

September 8, 2011

Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame Association  
Lawrence P. Taylor, Executive Director  
P.O. Box 785  
Bloomington, IN 47402

Dear Mr. Taylor,

Walt Tabak's 25 years of providing technology support to Associated Press members in Indiana overlapped monumental changes in the way words and pictures were delivered to the state's newsrooms. Tabak helped AP members make changes as dramatic as moving words at 66 words a minute and delivered by teletype to 1,200 words a minute and delivered by satellite. When he began, photos were delivered on flimsy paper. By the time he retired in 1986, photos were called "LaserPhotos".

By helping members make and understand these changes, and for handling the daily concerns of Indiana's broadcast and newspaper members, we nominate Walt Tabak for the new Distinguished Service to Journalism Award instituted by the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame.

"If one measure of success is the ability to deal with change, few people could be considered more successful than Walt Tabak," concluded Jack Ronald, editor and publisher of The Commercial Review in Portland. "I can think of no one who had a greater impact on news technology in Indiana in the 20th Century."

Tabak, a World War II veteran who served three years in the Army Signal Corps, joined the AP in 1952 and in his first assignment in New London, Conn., sent all the copy when the world's first atomic submarine, the Nautilus, was launched. After assignments in Bridgeport, Conn., and New York City, he moved to Indianapolis as a technician in 1961 and was promoted to Indiana chief of communications two years later.

While chiefs of bureau were in charge of the news report and membership concerns, it was often Tabak, or his technicians, who went out in the worst weather to make sure that newspapers and broadcast stations stayed in business.

Former Indiana Chief of Bureau Joe McGowan -- one of six AP chiefs of bureau with whom Tabak worked - recalls that in 1972 the Evansville Courier called the AP office in Indianapolis to say they had lost all AP service. It was late in the day. Tabak got his late wife Dot to join him and they drove to Evansville to personally make the repairs. While he worked in the newspaper, Dot slept in the car. Late that night, with repairs complete, Walt joined Dot and she drove back to Indianapolis while Walt slept. He then went to work the next morning, ready to serve other members.

Tabak recalls another time when his son Ron drove him in his four-wheel truck to Elkhart to help get the paper back in service during a blizzard.

When Tabak marked his 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with AP in 1982, AP President Keith Fuller was among many who cited his accomplishments.

"I could recount here the numerous compliments and bouquets that have come your way over the years, both from members and staffers alike," Fuller said. "Suffice it to say that one would have to go a long way to find another chief of communications as well-liked and as thoroughly professional as you."

While chiefs of bureaus came and went, Tabak and his wife Dot were the continuing welcoming face to members and non-members alike. He helped preside over conventions, made visits with the chiefs, and turned each trouble call into a chance to solidify the bonds between the cooperative and the member.

He didn't only fix things. He listened to member concerns and he was a teacher during this time of great change.

"Walt was a constant comfort for Indiana newspapers," said Bob Zaltsberg, editor of the Herald-Times of Bloomington. "During a time of transition in technology, he was the one person between AP and its members when it came to systems problems."

For standing with and for the newspapers and broadcasters in Indiana, we proudly nominate Walt Tabak for this new category of the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame.

Attached to this nomination are letters of support from:

Tim Harmon, Executive Editor, South Bend Tribune  
Joe McGowan, former AP Chief of Bureau, Indianapolis  
Jack Ronald, Editor and Publisher, The Commercial Review, Portland  
Bob Zaltsberg, Editor, The Herald-Times, Bloomington

We have also attached the cover letter in case it is easier to handle that way.

Please let us know if we can provide any further information you might need. Thanks.

Sincerely,

Andrew Lippman, Indianapolis chief of bureau, 1984-89  
Paul Stevens, Indianapolis chief of bureau, 1982-84

## **NOMINATION**

### **To The Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame**

**Nominee: Walter M. Tabak**

**Indiana connection: Walt Tabak was for 25 years the Chief of Communications for The Associated Press in Indiana. As such, he supervised a team of communications specialists and was responsible for making sure Associated Press news, stock markets and photos reached the newspapers, radio and TV stations throughout Indiana.**

**Nominee living: Mr. Tabak lives in the Indianapolis area.**

**Highlights: Mr. Tabak began his lifetime in communications at age 20 when he joined the U.S. Army during World War II. He was assigned to 418<sup>th</sup> Signal Company attached to the Eighth Air Force Fighter Command in England. He crossed the English Channel and landed at Le Harve, France. Tabak was trained as a radio/teletype operator, which made him a natural for communications work with The Associated Press. His entire life has been in communications and serving the news media.**

**Walt was totally dedicated to serving AP member newspapers in Indiana. This is best illustrated by one event about 1972. The Evansville Courier called the AP office in Indianapolis to say they had lost all AP service. It was late in the day. Walt got his wife Dot to join him and he drove to Evansville to make the repairs personally. While he worked at the newspaper, Dot slept in the car. Late this night, with repairs complete, Walt joined Dot and she drove back to Indianapolis while Walt slept. He then went to work that morning, ready to serve other AP members!**

**Contribution to journalism: Mr. Tabak spent his career making sure the media in Indiana got the worldwide news and photos from AP.**

**Nominator's name: Joe McGowan Jr.**

**AP Chief of Bureau, Indiana, 1970-75**

**AP Chief of Bureau, Massachusetts, Rhode Island 1975-78**

**AP Chief of Bureau, Colorado, Wyoming 1978-1997**

**303 882-2494, 2893 Ridge Drive, Broomfield, CO, 80020.  
joedos2@comcast.net**

To the Selection Committee,

Oddly, when I think of Walt Tabak, his role helping steer Indiana newspapers through unprecedented waves of technological change doesn't come immediately to mind.

Instead, I see standing in a hotel reception room, mixing bloody marys on Sunday mornings at the APME conventions.

He was at those events every year. Not just to mix drinks, of course, but to keep members informed about the ever-changing landscape of Associated Press technology and, presumably, to field complaints.

But there were so few complaints.

During Walt Tabak's 25 years as a technician and chief of communication in Indiana, the AP went from teletype transmission to satellites, and from slowly transmitted images to LaserPhotos.

But the simple fact is, transitions such as those went very smoothly, and the few problems and complaints were handled very well. Walt's work was seamless and routinely invisible.

Walt's quick responses to the occasional transmission or reception crisis are legendary and no doubt are detailed in other nominating letters.

But in truth, Walt was the Maytag repairman of Indiana newspapers. He was always ready to help, but technology ran so smoothly, we rarely had even to contact him.

Which is why my memories of Walt Tabak center on those annual conventions.

The blood-mary-availability event belongs to another age now. The idea of editors and wire-service reporters downing vodka-laced morning pick-me-ups doesn't sound nearly as appropriate today as it once did.

But the high-quality service that Walt embraced and practiced for so many years served generations of newspaper staffs and readers who never met him or heard his name. In Indiana, Walt Tabak set the standard for technological excellence in journalism.

Tim Harmon  
Executive Editor  
South Bend Tribune

**Subject:** Fwd: Distinguished Service to Journalism Nomination - Walt Tabak  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 4, 2011 8:15 AM  
**From:** Lawrence Taylor <injournalismhof@gmail.com>  
**To:** Kurtis Beavers <kjbeaver@indiana.edu>

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** Paul and Linda Stevens <stevenspl@live.com>  
**Date:** Thu, Sep 8, 2011 at 7:20 PM  
**Subject:** Distinguished Service to Journalism Nomination - Walt Tabak  
**To:** ijhf@indiana.edu  
**Cc:** Andy Lippman <alippman22@hotmail.com>, Paul <stevenspl@live.com>

September 8, 2011

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Sincerely,

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Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame  
P. O. Box 785  
Bloomington, IN 47402  
PH: 317-371-7471

# The Herald-Times

To the selection committee:

I would like to support the nomination of Walt Tabak for the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame.

Walt was a constant comfort for Indiana newspapers as the chief of communications for the Associated Press in Indianapolis. During a time of transition in technology, he was the one person between AP and its members when it came to system problems. Without Walt's dedication and cool demeanor, we on a number of occasions after rejoining the AP in 1984 would have been without wire service — and in deep trouble in our effort to put out a newspaper.

Andy Lippman, the former Indiana AP Chief of Bureau, explained that the Hall of Fame board has established a category for people who had ancillary impact on journalism in Indiana, including in the area of technology. Walt Tabak would certainly qualify as a perfect choice under that category.

Thank you for considering his nomination.

Sincerely,

Bob Zaltsberg  
Editor  
The Herald-Times  
Bloomington

Aug. 9, 2011

To whom it may concern:

If one measure of success is the ability to deal with change, few people could be considered more successful than Walt Tabak.

During Walt's career with The Associated Press, the technology of delivering the news underwent a series of massive, fundamental changes still echoing today.

When I first met Walt in his role as communications chief for The AP's Indianapolis bureau in the late 1970s, we were still receiving the state report on the "slow wire" at a speed of about 50 words a minute. Newspapers were just beginning to make their transition to computers, and there was this thing called "electronic carbons" that was constantly being talked about.

Under Walt's watch, landlines were phased out, satellite feeds became routine, and the speed of The AP report left the "slow wire" in the dust.

For countless Hoosier editors trying to cope with all this change, Walt was an incredibly reassuring and stabilizing force. Nothing seemed to faze him. He'd shrug. He might mutter under his breath. But he would continually adapt.

And he did so with a grace that made it easier for others to follow suit. After all, if Walt could deal with all this change, the rest of us could get on board.

I can think of no one who had a greater impact on news technology in Indiana in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Sincerely,

Jack Ronald  
Editor and Publisher  
The Commercial Review