

Are We There Yet? An Argument For Maintaining the NMPW Name

By Chris Burroughs

Are we there yet? That's the question New Mexico Press Women need to ask when considering a name change.

Press Women was born out of an era when women were few and far between in the newsroom and when journalism wasn't considered a "safe profession" for women. This organization stepped in and encouraged women to not only become journalists but to be successful.

Women are still being shut out of good-paying jobs, and men continue to be dominant in all areas of media, including journalism and public relations. Susan Antilla wrote an investigative piece on the topic for CNN on Sept. 18, 2012 where she noted that "men make up 60 percent of newspaper employees, write 80 percent of newspaper op-eds and author most articles in 'thought leader' magazines such as the *New Yorker*," which in 2011 had 242 female bylines and 613 male. She added, "The record for 'new media' is better than print, though men and women are still nowhere near parity." In a March 18, 2010 cover story, surprisingly titled "Are We There Yet," written by three *Newsweek* women, the authors said 39 percent of the people on the *Newsweek* masthead were women, up from 25 percent in 1970. But men still had the star power, writing 43 of the 49 cover stories the previous year.

In 1993 our own organization, National Federation of Press Women, conducted a study that produced figures showing that women in management positions had risen by only one percent per year since 1977. If that rate continued, it would be another 30 years before there would be gender balance in top newspaper jobs in the United States.

And acknowledge, too, that the 106 year-old prestigious National Press Club in Washington, D.C. excluded women until 1971.

So, are we there yet? I think not! Hence the need for an organization with the name women in it that shows female journalists and media specialists it exists to be an advocate for women in terms of pay and promotion. Of course men are welcome to join the group. Of course, we want them. But remember our roots and the long road we still have to go for equality.

NFPW has struggled with the concept of changing its name for many years. Denise Tessier, long-time NFPW historian, said in a lengthy article in the organization's March 2010 newsletter that while some states were changing their names to titles like Ohio Professional Writers and Wyoming Media Professionals, New Mexico did not. She wrote, "New Mexico talked about it, but did not change. In 1994, NMPW surveyed its members in order to set goals. The more than 40 responses to a 24-page questionnaire revealed most members remained in NMPW for

networking, professional enrichment and friendship. And when asked how members felt about changing NMPW's name, four respondents said to change it, 16 said don't and 10 said change it only if national does."

The organization again revisited a name change in 2010 but could come to no consensus, and the name remained Press Women.

We all are aware that "press" is obsolete in a period where the numbers of newspapers are shrinking as more and more people get their information and news from the Web. But we should keep in mind the value of a name and the organization – an organization that has served New Mexico media professionals for 64 years. The name is recognizable, has clout and value. If NFPW changes its name, it will be just one more group in a labyrinth of groups with no name recognition.

If the intent of a name change is to attract new members to NFPW, it may backfire. Author and motivational speaker Richard Brody said in article in the online publication *Ezine Articles* Dec. 30, 2013, "A review of all sized organizations, whether small, intermediate or large, has indicated that nearly all have experienced a reduction in membership over the last couple of decades, with an even larger decline in the past decade. This includes various types of groups, including professional organizations, civic organizations, organized political parties, philanthropies, religious, etc." He noted in the article that there are several reasons for this, including 1) People are unwilling to spend money to belong; 2) The organization may not have evolved for modern times; 3) Many organizations suffer from a dearth of leadership; 4) Many leaders are not motivated; 5) Organizations need to address the issue of perceived values. Sounds a bit like Press Women, doesn't it?

I give you more reasons that I have noticed on my own why a name change won't bring in new members to Press Women. Journalists and other media professionals, especially people in their 30s and 40s, don't have time to participate. They are busy working and taking their kids to soccer practice, ballet classes and so on. Kids can't walk or ride their bikes to these events because they are either too far from home or it might be too dangerous. As a result, these responsibilities fall to the parents. In addition, young people in their 20s don't want to attend meetings; they want to go to movies or the bars or work.

I hope the NFPW membership gives careful thought to the idea of a name change. The name New Mexico Press Women has served the organization well for 64 years and will continue to do so in the future.