

# DESERTSCENE

## GIVING BACK



**Indio Mayor Waymond Feron shakes hands with Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation President and Co-Founder Ricardo Loretta.**  
COURTESY OF SANDIE NEWTON

**Guest attend the Coachella Valley Journalism Awards and Media Hall of Fame Induction luncheon at Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage on Feb. 28.**

# Why investing in journalism is ‘an investment in community’

Barbara Kerr Special to The Desert Sun

Imagine living in a region with no local news coverage. In some parts of the United States, people don't have to imagine it: they live in “news deserts” where there are no longer any local news sources. The Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation (CVJF) was established to ensure that our desert doesn't become a news desert.

## A lifelong passion for journalism

Growing up in a small mining town in Mexico, Ricardo Loretta discovered his love of reading in a one-room school with one teacher and 10 students. After serving as editor of his college newspaper, he considered a career in journalism but chose a different path to support his family.

A longtime leader in Palm Desert Rotary, Loretta attended a meeting when Julie Makinen, then executive editor of The Desert Sun, was the guest speaker. After Loretta shared his lifelong “love and passion” for journalism with her, Makinen reached out to talk about challenges facing The Desert Sun and the profession.

In 2020, a time when reporting was needed more than ever against the backdrop of COVID, journalists across the country were losing jobs, being furloughed or taking pay cuts. Some news outlets closed. Gannett, the parent company of The Desert Sun, was among the companies offering buyouts. Desert Sun Opinion Editor Al Franco was among those who accepted one.

As Loretta remembers the conversation, he and Makinen agreed that “we absolutely need a forum for receiving community input and exchanging ideas and having editorials and everything else that the opinion section of a newspaper does.”

Their first step was to find out, as Loretta put it, “if the community really wants our newspaper” enough to provide financial support. Loretta invited Joe Wallace, then the CEO of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership, to join the effort as co-founder of what became the Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation.

In addition to being co-founder and past president, Loretta now serves as vice president of the CVJF board of directors.

“In the first three and a half months, we were able to raise enough money to



**Coachella Valley Journalism Awards Hall of Fame inductee Bruce Fessier is photographed with Arizona Republic Executive Editor Greg Burton, center, and Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation president Randy Lovely.**

TAYA GRAY PHOTOS/THE DESERT SUN

pay for an opinion editor to replace Al Franco for a year,” Loretta said, “and that gave us a lot of encouragement because the support was widespread.”

Loretta noted that more than 100 people donated in amounts ranging from \$10 to \$10,000.

## In service to the community

Before serving as vice president of community news for Gannett's USA Today Network, Randy Lovely was executive editor of The Desert Sun. Now retired, he is president of the CVJF board of directors. Its focus: community news — not just at The Desert Sun, but across the region.

“One of the first things I did was create an advisory panel that includes leaders of the various news organizations,” Lovely said.

He said the CVJF wanted “to sit down with those leaders and listen to them about what their needs are and what's happening within their newsrooms.”

This underscores the mission of the CVJF which, as Lovely said, is to support local journalists and news organizations “to help them be able to do their best work in service to the community.”

Today, the CVJF supports staffing, in-



**Rich Tarpenting, assignment manager for Gulf California Broadcasting, won the journalist of the year award at the Coachella Valley Journalism Awards and Media Hall of Fame Induction luncheon.**

ternships, fellowships and one-time funding needs to support journalism that wouldn't be possible without financial assistance. Through grants, the CVJF has supported the Coachella Valley Independent, The Desert Sun, KESQ, NBC Palm Springs and The Palm Springs Post.

It has also established the Coachella Valley Media Hall of Fame with inaugural inductees Karen Devine, Bruce Fessier, Frank Jones and Milton Jones. To engage the community on issues of journalism and news and media literacy, CVJF hosted a presentation on “The History of Political Cartoons and Newspaper Opinion Pages” at the Rancho Mirage Library.

Looking to the future, Lovely said, “One of the areas that I really want us to expand into, as we hopefully expand our fundraising, is training and professional development. We have a lot of really young journalists here. In many cases, this is their first job, so we would like to be able to put more effort toward helping them be better journalists.”

## Seeking guardians, defenders, supporters and protectors of the ‘Fourth Estate’

As it marks its fourth anniversary, CVJF has created a “Fourth Estate Membership Program” to support its ongoing work. A nod to the three branches of the federal government, the “Fourth Estate” reflects the role of journalists in providing information to the public to hold government accountable. Information about CVJF and the Fourth Estate Membership Program is available at [cvjf.org](http://cvjf.org).

CVJF board secretary and treasurer Makinen understands that some people may ask why they should donate dollars to support for-profit news organizations.

“We are very clear on the fact that we cannot influence or affect the business decisions that anyone makes in terms of running their news organization,” she said.

Instead, CVJF focuses on how do we help the journalists who live in this community and who have committed themselves to serving this community? How do we help them do their best work despite the challenging circumstances that they face?

“A lot of our news outlets do a lot of work to publicize the work of local nonprofits and all that they're doing,” Makinen said. “If there are no news outlets to let people know about these organizations, those organizations might not have the type of support they have. They might not reach the people that they're trying to help.”

“It connects people to their community,” she said. “It connects people to their neighbors. Investing in quality journalism, I think, is really an investment in the Coachella Valley itself.”

To learn more about the Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation or to make a donation, visit [cvjf.org](http://cvjf.org).

An award-winning journalist and writer, Barbara Kerr was inducted into the Dayton (Ohio) Area Broadcasters Hall of Fame. She is a past chair of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) College of Fellows.