



## Anniversary Story

“The Groundwater Times”

By Jana Miller Langenmach

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For several years in the 1990s, one of the highlights of the annual Children’s Groundwater Festival in Grand Island was the publication of the *Groundwater Times*. This four-page tabloid newspaper recounted the highlights of the day-long festival and included interviews with participants, sponsors, and guests, as well as photos of the many different events. I was privileged to serve as *Groundwater Times* editor for four years, 1995-1998, and remember the experience fondly.



The *Groundwater Times* was distributed free to people involved in the festival including students, teachers, presenters, volunteers, and contributors. Among the sponsors over the years were the Union Pacific Foundation, the J.C. Seacrest Trust, the *Grand Island Independent*, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) College of Journalism and Mass Communications, and the Hastings College Journalism Department. Assisting was photographer Ann Enevoldsen.

The newspaper articles were written by journalism students at various Nebraska institutions, including UNL, University of

Nebraska-Kearney, and Hastings College. The students were supervised by their college instructors and a free-lance editor, who was hired by the Groundwater Foundation for the project. Assignments were developed with the festival director and given to the students in advance, along with background information.

“For one day we will function as a daily newspaper with assignments and deadlines,” the student writers were told. The editor added the following tips on what makes the *Groundwater Times* special:

- “Kids say the darndest things.” Remember the festival is for and about kids. Include as many comments from kids as possible.
- “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Maybe not always, but remember the necessity of eye-catching photos.
- “Grass is greener.” Don’t pass up a good story you come across that isn’t listed on the assignment sheet.

The students wrote their stories on computers at the *Grand Island Independent* under the guidance of Pete Letheby. The Groundwater Foundation’s free-lance editor collaborated with Pete and other *Independent* editors to write headlines, edit copy, decide placement, and select photos for the publication.

The notable visitors who attended the festival provided exceptional interview opportunities for the *Groundwater Times* writers. Among the visitors over the years were two Nebraska governors, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency administrator, the U.S. Geological Survey director, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Interior, a National Geographic reporter and photographer, representatives of UNICEF, and presenters from the United Nations in New York City and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

The *Groundwater Times* was a valuable learning experience for the college students, enabling them to work on their interviewing, writing, and editing skills in a real-world environment. It also provided youngsters attending the festival and festival presenters an opportunity to be interviewed, to talk to the media, and to organize and synthesize their thoughts. Even more, the *Groundwater Times* provided a reliable, interesting record of the festival and its impact on the community and the state.

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