

August 2007

A report from the Montgomery Chapter of the Public Relations Council of Alabama

# PRCA MONTGOMERY

CHAPTER NEWS

## Oscar Winner to Share Experiences in National Spotlight at PRCA-Montgomery's August Meeting

Be sure to mark your calendars for August's meeting when our guest speaker will be Richard Cohen, executive director of the Southern Poverty Law Center. A graduate of Columbia University and the University of Virginia School of Law, Mr. Cohen came to the SPLC in 1986. He formerly served as its legal director, and in 2003 was appointed to his current position as president and chief executive officer. He has successfully litigated a wide variety of important civil rights actions and in 1999 was named a finalist for the National Trial Lawyer of the Year award for his work on a lawsuit that ended with a record \$37.8 million judgment against the Ku Klux Klan for its role in the burning of a South Carolina church.

Mr. Cohen has also been the creative force behind some of the Center's most successful education projects. He has served as executive producer for the six documentary films created for the Center's Teaching Tolerance program. Four of those films were nominated for Academy Awards, and two won Oscars. Mr. Cohen will share with us the important role PR plays in the Center's operations, as well as how the Center frequently handles being in the national spotlight, including most recently a heated debate with CNN's Lou Dobbs.

Be sure to join us Monday, August 6, at the RSA Plaza!

## Humor and Solid, No-Nonsense Information Leads to a Successful Professional Development Workshop

"Be brief. Be brilliant. Be gone." Those were just some of the words of advice that Dr. Joseph Trahan gave to the public relations practitioners who attended the 2007 PRCA Professional Development Workshop on July 13 at the AIDT training center.



Kay Yarbrough is interviewed by workshop facilitator Joseph Trahan at the 2007 Professional Development Workshop.

Participants of the workshop on crisis communication marveled at the information presented and were anxious to take it back to tailor it for their organizations. "Not only did he give us practical ideas, he also showed us how to use them," said one public relations practitioner.

Trahan gave solid, no-nonsense information, such as never repeat a negatively phrased question as part of your answer. "Don't let the reporter put words in your mouth," cautioned Trahan. Repetition of the question, if edited properly, could give the appearance of affirming the negative information.

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## CHAPTER MEETING

### How to Handle Your Organization Being in the Spotlight

Monday, August 6, 2007

Guest Speaker:  
**Richard Cohen**

Executive Director of the Southern Poverty Law Center

RSA Plaza Terrace  
11:45 a.m.

Members: \$12  
Non-members: \$20

RSVP to:  
dchristy@ascpa.org

RSVP Deadline:  
Noon on Friday, August 3

*NOTE: Members who make reservations for chapter luncheons but fail to cancel by noon the Friday prior to the meeting will be responsible for payment.*

## 2007 PRCA-Montgomery Professional Development Workshop

### Sponsors

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*We would also like to thank DCVI Studios for allowing us to use their camera equipment and AIDT for use of the facilities.*

## Do Your Part to Help PRCA-Montgomery Grow And Enjoy the Rewards!

Bring a potential new member or a lost member to the August PRCA meeting and become eligible to win two tickets to the Shakespeare Festival and a \$45 gift certificate to Bonefish Grill. (The drawing will be held in August.)

Participating is easy. Just tell your friends and colleagues about the many benefits of PRCA membership and invite them to join. You'll receive three door prize tickets for each potential new member you bring to a meeting, plus you'll get a ticket just for attending the meeting. The more members you recruit, the more tickets you earn! Five tickets will be rewarded for each "lost" member you persuade to come back to a meeting.

## Humor and "Solid, No-Nonsense" Information Leads to a Successful Professional Development Workshop

*(cont. from page 1)*

In addition to teaching the workshop participants how to prepare for the interview, and how to anticipate questions and formulate answers, the retired Lieutenant Colonel of the United States Army Reserve also gave tips on personal appearance. "People remember 85 percent of what they see, but only 15 percent of what they hear." Wear solid colors, minimal jewelry and "use your hands when you talk," Trahan advised. Fidgeting with items in your pockets along with other nervous hand gestures can be distracting. The best place for your hands, Trahan demonstrated, is near your chest on the left side of your body. Animated, confident gestures near the heart are perceived as more credible and sincere.



*PRCA-Montgomery President Stacy Benefield, Workshop Facilitator Joseph Trahan, and Fundraising Chair Heather Holcomb at the workshop.*

Trahan, a native Louisianan, flavored his presentation with personal anecdotes and down-home wisdom. Raised by a Cajun father and Italian mother, Trahan used humor and colorful language to bring his message to life. "Listen; pause; think; answer, and then, as we say in Louisiana 'fermer la bouche' --- SHUT YOUR MOUTH." Rambling is a primary cause for saying the wrong thing.

The workshop wrapped up with members of the audience being placed in front of the camera and interviewed about their job responsibilities and knowledge. "Constructive criticism is still criticism," Trahan explained as he pointed out the strengths in each interview. His method of teaching is to encourage others to continue to develop their strengths.

Another great tip he offered is to remain professional even when the interview ends. "Remember, there is no such thing as 'off the record,'" Trahan stressed. As the interview ends and the mic is pointed downward, "it can still be picking up sound and recording your every word."

The day ended with comments and critiques from the group. "Fantastic," said one seasoned professional. And still another said, "I've always paid for these workshops out of my own pocket. I figured I would only ask my employer to pay if I felt like I was getting my money's worth. They're getting this bill today."

Mary Kelley and Vernita Oliver-Lane were the winners of the first door prizes. Kelley was the first to register for the workshop and Oliver-Lane was the only member to bring an executive from her office. Philip Lasater, the Executive Director of the Alabama Real Estate Commission shared with the group that he's sat in many seminars, but will take away more information from this course than any other by far.

Dr. Joseph Trahan, APR, Fellow, PRSA is the President and CEO of Trahan & Associates, a media training company. Visit his Web site at [www.doctrahanmedia.info](http://www.doctrahanmedia.info) or email him at [goldeneagle912001@yahoo.com](mailto:goldeneagle912001@yahoo.com).

## New Members!

Amy Waters - South Central  
Regional Coordinator, Children's  
Hospital

James Yeaman – retired PR  
practitioner; Owner of  
The Lattice Inn

## Have Fun (And Learn Stuff, Too!) at the Upcoming SPRF/PRCA Conference

The annual SPRF/PRCA Conference in Mobile is just around the corner! The line-up of activities and sessions this year is fantastic. Enjoy yourself at the Monday night social with food, drinks, music, socializing, and take in all the sights that are at the Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center. On Tuesday night, enjoy a cocktail reception before the dinner and awards banquet.

Professional development opportunities are plentiful as well. Sessions on crisis communications, media relations, trends in PR, becoming a super spokesperson, and many more will be sure to add value to your PR knowledge. (A complete list of sessions is listed on page 4.)

The conference will be held in Mobile, Sept. 16-18, at the historic Battle House Hotel. Everything you need to know about the conference can be found online at <http://www.prcaonline.com>. Discounted room rates and earlybird registration rates will be offered until August 24, so don't delay. You won't want to miss this year's "Power PR!" SPRF/PRCA conference.

## PRCA Member Profile

Melanie Beasley is Outreach and Prevention Supervisor at the Family Sunshine Center. She has many duties including serving as the agency spokesperson in absence of the Executive Director and program director; supervising publications and website; developing PR campaigns; and using standard PR tools such as press releases, posters, brochures, and other printed materials to fulfill PR plans and communicate agency's mission. Melanie earned a BS in Secondary Education from AUM, and has taken classes toward a Masters in Liberal Arts from AUM.



### *Do you have any tips to being a top PR practitioner?*

**Melanie:** The old adage, "It's not what you know, but who you know," is certainly true in the PR profession. While PR is not about "glad handing," it is about knowing the right people to call to get help when you need it. Oftentimes PR professionals are dealing with complex issues, and it helps to have the skill, experience or intuition to narrow the issue to its most basic components so that your communications can be clear and concise. Of course, staying up-to-date on the latest in electronic communications will play a critical role in the future of PR.

### *What are the top three skills needed in PR?*

**Melanie:** The ability to build relationships/network, ability to identify the root of an issue, and the ability to communicate well-graphically, verbally and in writing.

### *From where did your interest in PR originate?*

**Melanie:** I have always loved to write-poetry, short stories, song lyrics, essays, etc. While some people envision PR as developing and parlaying personal contacts to advantage, I always saw it as an opportunity to write. In many ways, that part of the PR business has been very fulfilling; however, I've had to work to develop skills using other, equally valuable and necessary PR tools. Never outgoing, I really had to work hard at public speaking and interaction with the news media. I am much more comfortable expressing myself and my agency's mission in any type of venue.

### *What is your greatest achievement?*

**Melanie:** I am very proud of putting into place a community education plan at the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. Prior to resources becoming available through the settlement of a 30-year-long lawsuit, most of that department's PR had been reactive. While the PR plan needed on-going refinement, and the person who took my place at the agency has done an excellent job in moving that process forward, we did "get the ball rolling."

## **“Power PR” 2007 SPRF/PRCA Conference**

### **Professional Development Topics**

#### Key Notes

PR to the Rescue: When All Heck Breaks Loose  
How to Baby Your Contacts

#### Breakouts

Trends in PR and What it Means in Education Today  
Brave New World: PR in the Age of Consumer-centric Media  
The Bottom Line: PR Analyzes Media Impact  
Connecting the Dots: Using Everything You Know to Be an Exceptional Communicator  
Become a PR Super Spokesperson  
Getting Social Online

#### Student Session

Powering Up for Your Dream PR Job

#### New!

Pre-Conference Leadership Session

*Seasoned practitioners won't want to miss the "Powerful Leadership" seminar on Sunday, Sept. 16. The speaker will share stories and insights to teach seasoned practitioners easy tips to remain at the top of their game.*

## **Don't Miss Out On Going to the SPRF/PRCA Conference - Scholarships are Available!**

PRCA-Montgomery has available three scholarships to cover the cost of full conference registration for the 2007 SPRF/PRCA Conference "Power PR" in Mobile on Sept. 16-18. Scholarship recipients will be selected randomly from the group of eligible applicants. Applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Personally responsible for conference fee (company will not pay)
2. Attended three or more regular PRCA meetings year to date
3. Able to attend full conference (social and awards events optional, pre-conference leadership session not covered by scholarship)
4. Able to secure own accommodations, either at The Battle House Hotel (Special PRCA rate: \$125/night) or alternative accommodations

If you meet the above criteria and are interested in attending the conference, please submit your name to PRCA-Montgomery President Stacy Benefield at [stacy@squareroot-inc.com](mailto:stacy@squareroot-inc.com) by **August 8**. Also, feel free to direct any questions related to the scholarships to Stacy.