

# Music major finds her voice in radio (and SPJ)



Photo courtesy of Ryan Kurtz

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— AMBER STEARNS

BY ANDREW M. SCOTT

In a matter of days, Amber Stearns went from becoming a member of the Society of Professional Journalists to an Indiana Pro chapter board member to the chapter's No. 2 vice president. She didn't even have a chance to pay her dues yet. Stearns then found herself taking on the No. 1 vice president position two months later on the weekend she returned from SPJ's Ted Scripps Leadership Institute.

"The Scripps Leadership Institute was a phenomenal experience," Stearns said. "It gave me the tools I needed to take on the position I found myself in as quickly as I did."

Two years later, Stearns is chapter president and a Diversity Leadership Fellow for the 2010 SPJ Convention and National Journalism Conference in Las Vegas in October.

As a Diversity Fellow, she hopes to encourage reporters of different ethnicities to engage and enhance their voice in local communities as well as worldwide. Stearns said that, through today's newsroom technology, "We've truly become a melting pot."

"I love the fact that (incoming national president) Hagit (Limor) has a vision of improving diversity," Stearns said. "It inspired me to get into the diversity arm of SPJ because it is so needed today."

Stearns also believes that recent cutbacks in newsrooms across the U.S. have had a negative impact on diverse and ethnic news coverage.

Aside from her responsibilities with SPJ, the Indianapolis native is a news anchor/reporter at WIBC radio. Stearns was a Marconi Award Finalist for "Small Market Personality of the Year" in 2002 with WZWZ co-host Allan James and has earned many other awards during her career, including 2007 Best Breaking News Coverage in radio by the Indiana Broadcasters Association. She is also a member of the National Association of Black Journalists.

Although her passions in journalism are dynamic, Stearns' overall theme is education and journalism as a form of education. She thoroughly enjoys informing audiences of particular studies on a variety of topics such as health and non-profit needs while letting audiences know what resources are available to them.

Stearns sees her future in education, working to enhance student journalists' efficiency with utilizing technology in the college setting. She is currently pursuing a master's in interactive communications from Quinnipiac University.

"(Journalism) is so integrated. Once upon a time we thought of journalism in three different silos," Stearns said. "You were either a print, broadcast (television) or radio journalist and you didn't really compete with each other because the genres were so different. Especially in the 21st century, the industry lies with the Internet, social media and blogging."

Stearns' profile picture on Facebook is a candid snapshot with her early career influence, Jane Pauley. Other influences include Oprah Winfrey and Barry Manilow for his ability to capture audiences with clever commercial advertising.

But it was the efforts of mentor Ed Roehling that brought Stearns into journalism. She began her college career as a vocal music major with a minor in piano at the University of Indianapolis. Roehling recognized her potential early on, telling her that she had both the voice and inquisitive nature of a broadcast journalist.

"I didn't understand until later," Stearns said. "He helped me find my place in radio news."

She later received a bachelor's in electronic media. In her free time, Stearns is fascinated by in-depth, investigative crime series and Discovery Channel programming. She also enjoys baking.

"I have spoiled many a co-worker with cookies, pies, cakes and pastries," Stearns said with a laugh.

Before going to WIBC in 2007, Stearns worked in Kokomo, Ind., where she served as news director and assistant program director at WIUO-AM/WZWZ-FM for over a decade. She has also worked at WBAT-AM/WCJC-FM in Marion, Ind. She is active with her alma mater, serving on the University of Indianapolis Board of Trustees and the Alumni Association Board of Directors.

Stearns resides with her son on the north side of Indianapolis. ♦