

SPJ Detroit Minutes – April 16, 2026

Attendees: Marty Fischhoff, Rob Davidek, Tracy Wolf, Mark Lee, Mary Zatina, Peg McNichol, Walter Middlebrook, Jeremy Allen, Annalise Frank, Kennan Oliphant, Beth Konrad, Vince McCraw, Christine Ferretti; Marcia Hart, administrator

Absent: Briana Rice, Jeff Payne, Nicole Avery Nichols, Anna Clark

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

President's Report – Marty Fischhoff

- Marty reported that a group of journalists in Northern Michigan had reached out to SPJ Detroit to discuss its interest in becoming members of the organization. That could take a variety of forms, such as starting its own chapter, becoming a satellite chapter of SPJ Detroit or simply joining the Detroit chapter. Marty said that he would be seeking advice from Chrystal O'Keefe, who leads on membership for the national SPJ.

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

Banquet – Tracy Wolf

- Tracy reported that we were able to announce the names of the finalists in the Excellence in Journalism competition. An email has gone out, which included a link to the new platform for selling banquet tickets on the SPJ Detroit website. It is also being posted on social media.
- Tracy is beginning to work on the program for the banquet, which needs to be ready for printing in mid-May. She also talked about tasks for volunteers at the event, which include working the registration table, managing the silent auction and distributing the awards.
- There was discussion of the audio issues at the past two banquets and the need for a tech support person on hand. Rob Davidek said that WWJ might be able to provide equipment and expertise. It was decided that Rob and Tracy should pay a visit to the San Marino club to test the sound system. Peg McNichol offered to come early on May 20 to help set up the audio equipment.
- Mary Zatina discussed the silent auction, which she is managing this year. She asked if someone could operate the credit card reader at the event. Mary has created a google sheet, listing the auction items and descriptions. It was suggested that we stagger the closing times of the various auction items to build drama. The auction would end at 9 p.m. with all items out the door by 9:30. We could offer tidbits of information about items during the program. Jeremy Allen said we should consider announcing the winners of auction items as part of the program, if we can.
- Walter Middlebrook said we should make sure we know the total dollars the auction raises this year.
- There was discussion about how we might attract students and young people to the banquet in the future, perhaps finding people or sponsors willing to pay for their tickets.

Programming – Tracy Wolf

- Tracy said the committee continues its work on two upcoming programs. The first would be how the news media should be covering ICE activities locally. A four-person panel has been selected,

including journalists and community leaders. Briana Rice has offered to serve as moderator. The proposed date would be in early May.

- A second program would examine the rights of reporters as they cover protests and other volatile situations. Anna Clark reached out to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Marty has identified a local attorney is familiar with related legal issues. This program would follow in June.

Regional Conference – Peg McNichols

- Peg said that the SPJ Megaregional Conference was held the previous weekend in Clarksville, Indiana (near Louisville). She would request a debriefing on how things went.

Contest – Walter Middlebrook

- Marty was able to announce the finalists for Journalists of the Year.
- Journalist of the Year: John Carlisle and Ryan Garza, Detroit Free Press; Bill Kubota, Detroit PBS; Koby Levin, Outlier Media
- Young Journalist of the Year: Ronia Cabansag, Michigan Public; Isabel Lohman, Bridge Michigan; Briana Rice, Outlier Media
- Marty said that we have 771 entries to judge in the Green Eyeshades competition, far more than we had anticipated. He said that it would be important for all board members to pitch in, by judging an average of 45 entries each. Peg suggested that we might want to ask retired journalists to take on some of the judging.

Scholarships – Annalise Frank

- Annalise said that the committee had decided to award three scholarships to worthy journalism students.
- A spirited discussion ensued on how much to award each student, with the final resolution being \$2,000 each.
- Peg suggested that we record short video interviews with the scholarship recipients at the banquet.

Financial – Walter Middlebrook

- \$9,783.21 - Checking
- \$7,219.70 – Scholarships
- \$14,366.57 – E-Trade
- \$25,647.66 – PayPal
- \$57,067.14 – Total

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, May 14, 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