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Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame launches 50th year with nine inductees, two lifetime achievement honorees

EDMOND -- Nine journalists and two longtime educators will be honored as the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame launches its 50th year with a special First Amendment Day on the University of Central Oklahoma campus.

The induction ceremony will be from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, April 25, in the Nigh University Center.

The 49th hall of fame inductees are **M.J. Alexander**, internationally recognized journalist; **Mary Bishop-Baldwin**, *Tulsa World* assistant editor and marriage equality pioneer; **Brian Blansett**, owner of the *Tri-County Herald*; **Ziva Branstetter**, *The Washington Post*'s corporate accountability editor; **Chris Casteel**, *The Oklahoman*'s news director; **Bob Dotson**, retired NBC-TV correspondent and author; **Wayne Greene**, the *Tulsa World*'s editorial page editor; **Griff Palmer**, database journalism pioneer and former *New York Times* reporter; and **Timothy E. Talley**, political reporter for *The Associated Press*.

The Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame is also giving individual Lifetime Achievement Awards to retiring University of Central Oklahoma President **Don Betz** and UCO President Emeritus **W. Roger Webb**.

"Dr. Betz and Dr. Webb were chosen to both receive Lifetime Achievement Awards by the selection committee because of their support for the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame and for journalism," said Joe Hight, Hall of Fame director and Edith Kinney Gaylord Endowed Chair of Journalism Ethics at UCO.

"They have shown a commitment to First Amendment and press freedoms throughout their careers and have spotlighted the important role that the press plays in our democratic society," he said. "Dr. Webb is responsible for relocating the hall of fame at the Nigh University Center and its yearly support. Dr. Betz has maintained that support and also committed to establishing a hall of fame museum and improving its presence as a statewide institution."

Doors will open at 11:15 a.m. for the ceremony, and the luncheon program will begin at 11:30 a.m. on the third floor of the Nigh University Center, across the hallway from the Hall of Fame.

Master of ceremonies will be Mark Thomas, executive vice president of the Oklahoma Press Association. Vance Harrison, president of the Oklahoma Association of Broadcasters, will serve as the presenter. Tribute videos will feature each hall of fame inductee, who will receive a plaque and a lapel pin signifying membership.

Hight praised the accomplishments of the new members of the Hall, as it prepares for the 50th anniversary celebration next year. “The nine inductees are among the pioneers in their field and who show why the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame features the best of journalism in this country.”

“This is a high-profile class of inductees who represent national, regional and local news organizations. It’s also the 49th class and one that kicks off our 50th anniversary of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame,” he said. “But most of all it represents a group of individuals who have distinguished themselves in their profession.

As part of the kickoff to the 50th anniversary, Betz has declared April 25 as First Amendment Day on the UCO campus. The induction ceremony will be among several activities planned on the campus that day. Betz and hall of fame inductees will be part of the activities including a march to dedicate a special First Amendment display in the Mass Communication building. The “1 (Amendment) for ALL” organization provided a grant for the day’s activities.

“Even before being selected as a Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, Dr. Betz wholeheartedly supported and declared April 25, 2019, as First Amendment Day,” Hight said. “Freedom of the press, guaranteed in the First Amendment, is a foundation of our country.”

Student co-directors Erin Barnett and Trevor Stone, both UCO seniors, are working with Hight on other daily events, which will be announced later.

The Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame was founded in 1971 by former UCO Journalism Chairman Dr. Ray Tassin. He was followed by Dennie Hall as director. Hight is the fourth director, succeeding Dr. Terry Clark, who retired two years ago and serves as a consultant. This year’s honorees make for 427 total members, all of whom are featured on the hall of fame website (okjournalism.uco.edu). Past honoree plaques are on display in the Hall of Fame in UCO’s Nigh University Center.

The hall, hosted by the UCO Department of Mass Communication, is also supported with funding from the University of Central of Oklahoma. The Ethics & Excellence in Journalism Foundation is also a sponsor.

Ten members were on the Selection Committee this year: Harrison and hall of fame members Barbara Hoberock, Carla Hinton, Billie Rodely, Ralph Schaefer, Jennifer Gilliland, Terri Watkins, Lindel Hutson, Thomas and Hight. A primary consideration of the committee is how nominees distinguish themselves as journalists.

The biographies of the honorees follow:

OKLAHOMA JOURNALISM HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

M.J. Alexander (1961-) brought two decades of work as a photographer, reporter and editor with newspapers, magazines and **The Associated Press** when she moved to Oklahoma in 1998. In the years since, she has documented the people and places of her adopted home state for

regional and national magazines, focusing on the overlooked and underestimated. She is author and illustrator of two fine-art books: *Salt of the Red Earth: A Century of Wit and Wisdom from Oklahoma's Elders*, featuring interviews and portraits of 100 centenarians, and *Portrait of a Generation: Sons and Daughters of the Red Earth*, winner of an Oklahoma Book Award. Her photographs have been exhibited in more than 25 solo shows, from the Oklahoma City Museum of Art to a 2018 retrospective at London's Crypt Gallery. She was the first Oklahoman featured in a solo exhibition in the Main Gallery of the International Photography Hall of Fame, which describes her as "combining the vision of an artist with the skills of a storyteller."

Mary Bishop-Baldwin (1961-) is an assistant editor and copy editor at the **Tulsa World**, having worked as a copy editor and assistant city editor since 1995. From 1986-95, she was a journalism professor at East Central University in Ada. She received her bachelor's degree in mass communication from East Central University and earned a master's degree in mass communication from Arkansas State University. She began her journalism career as a reporter at the **Bristow News & Record Citizen** and then worked on the copy desk of **The Daily Oklahoman**. She is recognized for her professionalism during the **Tulsa World's** coverage of the decade long federal lawsuit, in which she was a lead plaintiff, that brought marriage equality to Oklahoma and other states in 2014. As a result, she was honored by the Tulsa Chapter of the Association for Women in Communications with its Newsmakers Award in 2015. She was named by Oklahoma magazine as a 2014 Oklahoman of the Year.

Brian Blansett (1952-) A native of Fitzhugh, Blansett knew as a third-grader that he wanted to be a newspaperman and he considered himself among the highly fortunate for getting to live his boyhood dream. He won a variety of writing, reporting and photography awards, including the **Oklahoma Press Association's** sweepstakes award for best editorial in 2015. He was city editor at the Waco, Texas, **Tribune-Herald** during the assault and siege at the Branch Davidian compound in 1993 and directed his newspaper's award-winning coverage of the events. He retired in 2014 but soon discovered he had no knack for it. Six months later he bought the **Tri-County Herald** newspaper in Meeker and turned it into a consistent Sequoyah Award winner. He taught as an adjunct at Baylor University and Oklahoma Baptist University and was elected to the North Rock Creek board of education. He is a graduate of Latta High School and East Central University, a past president of the **Oklahoma Press Association** and a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and the 45th Infantry.

Ziva Branstetter (1964-) began her career at the **Guthrie Daily Leader**. In 1989, she was hired by **The Tulsa Tribune**, where she was a reporter and assistant city editor until the newspaper closed in 1992. Branstetter then worked for the **Philadelphia Daily News** for two years, and at the **Tulsa World** for 21 years in several reporting and editing roles, including as an investigative reporter, city editor and enterprise editor. During 21 years at the **World**, she held various reporting and editing roles, including city editor and enterprise editor. Her investigations led the governor to disband a state nursing home board, sparked criminal charges against a state lawmaker, helped free wrongfully convicted people and prompted new laws. In 2017, Branstetter moved to the Bay Area to become senior editor at **The Center for Investigative Reporting**, where her team exposed abuses by federal immigration contractors. In 2018, she was hired by **The Washington Post** to lead a new reporting team focused on corporate accountability.

Chris Casteel (1959-) Began working for **The Daily Oklahoman and The Oklahoma City Times** in August 1982, while in school at the University of Oklahoma. He has guided Oklahomans through the corridors of power for decades. Chris began covering the state Capitol in 1985 for **The Oklahoman** after stints in metro and police reporting. Five years later, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he documented major political events for more than 25 years. That included 15 national political conventions, Supreme Court cases, White House events and the Anita Hill hearings on Capitol Hill. He also traveled back to Oklahoma City in 1995 with President Bill Clinton for a memorial service immediately after the bombing. He has earned awards for feature writing, spot news, investigative reporting and sports writing. In 2018, he was named news director for **The Oklahoman**. He is a member of the Washington Gridiron Club and past membership chairman of the National Press Club.

Bob Dotson (1946-) began his career in 1969 at **WKY-TV** in Oklahoma City as a photojournalist/reporter/anchor/documentary producer. In 1974 he won Oklahoma's first national Emmy for a 90-minute documentary on African American history called "Through the Looking Glass Darkly." Dotson was nominated for 11 national Emmys — and won seven more — after he became an **NBC News** correspondent in 1975. His long-running series, "The American Story with Bob Dotson," was a regular feature on the **TODAY Show** for 40 years. He also continued producing documentaries. In 1990 "El Capitan's Courageous Climbers," won seven International Film Festivals and documentary's highest honor, the CINE Grand Prize. His reporting and storytelling have earned 120 national and international awards. They include grand prize recipient of the DuPont Columbia, Robert F. Kennedy and William Allen White awards and a record six Edward R. Murrow Awards for Best Network News Writing.

Wayne Greene (1963-) has been the **Tulsa World** editorial pages editor since 2013, the capstone assignment in a 30-year career with the newspaper. He was the **World's** city editor for 13 years, starting in 1995 and, before that, spent four years in the **World's** State Capitol Bureau. At the helm of the editorial page, Greene has steered the newspaper toward a policy that emphasizes education, adequate funding of state services and transparency in government. Greene's family has been in Oklahoma since 1889. He grew up in Oklahoma City and graduated with highest honors from the University of Oklahoma in 1985 with degrees in English and history. He started his journalism career at **The Enid Morning News** and **Enid News Eagle**, before joining the **World** staff in 1987. He has won several awards for reporting, writing and leadership. He was presented the University of Oklahoma Regents Distinguished Alumni Award in 2017 and was named "The Conscience of the Community" by the Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce in 2016.

Griff Palmer (1956-) began his newspaper career in high school, as a student reporter for the **Muskogee Daily Phoenix**. After graduating in 1978 from Park College in Parkville, Mo., he worked for the **Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise**, the **Stillwater News-Press**, **The Oklahoma City Times** and **The Daily Oklahoman**. During 19 years at **The Oklahoman** and **Oklahoma City Times**, he covered a variety of reporting beats and served five years as an assistant city editor. He became **The Oklahoman's** first database editor in 1994, helping the newspaper integrate electronic data analysis methods into its news reporting. He spent six years at **The San Jose Mercury News** as database editor. In 2006 he moved to **The New York Times**, where he joined a seven-member reporting team, working on projects throughout the newsroom. He

contributed reporting to two projects that won Pulitzer Prizes, along with projects that won other national awards. He is a fourth-generation Oklahoman with family roots in the 19th-century Chickasaw Removal.

Timothy E. Talley (1952-) has covered Oklahoma state government, politics and the courts for **The Associated Press** since 1995. He began his journalism career at radio stations **WLCS-WQXY** in Baton Rouge, La., in 1976 before moving to print journalism at the **Plaquemine Post**. He joined the **Morning Advocate** and **State-Times** in Baton Rouge in 1980, first as a general assignment reporter at the River Parishes bureau and then as the state courts reporter, where he was a two-time recipient of the Louisiana Bar Association's top journalism prize. He co-authored the book "Freeze," about the shooting death of a Japanese exchange student, published in Tokyo in 1993. He has covered the Oklahoma Legislature and state government since 1998 and was part of a team of reporters who covered the criminal trials of Oklahoma City bombing conspirators Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. He was principally responsible for covering Nichols' trial on Oklahoma murder charges in 2004. He is a graduate of Louisiana State University.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Dr. Don Betz (1945-) Betz began his distinguished career in higher education as a member of the Faculty/Administration at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah in 1971. Betz would remain in this position until 1994 when he accepted the position of Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs for Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa. From 1982-2003, Betz served as a consultant for the United Nations. Betz returned to Oklahoma in 1999 when he became Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs for University of Central Oklahoma. In 2005 Betz accepted the position of Chancellor of University of Wisconsin-River Falls where he would remain until becoming the President of Northeastern State University in 2008. Betz became the 20th President of the University of Central Oklahoma in 2011. Betz received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Philosophy from the University of San Francisco, a Masters of Arts degree from the University of Denver, and a Ph.D. in International Studies from the University of Denver.

Dr. W. Roger Webb (1941-) Webb's professional career began in law enforcement, where he served 12 years with the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety and as Commissioner of Public Safety for the State of Oklahoma from 1974-78. During that time, Webb was elected to the Board of Directors for the International Association of Chiefs of Police and chaired a national task force studying the threat of terrorism in large stadiums and sports arenas and on our nation's energy pipelines. Given that experience, Webb has been a national voice on campus safety, preparedness and violence prevention. Webb entered higher education in 1978, when he was named President of Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, a position he held until being named President of the University of Central Oklahoma in 1997. Webb retired as president of UCO in 2011. Webb received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Oklahoma State University, and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Oklahoma.