

# NEWS



**Director of University Relations**

**Frances Weyand Harrison**

**770-423-6203**

**[fharris4@kennesaw.edu](mailto:fharris4@kennesaw.edu)**

**Contact/Writer: Sabbaye McGriff, 678-797-2550 or [smcgrif1@kennsaw.edu](mailto:smcgrif1@kennsaw.edu)**

## **Journalism professor receives grant to launch innovative online community news project**

**KENNESAW, Ga. (Feb. 20, 2008)** — As American journalism struggles with the loss of its advertising support base, a family foundation is providing an initial \$51,000 grant to test a promising new approach to local and interest-specific journalism—via self-funding, social-network communities.

The test will involve “Locally Grown,” a two-year old Northfield, Minnesota blog and podcast about local civic issues, with a large participatory following of area citizens and community leaders.

“The Harnisch Family Foundation is delighted to provide the financial resources needed for the first test of what we’re calling ‘representative journalism,’ ” said Ruth Ann Harnisch, foundation president. “From the first time I heard about this concept in Leonard Witt’s blog, I was eager to help launch it. Len’s idea has the potential to revolutionize the practice of journalism.”

Leonard Witt is a journalism professor at Kennesaw State University, near Atlanta. His consulting collaborators include Bill Densmore, director of the Media Giraffe Project at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Chris Peck, editor of The Commercial Appeal, a Memphis, Tenn., daily. He first proposed the idea of “Representative Journalism” idea in his Public Journalism Network blog ([www.pjnet.org](http://www.pjnet.org)).

“Representative journalism describes a system to help communities, individuals and groups underwrite their own journalists,” says Witt, who formerly was a print, radio and magazine journalist in the Twin Cities and now holds the Robert D. Fowler Distinguished Chair in Communication at Kennesaw. “We think it can work for both geographical and topical communities.”

If the Minnesota project succeeds, Witt envisions a Representative Journalism Center will be a full-service hub enabling groups, institutions, communities or individuals to underwrite their own journalists whose work will meet the highest journalistic and ethical standards.

“This is social networking applied to news-gathering and sharing,” says Witt. “The center will provide everything communities need to have their own journalists, while at the same time protecting journalism integrity and ensuring communities the highest quality journalism.”

Peck, a former president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Associated Press Managing Editors, has agreed to provide part-time, consulting editorial oversight for the test project. Densmore co-founder of the Media Giraffe project at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst will provide administrative advice and support.

Peck says, “Finding a new business model to support journalism represents the key challenge facing news-gathering organizations today. I’m excited to work on this innovative project and learn about what might be a viable new model for supporting journalists.”

Densmore, a former wire-service and trade-magazine editor, weekly newspaper publisher, daily advertising director, and Internet technology patent holder, began the Media Giraffe Project in 2005 to find and spotlight people making innovative use of media to foster participatory democracy and community. “Len’s idea is one of the most promising we’ve seen in our research so far,” said Densmore, “because it recognizes that advertising alone is not likely to sustain independent, watchdog journalism. We think this idea can work financially, editorially and ethically.”

Ross Currier, Tracy Davis, and Griff Wigley are the three local citizen bloggers, podcasters, and community activists who manage “Locally Grown”. They fill the web site with bits of community news, hundreds of photos, strong opinions, and quirky humor, and then engage the community in vibrant online discussions, some of which have drawn as many as 300 posted comments. The partnership with Representative Journalism allows the site to add breaking and in-depth journalism.

Tracy Davis: “I appreciate the opportunity to develop this new conceptual model for both practicing the profession of journalism, and enhancing and strengthening the local Northfield community via online social networking.” Davis is a member of the Northfield Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals, a co-founder of Northfield Citizens Online, and a local business owner.

Ross Currier: “I’m excited by the opportunity that the Harnisch Family Foundation has provided. The addition of an experienced journalist will allow for greater depth of coverage, more substantial analysis, and longer term follow-up of key issues. Locally Grown will continue to provide a safe place to comment, openness to alternative perspectives, and citizen access to information of importance to the community.” Currier is the Executive Director of the non-profit Northfield Downtown Development Corporation, and a member of the Northfield Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals.

Griff Wigley: “Northfield’s vibrant civic blogosphere is four years old, and we have 15 years experience in using an online community to enhance geographic community. So I think it’s the perfect place to launch this experiment with Representative Journalism, a new form of collaborative journalism.” Wigley is a co-founder of Northfield Citizens Online, and a consultant in the areas of leadership blogging, citizen media, and weapons of mass collaboration.

“We appreciate Ruth Ann Harnisch’s willingness to make a philanthropic investment in this venture, says Witt. “She understands the urgency with which we all must act in this time when the old, long-sustained journalism models must change to meet the new technological realities.”

Harnisch, whose journalism career included work in newspaper, television, and radio, has led The Harnisch Foundation since 1998. She says supporting the Representative Journalism experiment is a natural extension of her philanthropic activities in journalism. The Harnisch Foundation has underwritten “Studio H” facilities at Link-TV and The Women’s Media Center in New York City as well as The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida. She has underwritten scholarships for freelance journalists through the Investigative Reporters and Editors, and served on the board of the Society of Professional Journalists’ charitable Sigma Delta Chi Foundation.

Harnisch is married to New York hedge-fund manager William F. Harnisch of Peconic Partners LLC.

A member of the 35-unit University System of Georgia, Kennesaw State University is a comprehensive, residential institution with a growing student population of more than 20,000 from 132 countries. The third-largest university in Georgia, Kennesaw State offers more than 60 graduate and undergraduate degrees, including a new doctorate in education.