

SPJ Detroit Minutes – March 18, 2026

Attendees: : Marty Fischhoff, Rob Davidek, Tracy Wolf, Mark Lee, Mary Zatina, Peg McNichol, Walter Middlebrook, Jeremy Allen, Annalise Frank, Anna Clark, Jeff Payne; Marcia Hart, administrator

Absent: Christine Ferretti, Briana Rice, Beth Konrad, Vince McCraw, Nicole Avery Nichols, Kennan Oliphant

Marty Fischhoff called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m.

Minutes – The minutes from the February meeting were approved unanimously.

Programming – Tracy Wolf

- The Programming committee met after the last board meeting. Nothing on the calendar yet, but there were some very good ideas discussed.
- Walter Middlebrook offered a suggestion based on a program that Philadelphia NABJ produced. The chapter organized a virtual event involving journalists who covered ICE activities in Minneapolis, which was the scene of mass arrests, protests and violence. SPJ Detroit could host a similar virtual panel. Briana Rice recommended inviting Koby Levin to participate, as he has covered local ICE activities extensively. Tracy is reaching out to the person who organized the event in Philadelphia. Rob Davidek has contacts in Minneapolis. Peg McNichols said IRE may have some guidance to offer. Tentatively, we are looking for a date in late April or May.
- The chapter is also planning a program on the Rights of Reporters as they pursue stories, often in difficult situations. Marty has spoken to local attorney Bill Burdett, who has expressed interest in participating. Anna Clark is contacting Adam Marshall and Jennifer Marshall of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. If we would like to include a local reporter who has faced such challenges, Sam Robinson was suggested.
- Tracy said that she and Jeremy Allen are organizing a kickball tournament for local newsroom teams and freelancers, to be held this summer, likely on Belle Isle. They have been working with Come Play Detroit, a company that puts on such events. Estimated total costs of about \$2,000 (for the kickball field, umpires, etc.) would be covered by registration fees. The event would be a great opportunity to build camaraderie among our colleagues.

Banquet – Tracy Wolf

- Tracy has received the biographies and photos of the three Lifetime Achievement Award winners and said she should be able to issue a press release soon.
- Our annual Excellence in Journalism contest is out for judging with a March 31 deadline. Hopefully we can publish the long list of EIJ finalists the week of April 6. We can then start ticket sales.
- Mary Zatina discussed the silent auction. Her goal is to beat last year's receipts and to have all items ready to go home with the winning bidder that night. She is suggesting we begin the auction before dinner, and she would like to add a donors' list to the program booklet. Mark Lee said he is working on donations from the Tigers, Red Wings and maybe the Pistons. Rob will try to obtain a gift certificate for Tree Top in Gaylord. He is also trying for a "pie of the month" package from the Grand Traverse Pie Company. Mary is hoping for some lower price items, too.

Regional Conference – Peg McNichols

- The SPJ Megaregional Conference will be held on April 10-12 in Clarksville, Indiana (near Louisville).

- Distance may make it difficult for Detroit SPJ members or Detroit area journalism students to attend.
- It should be SPJ Detroit's turn to host in 2027.

FOIA – in Beth Konrad's absence

- State Sen. Jeremy Moss was interviewed by M.L. Elrick in the Sunday Free Press on the need for greater transparency in Michigan government.
- It is reported that Speaker of the House Matt Hall is holding up passage of legislation in Lansing.
- Jeff Payne says he is working with the Michigan Press Association to hold conversations with state legislators who might support FOIA reform.

Contest –

- Marty said that we had significantly more entries than in previous years in the annual Young Journalist of the Year and the Journalist of the Year competition. Two panels are judging the contests, which should be completed in early April.
- Annalise said the review of the six scholarship applications received is underway. The number of scholarships and amounts are still to be determined.
- Marcia Hart reviewed details of our judging partner, Green Eyeshades, which represents a number of Southern states. The competition consists of three rounds of judging – details were discussed briefly. There are approximately 600 entries to be assessed. Peg suggested reaching out to a group of local retired journalists as potential judges.

Membership – Rob Davidek

- Our membership count is now 63 according to the latest information from SPJ National.

Financial – Walter Middlebrook

- \$9,783.77 - Checking
- \$7,219.58 – Scholarships
- \$13,620.27 – E-Trade
- \$24,395.00 – PayPal
- \$55,018.62 – Total

Other Business:

- Mark Lee discussed the 12th annual Small Business Workshop, offered by his company, The LEE Group, which will take place on May 13. This year's theme is "Resilient by Design: Innovating through Disruption."
- Marty reported that New England SPJ, in collaboration with National SPJ, is conducting a free two-day virtual program, called SkillsFest26, featuring a variety session on important topics in the journalism profession. It is being held on March 26-27.

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, April 16 at 8 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 a.m.

Committee Assignments (chairs in bold text)

- Programs: **Tracy Wolf**, Walter Middlebrook, Beth Konrad, Mark Lee, Briana Rice, Anna Clark

- Membership Outreach: **Rob Davidek**, Mary Zatina, Walter Middlebrook
- Communication Committee: **Peg McNichol**, Christine Ferretti, Tracy Wolf
- FOIA: **Beth Konrad**, Mary Zatina, Peg McNichol
- Banquet: **Tracy Wolf**, Marcia Hart
- Campus Outreach/Scholarship: **Annalise Frank**, Kennan Oliphant, Christine Ferretti, Briana Rice, Anna Clark and Beth Konrad
- Finance/Fundraising: **Walter Middlebrook**, Marty Fischhoff
- Bylaws and elections (nominating committee): **Marty Fischhoff**, Mark Lee, Rob Davidek, Peg McNichol, Walter Middlebrook
- Contest: **Walter Middlebrook**, Jeff Payne, Marty Fischhoff, Phoebe Wall Howard