

TOWA

The Official Publication of the **Texas Outdoor Writers Association**

TOWA PRESIDENT'S REPORT

TOWA Continuing on Progressive Course

By David Sikes, President

The Texas Outdoor Writers Association is an organization on the rise.

Not to dwell on the past, but it is no secret that TOWA leadership suffered a low period several years ago. This era ended abruptly with a newfound sense of pride and character so powerful that it could not be denied.

The likes of Ralph Winingham, John Goodspeed, Bob Lusk and perhaps our ultimate savior of credibility, Larry LeBlanc, returned TOWA to prominence as a strong honorable organization of professional communicators.

I plan to continue this course, with the help of new board members Bob Hood and Judy Jurek, along with Peggy York, who was reelected to the board last month.

Most of you are aware that TOWA Executive Director Larry LeBlanc has decided to step down from his position following the 2013 conference in Galveston.

Larry's accomplishments are many. He untangled our finances, and straightened the books, renewed our relationship with the IRS and with the state.

He negotiated the complex requirements of turning an organization that was barely recognized by the state into a nonprofit in good standing. We are now a 501(c)(6) organization, which allows us to fulfill a promise to supporting members by providing them a marketing presence on our website, while allowing TOWA to benefit from tax-exempt status. This designation is a good fit for TOWA.

We owe our gratitude to Larry for leav-



Incoming TOWA President David Sikes admires his first tarpon. ing the organization much better than he found it and for paving the way for his successor.

The board of directors, and specifically the ED search committee, now is charged with filling the ED position. This paid position is open to any TOWA member and to any qualified candidate outside the organization.

In keeping with our progressive course, you can expect changes in this area as well. After reviewing the decades old bylaws regarding ED duties and responsibilities the ED search committee has decided to reexamine them.

It's difficult to believe anyone ever fulfilled these duties with or without pay, especially when you consider that technol-

ogy has expanded many of the responsibilities.

We are considering splitting the position into a management branch that handles finances and such, and a position that handles membership issues, outreach and generally assumes the role of TOWA ambassador and liaison. I hesitate to define these roles too specifically because that will be the job of the ED committee, which is made up of John Goodspeed, TJ Greaney and myself.

More on this as it unfolds.

Many of you also are aware that Ralph Winingham, after serving as president, board member, newsletter editor and other leadership roles, has decided to step

Continued on Page Two

TOWA OFFICERS, BOARD

PRESIDENT

David Sikes (361) 886-3616
sikesd@caller.com

PRESIDENT-ELECT

TJ Greaney (512) 789-3838
tj@countrylinemagazine.com

TREASURER

Bill E. Mills (281) 448-5811
offtheroad.mills@earthlink.net

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Larry J. LeBlanc (936) 445-9438
904 W. Montgomery, Ste. 4 cell (936) 524-0761
Willis, TX 77378

towa@suddenlink.net

BOARD MEMBERS

BOARD CHAIRMAN

John Goodspeed (210) 573-7460
john@johngoodspeed.com

Susan Ebert (2013) (512) 431-2013
susanebertink@gmail.com

Cody Greaney (2014) (512) 576-2200
cody@texasoutdoorzone.com

Kendal Hemphill (2013) (325) 347-6440
jeep@verizon.net

Bob Hood (2015) (817) 228-5952
bobhoodoutdoors@yahoo.com

Judy Bishop Jurek (2014) (979) 541-7776
redhawkconsulting@yahoo.com

Peggy York (2012) (210) 647-7053
peggy.york@sbcglobal.net

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

CONFERENCE CHAIRMAN

David Sikes (361) 886-3616
sikesd@caller.com

CONFERENCE PROGRAM CO-CHAIRMAN

TJ Greaney (512) 789-3838
tj@countrylinemagazine.com

SCHOLARSHIP

Judy Mills, Marianne Odom (281) 448-5811
offtheroad.mills@earthlink.net;
marianneodom27@hotmail.com

MEMBERSHIP

David Sikes (361) 886-3616
sikesd@caller.com

SITE SELECTION

Jonette Childs (361) 729-0239
saltex@pyramid3.net

AUCTIONS

TJ Greaney (512) 789-3838
tj@countrylinemagazine.com

EIC AWARDS

Kendal Hemphill (325) 347-6440
jeep@verizon.net

TOWA PHOTOGRAPHERS

Gerald Burleigh and David Redwine

TOWA HISTORIAN

John Thompson

TOWA News is published monthly by the Texas Outdoor Writers Association and edited by Susan L. Ebert. Layout by SusanEbertink, SusanEbertink@gmail.com. Contributors are urged to submit material by the 15th of each month. For advertising information, contact Susan L. Ebert at (512) 431-2013 or SusanEbertink@gmail.com. TOWA News is emailed to members and mailed first class, if requested, from Porter, Texas. TOWA was formed in 1958 as a professional/social organization for those who communicate about hunting, fishing and other outdoor pursuits, as well as those in business and industry connected with the outdoors.



The TOWA Newsletter is proudly sponsored by Gulf States Toyota. For information, go to www.buyatoyota.com.



Continued from Page One

aside so he can pursue the ED position.

What you may not know is that Ralph has done much to guide this organization. He's done this by keeping the board on course in all matters covered in the bylaws. He, in effect, has been our conscience and our collective memory regarding the history of past decisions and the rules that govern TOWA.

I'm hoping his guidance and influence will remain a part of this administration.

And throughout this fledgling new era John Goodspeed has been a calming influence on the board. I am honored that he has accepted our request to serve another year as chairman of the board. We need him for continuity and for the reasons listed above.

Speaking of continuity, TJ Greaney will continue handling his previous responsibilities as board member and conference co-chair, as well as serving on the ED search committee.

TJ has been a big part of changing the face of TOWA through the conference programs he has spearheaded for the past several years. He also created the student outdoor adventure writing competition, which came out of a relationship he forged with the Dallas Safari Club. My role as co-chair on both of these endeavors has taken a back seat to TJ's energy, enthusiasm and quest to create a more professional and high-profile organization. None of this will change.

But you can expect some fundamental changes in the coming months. For example, Susan Ebert, who also is a candidate for the ED position, will be handling all responsibilities for the newsletter on an interim basis. She's already improved the look of this publication as well as the membership directory. She and board member Cody Greaney also are commit-

ted to revamping the TOWA website. Anyone interested in assuming the newsletter editor position should contact me at sikesd@caller.com.

Let me urge every TOWA member to at least glance at the monthly newsletter.

This should eliminate the pervasive complaint from members who say they are unaware of deadlines, upcoming events, TOWA news and other issues covered in the newsletter.

We will try harder to keep the membership informed. Please meet me halfway on this issue. I welcome suggestions on how we might improve communications.

Along those lines, the board will again reexamine the bylaws for ways they could be updated and improved. For example, we may add a volunteer category to active membership. This would open the door to longtime members who continue writing for nonprofit outdoor organizations and programs without pay.

We also will look at adding a retired category for those longtime members who no longer write enough to qualify for active membership. Please, we welcome your suggestions.

Many of these changes would require a vote from the general membership.

Under current circumstances, such referendums occur only at the annual conference. We may schedule a midyear membership meeting to expedite the process of altering TOWA bylaws. If we do, then members will be allowed vote in person or by proxy. A proxy vote could be submitted by mail or perhaps electronically.

These changes are aimed at making TOWA a more modern, efficient and professional organization that is responsive to its members and to our changing world.

Please help me in this quest. We cannot thrive by apathy and will only continue the course we have set with your activism.

TOWA CONFERENCE FUNDRAISING TRACKS UPWARD

Below is the Silent Auction, Dirty Dozen and Raffle Income for the past four years as tabulated by Executive Director Larry LeBlanc.

YEAR	SILENT AUCTION	DIRTY DOZEN	RAFFLE	TOTAL
2009	\$1750	\$1800	\$0	\$3550
2010	\$1264	\$2460	\$0	\$3724
2011	\$1936	\$2835	\$0	\$4771
2012	\$1531	\$3275	610	\$5416

TOWA 2012 EIC Photography Category Winners

Please take a moment to more closely examine these winning photographs from the TOWA 2012 Excellence in Craft competition.

CATEGORY 1: OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY, PEOPLE



David Sikes

First Place: David Sikes, "Foggy Kenai Sunrise," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, July 31, 2011.



Lefty Ray Chapa

Second Place: Lefty Ray Chapa, "Cast... Away," *Southwest Fly Fishing Magazine*, May/June 2011.



Third Place: John Goodspeed, "The Smallest Fish," *San Antonio Express-News*, March 25, 2011.

TOWA EXCELLENCE IN CRAFT AWARD WINNERS

CATEGORY 2: OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY, WILDLIFE



First Place: David Sikes, "Tree Top Baldy," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, July 31, 2011.



Second Place: John Jefferson, "King of the Sendero," *Open Seasons*, October 30, 2011.



Third Place: Jim Steiert, "Grey Ghosts of Dawn," *The Hereford Brand*, October 2011.

TOWA EXCELLENCE IN CRAFT AWARD WINNERS

CATEGORY 3: OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY, OPEN



First Place: Shannon Tompkins, "Waterfowler and Dog at Dawn," *Houston Chronicle*, Oct. 28, 2011.



Lefty Ray Chapa

Second Place: Lefty Ray Chapa, "Lining the Guadalupe River," *Southwest Fly Fishing Magazine*, November 2011.



Third Place: Jim Steiert, "Let 'em Down Easy," *The Hereford Brand*, March 6, 2011.

TOWA BOARD MEETING MINUTES

February 26, 2012, Courtyard Marriott, New Braunfels, Texas

- 1. The meeting was called to order at 9:45 a.m. by Bob Lusk.** John Goodspeed has agreed to continue as Chairman of the Board, as Bob stated he has several businesses to run and cannot commit the necessary time required for the office. Bob thanked everyone for their hard work and dedication. The following officers, board members and committee chairs were present: David Sikes, President; TJ Greaney, Vice President; Larry LeBlanc, Executive Director; Bill Mills, Treasurer; Peggy York, (2014) Recording Secretary; Judy Jurek (2014); Kendal Hemphill (2013); Susan Ebert (2013); Cody Greaney, (2014); Ralph Winingham, (2014); Marianne Odom, Scholarship Committee; and Judy Mills, Scholarship Committee.
- 2. Welcome to the newly elected board members.** They are David Sikes - President, TJ Greaney - Vice President, Judy Jurek and Peggy York. The board re-elected John Goodspeed as Chairman of the Board and Peggy York as Recording Secretary.
- 3. Copies of the General Membership meeting were distributed.**
- 4. Executive Directors Report:** Larry LeBlanc reported \$610 was received on the raffle. All other revenue will be forth coming. Larry discussed vulnerability in the position of Executive Director. He recommended the company "Carbonite" be reviewed to ensure our records are not compromised. He also suggested we look at a management company.
- 5. President's Report:** David Sikes had no report but announced he has assembled a committee to search for an Executive Director. The committee would include himself, TJ Greaney, John Goodspeed and Larry LeBlanc. There was much discussion on how to fill the position of Executive Director with many pros and cons of the process. Once determined the format of the application, both internal and external candidates will be considered.
- 6. Treasurer's Report:** Larry LeBlanc previously reported on the finances.
- 7. Roundtable Discussion of the Conference:** Several items were discussed to do better next year in Galveston. TJ gave a positive report on the Roundtable with the sponsors. It was discussed that the spouse fee should be increased to at least meet the cost of meals. A clearer explanation on the registration form should include the number of meals members, spouses and guests will be participating in. A flat fee for the spouse will be eliminated. Cost for spouses will be determined by the number of meals reserved. The Coleman tour was the only event that did not go smoothly. All events will be followed up a few days before the conference to ensure the event is still as advertised.
- 8. Old Business:** None
- 9. New Business:**
 - a. Ralph Winingham gave his resignation from the board as Board Member and Newsletter Editor. He is intending to apply for the Executive Director position and did not want the appearance of prejudice.
 - b. Cody Greaney and Susan Ebert want to offer a business plan and to offer a new website. Susan suggested we recruit funds from corporate sponsors to help build a dynamic site that can promote our organization. A motion by David Sikes to authorize Cody and Susan to pursue this opportunity was seconded by Kendall Hemphill. Motion carried.
- 10. Report of Standing Committees:**
 - a. Jonette Childs was not in attendance but the Galveston location was reconfirmed.
 - b. EIC had no report.
 - c. Marianne Odom asked if there were any changes needed to the scholarship process. After was much discussion, Susan Ebert suggested any changes needed would be left to the discretion of the committee. The board agreed.
- 11. TJ Greaney thanked the ladies that managed the registration desk.** The board agreed.
- 12. A motion was made to adjourn** by TJ Greaney and was seconded by Kendal Hemphill. Motion carried.
- 13. Next meeting will be at Spring Fling in Rockport, TX, April 22, 2012.**

Respectfully submitted,
Peggy York
Recording Secretary

Outdoor Fools Day Offers Food, Fun and Outdoor Activities

ATHENS, TEXAS – Life's better outside, especially during springtime in Texas. And nowhere will it be better than on April 7 at Outdoor Fools Day at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center (TFFC).

The annual event will run from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and all activities are free with regular paid admission to the center (\$5.50 adults, \$4.50 seniors, \$3.50 children ages 4 to 12) .

The event will showcase outdoor recreation opportunities in East Texas while teaching some of the skills to help enjoy them, such as camping, fishing, dutch oven cooking, birding and more.

The Blackland Prairie Raptor Center will display various birds of prey while explaining their place in the ecosystem and why it is important to protect them.

Returning for another year will be the popular Wildlife on the Move "The Unhuggables" show, which features a variety of animals and lots of information about them. Presenter Eric Brittingham delivers a rapid-fire presentation about the animals' habitats and conservation and debunks myths such as "snakes are slimy."

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Coastal Fisheries Division will present a saltwater touch tank.

The Lone Star Bowhunters Association and Dutch oven cookers are perennial favorites at Outdoor Fools Day. Young and old alike enjoy flinging arrows at life-size replicas of deer, hogs and turkeys almost as much as they like snacking on tasty goodies cooked over coals and served up warm.

Tracking dogs from Texas Trackers will do their thing along the Wetlands Trail, demonstrating how these amazing dogs with their sensitive noses can follow the trail of a wounded animal. They also love to be petted. (Please leave your own dog at home. Pets are not allowed at TFFC.)

Other exhibits will include a state park area, fly-fishing and kayaking instruction, and information on hunter education. Shopping for a variety of outdoor products will be offered by Cabelas, and the TFFC gift shop is well-stocked with snacks and fishing-related clothing and gift items.

Bring an ice chest to take home some rainbow trout: Fishing is always free at TFFC, and currently each person can harvest and keep up to five trout for free. The Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center is located at 5550 F.M. 2495, Athens, Texas, which is about 75 miles southeast of Dallas. For information or directions, call (903) 676-2277 or visit tpwd.state.tx.us/tffc.

Scholarship Winners Express Gratitude to TOWA



RON WOOTEN

Dear TOWA Members,

I'd like to express my gratitude to the Texas Outdoor Writers Association for awarding me the Dan Klepper scholarship. It is truly an honor to receive this award and I can't tell you all how much this means to me, both from the award itself AND the membership in the TOWA.

The past 2 years I've had the opportunity to write for *Galveston Monthly*, a small local travel magazine about Galveston and the surrounding areas: terrestrial, estuarine, and offshore. As a teacher I was able to reach students in my classroom, but as a writer and photojournalist I've had an even better opportunity to reach more people, hopefully to entertain, but more importantly to educate these readers about the creatures they see and the challenges our ecosystems face, both natural and man-made.

While my wildlife and fisheries education and marine biology work experience has given me scientific understanding of some of the many forces working in natural systems, not everyone speaks or understands the technical intricacies. As a writer I try to present information as an interpretive specialist, a go-between or translator from what some would say is scientific mumbo-jumbo to delivering a 'working man's' understanding of these vitally important concepts. People do care if they can understand what is really going on, and they will help do their part to help solve problems and find solutions to the many complex issues facing

us as we approach a time of too-rapidly dwindling resources. When I graduate I hope to be able to continue working as a photojournalistic interpretive naturalist, and would be very happy to work for a conservation or natural educational organization as a writer, photographer, or educator-or some combination of all these, delivering information that everyone can understand in a way that perhaps will move individuals from complacency into action in developing ways to live sustainably.

I am very grateful for Dr. Tom Linton's guidance throughout my education and career, and would like to thank everyone from TOWA for being so warm and welcoming at the conference. I'd especially like to thank Judy Mills and Marianne Odom for their assistance and introductions to so many fantastic people at the conference! Being at the conference was very enlightening, as it helped me understand what it would take for me to be successful as a working writer/photographer, and it gave me some definite goals on which to direct my energies and attention.

– Ron Wooten

Dear TOWA Members,

I regret that I could not be there in person to accept my scholarship check. My wife and I welcomed our son one month ago, and were hopeful that we could attend the conference, but young Samuel has had a rough week, and I needed to stay home to help around the house.

I cannot express enough how much it means to me to receive this scholarship for a second time. Last year, I was very confident with my application because I had a lot of different examples of my involvement in outdoor communication and education. When I started on my application this year, I realized it was going to be much more difficult. I had to use what I had done over the past 12 months, and that made me wonder whether I had done sufficient work to earn this scholarship.

I work full-time and go to school part-time, and it is very difficult to find scholarship opportunities for part-time students. This scholarship is a huge help in getting me closer to my Master's degree. My M.S. is in Marine Resource Management, and focuses on coastal conservation, policy and management. I should complete my degree in May 2013, if not sooner.

I have always loved the coast, and Galveston holds a very special place in my heart. Last year, I spoke of how my goal was to find a job that would allow me to share my love of the Texas coast with others, and also become involved in land conservation. I am pleased to say that I have accepted a position with the Galveston Bay Foundation as their Conservation Programs Outreach Specialist. I will be working with their various conservation programs, and also doing community outreach to help bring awareness to the issues surrounding Galveston Bay and to help increase public involvement.

I know that the support I have received from TOWA will be a valuable asset in this new position.

Once again, I sincerely thank the Scholarship Chairs, the Board of Directors, and all of the members of the Texas Outdoor Writers Association for this honor.

–Matthew S. Abernathy



MATTHEW ABERNATHY

TOWA President David Sikes Honored at 2012 Wetland Conservation Achievement Awards

ATLANTA – On March 16, Ducks Unlimited announced the winners of the 2012 Wetland Conservation Achievement Awards during the 77th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, held at the Hilton Atlanta. This year's winner in the Communications category is David Sikes, outdoors columnist for the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*.

"David has been a driving force for communicating issues important to waterfowl and wetlands conservation along the Gulf Coast and throughout Texas," said DU Chief Conservation Officer Paul Schmidt. "He has spent the last decade using his writing to promote the work of conservation organizations and the benefits that work provides hunters and waterfowl."

DU's Wetland Conservation Achievement Awards recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the restoration and conservation of North America's wetlands and other waterfowl habitat.

As the *Caller-Times* outdoors columnist since 1998, Sikes serves as a regular and reliable source of conservation-related information for approximately 50,000 southeast Texans. Sikes also promotes the outdoor offerings of the Coastal Bend in multiple venues, including other newspaper columns, magazine articles and group presentations, including the Texas DU State Convention.

"David does a tremendous job covering important conservation issues along the Texas Gulf Coast, including promotion of freshwater inflows into Texas bay sand estuaries, seagrass protection throughout coastal Texas, invasive species problems, water availability issues and the economic impacts of hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation," Schmidt said.

Sikes' friends and colleagues are quick to point out the writer's active pursuit of the topics he covers. Rather than sitting behind a computer wondering where his readers' interests lie, Sikes is out in the field, fishing the same waters and hunting the same areas.

"David is out there finding the stories. And he has a knack for seeing a much bigger picture. Corpus Christi is a long, long way from the Prairie Pothole Region,



Left to right: Paul Schmidt, DU chief conservation officer; David Sikes, *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* outdoors columnist and 2012 Wetland Conservation Achievement Award winner; and John Tomke, president of Ducks Unlimited de Mexico.

but through his writing, people along the Texas Gulf Coast understand the issues facing the Duck Factory," said David Schuessler, DU's national director of grassroots fundraising and a longtime friend of Sikes. "David helps his readers understand the linkages between places as far removed as Eston, Saskatchewan, and Edna, Texas."

Sikes is a longtime member of the board of directors of the Texas Outdoor Writers Association and currently serves as the association's president. He has received numerous awards from TOWA and was named the 2012 Professional Conservationist of the Year by the Harvey Weil Foundation.

"Conservation is the lifeblood of hunting and fishing" Sikes said. "Without it, I, too, would wither and die along with the habitats I enjoy."

To view all 2012 Wetland Conservation Achievement Award winners, please visit www.ducks.org.

Ducks Unlimited is the world's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing waterfowl habitats. Established in 1937, DU is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, with special events, projects and promotions across the continent. Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 12 million acres thanks to contributions from more than a million supporters across the continent.

Candidates Sought to Serve as TOWA Newsletter Editor

TOWA is seeking applicants from the membership who are interested in taking over the duties of TOWA newsletter editor.

After serving as newsletter editor for the past five years, Ralph Winingham is stepping down from the post and is passing on the duty of disseminating information on board activities and other items of interest to the membership. The March edition was his last as editor.

The editor's duties include producing, from a variety of sources, about 5,000 words of copy plus photos by the middle of each month for the following month's edition; copyediting, copyfitting and proofreading the same; and working with Board Member Susan L. Ebert, who does the newsletter layout. After approving the final version, the editor distributes the newsletter to all members via email and posts it to the TOWA website.

The editor receives \$200 per month for undertaking this information service for the membership.

Ebert has volunteered to take over as interim editor, but any interested individuals may contact David Sikes at sikesd@caller.com or by calling (361) 886-3616 for further information or to apply for the position.

CALENDAR

April 7 – Outdoor Fools Day at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center (TFFC). The annual event will run from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and all activities are free with regular paid admission to the center; \$5.50 adults, \$4.50 seniors, \$3.50 children ages 4 to 12.

April -22-23 – Annual Spring Fling and TOWA Board Meeting in Rockport-Fulton, hosted by the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce.

May 18 – Operation Game Thief Clay Stoppers Shootout, with a TOWA Board team participating. 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Capitol City Trap & Skeet Club, Austin. Prizes, shooting games, and silent and live auctions. For further information, contact Scott Grant at (512) 694-6585 or sgrant@austin.rr.com.

June 2-10 – National Fishing and Boating Week. Further information is available at takemefishing.org and at rbff.mediaroom.com.

July 11-13 – ICAST 2012 in Orlando, Fla. Obtain media credentials by registering at ICASTfishing.org/ICAST-press-room. Contact Mary Jane Williamson, Communications Director, at (703) 519-9691, x227 for more information.