NebraskaPressWomen.org
Community of Communicators

Living and Working on the Plains



Photo Courtesy hendersonheritage.org
Mennonite Heritage Park near Henderson honors and preserves the history of 35 Mennonite families from Germany who settled in the area in 1874. Nebraska Press Women will learn about and celebrate the efforts of these families at their fall conference, as well as learning about current efforts to make a positive impact on the plains of Nebraska.

HENDERSON – Nebraskans have loved and cared for the land for generations. Nebraska Press Women will learn about and celebrate some of those efforts at the fall conference Saturday, Oct. 17.

Board members will meet at 6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16 at Chances R, 124 W. Fifth St. in York. The conference will be at the Gathering Room at Mennonite Heritage Park, 720 Road B in Henderson, or 1.5 miles south of Interstate 80 Exit 342. The program will run from 10:15 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a general membership meeting 9-10 a.m. Registration is $35, due by Friday, Oct. 9.

The conference will include election of new officers and presentation of the Communicator of Achievement award. Lunch will be catered by The Dutch Kitchen of Henderson

The 8.5-acre park preserves the history of 35 German Mennonite families who settled in the area in 1874. It includes the Immigrant House museum, which replicates the building where all 35 families lived when they first came to Nebraska; a 1911 barn; a church; schoolhouse; and farmstead.

Suzanne Ratzlaff, a member of the park's board, will speak during the afternoon program about the history of Mennonites in the area and development of the park. She'll then lead a tour of the grounds, with golf carts available for those who prefer to ride rather than walk.

According to a story in the York News-Times, Ratzlaff, who chairs the Henderson Heritage and tourism Committee, won an Impact Award earlier this year from the York County Development Commission for her efforts. Those efforts included raising about $700,000 for the recently constructed Gathering Room, where press women are meeting.



Photo Courtesy hendersonheritage.org
The Gathering Room.

Grace McDonald, a reporter for KOLN-TV's Pure Nebraska, will offer a behind-the-scenes look at reporting and creating an authentic media presence in her presentation, "Grassroots and Grace: Stories from the Heartland." McDonald has worked for the Grand Island Independent, Kearney Hub, and as a stringer for the Associated Press. According to the KOLN website, her work as a student journalist at the University of Nebraska at Kearney earned her Eric Severeid awards and honors from the Northern Plains Collegiate Media Association.

Kerry Hoffschneider of rural Waco will present "Difference Makers - Difference in Action," a program that is revitalizing rural and lifelong learning/entrepreneurship with grassroots projects and storytelling. The program launched at York Public Schools and the York County Fair with volunteers from the Future Farmers of America organization and has spread into the greater school body, community, and even a school in Iowa. According to a story published by Melanie Wilkerson on Just Melanie W., the group is "learning about and sharing information around the stressors the world's farmers face every day." They are putting their knowledge to work through implementing local solutions around food and agriculture that can be replicated state and nationwide.

To register send a check to Lori Potter at 4437 Parkwood Lane, Kearney, NE 68845. Or, register online with PayPal at www.nebraskapresseomen.org.

For those needing accommodations, hotels off Interstate 80 include the Holiday Inn Express, Fairfield by Marriott, Victorian Inn and Suites, Quality Inn, Super 8, Best Western Plus and Motel 6. The park is a 15-minute drive.

Nominations Needed for COA 2026

By MARY JANE SKALA

Nominations for this year's NPW COA must be submitted on or before **6 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 8,** as an attachment to an email to: maryjaneskala@gmail.com

The Nebraska Press Women Communicator of Achievement is the highest award for NPW members. It recognizes achievement in the communications profession, community service and the industry, and service to NPW (and NFPW if applicable).

The nominee must be a living member who has paid NPW dues for at least the last two consecutive years.

*NPW can honor a previous nominee if the nominee has never been selected as NFPW's national COA winner.

*The COA can move on to compete for NFPW Communicator of Achievement if she/he has paid national dues for two consecutive years.

Final selection will be made by current NPW members who are former COAs.

The name of this year's COA will be announced at our NPW fall meeting in Henderson on Oct. 17.

If the COA is also an NFPW member, he/she will be automatically entered in the NFPW COA competition. That award will be presented at the 2027 NFPW conference. Questions? Contact Mary Jane Skala at 308-293-0982 or maryjaneskala@gmail.com



Mary Jane Skala awards Sherry Thompson the 2025 Communicator of Achievement Award at the fall conference in Red Cloud.

INCLUDE IN YOUR NOMINATION:

1. Name of member(s) making the nomination:

Your email(s):

Your phone number(s):

2. Name of nominee:

Nominee's Home Address:

Nominee's Email:

Nominee's Phone:

Nominee's Professional Title or Job Information and Address:

3. <u>SUMMARY</u> of nominee's information, divided as follows:

a. PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS:

b. NPW SERVICE (and NFPW SERVICE if applicable):

c. COMMUNITY SERVICE: (civic involvement and communications industry)

d. PERSONAL INFORMATION: why this member should receive this award. Include what the member has done and the impact he/she has made.

NPW Student Scholarship Winners Named

By MARYKAY QUINLAN

LINCOLN — Students from Nebraska and Texas have received the 2026 NPW scholarships.

Kylie Krajicek, a graduate of Yutan High School, is the winner of the $1,000 Marianne Beel Scholarship. She won multiple awards in the state high school journalism competitions and was involved in numerous high school activities in addition to journalism. Krajicek is attending the University of South Dakota.

Victoria Harris of League City, Texas, is the winner of the $1,000 NPW Memorial Scholarship. She has held numerous internships in broadcasting and, according to those who know her, she has taken advantage of every opportunity that has come her way. Harris will graduate from Hastings College in the spring.

Start Collecting Contest Entries

By MARY JANE SKALA

KEARNEY — The 2027 NFPW Communications Contest will open Oct. 1.

However, because the contest accepts all work done during 2026, deadlines are not until early 2027. The early bird deadline is in late January, with the final deadline in early February. More information will be coming from NFPW in about a month.

What's critical now: **2027 NPW dues must be paid, and in NPW hands, no later than 11:59 p.m. Dec. 31, 2026**, for all contest entrants.



Some of the 2025 Communications Contest winners.

No dues paid? No contest eligibility. It's that simple. Money must be in our hands by Dec. 31, which means checks can't be mailed at 5 p.m. on Dec. 31.

I will send reminders throughout the fall.

You can pay state dues now, and join national if your contest entry wins first place in its category and you want it to move on to the national contest.

Contest categories will remain the same as last year.

Mary Jane Skala,
Professional Contest Chair
308-293-0982

Flatwater Celebrates its Fifth

By BARB SODERLIN

LINCOLN — The Flatwater Free Press will mark its fifth anniversary with five public events Sept. 19-23, culminating with the annual Flatwater Festival celebration of Nebraska journalism.

All are invited to join in the events, including the Festival party in a historic barn at Roca Berry Farm, with guest speaker George Packer, a staff writer at *The Atlantic*.

Other events include a screening of the newspaper documentary Storm Lake at Omaha's Film Streams, and a forum at Lincoln's Sheldon Museum of Art, where Flatwater reporter Yanqi Xu, a New York Times local investigations fellow, will share findings from her latest story.

Launched in September 2021, Flatwater is Nebraska's first statewide, independent, nonprofit newsroom, focused on investigations and feature stories that matter. Flatwater has earned a national reputation for impact, and was named the 2024 Startup of the Year by the Institute for Nonprofit News.

Flatwater employs 18 journalists in offices in Omaha, Lincoln and Kearney. Editor Matthew Hansen called his team "the best collection of journalistic talent that the state has seen in my quarter century on the job here."

In five years, the newsroom has published more than 750 original stories. All are made freely available for republication by media across Nebraska, adding depth to local newsrooms' reports.

The work is funded by charitable contributions to the Nebraska Journalism Trust.

Event details are at flatwaterfreepress.org/festival.

"We hope you can join us, just as so many of you have joined as readers, subscribers, and donors," Hansen said. "Because you are the people powering our growth. You are the people granting us the ability to make a difference."

NPW Seeks Info for Archives

By MARYPAT FINN HOAG

NORFOLK — Continue saving photos and clips related to Nebraska Press Women/National Federation of Press Women, personal achievements and other items of note for inclusion in the NPW archives stored in annual binders at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln.

Send to me at 401 E. Maple Ave., Norfolk, NE 68701-4392, or bring to the fall convention at Henderson on Oct. 17. TIA!

On a related note, I plan to resign as NPW historian, a post I've held for more than a decade. If you're interested in serving as NPW's next historian, contact me at 402-860-0759 or NPW president Terri Hahn.