

The Rundown

Reporting on Local Television News Since 1981

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How they did it

Persistent Investigations Win Peabody Awards

The administrators of the Peabody Awards at the University of Georgia have announced [their 68th annual winners](#).



The 36 recipients were chosen by the Peabody board as the best in electronic media for 2008. These ranged from a documentary with no narration by the Shanghai Media Group to an HBO miniseries about John Adams. Three winners were investigations produced by local stations.

Here's how the award administrators described the investigations:

■ **Failing the Children: Deadly Mistakes**

KMGH-TV, Denver

Children were starved, beaten, abused and murdered by their adult caregivers --- sometimes when authorities had already been called in and caseworkers were supposed to be monitoring their situations. Motivated by the starvation death of a 7-year-old boy, the station's persistent investigation revealed systemic incompetence in Denver's Department of Human Services.

■ **NOAH Housing Program Investigation**

WWL-TV, New Orleans

Dogged inquiry by anchor/reporter Lee Zurik embarrassed the New Orleans Affordable Homeownership program, a non-profit agency intended to help poor and elderly victims of Hurricane Katrina, and prompted a federal investigation of its misuse of funds.

■ **Crossfire: Water, Power and Politics**

KLAS-TV, Las Vegas

This network-quality documentary was a brave, meticulous examination of a plan to pipe massive amounts of water from rural Nevada to booming Sin City and the potential consequences for ranchers, farmers, Native Americans and the environment.

Failing the Children: Deadly Mistakes

KMGH-TV, Denver

An investigation into the deaths of four children, who were supposed to be under the protection of the Denver Department of Human Services, revealed staggering incompetence in the agency. A year-long series of reports exposed a system plagued by incompetence, a lack of oversight, poor management and ineffective training. It was produced by investigative reporter John Ferrugia, producers Art Kane and Tom Burke, and photojournalist Jason Foster.

It was an investigation that went far beyond telling the tragic story of the children who fell through the cracks.

"This story went deeper than just showing a result of something that happened. It showed *why* this happened, and where the mistakes were made. It documented the mistakes and revealed that many people knew about the mistakes," says Byron Grandy, Vice President and General Manager, KMGH-TV.

The fact that the system was failing the youngest and most vulnerable members of society who are voiceless made the investigation even more significant.

"When there are children involved, youngsters who are just looking for help, it is easy to get motivated to make sure we have uncovered every bit of it we possibly can. That's what the team did. They didn't just stop at one roadblock. They didn't stop with one issue. For the children's sake, they worked to make sure that no stone was unturned, so everyone could see what was underneath," says Grandy.

How could this death have happened? Many people ask that after a child dies.

Unfortunately, we see these tragic stories far too often in too many towns. Family service workers are involved with a child at risk, and yet the abuse or neglect continues until the child dies at the hands of caregivers. Sometimes it feels like nothing ever changes. Youngsters keep on falling through the cracks.

Probe required persistent digging

The investigative team members had to track down involved adults and pry out the facts from people who didn't want to talk about it.

"That's what this investigative unit does. They are committed to finding enterprise, unique content and investigative work as it relates to what our government leaders and government agencies are doing. That's what they are charged to do," Grandy says.

They are also involved in the news of the day when big stories are breaking.

This began as a topical story --- a boy starving to death. Human Services had failed to follow up on a report by school officials that he had been missing for about a month.

These mistakes weren't rare

Investigative reporter John Ferrugia began with a series of stories on the death of the 7-year-old.

The child had been kept locked in a closet and eventually starved to death.

There were many questions about the response of Human Services to the case. As the stories unfolded, other children kept dying. Each time there were questions about how the agency staffers had dealt with those cases.

The investigators found a woman who took her child to a doctor, and said that when her boyfriend got mad at her, he dropped the baby. The doctor found bruises and reported the case to Human Services.

"When Human Services went out to investigate, the boyfriend was sitting in the room the whole time. But the caseworker didn't even talk to him! They made one visit, then went back a week later to ask if everything was going okay, and then they closed the case. Four days later, he dropped the baby again and killed her," says Ferrugia.

He adds that Human Services was violating its own policies and procedures and was hiding behind HIPAA so that nobody would catch their mistakes.

"It is incredible what was happening with this agency. They kept violating their own policies," he says.

In another tragic case, a little girl who had been raped was taken to a crisis center.

"The physical trauma was clearly evident. But her mother wouldn't testify against her sex offender boyfriend, so the police couldn't immediately pursue it," says Ferrugia.

The documents in the case warned that the danger was high. But Human Services closed the case, saying it was "unfounded." Instead of taking the case to court and removing the child, they decided to give the mother in-house counseling. The woman continued to see the sex offender, and before long the child was dead. The sex offender is the prime suspect.

"How can they have a child, who showed physical signs of rape, and then close the case as unfounded? It was absurd," says Ferrugia.

The lack of effective action by caseworkers was a systemic problem.

"They were keeping these cases out of court because the court would have ordered things that would have cost more money, and the agency had a deficit. If they managed it as a so-called 'voluntary' case, they could keep it out of court and do counseling, which costs less. And they wouldn't have to provide as many services," he explains.

Inside sources helped to get started; employment records were key

Ferrugia developed sources on the inside who helped him with the initial stories.

"Then we started looking at the systemic problems --- what was supposed to have happened," he says.

The parents may be willing to talk, and can provide valuable leads.

"Reporters at other stations, who don't have a source inside, should try to hunt down the parents. Ask them what happened. What did the caseworkers tell them during their visits and who did they interview?" he says.

He strung together three cases where children had died. In each one, a caseworker gave the parent a piece of paper or a card with their name on it.

The actual case records were sealed, but certain employment records were open.

"The employment records are public records. The records which show the management structure are public, too. We found out which caseworkers are under which supervisors," he explains.

"We found out that all of these (problem) caseworkers were with the same supervisor! She signed off on these mistakes over and over again. Nobody called her on this until we discovered it was the same supervisor. Then all of a sudden they suspended her," he says.

The public records request was very important.

"Even without the help of insiders, it was our public records request that broke this wide open. If you work as a supervisor in the chain of command, that is a public document. You won't get information on what cases they have. But you can see who they supervise, how many caseworkers they supervise and how many cases each caseworker has. You can see how overloaded they are," he adds.

The investigation picked up momentum as the stories began to air.

"Once we began running stories, people called us and started telling us what they knew," Ferrugia says.

These types of cases are usually very difficult to get a handle on because so much is hidden. But by continuing to dig and press for information, Ferrugia found a way around the privacy surrounding family services.

"You have to get to the parent and find out who the caseworker was and who the caseworker interviewed. You can start a story just like that," he says.

Grandy says that it takes perseverance to bring a problem of this magnitude to light.

"It's one thing to have the information on your side, it's another thing to have the commitment to make sure the information gets in front of people who need to see it. That's the difference with John Ferrugia," he says.

"It was that way with the Air Force Academy story (a previous Peabody winner), and it was that way with this story. His commitment to make sure the right people saw the information he had, responded to it, and were held accountable for answers, is the reason things got done that will hopefully be helpful to the Department of Human Services and to the people it serves," says Grandy.

Investigative units must be visible, on frequently

Given today's economic realities, Grandy says there is a balance that must be kept between devoting time to long term investigations and turning topical investigations.

"There is quite an investment in making sure we have a strong investigative team. They also must be tapped into for the big news events on the agenda, because there may be things about those stories that people have questions about they should answer," he explains.

"It's a real balancing act for them to make sure they keep their nose in the news of the day, but also in the business of collecting story tips and ideas and digging into things that aren't known at this point."

**Byron Grandy
Vice President and General Manager
KMGH-TV, Denver**

"You must be careful that your investigative unit doesn't get too isolated and too focused on the stories they are working on. If you're not careful, a big story could just walk right by," he cautions. Grandy admits that from an operating standpoint the pressure is on all departments these days.

"For investigative units to have a future, they must make sure their nose is in the news of the day, in order to ensure they are relevant, top of mind and visible," he urges.

"We have been committed to investigative journalism for a long time and remain so. This is why we do what we do," he stresses.

For more specifics of how they conducted the investigation, [check out our article when they originally brought the project to air](#). Grandy and Ferrugia explained exactly how they did it.

This is the third Peabody for Ferrugia. He won his first one in 1977 at age 26 in Kansas City at KCMO-TV (now KCTV) for a story on cars duplicitously resold after flooding.

His second Peabody was for [a KMGH report on the sexual assault of female cadets at the Air Force Academy](#), which resulted in an overhaul in policies and leadership at the institution.

Home Remediation Investigation

WWL-TV, New Orleans

Millions of dollars that were supposed to help rebuild New Orleans have been misused.

Stories done by anchor/reporter Lee Zurik prompted a federal investigation into misuse of the funds. The series has also won a Gold Medal from the [IRE \(the Investigative Reporters and Editors\)](#). The disaster relief money was dedicated to assist elderly and low income residents. But the investigation revealed many discrepancies in how it was spent by officials of the New Orleans Affordable Homeownership agency (NOAH).

It's more than three years since Hurricane Katrina slammed the region.

"The recovery --- or *lack* of recovery --- is the story in the city," says Executive News Director Chris Slaughter.

"There are other big stories that come up that we cover. But the overall dominant story remains the lack of recovery in the city --- even all this time after the storm. There are people who are still fighting to live in trailers that the federal government put them in right after the hurricane. They should have been out of those trailers years ago," he says.

There are schools, playgrounds and other facilities that still haven't been rebuilt.

"The pace of recovery, because of the inaction of every level of government, is just horrible," he says.

While it may appear to outsiders that money has been poured into New Orleans, Slaughter says a lot of it was spent on immediate repair and upgrades to the levee protection system and other large public works projects. These funds, however, were Community Development Block Grant funds to help the homeowners recover.

A local blogger provided leads

A blogger who is also a community activist approached Zurik about NOAH. [Karen Gadbois](#) had been exchanging e-mails with him for about a year on different stories.

Zurik told us, "It's always good to get a sense of what's going on in the community and what people are thinking. She is very active with the historical buildings and the preservationist community."

She is truly a citizen journalist, he says.

"She has many characteristics that make a great journalist: she's curious, she's smart, and she knows how to research," he says.

Gadbois had been watching the program since its beginning, hoping it would work, and that it would help the community rebuild.

"She wondered how it was going, so one day she asked for the records. She brought me in on it, and as we looked at it, more and more questions were raised," he explains.

Of the more than 100 properties she had checked, only two showed signs of any repair work being done by NOAH.

Repair claims were exposed as bogus

The first report looked at some of the remediation work NOAH claimed to have done. The agency said it had "gutted, boarded up, and even cut grass at more than 1,000 homes."

Zurik visited properties listed as having been repaired.

That was news to some of the elderly and low income property owners.

"There was no help," said one woman.

"I think somebody is lining their pockets," said her husband.

At one address of a home listed as remediated, there was an empty lot. A neighbor said the house was torn down before Katrina ever hit. Owners of other properties said they did the remediation work themselves, without NOAH contractors or NOAH funding, even though the agency listed their properties and the amount of money spent on them.

Stories stimulate other stories

The first story led to many, many followups.

It turned out to be a massive project, with more than 50 reports. Many of these were 5, 6 or 7 minute stories.

"For two or three weeks straight, we aired between 5 and 7 minute reports almost every day of the week at 10 p.m. In every moment, of every story, there was meaningful information. That takes a lot of research and a lot of time. We couldn't have done it all on our own, because we were writing and editing the stories every day," says Zurik.

"We do what we call 'shake the tree.' We do the first story and shake the tree, and then we step back and see what falls. Invariably, we have followup upon followup as more and more phone calls come in."

**Chris Slaughter
Executive News Director
WWL-TV, New Orleans**

The community reaction has been "electric."

Eighty percent of the city was underwater following Hurricane Katrina. Everyone was either touched by it, or had someone close to them touched by it.

Interest in the story was very high.

"This program affected the part of the community who needed the help the most --- the low income and elderly. The city's reaction to our stories also helped fuel the public's interest, because the city called us out, claiming we were hurting the recovery by bringing these stories up. They denied it for weeks," says Zurik.

It wasn't long before Zurik revealed personal ties between the director of the city agency that administered the program and many of the contractors.

"There were a lot of different newsworthy elements to the story. Besides money paid to contractors for work not done, there was the whole city hall denial, and the fact that the mayor's brother-in-law was one of the contractors, and that the people closest to the director of the agency were among the highest paid contractors," he says.

With so many people still struggling to recover, reaction to the revelations brought widespread anger. "The rage was palpable, and it was spread across all ages, races and socio-economic groups. People couldn't believe city officials could allow this to happen," says Slaughter.

"We have elderly people who are living in deplorable conditions where contractors had gotten money claiming they had worked on these people's homes. They hadn't done a thing!" he says.

Although the records were public records, the station still had to fight the city to get them.

"These people don't believe in the 'public' aspect of public records," says Slaughter.

He adds that the initial response by city officials was that the story was wrong.

But eventually they changed their tune.

"Less than a month ago, the city filed suit against a number of contractors named in our story, seeking to get the money back from them," he says.

The case is now under investigation by federal officials.

"They have served search warrants, confiscated computers and taken grand jury testimony. We're waiting to see what happens," he says.

Believe in the facts

Zurik believes that to bring important stories like this to air, you must be persistent.

"If we would have stopped after the first story when the mayor called us out, then it wouldn't have reached what it did. You must be persistent, and you must believe in the facts," he says. "If you've checked all your facts, don't let someone telling you that you are wrong stop you," he urges.

Slaughter says what happened in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina is the blueprint for what could happen after a major disaster anywhere.

"It could be an earthquake in California, a hurricane on the East Coast or a severe tornado outbreak in the Midwest. Wherever there is the potential for a large scale natural disaster people must watch how the federal government responds. Regardless of whether they are there ahead of time, or right after it, or not for some time, eventually, they are going to throw money at it. And, some of that money is going to be misspent," he warns.

Zurik adds, "Get a hold of every contract you can. See how they were bid, who got them, and who those people are linked to. It's always interesting to see who owns the companies, what other companies they own, and who they own those companies with."

Bloggers are potential sources

The station was careful to give the blogger the recognition she deserved for initially bringing the problem to light.

"She knew a lot about what was going on with this. We gave her credit in the story, and as a result, a lot of the tips and updates came through her pipeline," Slaughter explains.

The station's President and General Manager, Bud Brown, has invited her to attend the award ceremonies in New York.

"Bud wanted her at the table with us as part of our delegation. He wanted to make sure that she gets the recognition that she rightly deserves. He looks at this from the perspective of the community. He believes this is a good example of how the partnership between the community and local television stations is supposed to work," says Slaughter.

The news executive encourages others to look at bloggers in their communities with an eye toward who you might be able to work with.

"Not all bloggers are psychos blogging from their bomb shelter surrounded by cases of ammunition. There are some legitimate, well-intentioned, focused individuals who do have the public's best interests at heart, and who can uncover some good things," he says.

He adds that there is still a long way to go before there is a true symbiotic relationship because the majority of bloggers are still niche-focused. But there are some good ones with good contacts and good information in specific subject areas.

Crossfire: Water, Power and Politics

KLAS-TV, Las Vegas

In what the Peabody judges described as a "network-quality" documentary, investigative reporter George Knapp and photojournalist Matt Adams examined controversial plans that would seriously impact the environmentally sensitive rural counties of Nevada. Photojournalist Alex Brauer and producer Ian Russell also contributed to the piece.

One plan is to build a massive pipeline that would pump billions of gallons of water from rural Nevada and carry it to the booming Las Vegas area. The second concern involves building three huge coal-fired power plants in the same areas.

Knapp's report looked at what these projects would mean to the politically weak rural counties: the impact on the environment, on the quality of the air and water, and on the way of life of the ranchers, farmers and native Americans who live there.

Water is a vital issue

The news team has been following what has been happening with the Southern Nevada Water Authority for years, but recent actions were like something out of an old West gunfight over water rights.

"There is probably no more important or significant issue in the Southwest than water," says News Director Ron Comings.

"When you see the city of Las Vegas growing as rapidly as it was at that time, you have to look at what is going on with water," he explains.

Most people don't realize that Las Vegas only gets about one percent of the water in Lake Meade.

"Previous water rights going back many, many years give most of the water to Arizona and California, and some to Utah. And, of course the West has been in a drought for the last several years, so water has become a major issue," he says.

"Mark Twain once said, 'Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting over,' and that is true today. There is no more emotional issue out here than water," says Comings.

The city has been reaching out to tap the water in the rural areas.

"George began to raise the question that just because we needed water in Las Vegas doesn't necessarily mean it is a good thing to run a pipeline up to the center of the state and pull water out of the aquifer up there. The more we looked at it and at the hydrologists' models, we realized it might not be the right thing to do," Comings explains.

The cost estimates looked wrong, way too low.

"They couldn't possibly build this for what they are claiming. This would cost billions, and the taxpayers would be on the line to pay for it," he stresses.

"Those two points: what moving water from the central part of the state might do and what it might cost really sent George and Matt to begin investigating the story aggressively," he adds.

"Once they got into the story, the politics made it absolutely fascinating --- and developments in the story continue today," says Comings.

The reporting gave rural people access to the public debate.

"We knew about the politics behind the pipeline, and we knew about the questionable hydrology in pulling water from the aquifer. But it didn't hit home until George and Matt met the small farmers and ranchers, and saw what they were up against, and what might happen to their land. They realized that no one was listening. These people had no voice. They are miles and miles away from Las Vegas and they have no access to stand in front of the water authority and make a case in their defense," Comings explains.

In fact, the water authority is so powerful that the state legislature is now considering establishing a separate board to oversee the water authority.

Investigation took substantial commitment

"The biggest challenge for a reporter is to find the truth. The biggest challenge for an investigative reporter is finding the truth that is not readily available. When you take someone like George --- with all of his years of experience in the market and knowing all of the players --- he was able to put together a very compelling story," says Comings.

Because Knapp and Adams have worked so closely for so many years, they were able to produce a high quality special.

Knapp started working on water issues in the mid-Nineties, during a period of unprecedented growth. He told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* recently, "There is so much at stake, but no one paid attention because it's so complicated. But it involves primal forces of nature -- growth, quality of life -- not only for people in the valley, but the ranchers and the people who have chosen a different kind of life. Those people don't have a voice in it."

Adams did most of the photography on the special. He is also the Chief Photographer.

"He sets the standard for photography in our shop and he does it very, very well. He is absolutely an artist, as well as a serious journalist with a camera," says Comings.

"While George never fails to have 10 or 12 really good pieces for sweeps periods, he still took the time necessary to get this story together," he says.

KLAS has a large I-Team with three full-time reporters, three photographers and a full-time producer.

"Every time we put a George Knapp story on the air, we see a spike in the meter," says Comings. "He absolutely moves the meter! He's been here a long time, and the experience a reporter gains by staying in one place for a long time is absolutely invaluable. You can't replace that institutional knowledge and experience. When you lose those experienced reporters, it is gone," he stresses.

"The commitment to investigative reporting was made at the highest level of our station and our company. It is a way to really make a difference in your market. Investigative reporting is one thing we are known for, and it does separate us from the other television stations."

**Ron Comings
News Director
KLAS-TV, Las Vegas**

See also:

[TV Awards: Rules, Deadlines, Winners](#)

Here are links to the major broadcast competitions. Check out past winners and quickly get rules and entry dates.

[Investigation Of A Powerful Pol Was Dangerous](#)

At least one witness was murdered during a seven-month investigation by WWL-TV, New Orleans. Another person who was interviewed was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Death threats were received by those who worked on the story.

The list of allegations from former employees, patients, a bounty hunter and others was a long one: a prominent politician makes millions by billing the state for drug treatment programs; rampant drug use at those treatment centers; sex with teenaged girls; and, rape by drug counselors.

The investigation won a Peabody and an Edward R. Murrow Award for WWL and anchor Bill Elder. There was a tremendous reluctance on the part of the authorities, the Attorney General and the District Attorney, to press for an investigation.

News Director Joe Duke told us, "It is a political hot potato ... We were by ourselves for most of the story."

He said at one point during the investigation he recalled the movie, *All The President's Men*.

"There was a great line when Jason Robards (editor Ben Bradlee) turned to the reporters and said, 'Does it bother anybody that no one else is doing this story but us?' We did this story by ourselves for at least 10 stories," he told us.



[Return to TV Rundown home page.](#)

Special Reports

A positive use for parking tickets ... Sham Wow: Shame or fame? ... Insider on pain clinics ... Autism and toys ... Dangerous pet products ... Pit bulls at large ... A union and the hard times ... Defective drywall from China.

Here are projects that you should know about:

Glad to get parking tickets

WNYW-TV, New York

The city's computerized record systems do not correlate parking tickets and stolen car reports.

Ten million tickets are written each year in the city. The ticket writers unknowingly issue tickets to cars that are actually stolen.

But now, theft victims are using the parking ticket records to track down their stolen vehicles.

A Bronx woman's van was stolen. She thought it was gone forever. A police officer suggested she check the city's listing of parking citations online. She kept checking. Finally, her plate showed up. Her stolen car had been ticketed in East Harlem. Police responded and found the car parked not far from where it had been cited.

"It was the happiest feeling in the world to get a parking ticket," she told reporter John Deutzman.

Another car was parked on the woman's street. Tickets began to mount up on the windshield. A neighbor opened the car, looked in the glove compartment, and found a registration. He Googled the name and reached the victim. She was amazed to be getting her car back.

The hated parking tickets became heroes.

Fame or Shame:

WJBK-TV, Detroit

A high-energy television spot features a pitchman selling a supposedly super product that absorbs massive amounts of liquids.

Sham Wow was put to an informal test by reporter Rob Wolchek. He recruited three teenage boys and dubbed them The Clean Teens.

They were well familiar with the spots featuring "a gonzo salesperson." For just \$19.99, the item would soak up the liquids.

The test began with a regular paper towel that appeared to just spread some spilled water. The Sham Wow got much of it up after a few swipes. Next it was tried on a dish filled with water. Most of the liquid came up, like in the commercial. Cola was spilled on a carpet. Eighty percent of it was absorbed. It was effective outside polishing a car.

The bottom line: Was it Shame or Fame?

"Fame!" shouted The Clean Teens.

Toys that benefit children with autism

WSPA-TV, Spartanburg

Autistic children may benefit from playing with certain toys.

An autism advocate said pieces that target a child's hearing, vision, creativity, language and motor skills will benefit them best. For instance, a handheld remote can help. Initially the child may not know how to hold it. But once they learn, it will help them with things like holding forks and spoons. One mother told anchor Carrie Davis, "They would have helped me open up a whole new world for him but I didn't know using toys could benefit him."

Pain clinic insider talks

KPRC-TV, Houston

A convicted Louisiana drug dealer revealed how prescription pills are obtained in Texas for abuse. He is currently in prison.

He used to join users who left Louisiana and visited Houston pain clinics. The so called "patients" go from clinic to clinic, never see a doctor, and leave with hundreds of prescription pills visit after visit. The inmate said the clinics are "basically legalized drug dealers." He added, "As long as you got the cash to pay, you can keep going until you drop dead."

He said he used legitimate records, made copies, and changed out names. He had no problem obtaining hundreds of pills in the pain clinic cocktail -- pain reliever Hydrocodone, anxiety drug Xanax, and muscle relaxer Soma.

The man said the "patients" would use some of the pills and sell the rest on the street. There were people who drove vans from Louisiana, and they would sometimes get as much as half of a person's stash as payment for the trip.

Emergency room physicians said they now see more overdoses on prescription drugs than street drugs.

Dangerous pet products

KBNC-TV, Los Angeles

Thousands of pet illnesses and deaths are linked to products sold at supermarkets and pet supply stores. The items are meant to get rid of fleas and ticks on pets.

Flea and tick shampoos and drops sold by major companies contain the a pesticide, called pyrethrins. The synthetic versions are known as pyrethroids. These are the same pesticides in household products used to kill bugs around the home.

Workers at stores selling the items claimed they were safe.

One woman bought flea and tick shampoo for her two cats. She said both cats had seizures within minutes of applying the shampoo. An emergency room veterinarian was able to save one. The second one died.

"He died a horrible, violent, fast death," The owner told reporter Joel Grover.

A man told of applying flea and tick drops to his dog. He said the animal started having seizures the following day. It died two days after that.

Grover checked through an EPA database of incidents involving domestic animals and products containing pyrethrins and pyrethroids. There were numerous cases of animals whose skin was burned, animals that had seizures and vomiting. The news team members found tens of thousands of reported incidents, including thousands of deaths.

There are websites where pet owners report illnesses and deaths after using these products. A veterinarian said some of these products can be toxic.

Pit bull problem

KDKA-TV, Pittsburgh

Controlling out-of-control pit bulls becomes an issue after children are bitten.

A boy attacked over a year ago had plastic surgery, but the scars on his face are still visible. His mother is angry about the growing number of pit bulls throughout the region that are not properly controlled by their owners or are roaming free. Last year, Pittsburgh city animal control picked up 700 stray dogs, most of them pit bulls. Animal shelters are overrun with them. If you do this story, remember that pit bull lovers will be quick to remind you that in their opinion it is the owners that turn the bad dogs bad.

After a series of attacks on children, Youngstown banned future ownership of pit bulls and required present owners to carry at least \$100,000 in liability insurance.

Union construction workers hurting

WBBM-TV, Chicago

Forty percent of operating engineers at Local 150 are out of work. At the union headquarters, leaders are hoping that the state legislature will pass a stimulus package to rebuild the infrastructure. The union runs a huge training facility to help members learn new skills, and hold onto their livelihoods. The organization is offering a food pantry program, with certificates for food at markets and canned goods.

A young union member --- married with two children --- has been out of work for five months. He told about what it's been like trying to survive.

"We unplugged all our electric things that we weren't using ... We took all the extras off our phone. We did everything we could just to get by," he told reporter Rob Johnson.

Older workers face hurdles

KARE-TV, Minneapolis

Many older workers aren't ready for retirement, and the recession has left them looking for work. Some aging workers are battling for the same jobs as younger workers. Retire? A woman said she would if she could. But she still has mortgage payments and just isn't feeling safe enough.

A man told of applying for jobs, no one saying anything about his age, but as he looked around he saw no older workers.

To retire, a person must have enough in four areas: Social Security, pension, savings, and health coverage.

Once it was reasonable for a person with a good job to expect to have all four covered. However, with fewer companies providing extensive financial help, there are great problems for an older person. So many older workers have to keep working.

"Every time we put a George Knapp story on the air, we see a spike in the meter," says Comings. "He absolutely moves the meter! He's been here a long time, and the experience a reporter gains by staying in one place for a long time is absolutely invaluable. You can't replace that institutional knowledge and experience. When you lose those experienced reporters, it is gone," he stresses.

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[Investigation Of A Powerful Pol Was Dangerous](#)

At least one witness was murdered during a seven-month investigation by WWL-TV, New Orleans. Another person who was interviewed was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Death threats were received by those who worked on the story.

The list of allegations from former employees, patients, a bounty hunter and others was a long one: a prominent politician makes millions by billing the state for drug treatment programs; rampant drug use at those treatment centers; sex with teenaged girls; and, rape by drug counselors.

The investigation won a Peabody and an Edward R. Murrow Award for WWL and anchor Bill Elder. There was a tremendous reluctance on the part of the authorities, the Attorney General and the District Attorney, to press for an investigation.

News Director Joe Duke told us, "It is a political hot potato ... We were by ourselves for most of the story."

He said at one point during the investigation he recalled the movie, *All The President's Men*.

"There was a great line when Jason Robards (editor Ben Bradlee) turned to the reporters and said, 'Does it bother anybody that no one else is doing this story but us?' We did this story by ourselves for at least 10 stories," he told us.



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