disk is dictionary of military acronyms and slang. Price is \$495 for three disks, updated quarterly. Staff Directories Ltd. (703) 739-0900

- **Statistical Abstract of the United States:** Corresponds to the government bestseller of the same name containing a plethora of statistics and including tables not available in the book. Updated annually. Price: \$50 Customer Services, Bureau of the Census, (301) 763-4100

- **Budget of the United States Government:** Contains all parts of the budget except for the Appendix (which can be found on NESE, see next item.) Updated annually. Price: \$30. Same files are on FedWorld BBS. Department. of Commerce, (202) 482-1986

- **Regional Economic Information System:** Local area economic data including personal income, employment, and earnings by industry for 1969-91. Updated annually in May. Price: \$35 Contact: U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, Office of Business Analysis, (800) STAT-USA. (202) 606-5360

- **Crime and Justice Data, Issued March 1992 and June 1994.** A wealth of crime and justice data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which also produces the annual "Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics." This CD-ROM does not include a search engine; you need to have SAS or SPSS to import the statistical files directly. Text searches can be done with a normal text editor. DOS. Price: \$49. Contact: Bureau of Justice Statistics, (800) 732-3277

- **School District Data Book on CD-ROM:** Data derived from the 1990 Census data, the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data and the Census Survey of Local

Continued on page seven

Continued from page six:

Facts on CD-ROM

Government Finance. Individual states can be purchased as well as a single Special Extract File CD-ROM (with minimal software) that includes only selected data for 15,000 school districts. Price: \$15 each or \$300 for the full set of 42 CD-ROMs) Contact: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Data Systems Branch, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW., Washington, D.C., 20208.

- **Toxic Release Inventory for 1987-1990**—A nice, cheap disc containing lots of historical data about what plants are emitting what. Most everyone writes about the TRI every year; this can get you the background stats in a hurry, which will win you points in Graphics DOS. \$28 Contact: U.S. Government Printing Office, (202) 783-3238, Order No. 055-000-00399

- **Bureau of Transportation Statistics:** This agency develops more than a dozen CD-ROMs a year and are available free for the asking. Call (202) 366-DATA to get on the mailing list. Among the recent releases: Traffic Safety Data 1988-1993, National Transportation Atlas Databases 1995 and United States Waterway Data 1995.

- **Mutual Funds on Disc:** A must for larger organizations who do a lot of writing about mutual funds. This one featured the analysis by Morningstar on 3,000 mutual funds, their history, management, portfolio and a great graphic program. Price is \$795 for annual subscription. Contact: Morningstar, (312) 427-1985

- **PharmAssist**—Multimedia disc explaining all there is to know about drugs, legal and illegal. Not nearly as exhaustive as a PDR, but lots cheaper. Multimedia, DOS.WIN \$30. Contact: Software Marketing Corp. (602) 893-3377

- **Marriage Records Series**—This small company offers regional discs of genealogical information. For example, one disc offers all of the marriages from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee covering 1720 to 1926 for \$39. Great for genealogy research, plus historical stories. Not every county is included however. The data it does contain (this disc has 700,000 records) has been hand-entered from paper records in county courthouses around the U.S. (DOS) Contact: Genealogical CD Publishers, 1623 W. 3640 S, St. George, Utah 84770

- **Geographic Names Information System**—A disc from the U.S. Geological Survey designed to allow mapmakers to standardize spell-

ing of city and town names. Contains about 2,000,000 place names. Nice to find other cities in the country with the same name as your town and to do stories on the most popular town names. (Winners are Midway, with 209, Oak Grove, 145, and Five Points, 140). \$57. Contact: Geological Survey (800) USA-MAPS

- **Federal News Service.** Gives access to comprehensive verbatim transcripts of Congressional hearings, State and Defense Department briefings, Supreme Court hearings, Presidential speeches, loads of other federal documents. Pricey, but for the researcher, an invaluable resource. Main disc (four years of transcripts) plus monthly updates costs \$1,600. Contact: Federal News Service, Jack Graeme, (202) 347-1400

- **U.S. Code: Laws of the United States.** Updated annually. Price: \$36. Contact: U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. (202) 512-1524, Order No. 052-001-00389-6

- **CIA World Fact Book:** Available from a variety of commercial publishers. Make sure the CD-ROM contains the most current version (1994 was released in September 1994) of the book. The file also is available on many BBSes; having it on CD-ROM saves hard disc space. One publisher is Quanta Press, (612) 379-3956

- **Military Contracts and Procurement Locator**—A four-disc set that chronicles the previous 12 months' worth of military contracts and purchasing. Who bought what for how much. Includes 255,000 contracts ranging from pliers to dates (the kind you eat.) Each contract has 88 searchable fields. Also lists contractors barred from seeking federal contracts, including the reason. Cost is \$695, updated quarterly. Contact: Staff Directories Ltd. (703) 739-0900

- **Defense Library on Disc:** Another government disc, this one contains the catalogs of every government department having something to do with Defense. Has 210,000 records updated quarterly on international affairs, science, defense, military law, etc. Cost is \$340 for a year subscription. DOS Contact: NTIS, (703) 487-4630

- **Street Atlas USA**—The bargain of the year and must have for any city desk. This disc contains basically street level maps of the whole United States, down to dirt roads. You can zoom in at more than a dozen magnifications and

Don't forget that the Advanced Bootcamp offered by NICAR and Philip Meyer, author of "The New Precision Journalism" and journalism professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, will be coming up May 4-9, 1997. The seminar, which is held in Chapel Hill, will concentrate on stats and maps. For registration information, send e-mail to Wendy Charron at wendy@nicar.org, or call NICAR at (573) 882-0684.

Continued on page ten

New on-the-road trainer hired

By Brant Houston
Managing Director

As the new year starts, we want to share news on the latest happenings at NICAR and Investigative Reporters & Editors.

New training director

Sarah Cohen, recently of *The St. Petersburg Times*, becomes NICAR's newest training director. Sarah starts her new job this month and already is scheduled to travel to California and Pennsylvania.

Sarah will be telecommuting from her home in Maryland, following the lead of the previous training director, Neil Reisner, who worked out of his New Jersey home. (Neil begins working at the *Miami Herald* late this month.)

At *The St. Petersburg Times*, Sarah worked as a business reporter using computer-assisted reporting extensively. Before that she worked at the *Tampa Tribune*.

Sarah switched to journalism in 1992 after working as an economist, primarily at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This means Sarah brings a wonderful amount of knowledge of numbers and stats to the job. We hope that Sarah will not only do training, but also will analyze some data for news organizations.

Sarah has a journalism master's degree from the University of Maryland's journalism school and a bachelor's degree in economics from University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, both schools at which NICAR has jointly done seminars.

NashCAR

The schedule for panels at NashCAR, March 6-9, in Nashville, Tenn. (register through IRE, 573-882-2042 or on our Web site www.nicar.org/nashcar) is included in this issue. Panelists and instructors are being chosen as this is being written - look for them in the next issue of Uplink. As usual, we plan to cover a wide range of topics with some of the best CAR journalists in the country. Among the panelists and instructors will be CAR guru Philip Meyer, author of "The New Precision Journalism"; Shawn McIntosh, who heads CAR at the *Dallas Morning News*; training expert Jennifer LaFleur, now database editor at the *San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News* and NICAR's

first training director; Paul Adrian of WBNS-TV in Columbus, Ohio; Neill Borowski of *The Philadelphia (Pa.) Inquirer*; David Milliron, head of CAR for Gannett News Service; Bill Casey of the *Washington Post*; Brad Goldstein of *The St. Petersburg Times*; Bob Port of Associated Press; Tom Gaumer of *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*; and a host of others from newspapers and TV stations, including some of the newer names in CAR.

At this point, the computer situation in NashCAR looks awesome. We will rent some computers for the hotel, but Vanderbilt University has generously loaned several computer labs containing about 140 computers with Internet connections for the conference.

In addition to panels and three classes of hands-on training, we will have a mentor program in which you can get your work critiqued, a demonstration room for software, the Internet and Intranets, a section for vendors and rooms for impromptu meetings and brainstorming.

IRE membership

If you use NICAR services, then becoming an IRE member can save you or your news organization more money than ever. Uplink will cost \$40 for members, instead of \$60 for nonmembers. Data from the database library will cost \$10 more for nonmembers. Requests for articles from the IRE Resource Center — articles which often show you how to best use data from the database library — will cost more for nonmembers. If you become an IRE member you also will get the six issues of the IRE Journal free and numerous other IRE services.

Web activities

Our Web site (homepage: www.reporter.org) continues to expand and improve. We hope to have new designs for our pages up and running in mid-February. Wallace Winfrey, our Web administrator, and other staff members are hard at working putting more handouts and other educational material on the site.

We also will have a demonstration soon of a clickable map where you can choose a state and get a list of investigative reporters in that state. We also are making better use of Lotus Notes and Microsoft's SQL server. More on this later.

Brant Houston can be reached at (573) 882-0684, or send e-mail to brant@nicar.org

We've just made it easier to become an IRE member. Now, you can join IRE via our Web server, or you can download a copy of our membership form in Adobe Acrobat format from the Web site and submit it by fax to (573) 884-5544. For more information, check out <http://www.ire.org/membership.html>. If you have any questions, e-mail Web Master Wally Winfrey at wally@nicar.org.

Pushing the bridge limits

By Dave Sheingold

Westchester Rockland News

Dave Sheingold attended the NICAR bootcamp in July, 1996.

It sounded like a no-brainer: 13-ton school buses crossing 3-, 4- and 5-ton bridges running over busy railroad tracks? Trucks weighing up to 40 tons specifically directed to cross an 11-ton bridge over the same railroad lines?

Couldn't be?

Could be.

In fact, that — and other potential disasters — are just what Gannett Newspapers found in the northern New York City suburbs as part of a two-part series in November that stemmed from searches through a statewide database of bridge conditions.

Disaster in the making

Among the possibilities for serious trouble found by the newspaper were these:

- Fully-loaded school buses, which weigh anywhere from 10 to 15 tons running every school day over at least six bridges with signs barring vehicles of more than 3, 4 or 5 tons. Most of them spanned busy commuter railroad lines running into and out of New York City.
- Large vehicles ranging from 6-ton delivery trucks to 15-ton fire trucks to 40-ton tractor-trailers using the same bridges as the buses.
- A sign posted by one village that directed industrial truck traffic such as cement mixers, tractor-trailers and garbage trucks weighing well over 20 tons when full over an 11-ton bridge.

After the newspaper chain notified about 10 local busing and trucking companies, all vowed to immediately change their routes. But that didn't stop experts on bridge maintenance and construction from warning that the potential for crisis continued to loom across the state.

The difficulties in dealing with the problem included the century-old age of some bridges, commercial traffic routes running over many of these spans, police manpower too limited to consistently enforce the weight limits and a professed lack of funds by a commuter railroad that owns many of the most endangered bridges. Some communities look the other way because they fear damaging local commerce.

"I can't say what the odds are. But there is the potential for something very nasty to happen,"

said Norbert Luft, a state bridge engineer with the New York Department of Transportation.

How the story began

The story began with an idea to look at general bridge conditions contained in a complex ASCII, fixed-length database of about 100 heavily coded fields describing the latest bridge inspections and results, kept by the state transportation department. But the story quickly expanded to look at bridges with weight limits.

Initially, about 50 of the fields in the database that related directly to conditions, traffic volume, age, bridge lengths, weight limits and other elements were imported into a database manager using Paradox for DOS. We used a fixed-length importer called FLIMPORT that allowed us to pick and choose which fields we wanted to look at. (Excluded were many involving things such as bridge heights, underpass clearances, construction materials and types of connections with the adjoining land embankments. They needlessly clogged up an already lengthy database and could have been imported at some point, if necessary.)

At that point, we simply planned to do a single story looking at overall conditions in our coverage area (Westchester and Putnam counties, pop. 960,000) and the entire state, looking at the owners and regions with the best and worst bridges. But we began to notice that many of the bridges popping up in the weight-limit field ran through commercial areas. We pulled them out, sorted them by community and weight limit, then camped out by 15 bridges for about a half-hour each.

It took only a few minutes of observation at 11 of the bridges to see that the limits were routinely ignored. The other four were in lightly traveled areas.

Reactions

The reactions to the findings were mixed.

Nearby residents and merchants said the situation had gone on for years and that they figured it was allowed.

Meanwhile, school-bus officials in several communities, as well as businesses whose trucks were seen using the bridges, professed surprise and ignorance of the problem and immediately

Continued on page fourteen

**Download the IRE
Contest Entry Form
available from [http://
www.ire.org/contest/
contest.pdf](http://www.ire.org/contest/contest.pdf)**

**The form is in Adobe
Acrobat format,
which means you will
need a copy of
the Adobe Acrobat
reader to read and
print out the form.**

**The Acrobat
reader can be found at
[http://
www.adobe.com/
acrobat/](http://www.adobe.com/acrobat/)**

Use FoxPro to document a table

NICAR now offers the NASA Air Safety Reporting System database. The price ranges from \$40 to \$60, depending on the size of your news organization. For more information, call NICAR at (573) 882-0684.

By Richard Mullins

The Missouri School of Journalism

I wouldn't want to work in a paperless office, let alone try to analyze data and report without any paper. I want electronic copies of everything so I don't have to retype anything, and I want paper copies of some things because they're portable and usable in ways that the same stuff on a computer screen isn't.

One of the paper essentials in computer-assisted reporting is the record layout, although some data comes with this information in an accompanying text file. However, after you have created a table in FoxPro, it is very easy to document its structure, add in the data dictionary and even include narrative explanations of fields and stuff, all in one single file.

You can do this by creating a structure description table from the data table and adding fields and information to it.

Here's how to do it. First, with the desired data table open, use this FoxPro command to create the structure table:

```
copy structure extended to NewTable
```

The table, NewTable, contains the following four fields. The command has converted the field names from the original table into a table of records like this:

```
Field_Name|Field_Len|Field_Type|Field_Dec
"Field_name," obviously, lists the names
```

of the fields from the original table. "Field_len" lists the length of the field as designated in the original. "Field_type" shows whether the contents for that field in the original table are character, numeric, etc. And "Field_dec" indicates decimals, where applicable.

You also can add fields to NewTable to help further document the original table—just be sure to add fields to the end so the next step (see below) will work. The most useful field to add might be a description field of 30 or 40 characters, since the 10-character field name limit in FoxPro can require dreaming up some very cryptic field names. Referring to this table or a print-out of it can help you decipher field names like ACNMEXPDAT.

You can also create a memo field, which could hold a data or code dictionary and longer comments for the field. Be sure to add any supplemental fields to the end of the field order. This keeps the structure table usable for the next step—creating a new table based on the structure table.

This command is the reverse of the first command you used. It creates a new table using the structure table as the specifications for field names, data types, etc.

```
create NewTableName from ;
    StructureTableName
```

Richard Mullins can be reached at (573) 882-2127, or send e-mail to richard@nicar.org

From page seven:

Facts on CD-ROM

export the map to the Windows clipboard as a.BMP if need be. Places are searchable by name, ZIP code or phone number. Windows/Mac. Price: \$62 at Sam's Club; about \$80 elsewhere. Contact: DeLorme Mapping, (800) 452-5831

- Global Explorer— This disc does for the globe what Street Atlas does for the U.S. Great maps of the earth, down to street level in cities. (No dirt roads). Includes descriptions of 20,000 historical features and maps of 100 cities. \$80 Contact: DeLorme Mapping, (800) 452-5831

Here are some other CD-ROMs Jim didn't mention that we use frequently:

- InfoTax CD— nonprofit organizations. DOS search engine. Provides Federal ID num-

ber and summary data — NOT full 990. Tax Analysts, Arlington, Va. 22213. (800) 955-3444. \$99, updated quarterly.

- Current Population Survey Utilities. Unicon Research Corporation, Santa Monica (310) 393-4636. Raw data from the annual survey conducted by the Census Bureau.

- NCES. Common Core of Education Data: School years 1987-88 through 1992-93

- National Election Studies. A database of basic research on voting, public opinion and political participation in the United States. \$70. ICPSR, Ann Arbor, Mich. (313) 763-5010.

Jennifer LaFleur can be reached at (408) 920-5728, or send e-mail to jenster@aol.com

Slips tell the story

Pawnshops draw criminals

By Scott Glover

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Sun-Sentinel

Fort Lauderdale has the third worst property crime rate in the nation and has more pawnshops than it does McDonald's.

Is there a link? Police have been saying "yes" for years.

We decided to check it out for ourselves.

Beat the clock

In July, the Sun-Sentinel made a request under Florida's Sunshine Law for every pawn slip generated in the city in 1995. (Our request beat a change in state law in October that specifically exempted the forms from public view.)

There were nearly 70,000. About 32,000 had been entered into the police department's computer; another 38,000 had not.

We hired temporary workers to enter the paper records into our own PCs. Then we merged the two databases and loaded them into the computer program Paradox.

The result was a gold mine of information: the names, addresses and birth dates of everyone who had pawned anything in 1995. The slips, required to be filled out by pawnbrokers then sent to the police, also included detailed descriptions of the items pawned.

Criminal dealings?

The first thing we did was rank the pawners by their number of trips to the pawnshop. Then we used local and state databases to check the criminal records of the top 50.

The result: Thirty-nine out of 50 had criminal arrest records; 19 for burglary, theft or other related offense; 14 others faced drugs charges, almost all of them for cocaine. The remaining five faced a hodgepodge of charges.

But we let the pawners' activities speak for themselves.

Is something amiss when a 21-year-old convicted burglar goes to the pawnshop 66 times in one year, pawning, among many other things, 12 bikes, 14 beepers, five car stereos four portable stereos, two VCRs and eight rings?

What about a man with a laundry list of drug and theft charges on his rap sheet who went to the pawnshop 64 times in 1995, pawning seven TVs, eight VCRs, four portable stereos and two

home stereos?

We let readers decide.

Judging from the hundreds of calls, letters, faxes and e-mails that we – and more importantly, state legislators – received in response to our series, it seemed certain that readers were angry at what they had read. The state senator who sponsored a new law governing pawnshops has already filed a bill that will tighten restrictions on the industry.

Banks for the poor

Finding bad guys was not the only use for our database. We also wrote a story about frequent pawners who were not suspected of anything criminal, but were caught up in a cycle. That story, which included anecdotes about a man who made 153 trips to the pawnshop in a single year, focused on the role of pawnshops as "banks for the poor."

As best we can tell, this project is unique. Nowhere, including in the IRE morgue and NICAR database library, could we find an investigative story based on pawn slips.

Duplicating the project

If you're interested in conducting an investigation similar to ours, step one is to determine whether pawn slips are kept in your city and, if so, whether they are public record.

Since the document is little known, chances are reporters haven't asked to inspect them. Go in assuming you have the right to. We didn't know whether our request would be granted and were prepared to get the lawyers involved if it wasn't. One argument we would have made is that pawn slips are provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and by law are forwarded to local police departments, hence they are public.

We don't know if that argument would have worked, but it's probably worth trying under similar circumstances.

If your police department does keep pawn slips and agrees to turn them over, make sure to ask if they are available electronically.

It'll save you a lot of work.

Happy hunting.

Scott Glover can be reached at
(954) 356-4523.

The complete Fort
Lauderdale (Fla.) Sun-
Sentinel series on
pawnshops is available
on-line at www.sun-sentinel.com/news or
through America
Online at Keyword:
SSDE NEWS.

The National Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference

NashCAR '97

Hosted by IRE, NICAR and The Tennessean in Nashville, Tenn.
Conference Site: The Renaissance Nashville Hotel

Check out what's
happening at
NashCAR, NICAR's
annual conference,
which will be held
March 6-9 in Nashville,
Tenn., and register on-
line at [http://
www.nicar.org/nashcar](http://www.nicar.org/nashcar)
For a registration
form and fee
information, call
NICAR at
(573) 882-0684.

Learn more than 50 ways to use computers in the newsroom at NashCAR '97, March 6-9 in Nashville, Tenn. This year's National Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference is sponsored by IRE, NICAR and *The Tennessean*.

Break-out sessions on special topics will be held in siderooms and speakers will give presentations on problem-solving, software, hardware, and data analysis in a demonstration room. Training will include classes in spreadsheets, database managers, mapping, nine-track tapes, creating World Wide Web pages, and surfing the Internet. We will announce panelists in the coming weeks.

In addition, there will be up to six hours of hands-on training offered to registrants on a first-come, first-served basis and one-on-one work critiques for the first 50. Hands-on training will include beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes. Here is the tentative program of panels.

Panels marked (B) are for Beginners; (I) for Intermediate; (A) for Advanced; and (E) for everyone.

NashCAR '97 starting line

WEDNESDAY:

6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Early Registration

THURSDAY:

7 a.m. to 9 a.m.

Registration

9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Welcome and introduction to conference.

10 a.m. to 10:50 a.m.

Panel 1: Finding people and sources with on-line techniques (B)

Panel 2: 50 of the newest CAR stories, for beat and deadline reporters (E)

Panel 3: Beginning from the beginning – How to get started. Hardware, software,

expectations (B)

11 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

Panel 1: Getting CAR started in broadcast (B)

Panel 2: Using spreadsheets to cover local government, budgets and salaries (B,I)

Panel 3: Covering the environment with CAR (I)

Noon to 1:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 to 2:20 p.m.

Panel 1: Making data accessible to the whole newsroom (Intranet, etc.) (A)

Panel 2: Using Census data to profile your local community (I)

Panel 3: Covering education with CAR (I)

2:30 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.

Panel 1: Getting valuable, but free data from the Internet (B, I)

Panel 2: Finding and negotiating for data (B,I)

Panel 3: Covering politics with CAR (it's not just the election) (I)

3:30 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.

Panel 1: Choosing your tools (software, hardware: strategies and finer points) (B,I)

Panel 2: Strategies for producing CAR stories at smaller news organizations (I)

Panel 3: Covering housing with CAR (I)

FRIDAY:



9 a.m. to 9:50 a.m.

- Panel 1:** Using CAR to cover health issues (I)
Panel 2: Data nightmares and how to avoid them (request strategies) (I,A)
Panel 3: Examples of good stories based on use of math and statistical tools (I,A)

10 a.m. to 10:50 a.m.

- Panel 1:** Using CAR to cover transportation (trains, planes and cars) (I)
Panel 2: Data nightmares and how to clean them up when you can't avoid them (A)
Panel 3: Basic math for journalists (B)

11 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

- Panel 1:** Using CAR to cover state government (B,I)
Panel 2: Managing your data (keep it up to date and accurate) (I,A)
Panel 3: Using CAR to interpret government statistical reports (A)

Noon to 1:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 to 2:20 p.m.

- Panel 1:** Using CAR to cover federal government (and applying it locally) (B,I)
Panel 2: Search strategies for the Web: quick hits for broadcast journalists (B)
Panel 3: Using CAR to interpret business and annual reports (I)

2:30 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.

- Panel 1:** Using CAR to cover the workplace (I)
Panel 2: Making data easy to understand through graphics and visuals (I,A)
Panel 3: Using CAR to do meaningful and understandable regression analysis (A)

3:30 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.

- Panel 1:** Using CAR to cover not-for-profit organizations (I)
Panel 2: Using CAR to cover consumer issues (B,I)
Panel 3: Using CAR for significance tests. Does the info really mean something?(A)

SATURDAY:

9 a.m. to 9:50 a.m.

- Panel 1:** Managing CAR – managing the reporter, managing the editor (I)
Panel 2: The latest doings on the Web – Security, new technologies (E)

Panel 3: Using CAR to cover business (I)

10 a.m. to 10:50 a.m.

- Panel 1:** Managing CAR projects (not for managers –° for reporters) (E)
Panel 2: Putting investigative stories on the Web (I,A)
Panel 3: Using CAR to cover sports (I)

11 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

- Panel 1:** Covering social issues with CAR (I)
Panel 2: Dealing with FOIA issues, including privatization of public functions (B,I)
Panel 3: Using CAR to cover crime and courts (I)

Noon to 1:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 to 2:20 p.m.

- Panel 1:** Teaching CAR - new techniques for trainers and academics (I,A)
Panel 2: Using CAR for international reporting (I)
Panel 3: Using CAR to cover features (I)

2:30 to 3:20 p.m.

- Panel 1:** Writing and thinking clearly about databases (E)
Panel 2: The latest legalities involving on-line data (E)
Panel 3: Using CAR to cover utilities, technology and cyberspace (I)

3:30 to 4:20 p.m.

- Panel 1:** Putting some dazzle in CAR stories – combining writing and graphics (E)
Panel 2: The latest in hardware and software for CAR in the newsroom (E)
Panel 3: Ideas for matching databases to create new stories (E)

4:30 to 6 p.m. Supersession

SUNDAY:

This is a morning of workshops, both in panel rooms and training rooms in the hotel

Main workshops

10 a.m. to Noon

- Room 1:** Database editors and news librarians
Room 2: Editors, managers and trainers
Room 3: Special issues for broadcasters
Room 4: Tricks of the CAR trade (How to use what you've just learned)

Hotel Registration

The Renaissance

Nashville Hotel

611 Commerce

Street, Nashville,

Tenn. 37203

Single Occupancy

\$105—Double

Occupancy \$115

Call (800) 468-3571 or

(615) 255-8400

Indicate that you are an IRE participant and that you want to get the special rate.

Reserve your room by Feb. 6; after that, rooms might not be available, or might cost more. Use a credit card to hold your reservation.

Seminars, bootcamps, conferences

Get your training

Get all 12 1995
Uplinks in a bound
edition for \$10 plus
shipping.
With the bound
edition, you can
review macros
devised by the St.
Louis Post-Dispatch's
George Landau for
cleaning data (January
1995); revisit advice
from U.S. News and
World Report's Penny
Loeb on covering
schools (April 1995)
and tracking
nonprofits (December
1995); and remind
yourself of how other
reporters have used
OSHA, HMDA
and more.
To order, call
Wendy Charron at
(573) 882-0684.

Available soon:
Bound 1996 Uplink.

On-the-road training

NICAR and, where indicated, The Associated Press provide specialized training in your newsroom. Learn to transfer data from government files into newsroom PCs. Build spreadsheets for insightful stories on the beat. Comprehend documents with database managers. Navigate the Internet and on-line databases.

Cost varies. For information, call Lisa Barnes at (573) 882-8969, or to register, call the numbers below.

Note: In the following list, "Open to all" means any journalist may sign up. "Closed" means the session is open only to members of the host organization.

- York, Pa., York Daily Record — Jan. 27-28. Closed.
- PNPA, Harrisburg, Pa. — Jan. 29.
- San Diego, Calif., San Diego Tribune and SPJ — Feb. 19-22, 1997. Open to all. (619) 293-1261
- Washington, D.C., Newsday, Feb. 17-20. Closed.
- Palm Beach, Calif., Palm Beach Post — March 25-27.

Conferences

NICAR will offer training and seminars at the following professional conferences, including the IRE and NICAR national conferences. Costs vary. For information or to register, call Lisa Barnes at (573) 882-8969.

• NashCAR, NICAR National Conference, Nashville, Tenn. — March 6-9. Costs are: IRE member, \$150 for entire conference. Non-IRE member, \$190 for entire conference, includ-

ing IRE membership. Renewal member, \$190 for entire conference, including IRE renewal. Students, \$125 for conference, including student membership. Late fee is \$15 for registrations not postmarked by Feb. 14.

• IRE National Conference, Phoenix, Ariz., — June 12-15.

Bootcamps

Bootcamps are week-long, intensive training sessions offered at NICAR's headquarters at the Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia, Mo.

As with on-the-road training, you will learn to transfer data from government files into newsroom PCs, build spreadsheets for stories on the beat, comprehend documents with database managers, and navigate the 'Net and on-line databases — but you'll be drilled all day, every day for a full week. Tuition ranges from \$500-\$1,000 depending on circulation or market size.

For information, call Wendy Charron at (573) 882-0684.

• Jan. 24-26. Intermediate Bootcamp concentrating on data clean-up and more. For details, call (573) 882-0684.

• May 4-9. Advanced Bootcamp concentrating on stats and maps at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill with Philip Meyer, author of *The New Precision Journalism*. The seminar is held in Chapel Hill. For details, call (573) 882-0684.

• May 18-23. Regular Bootcamp on general computer-assisted reporting. For details, call (573) 882-0684

NEW • Aug. 10-15. Regular Bootcamp on general computer-assisted reporting. For details, call (573) 882-0684

From page nine: CAR Trips

said they would tell their drivers to re-route themselves. A county bus official said he believed it was all right to run 15-ton buses over 10- and 11-ton bridges, but later changed his mind after a state bridge official strongly suggested otherwise.

However, the traffic coordinator for the village of Mamaroneck said it was unlikely that a sign directing truck traffic over an 11-ton span would be changed because that was the easiest route out of the village for large ve-

hicles. And the village administrator in Irvington said local police were unlikely to enforce limits on a 15-ton span because it was the only connection to one busy industrial strip.

Amid those conflicting responses, it was clear the problem would not be resolved any time soon.

A follow-up story is planned in a few months to see what, if any, changes are really made.

Dave Sheingold can be reached at (914) 696-8229, or send e-mail 102503.520@CompuServe.COM

Growing collection of federal databases

From the NICAR library

NICAR offers a number of federal government databases. Here is a list of our growing collection:

NEW • Federal Aviation Administration's accidents and incidents, including major plane crashes since 1971.

NEW • NASA's air safety reporting system, including anonymous complaints by pilots and air traffic controllers. Useful for finding near misses and problems at local airports, 1988-1996.

- A monthly CD subscription for all 1995-96 Federal Election Commission campaign contributions by individuals and political action committees, plus all presidential matching fund requests.

- The Health Care Financing Administration's 1995 database of all Medicare-funded inpatient work in U.S. hospitals.

- Federal Railroad Administration data for accidents, casualties, and highway crossings. 1991-1995.

- Coast Guard boating accidents, 1969-1994.

- Federal Aviation Administration data, including airplane maintenance work documented in the service difficulty report, pilot licenses and grades, and aircraft registration.

- Home Mortgage Disclosure Act records, for tracking who gets loans and who gets turned down, and finding redlining patterns, 1992-1995.

- Federal procurement data, 1992-1995, includes breakdowns by agency.

- Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms gun dealer records. 1993-1995.

- National Bridge Inventory System data, includes inspection grades. 1994-1995

NEW • FBI Uniform Crime Reports, a detailed compilation of crime data that includes statistical breakdowns of individual murders. This

includes the new 1995 data.

- Social Security death records, by name and social security number, going back to 1937.

NEW • Occupational Safety and Health Administration violation data includes worker accidents and exposures to hazardous chemicals by companies, 1974-1996.

- U.S. Department of Transportation truck accident and census data. It includes accidents by company and road.

- U.S. Small Business Administration loan guarantees, 1989-1995. This includes the name of the business, address, amount covered by the SBA, and status, including whether the loan went bad.

- U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loan guarantees, 1989-1995. This includes individuals and businesses, the amount covered by the SBA, and the status, including whether the loan went bad.

- U.S. Small Business Administration's list of minority companies certified for SBA assistance in seeking federal contracts. It includes the name of the company, its address, the owner, type of business and phone number.

- The National Inventory of Dams. 1991-1995.

- U.S. Department of Transportation hazardous materials accidents database, a collection of roadway, rail, air and waterway accidents from 1971 to 1995.

- U.S. Department of Transportation fatal accident reporting system. It includes all roadway accidents from 1988 to 1995.

- U.S. Coast Guard directory of U.S. merchant vessels. It includes the name of the ship, the managing owner, home port and various descriptive information.

For up-to-date prices and more information, call (573) 882-0684, or send e-mail to nicar@muccmail.missouri.edu.

NICAR's week-long

bootcamps in Columbia, Mo., offer hands-on training in computer-assisted reporting skills, including the use of spreadsheets and database managers, accessing data in various media, such as nine-track tapes, and negotiating for data.

For more information,

call NICAR

(573) 882-0684, or send e-mail to nicar@muccmail.missouri.edu

Bits, Bytes and Barks

Keep this

After our issue on Freedom of Information battles, Joe Carroll of the *Hammond (Ind.) Times* shared this story:

The criminal court clerk in a nearby city refused to let me look at a court file for a woman jailed on battery and resisting arrest charges. I offered the name of the defendant and cause number.

"You'll need the judge's permission to see that."

I said, "No I don't, but even if I did, how do I find out who the judge is without looking at the file?"

"Well, you'll need one of the attorney's permission."

When I raised the same objection, I was told they couldn't find the file because they do not file cases according to name or cause number. They file them according to the defendant's next scheduled court date.

"Again, how do I find that out without looking at the file? And since this defendant has already been sentenced to jail time, I doubt there IS another court date in store for her."

The court clerk said she is, by law, the Keeper of Records, not the Distributor of Records. I was once again referred to the unnamed and unknowable judge.

Needless to say, Indiana's Open Records Law makes no provision for such denials, even if by officeholders who give themselves spooky titles like Keeper or Records.

Eventually, it took a brief lawsuit to straighten them out.

Jobs

• *The Miami (Fla.) Herald* needs a capital bureau reporter.

Applicants should be skilled in computer-assisted reporting.

Contact Mark Washburn, state editor, at (305) 376-3765; George Haj, assistant state editor, at (305)-3766; Chris Morris, newsroom recruiting, at (305) 376-3592.; or Dan Keating at (305) 376-3476 or by e-mail at dtkeats@ibm.net

• *The San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News* needs technology reporters someone to dig for and crunch business data. Daily newspaper experience is preferred.

Contact Peter Hillan, executive business editor, at phillan@sjmercury.com or Jonathan Krim, assistant managing editor at jkrim@sjmercury.com.

• *The Orange County (Calif.) Register* needs a technology reporter and an assistant city editor for medicine and science.

Applicants for the editing position should have at least three years reporting experience on a daily metro and at least two years editing experience.

Applicants for either position should submit a packet of current work, a resume and a one-page statement of philosophy to: John Doussard, 625 N. Grand Ave., Santa Ana, Calif. 92701. Telephone: (714) 953-2225. Fax: 714-565-3681.

• *The Wilmington (N.C.) Morning Star* needs a court reporter. Applicants should have at least two years' reporting experience and computer-assisted reporting skills.

Send a resume, references and five to 10 clips to: Dave Ennis, city editor, *Wilmington Morning Star*, P.O. Box 840 (1003 S. 17th St.), Wilmington, N.C. 28402-0840

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 309
COLUMBIA, MO. 65211

Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.
100 Neff Hall
University of Missouri
School of Journalism
Columbia, MO 65211