

Gregory Stockard Distinguished Service Award

Michelle Brooks, Recipient



With 24 years in the newspaper business, Michelle Brooks has proven wrong her high school English teacher, who said Brooks would never make it as a professional writer.

The last 14 years, she has been a general assignment reporter with the Jefferson City News Tribune, reporting on historic preservation, veterans and military issues, and faith-related matters, as well as covering the communities of Russellville and Eugene.

Historic preservation was a new issue to Brooks when she arrived in the Capital City. It was Greg Stockard, namesake of this Distinguished Service Award, who took the time to explain the issue and answer her numerous questions.

She first was introduced to the city's historic inventory through regular meetings of the city's

Historic Preservation Commission and also as impending demolitions arose, such as the city-owned row of homes in 200-block of West McCarty Street; the Cook Mansion, where the Heisinger Bluffs assisted living units are today on West Main Street, and the Lohman House, replaced by The Salvation Army's Lohman Prayer Garden on Jefferson Street.

In 2008, the News Tribune launched a series of stories highlighting those properties designated as city Landmarks. With nearly 70 stories written about winners, Brooks said she was excited this year to write her first nomination for the awards on behalf of Central Missouri Newspapers for the News Tribune building at 210 Monroe St.

As people have stories to tell, so do places, Brooks said, noting the best part of her job is enlightening readers, sharing stories or details they didn't know before. That often is the case with the many century-old buildings that have become commonplace to the local eye, like the former Cole County Jail and Sheriff's House.

A reporter doesn't have the luxury of time to research most historic stories in-depth. So Brooks has valued the work provided by local authors, including Gary Kremer, Bob Priddy and Mark Schreiber, as well as the volunteer efforts of local enthusiasts including Cathy Bordner, Jenny Smith, Mary Ann Hall, Steve Veile, Dottie Dallmeyer, Jane Beetem, Henry Genske, Deedie Bedosky, Carol Blaney, Charlie Palmer, Bill Case, Laura Ward, Jim Dyke, Walter Schroeder and Janet Mauer. She also would like to say a special thanks to keepers of historic resources, including Anne Gue at the Cole County Historical Society, Robyn Burnett and John Dougan at the Missouri State Archives, Linda Endersby at the Missouri State Museum and Charles Machon at the Museum of Missouri Military History.

Some of Brooks' favorite history-related stories include exploring for hidden log cabins, recognizing the many local tributes to service members past and present, and whatever story she's working on next.

Brooks' first newspaper job was with The Carthage Press in the early 1990s as a stringer while still in high school. She has reported for the Central Methodist College Collegian in Fayette, The Daily Dunklin Democrat in Kennett, The Monroe City News, and The Current Local in Van Buren.

She also volunteered three years as editor of the American Legion Auxiliary's Missouri Girls State Gazette. And she has received many awards from the Missouri Press Association, Kansas City Press Club and Missouri State Teachers Association for her work.

Brooks met her husband Stephen, when he was a photographer for the News Tribune. Her son William is a junior and violin performance major at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau. And she is the daughter of Larry and Melinda Dixon, who recently retired after more than 40 years each teaching high school science and social studies/Spanish, respectively, in Lockwood.