

Journalists and public officials sound off at Media Bash

by Karen Splawn
Staff Reporter

Las Vegas Review-Journal Editor Sherman Frederick said, during the Nov. 15 Media Bash, that he was not part of any anti-abortion strategy when he wrote about "Baby Adam" in his Oct. 27 column.

In the controversial column, Frederick wrote about an aborted fetus that was still viable but taken off a life support system. His story touched off protests by abortion foes and ran nine days before residents would go to the polls and vote on the controversial abortions referendum, known as Question 7.

This year's Media Bash, televised live on KLVX Channel 10, was a considerably tame one, with less than 50 people in the studio audience. It featured a panel of journalists and public officials, including Las Vegas Mayor Ron Lurie.

Frederick, who would not say who gave him the information on Baby Adam, said, "Everything that was presented in the column was true."

"It's just amazing that people said that it shouldn't [have been] reported," he said. "I think that's crazy."

Gwen Castaldi, a news anchor at KVBC, Channel 3, said there was much debate in her newsroom over the case. "I know there were a lot of questions on the timing [and] the follow-up," she said.

Sandra Thompson, managing editor of the Las Vegas Sun, said it was interesting that abortion opponents showed up at Humana Hospital Sunrise, where the abortion was performed, just hours after the Oct. 27 edition of the R-J came out. She added, however, that she couldn't answer if the story was manufactured by the pro-life camp.

Jon Ralston, the Review-



Media Bash - Local media representatives answered questions and took some hard knocks from local and state officials at the event held at Channel 10 studios.

Sherman Frederick, editor of the R.J., (concerning baby Adam) "It's just amazing that people said it shouldn't have been reported. I think that's crazy."

Last year's gripe festival was held in Wright Hall and had its share of yelling, lively banter and plenty of catcalls from a large audience.

Kathleen England, a member of Pro Choice Advocacy, asked Frederick why he hadn't revealed his sources and why he didn't assign the story to a reporter.

Journal's political columnist, said that it's easy for many to have conspiracy theories on Frederick's story.

Lurie, who never mentioned the coverage of his now-infamous land deal with former city manager Ashley Hall, criticized the media for reporting only the negative aspects of city government. "I

don't want to be used as a tool to win awards," he said.

Frederick asked Lurie if there was any particular story that bothered him, but the mayor wouldn't say.

Metropolitan Police Department Undersheriff Eric Cooper was also curious as to why the media was so hard on law enforcement.

An example of that, he said, was a recent story that ran in the Review-Journal about a survey stating that 81 percent of those persons asked believed the police department was doing a good job, with 19 percent saying the opposite. The R-J's headline had only

the 19 percent unfavorable rating. Frederick said that the headline was irresponsible.

Gaming executive Mike Sloane wanted to know why there is a "circling of the wagons" in the journalistic community and reporters don't take each other to task for inaccurate reporting.

All journalists on the panel agreed strong ethics and a commitment to the facts are needed for a reporter. Frederick, however said there should be no single code of ethics for reporters. "What I want is an independent thrust," he added.

Cooper accused him of having a double standard, because journalists demand that public officials live up to a certain code, but not reporters.

In the past, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) have censured reporters for negligent stories, but Thompson said, "If you're responsible, there should be no problem."

Castaldi said those in her

profession are human and can make mistakes. "Things slip through," she said. "You really have to hope that the source you have [is telling the truth] and your sense of news gathering is good."

Ralston said press organizations like the SPJ need more power to censure journalists who are careless.

The Review-Journal's policy requires reporters to reveal their sources, Frederick said.

Most news organizations, Castaldi said, won't run with stories by rookie reporters who say they have many different sources.

Not all audience questions and discussion by the panelists were so serious. One man, a devout horse racing fan, asked Frederick why his beloved sport didn't get much coverage in the

R-J. Frederick replied that reader surveys taken by the newspaper staff showed that people weren't that interested in the sport.

Missing scientists add new twist to cold fusion controversy

(CPS)—The controversy over "cold fusion" has reached a new level: the scientists who first announced it are missing.

University of Utah Professor Stanley Pons and British Prof. Martin Fleischmann startled the world in 1989 when they announced they had managed to achieve a nuclear fusion reaction at room temperature, a feat previously thought to be scientifically impossible.

Neither Pons nor Fleischmann attended an Oct. 25 meeting of a state panel that oversees the \$5 million the state legislature, impressed and excited by the possibilities the discovery presented, appropriated to further "cold fusion" research.

After more than a year of no significant results, the researchers started falling out of favor. Other labs, with the exception of a well-received experiment at Texas A&M University, were unable to duplicate Pons and Fleischmann's results.

Meanwhile, more traditional work on fusion—potentially a nonpolluting way of producing nuclear energy, and much safer than current fission methods—proceeded.

On Oct. 2, scientists at Princeton University announced they had coaxed a fusion nuclear reactor to produce encouragingly high

levels of energy.

"The idea (behind announcing the discovery) is to get appropriate coverage that is truly important, without hyping something that isn't significant," explained Princeton assistant news director Jacquelyn Savani in noting the difference between the Princeton's announcement and the almost circus-like promotion that surrounded the Utah experiment.

"There was euphoria for several days until the skeptics came in and started bursting bubbles," Utah spokesman Larry Weist recalled.

The university bookstore sold cold fusion mugs and T-shirts, while people in the community sold "fusion in a bottle" kits.

The mood in Salt Lake was more somber when Pons and Fleischmann failed to show up for the meeting to discuss the new Cold Fusion Institute's financing.

Faculty colleagues said Pons had abruptly given his teaching duties to another professor just before the semester began, disenrolled his kids from their schools, and led at least some coworkers to believe he was going to spend the year vacationing in France.

Fleischmann reportedly was in his native England, being treated for unknown health problems.

However, Pons is expected at a Nov. 7 cold fusion conference, Weist said.

Wherever they are, other scientists at the Cold Fusion Institute have "been doing most research without Pons and Fleischmann," Weist said, adding cold fusion itself is still being pursued.

Princeton publicists are more optimistic about their school's fusion efforts which, while they don't promise a future of limitless energy, have more scientific documentation than Utah's.

"This is a massive project" spanning 15 years, Savani noted. Researchers are "very sure" of their findings, and do not expect any controversy, she added.

Princeton scientists have created a reactor that produces energy at a ratio of 1 to .6 input to output.

The goal of fusion research is to build a reactor that would create more energy than was used to produce it.

Princeton researchers say their reactor has the capacity to reach a one-to-one ratio of input to output, but add that several things need to be worked out, including determining how to extract the energy from the reactor, before it can be put to commercial use.

TURKEY FACTS

The turkey, a traditional American Thanksgiving food, is native to North America. Fossils show turkeys roamed Texas 2.5 million years ago. Mexican Indians were probably the first to domesticate them.

Benjamin Franklin supported the turkey as the U.S. national bird. He said it was "more respectable" than the bald eagle, which sometimes eats carrion and steals food from other birds.

A day-old turkey weighs about 2 ounces. A year-old male turkey may weigh as much as 50 pounds.

