

Picture Professional of the Year: Larry Levin

Larry Levin was presented with ASPP's "Picture Professional of the Year" Award at Picturehouse in New York City on October 20, 2004.

The Can-Do Picture Man

by Cathy D-P Sachs

I have known Larry since the mid-1980s when he was a photo editor at *Nation's Business*, and I was working with a stock agency in Washington D.C. supplying images to him. Our friendship has grown and our paths overlapped in so many different ways from that initial client-agent relationship. I am extremely pleased that ASPP presented him the 2004 award of Picture Professional of the Year – but hardly surprised that he should be honored in this way. As you read on you will, I hope, share my amazement at all the ways in which Larry has demonstrated not only his total commitment to ASPP, but to many other areas of our profession as well.

If you are fairly new to ASPP, you may only know Larry as the advertising manager for *The Picture Professional*, a job that he held for several years. What you may not realize is the critical role he played in the development of our flagship publication. Niki Barrie, who nominated Larry for this award, says this of him: "His contributions helped shape the growth and direction the magazine has taken. Larry encouraged business writers to send articles on small business concerns, the importance of disability insurance, and other topics we had only touched on until then. He brought Washingtonpost.com's writer/photographer Frank Van Riper into our magazine, and Frank's "Talking Photography" column has raised the bar for the quality that we now expect. These shifts in content have made *The Picture Professional* a better magazine and a more useful tool for members." On another note, in Larry's never-ending quest to bring in new advertising revenue, he recommended special subject issues and sleuthed new avenues, all of which created a more financially stable magazine for the first time in its history.

Perhaps I should go back a little further in time, though, to give you some perspective on Larry's involvement with ASPP. In the 1980s he worked with John Schultz, the former editor of *The Picture Professional*. In 1994-1995, Larry served as national president. During his term, he made establishing an ASPP website a priority, using friends, contacts – even family! – to get ASPP to where it needed to be. A couple of years later he took



© Nick Cabrera

Larry Levin handled credentialing of still photographers for the Senate Photo Gallery at the Republican National Convention in New York City earlier this year.

on a new and much needed role. Do you remember when you first started to get those ASPP emails? Well, that was Larry. As our first communications director, he wanted to give members every advantage and benefit when it came to news, jobs or announcements.

Louis Plummer has known Larry well over the years. When Louis was president of the DC/South chapter, he turned often to Larry for ideas for guest speakers, tours or upcoming shows. "When Larry worked with me on our virtual gallery, he had so

many ideas and so much energy we couldn't keep up with him. And while I was serving as national president of ASPP (2002-2003), when faced with a situation which was out of the ordinary, Larry was the man I would turn to." Energy, enthusiasm and loyalty – these have always been the trademarks of his character.

Larry started his career as a photo intern at the *Chicago Tribune* in 1980. He moved on as an account executive at Black Star, then as a photo editor at Hayden Publishing, and then at *Nation's Business*, where I first met him. Sal Catalano worked with Larry at Black Star and his friendship continues to this day. (Note: You probably can already see that this is a trend with people whom Larry has dealings. He works with someone and they turn into a lifetime friend.) Sal told me "Larry is a guy of his word – as honest a person as you have ever met. His passion and commitment for the industry are above and beyond."

In the 1990s, Larry was very involved with NPPA (National Press Photographers Association) and its Flying Short Course, which traveled around the country. Mary Lou Foy was the president of NPPA in those days and counted on him completely to organize and promote the event. "He does so many things and accomplishes so much effortlessly – he makes it look so easy." Also in the 1990s Larry took on the job of executive director of WHNPA (White House News Photographs Association). Kevin Gilbert, as the president, counted on Larry to be his right-hand man and to execute the bold vision he had for the association. Larry was the team captain, bringing into fruition the "Eyes of History" project, shows at the Corcoran, and

annual high-profile black tie dinners. Kevin says, "Larry was the steady voice of reason every year and gave me the confidence to make the bold moves to put WHNPA on the right path."

If you have been a member of ASPP for some time, you may have picked up that there are also many other sides to Larry. Periodically he would disappear to follow other pursuits and volunteer assignments. I got a big kick out of his going to L.A. in the fall of 2002 to be an intern on the set of *The West Wing*, and more recently as a photographer on *The Apprentice Season II*. And did you know that he has refereed the Northeast Conference Division I Women's Basketball from 1997 to 2003; is a member of the International Association of Approved Basketball Officials; and, refereed basketball at the 1991, 1999 and 2003 International Special Olympics World Games? Cool, eh?

Another fascinating side of Larry's extracurricular activities is the volunteer photography he does for the Best Buddies organization. (Best Buddies is dedicated to enhancing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities.) For more than 13 years, whether photographing events in L.A., Cuba, Miami Beach, at their fundraiser ball, or around the movement's founder Anthony Shriver and the Shriver family, again, it is Larry's helpful nature and abundance of ideas that endear him to people. As Mark Wylie, vice president of talent relations at Best Buddies, told me: "Larry is so generous with his time and easy to work with. He is part of the Best Buddies family, and it is not an event if Larry is not there."

Yes, I am a huge fan of Larry's energy too. How many times have I answered my phone to have him pour out yet more ideas as to how we can improve the magazine, the website or membership benefits, until I have to cry "Stop!" Meanwhile he is working hard to achieve that MFA from American University. Hurry up and finish your dissertation ("Visual Honesty: Roy Stryker and the Farm Security Administration Documentary Photographs"), Larry, so you can follow your next star. This honor given to you as ASPP's Picture Professional of the Year may not have the cachet of that piece of paper from American University, but it comes with our greatest admiration and thanks for all you have done for the photographic community. Cheers!

Cathy D-P Sachs is the executive director of the American Society of Picture Professionals.



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rlevine@levineroberts.com
www.levineroberts.com