An Ultimate Pass: The Incredible Power of a Press Credential

By Linda Bartrom-Olsen

When is plastic more than plastic? When it's a Press Pass! Part of the training for TV Media students is the development of the insight required to recognize news in the making. Beyond school events such as athletics, plays, assemblies and dances, there is also the larger community of which the student, and indeed the school itself, is a part. Young journalists can become viable reporters of nearly any event, and often are accommodated with surprising access due precisely to their youth. This access can be enhanced, validated by, and affirmed with a "Press Pass".

After being involved with teaching Media for twenty years, I was in the habit of making a Press Pass for my students for admission to Basketball Games, Dances and the like. I would make arrangements ahead of time so their pass would suffice as admission. They were honored and affirmed by the pieces of plastic with their picture; it is such a small gesture and such a fragile invention on my part, and yet it has the power to make them feel truly like Jouranalists. However, I think because I created the passes, I honestly did not understand their power until four years ago.

Then it happened. In the spring of 2007 one of my Seniors Named Jeff

came in on Monday absolutely aglow with an exclusive he'd gotten at an International Ping Pong Championship at The Richard Nixon Library! I was confused, and had to make him slow down enough to understand what had happened. He had been driving up the Santa Ana Five freeway when he saw a huge traffic jam and decided to see what was going on. The crowds led him to The Richard Nixon Library, with crowds gathered outside, and uniformed police and full dress security surrounding the entrance. He pulled in, asked a few questions and learned he had stumbled on the International Ping Pong World Finals with crowds of Americans and Nationals from many countries vying for entrance.

With the amazing blind confidence of youth, Jeff parked his car, pulled out his ever-present camera and Press Pass, and headed for the door. To his own amazement he was admitted! He said there was perfect front access seating reserved for the press... of which he was a part! As a result, he got tremendous footage and great interviews, adequate for a half hour show on our local Cablevision Channel 3 in Villa Park and on Channel 95 in Orange as well. I think my view of my own young students and their credential had become jaded by knowing them, by raising them, by seeing them as children. This event made me take a step back and readjust my glasses.

Of course there is a range of acceptance depending on the age of the learner. Elementary students will be more limited in what events they can access; with high school learners more events will open doors to them.

For all levels of young journalists a press pass provides an affirmation of their role like nothing else can. So how can you make them? If you don't have the equipment to produce them, try your Activity Director who produces Student ID cards. If that is not available I have a golden piece of advice for you: try your school photographer. School photographers have a wide range of products available and believe it or not, they will probably make them for you free of charge. They have your students photos already stored, and if you provide the student ID numbers and a design for your Press Pass, you'll probably be pleasantly surprised that in a week or so you'll have a stack of reasonable professional-looking Journalist I.D.'s. The reason is that your school photographer really wants to please your school, they make their living pleasing their clients, and the cost for such items is actually pretty minimal for them.

A sample of the design I use is below. Because we are associated with a nearby Cablevision Channel, the pass features that. Your pass can feature your school and its publications with equal validity. For larger events larger passes can be made, 5 X 7 in size, with photos, your design, with double holes for a neck lanyard as with professionals in the industry.

If you are fortunate to live in southern California and apply for credentials early enough, you may get your students an Event-Issued Press Credential such as the Exterior Access Badge issued for The Oscars, pictured below. From wallet-size ID's, to larger neck-lanyard photo ID's, through event-issued Badges, Press Credentials are a source of pride for the learner, affirm journalistic standing, and can establish a credibility far beyond what the student may expect. Sometimes they may even surprise the teacher!