

Enlarging journalism — and life

In Memoriam: Cole Campbell, Reynolds School of Journalism dean

By Deidre Pike '98, '02M.A.

That Friday morning, the couple had discussed hiring a private chef to cook a meal with wild salmon — a favorite entree — to celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary.

Cole Campbell, dean of the Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno, had just learned this would cost \$250.

His wife, Catherine Werner, balked at the expense. Campbell's response? Likely the characteristic grin — and a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"I think we should splurge," he told his wife.

Werner wasn't surprised.

Deidre Pike is a freelance writer and writing lecturer in the University of Nevada, Reno's Reynolds School of Journalism. She has contributed to several publications, including *The New York Times*, and her column "View From the Fray" has run for more than five years in the weekly *Reno News & Review*.

in Norfolk, Va., approached the world with gusto, from personal relationships to the lofty mission of repairing journalism. Hired as journalism dean in 2004, Campbell felt the profession — and the ideals that drove it — had suffered.

In November 2006, he moderated a Charles Kettering Foundation roundtable that addressed a report detailing the alienation people feel from politics, community affairs and the media. Campbell, once a senior associate at the foundation, hoped he could encourage new ways of thinking about

"Cole often encouraged us to do things that were slightly beyond our means or ability," Werner says. "He believed in living life each day as a celebration."

Campbell, former editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *The Virginian-Pilot*



Photo by Jean Dixon

Reynolds School of Journalism Dean Cole Campbell, though he was a man of ideas and of high concepts for his school, never completely lost the practicing journalist's compulsion to cover the story. In summer 2006, under the shade of his trusty straw hat, Campbell joined graduate students from the Reynolds School in covering the Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit.

the media, ones that gave citizens a voice.

"Journalism matters," Campbell often said. "We must enlarge our conception of journalism beyond merely printing news to helping people make sense of their lives and their times."

That Friday morning, after calling the journalism school to say he'd be 10 minutes late for a meeting, Campbell left home.

He never arrived at school.

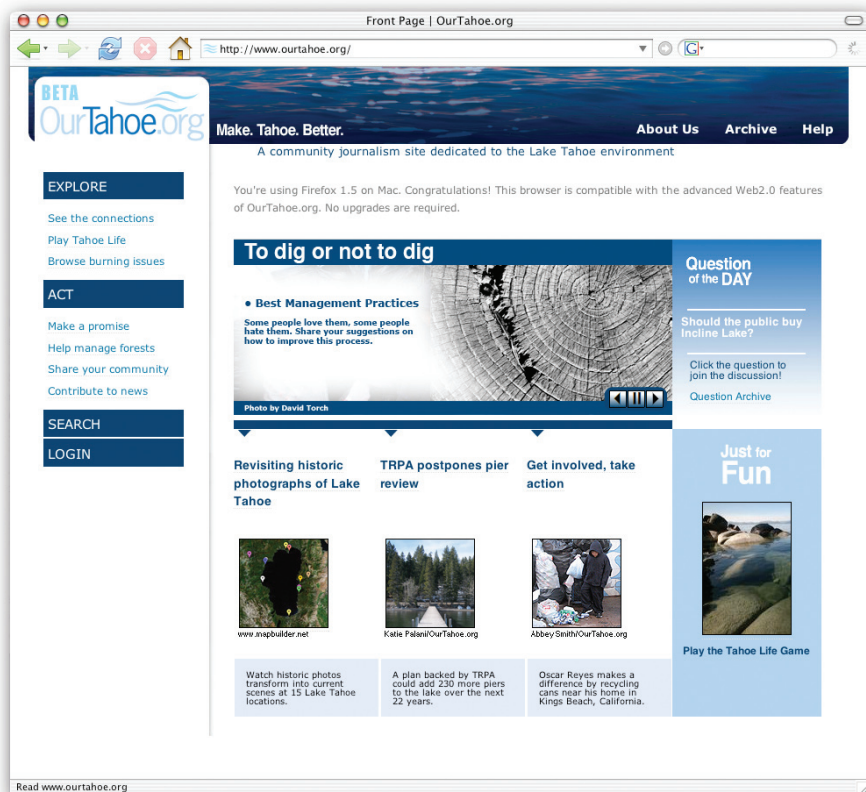
The 53-year-old died Jan. 5, 2007, when his vehicle flipped over on icy McCarran Boulevard.

University faculty, staff and students as well as Campbell's family and friends gathered in Nightingale Hall Jan. 24, the

first week of the spring semester. Before Campbell's memorial service began, a video showed scenes of him playing with his son Clarke, who turned 2 in February. In one scene, Clarke is dressed for Halloween. His dad helps him try out a slide.

Bagpipes played as Campbell's family filed into the concert hall.

At the stage's center, a table piled with books spilled over onto the floor. The dean, an avid reader and thinker, was never without a book or three. A fervent consumer of books on social, political and media issues, Campbell was known for overflowing bookshelves. His office was known as a maze of printed material piled on floor, table and



chairs. Campbell called this “intellectual mulch.”

Songs were sung, including “This Little Light” and “If I Had A Hammer.” Cole’s sister, Catherine Campbell, one of several speakers, humorously noted her brother’s “great passion” for books.

“We recognize that Borders and Barnes & Nobles everywhere are also mourning our loss,” she said.

Catherine Campbell spoke of her brother’s sense of humor. For their father’s 80th birthday, Cole had created a preacher costume out of a black turtleneck with white cardboard collar and a black tuxedo jacket. “He proceeded to recite a special version of the Lord’s Prayer, starting, ‘Our father, who art in Homestead Hills,’ which of course was where our Dad was living at the time.”

Campbell had ended the prayer: “Can I get an amen, somebody?”

Their father, an Episcopalian minister, died in November 2006. He’d written a letter to his children, with advice that his son had already taken to heart: “Worrying is a waste of time and energy. Apply yourself to finding possible solutions for your problems.”

LOOK ONLINE

Visit Cole Campbell’s online tribute: <http://journalism.unr.edu>

See what’s new at the Reynolds School of Journalism: <http://www.unr.edu/journalism>

When she finally ventured into Campbell’s home office after his death, Werner found her husband’s computer on—and a beta version of the Reynolds School graduate students’ OurTahoe.org website on the screen.

“Other than emails and phone calls, it is clear that the OurTahoe was the last thing Cole was working on,” Werner says. “He had gotten up early—as he often did—to get in quality work time before Clarke started demanding Daddy’s attention.”

The loss of the leader might have slowed progress on the innovative project—melding Web 2.0 technologies with the ideals of community-based journalism.

Instead, students in the year-long interactive environmental journalism grad program are further resolved to bring the project to fruition.

“Cole was so excited about this,” says Donica Mensing, the program director. “It



Photo by Jean Dixon

“He believed in living life each day as a celebration,” said Campbell’s wife, Catherine Werner. And nowhere was this more evident than in Campbell’s interactions with journalism students, whether in formal settings or in the comfortable confines of the Reynolds School.

was finally a way for him to demonstrate his ideas. He’s been telling people that journalism should be seen as a social practice rather than a professional practice, that journalism should be about helping people govern themselves.”

One of the questions that Campbell wanted to test: What changes when news organizations shift from treating audiences as consumers and spectators to treating them as participants and citizens?

“Cole believed that if you speak to people differently, people will respond differently,” Mensing says. “If journalism is about public purpose, it can call a public into being. If there’s a problem, there will be people in the community energized by that problem.”

Mensing described the project as taking the energy of Internet innovations like YouTube and MySpace—and adding a place-based component.

“We see real opportunities for people all around the lake to discuss issues that impact their lives,” she says.

One afternoon this February, grad students were feeling deadline pressure as they worked to complete several aspects of the site — from a social networking map linking civic groups to PromiseTahoe, a website unit-

Continues next page

ing potential volunteers and activists. Boxes of donuts were open on a table, remnants of the 50th birthday celebration for Larry Dailey, the school's media technology chair.

"Failure is not possible," Dailey says of the project. "If we envision our goal as to build a learning community — then even if something goes wrong and we have to work to fix it, it's not a failure."

OurTahoe.org launched March 1 of this year during the school's inaugural Journalism Week celebration. National media professionals from the Associated Press, MS-NBC.com, Gannett, ESPN, MediaStorm.org, the Maynard Institute and the Center for Public Integrity convened at the Reynolds School during the week for a think tank on the future of journalism.

Another of the program's graduate students, Sevil Omer, an assistant city editor at the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, recalled one of her last conversations with Campbell.

"He said that it's not that we do stories with these different tools," Omer says, "it's that we do the story differently — using these new tools."

The loss of the leader provoked reflection.

"It's making us ever so mindful of why we must do these stories differently," Omer says. "And in the spirit of Cole, to enjoy the whole process of learning."

Taped over the dean's desk was a quote that Campbell had copied, with nouns in all caps: "LUST * PASSION * GREED * GRAVITY * RIVERS * EARTHQUAKES * TSUNAMIS * IDEAS * IDEOLOGY * IMAGINATION * WAR * FAMINE * PESTILENCE * DISEASE."

The caption read: "Many forces have shaped the world. We specialize in two." Highlighted were "IDEAS" and "IMAGINATION."

Sitting at the dean's desk was Rosemary McCarthy, Reynolds' academic chair, recruited after Campbell's death to handle the day-to-day leadership of the 24-year-old journalism school.

"Cole infected everyone with his enthusiasm," McCarthy says. "That won't go away."

Campbell's books were no longer piled on floors and chairs. Many had been boxed and put in storage — to be donated to a eventual journalism library bearing Campbell's name.

The Reynolds School, McCarthy says, will continue on its newly charted course, becoming a school known for its "vigorous blend of theory, practice and critical thinking."

One challenge will be to maintain the level of energy and excitement that Campbell left in his wake.

"We have lots of momentum," McCarthy says. "And we have the people to put that to good use. Everyone here cares about the school, about journalism, about the students. How can we go wrong? I know that sounds Pollyanna-ish but I believe it."

The day after Campbell's memorial service, McCarthy spoke at the President's Associates reception, honoring donors to the school, in the Linn Reading Room. She lauded new faculty and staff who keep the Reynolds School "ahead of the game." She noted a rise in undergraduate enrollment. In Spring Semester 2004, the Reynolds School had 500 undergrads. This year, there are 619. Students have signed up for an array of new offerings, from interactive game design for journalists to entrepreneurship.

"In this generation, students are choosing to take major courses in more than one arena," she says. "They get it."

Memorial fund

A fund in memory of Cole Campbell, dean of the Reynolds School of Journalism, has been established with the University of Nevada, Reno Foundation. Campbell's sister, Cathy Campbell, will match gifts up to \$10,000. To make a gift online, visit <http://giving.unr.edu/giveonline.aspx>, click on "Give online," fill out your personal information and then designate the Cole Campbell Memorial Fund as the beneficiary.

For details, call Kristin Burgarello, the school's director of development, at (775) 784-4471 or email her at kburgarello@unr.edu.

Campbell transformed the school by driving a culture of innovation and improvement, University Provost John Frederick said.

"He didn't allow you not to be excited about changing," Frederick says.

Campbell's influence extended to the rest of the Nevada campus through his involvement on the Council of Deans.

"Cole contributed in so many helpful and unique ways," Frederick says. "We could sometimes get caught staring at trees and not looking at the forest. Cole helped us see the forest."

Werner remembers her husband's frequently used term: "Journalism enlarged."

Campbell wanted to know how conventional journalism's practices and lessons could be expanded and adapted to work better, she said.

"But I think that concept of enlargement really applied to all aspects of his life," Werner says. "He was always pushing the envelope, striving to improve things and make our relationship, our home, the journalism school, the University, journalism... the world a better place."

"These efforts weren't always appreciated or understood, but that never daunted him. Even in the face of criticism he persevered and soldiered on to do what he thought was right."

At the memorial service, Werner asked a few friends and family members to talk about Campbell's devotion to the Hebrew idea of Tikkun Olam, the human responsibility to heal and help the world.

"Cole believed in this concept very deeply and demonstrated his commitment to it in every thought and action he took," Werner says. "He helped heal people's self-confidence by letting them know he valued and believed in them. Cole helped repair an ineffective model of journalism by being a relentless champion of new thinking, new methods and new means of citizen engagement."

"Journalism enlarged. Life enlarged. Cole Campbell." 