

Bee's Philp wins editorial-writing Pulitzer

By Sam Stanton -- Bee Staff Writer
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Tom Philp, an associate editor of The Sacramento Bee's editorial board, won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing Monday for a series urging the restoration of Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Philp, 43, choked back tears as he watched for Associated Press news bulletins announcing at 12:08 p.m. that he'd won American journalism's highest honor.

"I still have a hard time accepting this," Philp said as his colleagues and family surrounded him in The Bee newsroom, applauding loudly.

It is the fourth Pulitzer Prize for The Bee and the first the newspaper has won since 1992, when it was awarded two Pulitzers.

The award, which includes a \$10,000 prize, came for "Hetch Hetchy Reclaimed," a package of what the Pulitzer board called "deeply researched editorials on reclaiming California's flooded Hetch Hetchy Valley that stirred action."

Editorial page editor David Holwerk, who has overseen seven Pulitzer finalists in his career, including two winners, told staffers and editors gathered in the newsroom that "in the past two years Tom Philp has won every major award given for editorial writing in American journalism."

Philp, he added, "is one of the best editorial writers working in this country today."

The other finalists in Philp's category were Sebastian Mallaby of the Washington Post, who wrote about the crisis in Sudan; and David Yarnold and Daniel Vasquez of the San Jose Mercury News, who campaigned against unethical behavior at San Jose's City Hall. Yarnold was an editor of Philp's at the Mercury News.

Philp's award was one of 15 Pulitzer Prizes in 14 journalism categories unveiled Monday.

The Los Angeles Times won two prizes, one for public service for its coverage of "deadly medical problems and racial injustice at a major public hospital," the Pulitzer board said,



Tom Philp learns Monday that he's won the top prize in U.S. journalism. Celebrating behind him are, from center, Bee Publisher Janis Besler Heaphy, editorial page editor David Holwerk and deputy editorial page editor Maria Henson.

• [Read the winning series: "Hetch Hetchy Reclaimed"](#)

• [David Holwerk, editor of the Editorial pages, congratulates Tom Philp - Broadband | Low Band](#)

• [Bee Publisher Janis Besler Heaphy congratulates Tom Philp - Broadband | Low Band](#)

and another for international reporting by Kim Murphy for coverage of Russia's struggles to cope with terrorism, recession and political change.

The board awarded another Pulitzer in the same category to Dele Olojede of Newsday "for his fresh, haunting look at Rwanda a decade after rape and genocidal slaughter" there.

San Francisco Chronicle photographer Deanne Fitzmaurice won for feature photography for documenting efforts of doctors to treat a 9-year-old Iraqi boy seriously wounded in an explosion.

Word that Philp was one of three finalists for the editorial writing prize leaked out several weeks ago. Although the names of winners are supposed to remain secret until they are announced, word had spread among the editorial board by late Friday that Philp would win.

Nevertheless, Philp sat nervously at a newsroom computer at noon as the awards were announced in New York and relayed by the AP.

"Will you stop taking pictures of me crying?" he joked to staff photographer Jay Mather, a 1980 Pulitzer winner.

Standing among Philp's colleagues and editors as they waited were his mother, Nell Farr; his son Max, 11; daughter Charlotte, 9; and his wife, Lisa Lapin; and her parents, Larry and Ingrid Lapin. Lisa Lapin, a former Bee reporter and editor, is now assistant vice chancellor of communications at the University of California, Davis.

Philp's editor on the Hetch Hetchy project was deputy editorial page editor Maria Henson, who won a Pulitzer in 1992 at the Lexington Herald-Leader in Kentucky while working for Holwerk there. She called Philp's project a "worthy endeavor."

Bee Publisher Janis Besler Heaphy, standing on a desk in the middle of the newsroom, said the award came for an effort that is "in the best tradition of The Sacramento Bee, McClatchy and American journalism" and stems from Holwerk's philosophy of allowing writers to take chances.

"David has a knack for creating a culture that really inspires risk-taking and excellence," Heaphy said.

James McClatchy, publisher of The McClatchy Co., which owns The Bee, said Philp's strong suit was his "ability to go outside the box, to find stories and situations that needed attention."

Philp, a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, came to The Bee in 1992 from the Mercury News.

He began as a reporter in the newsroom, moving to the editorial board five years later to focus on water use and other issues.

Philp said he first contemplated writing about Hetch Hetchy on a plane flight as he looked out at the state's reservoirs and valleys below.

"I was aboard Southwest Airlines heading to Southern California, and as the water writer you like to look at the reservoirs along the way," he said. "I just looked out at Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy and thought, 'How beautiful.' "

Philp said he finally was spurred to tackle the project after reading a Fresno Bee story in December 2003 about a University of California, Davis, study on whether Hetch Hetchy could be drained and restored without damaging San Francisco's water supply.

Hetch Hetchy, which has been dubbed "Yosemite's second great valley," was flooded after Congress approved legislation in 1913 to dam the Tuolumne River and flood the valley upstream.

The measure provided San Francisco with a water supply it has relied upon since 1923.

But a computer model crafted by UC Davis graduate student Sarah Null and faculty adviser Jay Lund provided evidence the dam could be breached and the water held downstream in other reservoirs without depriving San Francisco of any water.

"That was kind of the turning point to think about taking it seriously," he said. "It just took a while to get up the courage to suggest it."

The Bee's editorial page already had voiced its opinion on the matter at least twice before. In 1913, the newspaper supported flooding the valley. In 1987, when Interior Secretary Donald Hodel suggested a study of restoring Hetch Hetchy, Bee editorials "mocked" the idea, Philp said.

The notion that Hetch Hetchy could be drained without harming San Francisco's water supply is highly charged, especially in the Bay Area, where officials have used their clout to scuttle such ideas in the past.

Philp, however, proceeded with a series of editorials and columns so detailed they included long passages from the Congressional Record of the original debate over the 1913 legislation.

Philp's editorials eventually led to suggestions by key legislators that the idea be studied, and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration has since agreed to assess the possibility of storing the water elsewhere.

Philp has won numerous journalism awards over the years, including several in 2004 for an investigative series looking into local municipal water boards and questionable spending by officials of the entities.

His awards for that series included a first-place National Headliner Award and the Scripps Howard Foundation's Walker Stone Award, but not, as Holwerk noted, the 2004 Pulitzer.

"He could and should have won the prize last year, but waiting a year is OK," Holwerk said.

Dateline, UC Davis, April 8, 2005

News for Faculty and Staff of the University of California, Davis

UC Davis research helps Bee win Pulitzer; Lund, Null advise on editorial writer's award-winning Hetch Hetchy series

By Sylvia Wright

As a ski patroller, Sarah Null fired explosives at snow-laden Sierra mountainsides to trigger avalanches. As a UC Davis geography student, she launched a bombshell into California water politics — a master's thesis on the feasibility of draining Hetch Hetchy Reservoir with minimal harm to downstream cities and farms.

That detonation launched an avalanche as well — one of public debate, led by Tom Philp, an editorial writer at *The Sacramento Bee* with a love of the high Sierra and long experience reporting on environmental and water-policy issues. Last summer and fall, with Null's thesis as a starting point, Philp wrote a series of columns and editorials that argued for undamming and restoring the once-spectacular Hetch Hetchy Valley.

On Monday, that series won Philp and *The Sacramento Bee* the highest honor of the journalism profession — the Pulitzer Prize —

for editorial writing. And when Philp's colleagues toasted him with sparkling cider in the *Bee's* pressroom, Sarah Null and her faculty adviser, Jay Lund, were there, invited by Philp to join the celebration. (Also present was Philp's wife, Lisa Lapin, who is UC Davis' assistant vice chancellor for university communications and responsible for Dateline UC Davis.)

"I couldn't have done this without Jay and Sarah," Philp said in an interview minutes before the Pulitzer announcement. "Their work was objective research coming from a respected third party — UC Davis. It was crucial."

"Working with Tom was great. He went to a lot of trouble to make sure the story was right," Lund said after learning that Philp had won the prize. "When he first called us last spring, he said he liked the thesis and wanted us to describe it for the front piece of a series of *Bee* editorials. I said to myself, 'Gosh, this could be huge.' "

Was Lund concerned about putting a graduate student into the brutal arena of California water fights? He chuckled. "Not really. Sarah is a very brave person. You get a sense of the sort of person she is when you look at her resume and see she's got a license to throw bombs."

The many long conversations with Null and Lund that followed helped Philp understand the Hetch Hetchy system and informed his articles, which began on Aug. 22, 2004. On Aug. 29, a long interview with the UC Davis researchers was published in the *Bee's* Forum section, illustrated with maps of the Hetchy water distribution network and a photograph of Null and Lund.



Tom Philp, left, of *The Sacramento Bee* talks with UC Davis graduate student Sarah Null and faculty adviser Jay Lund, a professor in civil and environmental engineering, during a reception at the *Bee* honoring Philp for winning the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing. Null and Lund provided research that inspired Philp's series of editorials supporting the restoration of Hetch Hetchy Valley. (Debbie Aldridge/UC Davis)

In that story, Philp introduced CALVIN (for California Value Integrated Network), a computer model Lund developed to analyze water supplies and delivery. In an accompanying editorial, Philp wrote, "Using state and federal dollars, the University of California, Davis, invented CALVIN in 2001 to calculate how changes would affect a water system. It has come in handy in other California water quandaries thanks to its dispassionate, outside-the-box view of the world. ... CALVIN, applying a computer's cold-eyed logic to the situation ... has done its job, which is to reveal whether a [water-supply] system is flexible enough for a change. This one is."

This year's Pulitzer for the *Bee* is not the first time the newspaper has turned to UC Davis expertise in its award-winning reporting. Then-*Bee* science writer Deborah Blum (now on the journalism faculty at the University of Wisconsin, Madison) won the Pulitzer Prize for beat reporting in 1992 for her stories on the ethical and moral questions surrounding primates in research, which included many interviews with UC Davis faculty and staff. That same year, *Bee* reporter Tom Knudson won the Pulitzer for public service for his stories on environmental threats and damage to the Sierra Nevada, which also relied in part on UC Davis expertise.

After Monday's announcement, Lund and Null were quick to point out that the CALVIN model is the product of several years of work by many UC Davis faculty and staff and almost 20 students from five graduate programs. Lund, a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in the College of Engineering, emphasized in particular the contributions of Richard Howitt, a professor in the Department of Resource and Agricultural Economics in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Lund said the *Bee's* Pulitzer-winning series, and the public discussion it generated, demonstrate the essential role that university research plays in public policy matters. "We are relied upon to develop and explore novel solutions to major problems of California and the world," he said.

That reliance means academics are obligated to present "both the upside and the limitations of our work," he added. "The public and media are smart. If Sarah's report had not been balanced, it would have received very little attention."

In fact, it received and continues to receive a great deal of attention. Tom Philp learned of it from a story in *The Fresno Bee*; *Fresno Bee* reporter had heard about Null's study and read it on the CALVIN web site. Null and Lund have made dozens of public presentations on the Hetchy findings specifically and the potential uses of the CALVIN model generally.

In one example, Null was asked by California state Assemblymember Lois Wolk, D-Davis, to report her conclusions to a large group of legislators' staff members. Wolk was then instrumental in prompting the state's natural resources chief, secretary Mike Chrisman, to order a report on the potential impacts of draining Hetch Hetchy Reservoir. It is expected this summer.

Null is continuing her studies for a Ph.D. in geography, focusing on efficiency in environmental water use. The CALVIN research group continues to develop and apply the computer model to a wide variety of western water problems, including long-term water management in California in an era of climate change; water concerns in Baja California; and cross-boundary water issues with Mexico.

"CALVIN is a very clever, refreshing way to look at water supplies and delivery," said Philp.

"We were very lucky to have such a talented and passionate journalist notice our work," Lund concluded.

UC Davis' CALVIN site is located at <http://cee.engr.ucdavis.edu/faculty/lund/CALVIN/>; and the California Resources Agency's Hetch Hetchy site is at <http://hetchhetchy.water.ca.gov>.