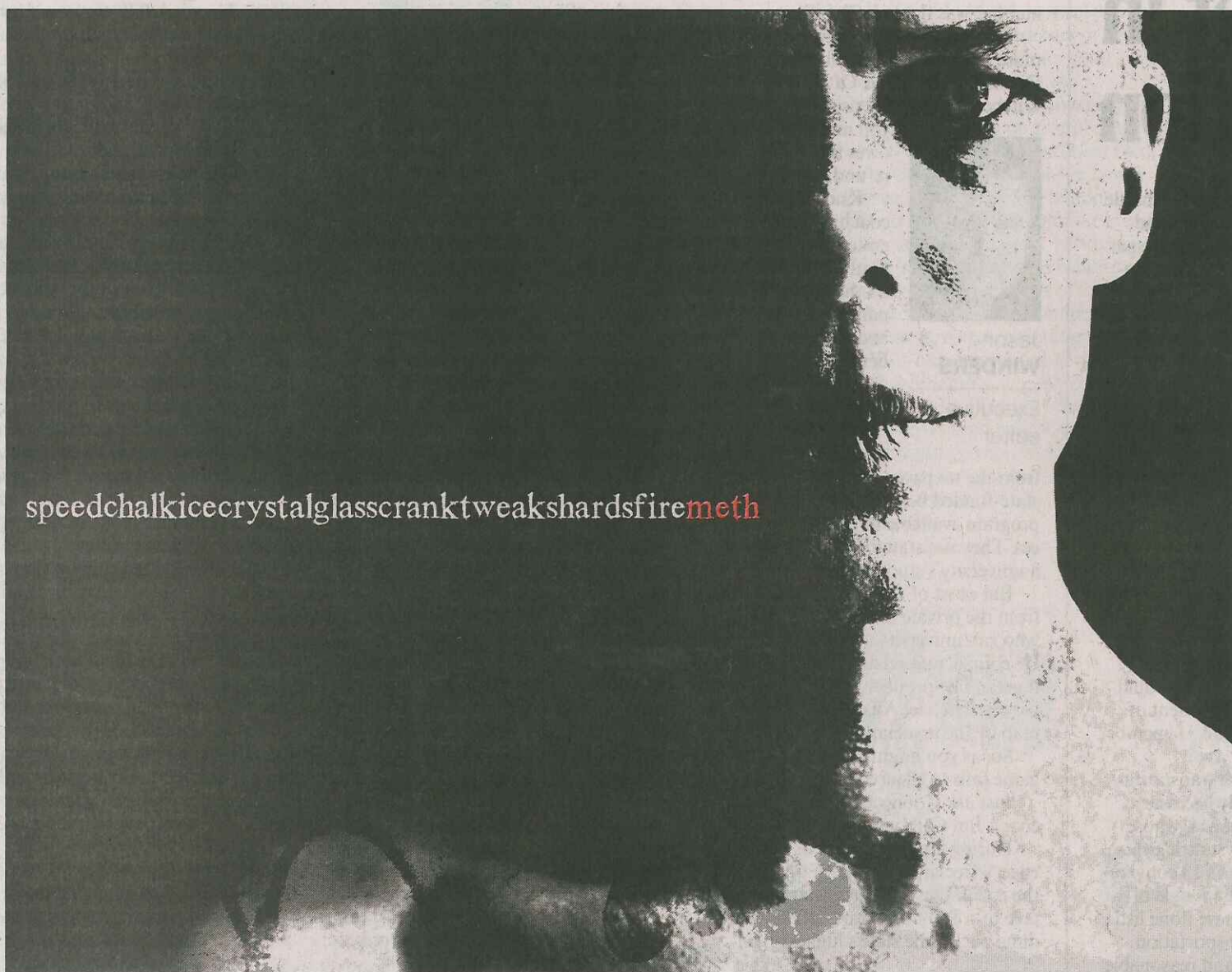


insight&ideas

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ATHENS BANNER-HERALD
SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2009

THE BIG IDEA



speedchalkicecrystalglasscranktweakshardsfiremeth

MONSTER

among us

FORUM

Bloggers no replacement for the pros

By Claire Rock

Go to school, develop an expertise, get a job, put your knowledge into practice, work hard.

The steps to success, right?

But what if thousands — maybe millions — of people are trying to do your job with no expertise, no hard work?

This is exactly the reality into which journalism students, such as myself, will be stepping as we begin our careers in the news media. The question for us is how we can work as self-respecting professional journalists as “citizen journalists” are taking over the Internet.

Ken Edelstein, former editor of Creative Loafing, an alternative weekly newspaper in Atlanta, wrote recently in a commentary published in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that “voluntary watchdogs” — citizen-journalists using the Internet — “could leave citizens better informed than ever.”

The public will not be better informed by untrained amateurs than by qualified reporters trained in such writing for the mainstream media. The skills I’m learning at the University of Georgia are crucial to good journalism. The ethical standards and professional integrity my fellow students and I will have as a result of our education will distinguish us from the army of bloggers now posting on the Web.

Our commitment to fairness and balance isn’t present in all blog “journalism.” Indeed, bloggers often knowingly disregard opposing viewpoints on issues of public interest.

Many blogs facilitate discussion of important public issues and are positive additions to the market-

METH INGREDIENTS

- Ephedrine, pseudoephedrine
- Rubbing alcohol
- Toluene (brake cleaner)
- Ether
- Sulfuric acid
- Methanol (gasoline additive)
- Lithium (camera batteries)
- Trichloroethane (gun scrubber)
- Anhydrous ammonia (fertilizer)
- Sodium hydroxide (lye)
- Red phosphorus (matches)
- Iodine
- Table salt/rock salt
- Kerosene
- Campfire fuel
- Muriatic acid
- Paint thinner
- Acetone

By Jim Langford

As a native North Georgian, I'm proud of our unique heritage and our communities. I'm also proud of how we have grown and changed.

But something ugly and dangerous is threatening our lives, our families and our future: methamphetamine, or as it is known more commonly, "meth."

Meth is not a scarecrow like the kind we laugh about from the days of "Reefer Madness."

This drug is a real monster — a flesh-eating, brain-frying, homicide-suicide inducing, child-poisoning monster. And it costs us big money.

Recently, the RAND Corporation released its findings of the cost of meth in the United States. The cost across the country is an astounding \$23.4 billion per year, and the cost in Georgia is about \$1.3 billion per year.

In this moment of tough economic conditions, we cannot afford these escalating meth costs: health care, child care, law enforcement, incarceration and lost productivity in the workplace. And we can't afford the human costs and lost opportunities that may set us back for generations.

Scientists tell us meth is more addictive than other drugs because it produces large surges of dopamine throughout the brain — five times more than drugs like cocaine. Addicts go on sleepless binges that last

for a few days to as long as two weeks.

When these addicts look for more meth to feed their needs, nothing can stop them. They rob parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, co-workers and strangers. They steal credit cards, electronics, copper wiring, appliances — anything they can convert into cash and more meth.

In recent years, large-scale meth production in Mexico has provided a higher-quality drug at a cheaper price. But small toxic labs still persist in homes everywhere, and they endanger everyone — addicts, children and law enforcement personnel.

From 2000-05, meth-related crime in Georgia increased by more than 132 percent, and meth-related prison admissions increased 96 percent.

Now, some Georgia counties report that 70 percent of foster care children come into their systems because of meth-addicted parents. Some Georgia courts say that almost 100 percent of their child deprivation cases also are meth-based.

Most of these dismal statistics originate with young people — those most vulnerable to trying meth. Georgia now ranks third in the United States for the total number of reported meth users between the ages of 12 and 17. Compared against states, a group of counties in North Georgia rank first, on a per capita basis, for meth use among teenagers.

In response, Georgia will

launch a privately funded meth prevention campaign. Called the Georgia Meth Project, this effort is modeled after the Montana Meth Project, a highly successful program begun in 2005 in response to the meth problem in that state.

The research-based Meth Project model combines an award-winning media campaign with community action programs.

The Montana Meth Project is credited with reducing adult meth use in the state by 70 percent; a decline of 53 percent in meth-related crimes; and a 50 percent decline in meth-related foster care admissions.

Six other states began similar programs within the past two years. Georgia will be the first Southern state to launch such an effort.

We are fortunate that business, health, political and law enforcement leaders in Georgia are stepping forward to address this emergency.

Lee Shaw, chairman of the Georgia Meth Project and a former executive with Shaw Industries, and Attorney General Thurbert Baker are working closely together to make the program successful.

The Georgia Meth Project takes shape over the coming months. You may be asked to help. You can start now by asking questions and understanding the depth of this danger Georgia faces.

• Jim Langford serves as executive director of the Georgia Meth Project.

place of ideas. But many feature banter — often biased or untruthful — that skews public understanding.

Our role as professional journalists in the future will be even more important, as we work to sort out this information and present truthful news to the public.

Even well-educated citizens don't have time to look over the shoulders of public officials. Thus, the public needs unbiased reporting, and I believe the public will continue to seek out the work of professional journalists, whether on the Web or in print.

The increasingly chaotic nature of the Internet — unedited, uncontrollable — could cripple our profession, if not challenged by those of us who will be embarking on careers in it.

Now more than ever, I understand the importance of flexibility in this job, as well as having an expertise.

In many cases, a willingness to develop new skills amid rapidly changing technologies may be the reason one reporter keeps their job and another gets canned.

We're arriving in a new era, as a new breed of journalists. As much as old-timers would like to return to the days of print-only media, we know that day is gone.

I'm confident the standards to which we hold ourselves and our work will distinguish us, and professional journalism, from the clutter and chatter of the Internet.

Bloggers are here to stay — but so is professional journalism.

• Claire Rock, a junior majoring in journalism at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, is also managing editor of the Pandora yearbook.

School thought

There always will be children who are left behind as long as their parents never caught up.

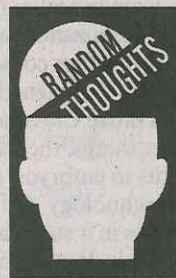
Gerard F. Lentini

Where's the change?

So much for change we can believe in. What President Obama and his fellow Democrats are giving us is the same old class envy that has been the cornerstone of liberalism for years. The market continues to drop each day, people lose their retirement savings, and our president has the nerve to say he doesn't pay attention to the markets. Are you serious? This guy is our president? Repeat

after me: hope and change, hope and change.

Andy Oliver



Loopy make-up

I am constantly amazed at how many drivers ride around the Athens Perimeter in the passing lane applying make-up. Just last week, I got behind an SUV with a

Walton County license plate and a big University of Georgia sticker on the rear window. After flashing my lights at the driver several times, she finally moved over, and as I passed I noticed she had her sun visor down and was primping in the mirror. This is

almost a daily occurrence. I hope law-enforcement officers are stopping these drivers.

Todd Dorsey

Radio love

I just wanted to take this time and thank the wonderful people at Athens radio station WGAU-AM (1340) for its outstanding coverage of the snowstorm Sunday night and into Monday morning. I know I can count on WGAU News Director Tim Bryant during the week, but it was very comforting to hear a familiar voice Sunday night when the power went out, and all I had was a battery-operated radio. Thank you, WGAU, for still serving the Athens

community after all these years.

Sally Davidoff

Same for EMCs

Thank you many times over to the Georgia Power workers for the job done during the recent snowstorm. We appreciate your working in such awful weather and in such hazardous conditions to restore electrical service. When "the weather outside is frightful," you are the ones out in it. Thanks to your families, too, because I know many times you have to leave town to go wherever you are needed.

Jane Nute

• If you have a random thought you'd like to share, e-mail it to Editorial Page Editor Jim Thompson at jim.thompson@onlineathens.com.