

Re-launched Forum for Community Journalists aims for diversity

The Forum for Community Journalists (FCJ) has relaunched the organization as an independent body serving the interests of local journalists countrywide, following 18 months of drama after the main community publishing groups withdrew from the Community Press Association (CPA). The FCJ aims to promote more diversity and representation.

The FCJ's Mission Statement, states that the Forum's objective is: "To promote the interests of and nurture excellence in community journalism through a national programme of diversity, development and growth. We will strive to deepen our credibility among all sectors of South African society."

In this context, the meeting made the following decisions, among others:

- To further improve communications with journalists and others in the community press sector through regular press releases, the development of a website and the strengthening of the Forum's newsletter, Deadline.
- To begin preparation for five training seminars in the Western Cape, Mpumalanga/Gauteng/Limpopo, Free State/North West Province/Northern Cape, Kwazulu Natal and the Eastern Cape, to be held during 2005. Last year, more than 400 people attended the Forum's seminars.
- To actively campaign around issues affecting journalists - a process that began during 2004.
- To be part of an advisory group that facilitates the further transformation of the prestigious Sanlam awards so that it attracts a broader cross-section of the South African media fraternity.
- To draw more journalists into the activities of the Forum.
- To participate in the activities of the Association of Independent Publishers, SANEF, the Press Ombudsman committee and other relevant groups.

The FCJ was set up 14 years ago as a sub-structure of the Community Press Association, to serve the interests of local journalists. In the last 18 months, there has been major restructuring within the CPA, sparked by the withdrawal of Caxton, Media 24 and Independent Newspapers. The CPA has metamorphosed into the Association of Independent Publishers of Southern Africa (AIPSA), which represents smaller, independent publishers.

The FCJ is setting itself up as an independent body representing community journalists from across the spectrum. The FCJ will thus draw its members from the big companies and the myriad of independent and emerging publications. The FCJ will continue drawing administrative support from Print Media South Africa. The FCJ's current strategic goals are to set up a new constitution and secure sufficient funding for its proper and dynamic functioning.

The current interim committee come from the following groups/newspapers: Cape Community Newspapers, Middelburg

Observer, the Rekord, the Potchefstroom Herald, the Kathorus Mail, the Grocott's Mail, Big News, the Southern Globe (Lenasia), the Vryheid Herald (KZN), Ons Stad (Free State).

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