Cathy Booth-Thomas to speak at J-Banquet

By Molly McCullough

Cathy Booth-Thomas, Dallas bureau chief of TIME magazine, will be the speaker at the Journalism Banquet April 17. Throughout her career she has interviewed everyone from Fidel Castro to Tom Cruise, and has reported from many foreign countries.

Every great journalist has to start somewhere. Booth-Thomas started reporting for several small Texas and Oklahoma newspapers, but she found her real inspiration for journalism while sitting in a parking lot of Towneast Mall in East Dallas.

“I was listening to the radio outside of Montgomery Ward, and it was about the Six Day War,” Booth-Thomas said. “I was listening to the reporter, and you could hear the tank crunching on the ground. And I wanted to be there; I wanted to do what he was doing.”

Booth-Thomas worked for the United Press International for 10 years and then TIME magazine since 1985. While working for UPI, she covered Mafia hits in New York and Palestinian fighters in Lebanon. A few years later, Booth-Thomas became the Rome bureau chief for TIME. She covered the Vatican, Italy, Greece and Turkey. Booth-Thomas has even had experience reporting on Iraq. She covered the Kurds fleeing Iraq from Saddam Hussein’s chemical weapons.

One of the most interesting interviews she did was with Fidel Castro while Booth-Thomas worked as TIME’s Miami bureau chief.

“With Fidel, you go and were told to come during dinnertime, which for Fidel, is like two in the morning,” said Booth-Thomas. “You do the interview and half the time you can’t have a tape recorder on or you can’t take notes. He is pretty much a real person. You may not like what he does but he is all there. He is not nuts.”

See Thomas, Page 3
Sue Mayborn visits the Mayborn Graduate Institute

By Margaret Myrick

Publisher Sue Mayborn visited Denton, Feb. 27, and was welcomed at a reception in the Mayborn Institute office. Mayborn graduate students, scholars, parents and local media attended.

Mayborn owns several media outlets in central Texas.

The visit consisted of a meeting with Mitch Land and Richard Wells to discuss the institute’s achievements and plans for the future, a meeting with NT Chancellor Lee Jackson, and a reception where students introduced themselves to the distinguished publisher.

“I’m sure a lot of Mayborn people were glad to finally put a face to the name,” said Jeff Ryder, a two-year scholarship recipient. “She’s done a lot for the program, but a lot of us haven’t had the chance to show our gratitude until now.”

Press Freedom International seeks student support

By Jason Goodman

Press Freedom International will present the Pius Njawe Award for Press Freedom at the C.E. Shuford Journalism Banquet on April 17. The organization presents an award every year to an outstanding journalist who overcomes press freedom barriers.

But giving awards is not all the club does. Club President Margaret Myrick has taken a proactive approach this year by raising money to send to help free journalists jailed in Africa for violating press laws.

“We want to fight corruption in the global media and raise awareness of breeches of global press freedom,” Myrick said.

PFI needs student support and volunteers to survive. There are several events planned in the coming year, and PFI needs your help. PFI is also in the process of selecting a new president to take over at the end of the semester.

“I would love to see someone take over the presidency who can generate more interest about press freedom than already exists on this campus,” she said.
Mayborn student scoops all local media with story

By Jesse Jack Jones

Embezzlement at UNT was front-page news Oct. 31, 2003, when Jason Womack introduced the campus to the most costly crime committed there in recent memory.

“There is no excuse for us to be scooped on any story on the campus,” Womack said. His feat was all the more spectacular because he had scooped everyone with his exposé. *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* both used Womack’s story as a basis for their own coverage of the financial iniquities.

The story, which involved two separate and independent cases of embezzlement totaling more than $250,000, was still in the initial stages of investigation when Womack, following the trail of tips, discovered the ongoing inquiry the police were running. “Rumors were percolating around campus that somebody had been dismissed,” Womack said. “All I knew was that it involved thousands of dollars and students.” He followed the trail to a successful conclusion and said that once the story broke, people would approach him and say they had heard the same rumors.

“I think I just happened to find this one,” Womack confessed. “It was just a matter of time until the story broke.”

When questions about how he should deal with the story arose, Womack consulted instructor and *NT Daily* adviser George Getschow and Pulitzer Prize-winning adjunct Dan Malone. “My biggest fear was making the wrong initial move and the entire campus clamping down,” Womack said, relying on advice from his two mentors to navigate the dangerous waters surrounding the case.

Womack has since turned his attentions to other crimes, such as the accusations leveled against Dr. Paul Schlieve, a former NT professor who was let go under suspicions of fraud and has since been charged with the distribution of methamphetamine. “I don’t have an affinity for crime reporting,” Womack said, “I was just trying to do stuff nobody else was doing.”

When he is not fighting crime, Womack is attempting to further his own education by any means at his disposal. Over spring break 2003, he flew to New York and shadowed *TIME* editor-in-chief, Norman Pearlstine.

“I tried to get as big as I could, I tried to see how big I could get,” Womack said of his bold move to spend time learning from one of the leaders in the industry. It was through Getschow, who used to work under Pearlstine when they were both at the *Wall Street Journal*, that Womack was able to make his plans for the shadowing.

“It was a really exciting experience, seeing that level of professional at work,” Womack said.

“Writing at the Daily has been a great experience,” Womack said by way of parting. He went on to say that just because it is a student publication, “I don’t think there is any reason we shouldn’t break big stories.”

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Thomas

*From page 1*

Booth-Thomas also interviewed many celebrities while working as *TIME*’s Los Angeles bureau chief, including Tom Cruise, Russell Crowe, Nicole Kidman and Tom Hanks. Despite all these interviews with many celebrities, Booth-Thomas says she would rather interview regular people to get better stories.

When asked who she would like to interview right now she replied, “Anybody who is not a politician. I don’t care whether they are Democrats or Republicans, politicians are politicians. I like people who are trying to find themselves. Politicians are so sure they’re doing the right thing. It makes for great copy, but not a great interview.”

Booth-Thomas had a little piece of advice for aspiring journalists not to overlook simple situations.

“History is not made when you think it is being made,” Booth-Thomas said. “You have to be alert to that. You always have to have your ear open for what people are saying.”
Mitch Land is more than just the Mayborn director

By Julian Aguilar

“I’ve seen miracles. I’ve seen amazing things happen.” These statements, by Mitch Land, associate professor and director of the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism, do not sum up entirely who he is. One cannot deny, however, that spirituality is a big part of this educator, the man some students may see solely as a journalism professor and director.

In a scene common to Mayborn Institute students, Land jokes that the word “y’all” may and should be used often, since “you all” is quoted in the Bible. He explains the intricacies of this “slang” term with a smile on his face.

Land is a man led by his faith. He insists, however, that he is not out to change people, but will share his experiences when asked. Land says he uses his beliefs, not to propagandize, but to enhance his ethical consciousness in his professional life, “[Spirituality] makes me more responsible,” he says. “I have to be accountable, not just to myself and my department. It makes me remember that ethics count, that ethics matter. It drives my interest in encouraging our students to be ethical.”

He also speaks candidly about the most tragic experience he faced, the death of his son Austin. A drunk driver killed Austin Land in 1996, and Land admits that he was transformed into a hard and bitter version of himself for years following the tragedy.

“I guess I blamed God for not protecting him,” he says. He admits the toll it took on him was tremendous, but now realizes the bitter grief is gone, and how fortunate he was to have had his son for the time he did. “It’s a blessing that I had him for 22 years.”

A fact not known by most of his students is that he is fluent in French, his undergraduate major at Midwestern State University, a skill he polished while studying abroad in France. He also speaks some Ewe, which is spoken in West Africa, where he spent 15 years of his young adulthood. Land recently was invited to help inaugurate the Eduardo Mondlane University School of Communication and the Arts in Mozambique, Africa, and lay the foundation of their journalism curriculum.

Land is also an avid reader, Voltaire being his philosopher of choice. He also plays the piano and clarinet, although students on campus may be reluctant to ask him to sit in on a jam session.

“I’ve only picked up a guitar, that’s about it,” he says.

For the time being, Land is content being in charge of the graduate program. He said that he would receive the same amount of pleasure in seeing Mayborn graduates work for the Denton-Record Chronicle all his or her life, as he would seeing them win a Pulitzer.

“The program is all about the students,” he says, sitting in his office awaiting his next advising session. It’ll be a wonder if the next student knows that not only are they speaking to their adviser and professor, but also to a man who has seen demons cast out of people, witnessed a child being healed from deafness, and counseled a man who had beheaded his own sister to please a charlatan priest.

It sounds like a pretty interesting life, y’all.