

# Spot News

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A publication of the East Tennessee Chapter  
of the Society of Professional Journalists  
Visit us on the web at [www.discoverET.org/etspj](http://www.discoverET.org/etspj)



## Censorship in Public Schools Topic of ETSPJ January Panel Discussion

Spurred by the recent censorship of two articles written by Oak Ridge High School students for the school's *Oak Leaf*, East Tennessee Society of Professional Journalists will host the program *Censoring Students: Press Freedom & Public Schools* at 7 p.m. on Jan. 26, 2006 at the *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

Topics to be covered include: What did the U. S. Supreme Court's ruling say about high school newspapers, how much freedom should students have with high school newspapers; should school advisors try to make an honest attempt at student journalism or a public relations vehicle for the school; and why is this issue important to working journalists.

U.T. Professor, Bonnie Hufford and *Oak Leaf* editor-in-chief, Brittany Thomas will be among the panel.

The event is free and open to the public, but you must R.S.V.P. by January 25 to Missy Jackson at [missyj@att.net](mailto:missyj@att.net) or 588-8007.

*See related article on 2.*

## Call for GPC Nominations

Recognizing outstanding service and professional achievements in print and broadcast journalism in East Tennessee, the Golden Press Card Awards are slated for May 12, 2006 at the University Club.

Work eligible for consideration must have been printed or broadcast between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2005 and must be received by Feb. 1, 2006 to be eligible for consideration.

All entries must be **received** at Room 333, Communications Building, Circle Park on the UT campus or mailed to: SPJ Contest, c/o Dorothy Bowles, Professor, School of Journalism & Electronic Media, University of Tennessee, 333 Communications Building, Knoxville, TN 37996-0333.

All information and entry forms can be found on our web site at:

[www.discoveret.org/etspj](http://www.discoveret.org/etspj).

The reception begins at 6 p.m. and dinner will be served at 6:30 followed by key-note address by National SPJ President David

### ***Dates to Remember***

#### ***Censoring Students: Press Freedom and Public Schools.***

Jan. 26, 7 p.m. *Knoxville News Sentinel*. Panel Discussion. Please RSVP to Missy Jackson at 588-8007 or [missyj@att.net](mailto:missyj@att.net) by noon on Jan. 25.

#### ***Golden Press Card Awards***

May 12, 2006 at the University Club.(Corner of Kingston Pike and Neyland Dr.) National SPJ President David Carlson will be the guest speaker. Visit our web site for complete entry information. [www.discoveret.org/etspj](http://www.discoveret.org/etspj).  
***Entry deadline is Feb. 1.***

## Annual Holiday Party Filled with Fun, Food and Fundraising



Watching Larry Aldridge open gifts was as much fun as watching a barrel of kids on Christmas morning. Since his “gifts” kept getting “stolen” we had ample opportunity to watch. From Left, John Fox, Dorothy Bowles and Pete Prince enjoy the show.



Lisa Hood-Skinner and her husband Dr. David Skinner show off their “prized” gift.



Auctioneer extraordinaire, Jean Ash, takes a bid on a silk tie. Her auction of items from China and donations by members raised \$165 for the ETSPJ Scholarship Endowment Fund. Member donations are accepted year-round for this fund.



Jean Ash set off after Pete Prince during the “gift exchange.” Jean “stole” Pete’s motorcycle for Dorothy Bowles and in exchange got the vibrating slippers she wanted. David Lauer took time out from his recently acquired book to have a laugh.

## ETSPJ Responds to High School Newspaper Censorship

*The following letter appeared in the Knoxville News Sentinel on Dec. 9, 2005*

This is an open letter to Superintendent Dr. Tom Bailey, Assistant Superintendent Dale Dobbs and Principal Becky Ervin, Oak Ridge High School.

The board of directors of the East Tennessee Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists strongly opposes and expresses disappointment that Oak Ridge High School administrators censored the student newspaper.

This action contradicts not only the citizenship values that we seek to instill in young people but also the tradition of academic excellence touted on the Oak Ridge High Web site.

For many years, the Oak Leaf, through school practice of stated policy, has operated as a public forum open to all ORHS students with student editors, guided by adviser Wanda Grooms, making decisions about the paper's content. Indeed, the long-term, outstanding record of the award-winning student newspaper contributes to the reputation the school has earned in state and national evaluations.

While the leading Supreme Court decision on this subject permits public high school officials to exercise some control over school-sponsored newspapers without violating the First Amendment, such control is not absolute. Rather, the court held that such administrative action must be "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns," which the court went on to explain meant expression that is "ungrammatical, poorly written, inadequately researched, biased or prejudiced, vulgar or profane or unsuitable for immature audiences."

From all accounts, Principal Becky Ervin pulled the two articles because of subject matter alone, which violates the First Amendment and is contrary to the Supreme Court's ruling for a student newspaper traditionally operated as a public forum

within the high school. Granted, Superintendent Tom Bailey noted that some students at ORHS are as young as 14, perhaps intending to meet the Supreme Court standard for "immature audiences." As research indicates that many 14-year-old students are sexually active, information from a physician as stated in the Oak Leaf article is age appropriate.

At least one parent at the recent school board meeting claimed the article about birth control subverted parental authority simply because it contained a sentence quoting a Tennessee statute that allows minors to receive birth control information without parental consent.

The issue of teenage pregnancies is one well known to East

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### SPJ Officers 2005-2006

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missyj@att.net

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Tennessee families and teenagers. It showed responsibility on the part of Oak Leaf Editor Brittany Thomas to recognize this fact and utilize the high school newspaper to bring this issue out of the closet and into the open at Oak Ridge High School.

The actions of seizing the paper have changed the issue from one of health and safety and placed it in the realm of civics, where this example has illustrated to students that the First Amendment right of freedom of the press is only guaranteed to those who own one.

We would ask that the school reconsider its position.

*Ed Hooper is president of the East Tennessee Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. This guest column was endorsed by nine other board members of the society.*

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*ETSPJ member, John Shacter, wrote a letter of dissent regarding this letter which appeared on Dec. 23 in the Knoxville News Sentinel.*

## **TPA Winter Convention Begins Feb. 8 in Nashville**

The Tennessee Press Association's Press Institute and Winter Convention is scheduled for February 8 - 10, 2006 at the Sheraton Hotel in Downtown Nashville.

Activities on Wednesday and Thursday include a reception with members of the legislature, meetings featuring Governor Bredesen and Speakers of the House and Senate, and a forum with candidates seeking election to the U.S. senate.

Friday, Jan. 13 is the registration deadline for hotel and discounted Drive-In Training.

All information can be found at [www.tnpress.com](http://www.tnpress.com) or by calling the Knoxville TPA office at 865-548-5761 or 800-565-7377.

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