

ae TV

# NLGJA Seigenthaler Award for Excellence in Local Television

## First Place Presented to "Dads," Jessica Abo, WCAX-TV

BY JOHN SCAGLIOTTI

**W**CAX News Director Marselis Parsons is quite proud that one of his youngest producer/reporters has won a national award. "Impressive" was the word used by Parsons in describing the news that Jessica Abo won first place for the National Lesbian and Gay Journalist Association/Seigenthaler Excellence in Local Television Award. Abo's award-winning news story, "Dads," was part of a series of reports recently broadcast by Burlington's WCAX-TV on various forms of adoption taking place in and around Vermont.

As the title of the second of four WCAX reports indicates, "Dads" is about the "non-traditional" adoption of a young girl named Cheyenne and her baby brother Takoda by two Vermont gay men, Craig Stevens and James LaPierre. In the piece, we hear from not only the fathers, but also the birth mother, Karen. Abo asks Karen what she will tell her children why she consented to have them adopted by Stevens and LaPierre. "It's going to be hard telling them why I did it. That's going to be the hard part," says Karen. Abo continues, "And what will you say?" Karen replies, "I did it because I wanted to do what's best for you and I love you and I'm sorry I couldn't give you what you needed." In the piece, Karen adds strong praise for Stevens and LaPierre, "I like them a lot. They're good parents."

Jessica Abo flew out to Chicago's famous Palmer House to personally receive her NLGJA award November 8th. In the Windy City she was greeted by warm applause and congratulations by hundreds of her journalist peers who had gathered from across the nation to be part of the awards ceremony.

Abo told *OITM* that she was "ecstatic to win an award from the gay journalists association." Abo said she told the audience, "When I was in college, determined to be a good journalist, I took all types of courses, like American History of Gays and Lesbians, so I could better understand the communities I would be covering. And now to receive this award from NLGJA, well, it is extremely touching

and beyond being honored." The excitement of the award also spread to her parents, who flew up from Pennsylvania to celebrate with Abo at the awards ceremony.

PHOTO: ANDREW COLLINGS



Jessica Abo

News Director Parsons was also pleased with the results, especially when the piece was put on the WCAX webpage. "It received an incredible amount of hits, more than 5,000," he said. The record before that time had been a piece on Hooters, which came in at 200 hits.

Abo was pleased that she did not receive any negative emails about her reporting and that the "Dads" in the piece, Craig and James, called and told her

how much they appreciated her work. Abo added, "I promised them that the piece would not be so much about them being gay but about them being parents."

NLGJA is an organization of journalists, media professionals, educators and students who work within the news industry to foster fair and accurate coverage of LGBT issues. NLGJA opposes all forms of workplace bias and provides professional development to its members. It has more than 1,300 members around the nation.

NLGJA's Excellence in Journalism Awards was established in 1993 to foster, recognize and reward excellence in journalism on issues related to the LGBT community.

In addition to Abo's award this year, other awards included first place in Network Television to Lesley Stahl at CBS News' *60 Minutes* for a piece entitled "Gay or Straight?" The first place winner of the Sarah Pettit Memorial for Excellence in LGBT media went to Melinda Lo, AfterEllen.com. ▼



John Scagliotti, a documentary filmmaker living in Guilford, is head of the documentary caucus at NLGJA and a former recipient of an NLGJA Excellence in Journalism Award.

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