



2010 DPA Communicator of Achievement

Theresa Gawlas Medoff

Theresa Medoff, a prolific, award-winning freelance writer and a longtime member and mainstay of Delaware Press Association, was named the 2010 Communicator of Achievement. Through the nature and breadth of her writing, her service to the community and to DPA, Theresa personifies the COA award.

After college – Bucknell University, where she was graduated *summa cum laude* with a B.A. in English and Political Science and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa – Theresa got a foothold on a writing career. She moved to Massachusetts, where she copy-edited articles for six technical and scientific journals. At Regis College in Weston, Mass., she took charge of the quarterly alumni magazine and all college publications. And later, at the University of Delaware, she taught writing to undergrads and served the university as a technical writer, while earning a master's degree in English and American literature.

Over the years, the broad scope of Theresa's interests has made her conversant with subject matter that ranges from education and health to history, travel, and social issues. Her editors think highly of her work. So do DPA and the National Federation of Press Women, which have honored her with awards for essay, advertorial, photo essay and feature writing.

Since 1996, she has written for an array of publications. Her articles have been published in major newspapers around the U.S. and have appeared locally and regionally in *AAA World*, *Delaware Today*, *Delaware Bride*, *Delaware Health and Fitness Guide*, *Bucknell Magazine*, *Delaware Beach Life*, *Recreation News* and others. Theresa also takes photos, many of which have appeared in newspapers and magazines.

The Joys of Freelancing

Theresa says, "If I could pick any career in the world, being a freelance writer would be it. I have always loved to learn, to get to know new people, to go to new places and try new things, and that's all part of my job description. I love to work with words – reading, writing, editing, even proofreading – again, all part of my job description. I'm a curious person, always wondering, asking questions – and that's my job."

Addressing other joys of freelance writing, Theresa says, "Like many journalists, I've met, interviewed and written about my share of celebrities, but I enjoy more the articles I write about everyday people. We are privileged that people are willing to share their stories with us when we are usually total strangers to them. I am especially touched to gain the trust of people like the young woman who knew she was dying from breast cancer, or the man who told me what it meant to his life when finally, as an adult, he learned to read, or the mothers of soldiers killed in Iraq, or the woman who nearly died from undiagnosed AIDS and now works as a counselor to others with HIV/AIDS. Through our gift as writers and the power of the press, we can pass these stories along.

"Freelancing also has allowed me to be a mom in the way that I wanted to be. I could have a career as a writer (how great is it that I get to do what I love every day!), but also I could be there for my girls after school and could attend the shows and the games and the parent nights at school.

"As a freelancer, I spend much of my time at home alone, on the phone or on the computer. I don't have traditional co-workers but another great joy in work is the variety of colleagues I have come to know. Like my editors, some of whom helped me get started in this career, who gave generously of their time to help me become better at my craft. Like the administrative assistants, the PR and marketing people who provide story background and research groundwork, who help set up interviews and track down images and fact check articles. Like my fellow writers, some here in Delaware, others all over the country, with whom I share ideas and tips, commiserate and celebrate.

Giving Service

But Theresa is about more than just writing. She's also about her community. For many years, Theresa chaired the Social Action Committee at her church, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Mill Creek. She started the annual Souperbowl Sunday soup-and-bread sale at her church to raise money for the Food Bank of Delaware. She also arranged for her church to switch to Fair Trade coffee. And she has tutored students whose first language is not English.

The COA award also recognizes service to Delaware Press Association, and Theresa has filled that bill many times. She has served in several leadership roles, including president. In 2003, when DPA hosted the National Federation of Press Women's annual Communications Conference in Wilmington, Theresa was a key player lining up outstanding speakers from across the U.S. and helping Delaware to show off well. She has helped organize and present other major DPA public events, including a 2009 panel discussion on the economic collapse in the U.S., and another in 2008 on freedom of information issues.