

Syndicates/News Services

'Mr. Info' and other speakers offer info

Columnist talks about government, and editors discuss feature sections at AASFE convention

by David Astor

MATTHEW LESKO USES his "Mr. Info" column to tell consumers how to get all kinds of free and almost free information from the U.S. government.

He brought some of his tips to the nation's former capital, Philadelphia, where he addressed the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors convention last month.

"I found the government is the largest source of information for anything you want," said the *New York Times* Syndicate columnist, noting that Uncle Sam has reports and experts on everything from Russia and health to potatoes and pasta.

"I talked to a government expert on pasta who's been studying pasta for 10 years," Lesko said. "No one asks him about it. He's like the Maytag man! I couldn't get him off the phone."

Earlier in the convention, Arizona

Republic/Phoenix Gazette news executive Howard Finberg moderated a session about feature sections in the 1990s.

"The line is blurring between feature and news sections," said *Washington Post* executive editor Leonard Downie Jr., noting that news sections are running more feature stories and feature sections are carrying more hard-hitting pieces.

"Our feature staff writes regularly for other parts of the paper," said Patrick Yack, managing editor of the Eugene, Ore., *Register-Guard*. "We often put profiles on the front page."

Jane Amari, managing editor for design and features at the *Kansas City Star*, observed that running feature stories on the front page can make it harder to fill feature sections.

Panelists also discussed difficulties involved in paginating feature sections while adding that, on balance, pagination is a welcome development.

Speaking of technology, *USA Weekend* editor Marcia Bullard urged feature editors to get involved in new ventures, such as fax, audiotex and on-line services, to help build a "power base" at their newspapers.

"We have to use and harness these media to take our products to new audiences," Downie added. "Gadgets are allies, not threats. But they shouldn't take away from intelligent editing and good reporting or we'll die and there won't be anything to resell."

Downie said people will have access to "tailored" information via new media. "Newspapers will be the one place with a smorgasbord of everything," he added.

A smorgasbord of newspaper feature sections was displayed and discussed at the AASFE's annual show-and-tell session.

A number of slides spotlighted multicultural stories, reader-participation features and youth-oriented material. Also shown were fax newspapers that included feature material and special magazines (on topics ranging from gardening to parenting) created by newspapers for sale separately.

The session was hosted by *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* features editor Janet Grimley and Newspaper Management Center faculty member/Knight-Ridder consulting editor Mike Smith.

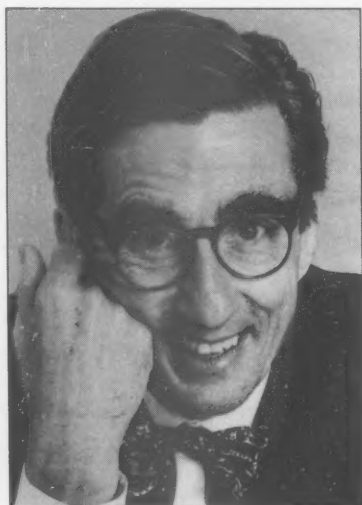
Smith and Grimley are on the 1993-94 AASFE board; Smith was elected second vice president and Grimley, secretary.

The group's new president is Susan Bischoff, assistant managing editor of the *Houston Chronicle*. She succeeds Sue Smith, assistant managing editor/Sunday of the *Dallas Morning News*.

First vice president is Dan Norman, deputy managing editor/features and sports at the Fort Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel*. Marcia Judson, features editor of the Leesburg, Fla., *Daily Commercial*, is treasurer.

Regional directors are Finberg; Jane Marshall, features editor of the *Houston Chronicle*; and Betsy Moye, assistant managing editor/features of the Charleston, S.C., *Post and Courier*.

The AASFE also announced results of a writing contest that drew more than 950 entries.



Matthew Lesko



Sue Smith