

AUGUST, 2011 SPEAKERS — JOHN BALLANCE AND RICHARD HANNON

Speakers for the August, 2011 meeting were John Ballance and Richard Hannon, both on the photography staff of The Advocate, Baton Rouge's daily newspaper. Ballance is photo editor at the newspaper and manager of the photography department. Hannon is a self-taught photojournalist who has photographed for newspapers around the United States, and has worked as staff photographer at The Advocate for 11 years.

Ballance and Hannon spoke and presented images from their work during the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. LPS has seen several presentations on the subject of Katrina, most of them photo-essays or what in photojournalism is called feature photography, much of it recording the tragic aftermath of the storm. Ballance and Hannon's presentations focused on breaking news photography, on-the-scene photographs taken as the storm, the winds, the flooding, the wreckage of human lives and property, the chaos and the devastation were actually occurring.

The photographers presented slide shows set to music and then commented on their images and answered questions. Hannon said that the first photographs were taken two days before the storm, when the path of the hurricane was unmistakable, most images taken with wide angle lenses. He mentioned that a number of student photographers converged on the area, and he felt that their presence was a potential interference with attempts to report the news. He stated that newspaper photos are essentially about people, and he chafed under any factors that limited his news gathering efforts.

Budgetary considerations were another frustration during the storm. The Advocate did not produce a large amount of aerial photography of the storm because of the expense of renting a helicopter and even an airplane for photo work. It was difficult to get news photographers to leave New Orleans at any time, for fear that they would not be allowed either by authorities or post-storm conditions to return to the scene. Hannon stayed in New Orleans for 11 or 12 days. Another serious limitation was the total lack of cell phone coverage. Finally, through special equipment provided by Verizon, reporters were able to send and receive text messages when cell phones were otherwise useless. Satellite phones would work but were expensive.

Even editorial constraints were frustrating. The Advocate is very conservative, and its editorial decisions reflect this attitude. The paper's executive editor has the final say on all publications. Hannon produced a photo of a woman who was dying on a New Orleans street, but who was being administered first aid. Ballance said that it was only after the most strenuous arguments from the photo department that the photograph was allowed to be published. The Advocate used an independent agency to sell its Katrina photos worldwide. With all of the turmoil following the storm, The Advocate and many others were too overwhelmed to rely solely on the regular news outlets such as the Associated Press.

The photography staff of the Dallas Morning News won a Pulitzer Price in breaking news photography for its Katrina images, and the Times Picayune of New Orleans won two Pulitzers for breaking news reporting and meritorious public service for the same

event. The Advocate did not win such prizes, but both photographers felt that their images were just as good as those of the winners. Moreover, for his Katrina images, in 2006 Hannon won first place in the category of Natural Disaster in the 63rd annual Pictures of the Year competition sponsored by the Missouri School of Journalism and MSNBC.

By Bob Connell