



2013 DPA Communicator of Achievement

Maria Hess

"Queen of All Media."

At first blush, it might seem that Chris Carl, the 2012 Delaware Press Association Communicator of Achievement, was engaging in a bit of hyperbole when introducing Maria Hess as the 2013 DPA COA at the annual Holiday Luncheon in December 2012. But as he went on to list the Maria's accomplishments, it became apparent that she had more than earned the title.

Hitting all the right notes

Currently the editor of *Delaware Today*, Maria's very readable writing style has a rhythm and pace that reflects her first love: music. After high school, she studied voice at Berklee College of Music in Boston, leaving school early to sing professionally for nearly a decade. She still performs at local churches and other venues, and her clear, vibrant voice makes each song her own.

After moving to Wilmington, she continued to be involved in the performing arts, directing stage plays and teaching voice at local schools and churches. She soon became a regular on local TV, creating "The Arts Report" for First State News, a Delaware station that became CN8.

Next, she took a job with the PBS TV station in Harrisonburg, Va., where for two seasons she created, produced and hosted the PBS flagship television series "Living in Virginia," earning two Emmy Awards, the National PBS Communications Award, and other honors.

Back in Wilmington in the late 1990s, she began freelancing for local publications – the *News Journal*, *Out & About*, *Delaware Business*, *Delaware Today* – and quickly became a go-to writer for all of them.

In 2005, she was named senior editor at *Delaware Today*, and proceeded to write in-depth stories on a variety of subjects, earning four first-place awards from the National Federation of Press Women, along with many awards from DPA.

During her five years as senior editor, Maria created *The Arts Buzz*, a weekly blog currently featured on delawaretoday.com. She also established relationships with media partners WDEL and WHYI, becoming a regular guest on WHYI's television newsmagazine, "First."

When Mark Nardone stepped down as *DT* editor in March 2011, publisher Robert Martinelli appointed Maria as Mark's successor. She took over the reins with her usual vigor, creativity and competence, and she's now responsible for the editorial content of four publications: *Delaware Today*, *Delaware Bride*, *The Ultimate Guide to Delaware*, and *302 Health*.

As editor, Maria has become a popular speaker at various academic and professional functions. Somehow this force of nature also has found time to serve as an adjunct professor at Wilmington University, and in May 2012, she earned a doctorate in Education, Leadership and Innovation from WU.

On Being a Work in Progress

In a gracious acceptance speech for the COA award, Maria said, "I share this award with my team at Delaware Today; my boss, Rob Martinelli, who gave me the opportunity in the first place; and all those who've happily stood in the wings while I enjoyed the limelight."

She told the DPA audience that "the best communicators are never satisfied. There's always something we could have written better, edited better, articulated better. Nothing is ever perfect. And, as such, most of us remain works in progress, constantly examining our lives, as Thoreau deemed appropriate."

Then, in a reference to her most important role – mother to 11-year-old Benjamin Hess – she said, "Benjamin, you are my heart and soul, and the reason I strive to be the best I can be."