



**JONATHAN
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Let us now praise, over and over and

For your average citizen, a vision of hell likely would involve a jammed elevator and a posse of life insurance salesmen. For a journalist, it's a room full of public relations hypesters.

So it was not without a certain sense of trepidation that I stepped Wednesday evening into the ballroom of the Hilton Hotel.

The occasion was the Third Annual Awards Banquet of the Columbia River Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. Translation: 'twas a convention of exaggeraters.

The assembled throng heaped so much praise upon each other that by the time they were done, the ballroom was hip deep in plaudits and the three-piece combo in the corner had played every fanfare known to man.

Fitting awards into specific categories was no problem for these guys. If the shoe didn't fit — heck, they just introduced another "feat" worthy of praise.

There were awards for brochures produced in two colors. Produced in three colors. And in four colors. And for annual reports produced in two colors. In three colors. And in . . . but by now you get the idea.

There were awards for designing corporate "looks and logos," and for writing speeches for corporate types too corporate to write their own. There even were awards for designing junk mail — oops, I mean "direct mail solicitations."

There were lots of awards for the folks who produce "in-house" publications. Nary a word was heard about outhouse publications all night long.

There was even a special award for pitching feature stories to recalcitrant newsmen. Former newshound Richard Ross nailed down this one for his dogged work selling the Oregon Lottery for Pihlas Schmidt.

And then, just when we thought we'd heard it all, one guy got an award for the masterful way he promoted last year's award show!

Tucked away amid all the hoopla, however, were a couple of worthy gems. The Summit Award for best use of public relations toward community improvement went to the Oregon Traffic Safety Commission for its efforts in persuading drunks to refrain from driving.

On hand to receive the award was the commission's administrator Gil Bellamy, an 18-year veteran of the fight to make Oregon roads safer. Bellamy reminded the crowd that the proof of his particular pudding is in the statistics. The "If you drink and drive, the least you will lose is your license" campaign is working. According to Bellamy, Oregon boasts the toughest drunken driving laws in the nation. That's something of which we all can be proud.

Finally there came the highlight of the evening, the handing out of The William Marsh Award for lifetime achievement. Marsh himself was on hand to present what he called "The Billy Award" to the guy he dubbed "Oregon's outstanding leader in the field of public relations," Ron Schmidt.

Highlights of Schmidt's 30-year career in Oregon include his pioneering work with the Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland, his stalwart service with Gov. Tom McCall, and his dynamic leadership today of the Oregon Arts Commission.

But the bottom line, really, is this: Ron Schmidt simply has helped to make the public relations profession in Oregon more professional. And that's good for us all. Even relcalcitrant newsmen.