



2004 DPA Communicator of Achievement

Rita Katz Farrell

Rita Katz Farrell, a Reuters correspondent since 1987 and Delaware Bureau Chief from 1999 until the bureau was closed in 2002, is an adjunct professor at Wilmington College teaching communication, serves as a guest panelist for the PBS affiliate WHYY-TV, and continues a 20-year stint as a correspondent for Variety. Now stringing part-time for Reuters and Agence France Presse, she continues to freelance and also does consulting for the University of Rhode Island and the

Newspaper Guild, among others. She specializes in speech/presentation writing, editing, and delivery. And she is a ballet instructor at the Academy of the Dance.

A native New Englander, Rita initially worked as a DuPont research chemist for several years before resigning to raise a family. She returned to work as a dance writer for Metropolitan Opera publications. She became a dance critic for the Wilmington News Journal and freelanced for the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Chicago Tribune, the L.A. Times and Boston Globe. She has taught business communications and ballet history and technique at the University of Delaware. And she's been Bureau Chief for Bloomberg Business News and a trial tracker for Court TV. A longtime business writer for the Associated Press as well as Bloomberg Business News, Rita covered corporate litigation, bankruptcies and shareholder meetings primarily, but also politics, high-profile criminal trials and government.

A member of Delaware Press Association since 1982, Rita's other affiliations include serving as a board member of the University of Delaware Friends of the Performing Arts, a member of the Delaware State Arts Council (appointed by Governor Thomas Carper), a member of the Bar Bench Media Conference since 1996, a founder of Dance Critics Association and of Journalists Association of Delaware, a member of the program committee for YWCA, and board member of the Delaware Chamber Music Festival.

When DPA orchestrated and hosted the NFPW "Brave New Media World" national communications conference in Wilmington in 2003, Delaware Governor Ruth Ann Minner, Attorney General Jane Brady and DSCYF Cabinet Secretary Cari DeSantis agreed to be present for a public press conference with questioning led by the national award winners of the NFPW High School Journalism Contest and their colleagues from Delaware. Rita was the lynchpin of the committee that organized the student awards luncheon and the press conference. Prior to the luncheon, to prepare them for the extraordinary opportunity, Rita held a session for the student journalists on proper protocol at a press conference.

A member of the Brave New Media World program committee, Rita organized and moderated a panel discussion, "Investigative Reporting or Life as a Mole: Digging through Public Records." She brought together experts who discussed how to negotiate the obstacle course of politicians who spin, leaders who dodge, figures that lie and reporters who fictionalize. The discussion ranged from how and where to conduct research needed to shape public policy to how a court administrator handles "public access" demands for anything from files to courtroom seating to cameras in the courtroom. Panelists talked about everything from how to cut through the public relations fog and the opaqueness of financial reports to dealing with the "no comment" mantra and the territorialism of court clerks.

In 1986, Rita served as project director for a DPA-sponsored public forum titled "The Free Press in a Democracy: Messenger? or Meddler?" She obtained substantial funding and enlisted the University of Delaware journalism program as a co-sponsor and presenter. The daylong forum featured Ben Bagdikian, award-winning journalist and chair of UCLA's journalism department, as the keynote speaker. James B. Steele, Pulitzer Prize winner and investigative reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer, David Hoffman, White House reporter for the Washington Post, and distinguished representatives of government, industry, labor and the University of Delaware faculty were among the speakers and panelists. She even got the flamboyant Frank Rizzo, then Mayor of Philadelphia, to participate. Rita was executive editor of a 30-minute documentary on Free Press, with Ed Asner as narrator.

Known for always asking tough questions and for telling truth to power, Rita received high praise from then U.S. Senator Joe Biden (D-Del.) who said at the NFPW/DPA Communications Conference in 2003, "Rita Farrell is the biggest pain in the ass . . . and the best reporter in the State of Delaware."