

NEWS RELEASE

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FROM: Washington Coalition for Open Government

TOPIC: Washington Coalition for Open Government to Honor Frank Blethen, Duane Swinton at Annual Madison/Andersen Awards

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The Seattle Times and its publisher Frank Blethen, along with attorney Duane Swinton and his law firm, will be honored at a Sept. 17 breakfast for their contributions to transparency in government. The Washington Coalition for Open Government (WCOG) will hold its annual James Madison/James Andersen Awards ceremony, in conjunction with a continuing legal education (CLE) seminar on public meetings and records laws, at The Conference Center, 8th Ave and Pike St in Seattle.

Blethen, publisher and CEO of The Seattle Times for 25 years, will receive WCOG's James Madison Award for his leadership in fighting for open government on many fronts—the paper's aggressive use of public records in reporting, including coverage that won a Pulitzer Prize this year; the paper's willingness to challenge government secrecy through litigation; and the paper's pioneering application of computers for the analysis of government data that has produced special reports about the inner workings of agencies.

"By creating public-service special reports year after year, The Times demonstrates the public good that is made possible by providing access to state records," notes WCOG Vice President Mike Fancher. "Often this record of powerful stories is the strongest argument against efforts to exempt records from disclosure."

Duane Swinton, a partner in the Spokane-based law firm Witherspoon Kelley Davenport & Toole, will receive WCOG's James Andersen Award. Swinton spearheaded WCOG's efforts to litigate a case that protected access to signatures on state referendum and initiative forms. In June, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8-1 that such signatures are generally available through public records requests.

"Duane and his colleagues took up this case from its inception and have seen it through all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court," according to WCOG board member Patience Rogge. "They have logged hundreds of hours of pro bono work on the Coalition's behalf, work that the organization could never afford with its limited budget."

The awards breakfast, 7:30 to 9am, will be followed by a daylong continuing legal education seminar on open government in Washington State. Approval of 5.5 hours of CLE credit for this seminar is currently pending.

The seminar is designed for government officials who handle public records and open meeting questions on a daily basis as well as the attorneys in public and private practice who litigate them. Seminar sessions will address the basic aspects of open records and meetings laws, recent legislative developments, agency efforts to comply with open government laws, access to electronic records, and litigating records cases.

Registration for the CLE seminar will open at 8:45am, with sessions running from 9:15am-4:45pm.

Reservations can be made online at www.washingtoncog.org or by phone at (206)782-0393. Discounted rates are available for government employees.

Founded in 2002, WCOG is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes the people's right to know by supporting open government laws and practices at the local and state levels.

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