



2010

White House News Photographers Association Lifetime Achievement Award Pege Gilgannon, WJLA-TV

WHO WEARS A SKIRT to every crime scene, political rally or weather event in Washington? Only Pege Gilgannon, WJLA-TV photographer.

“I felt a woman could do the job, too,” she says, “and you didn’t have to be a man or dress like one.”

It’s been her signature since Pege first came to Washington from her native Queens, N.Y., where she was one of 8 children. She took a job in the mailroom at WJLA in 1973. She moved to film editor, tape editor, floor manager, live truck operator, videographer and six or seven other jobs in 36 years at the station. Most of that time, she’s been Pege, the camera woman who’s always the hardest-working person at the news event.

WJLA was WMAL-TV when she joined the staff. Her first job was editor for “Money Movie 7.” She trimmed scenes from movies so they would make room for lots of commercials but still make sense. Joni Mazer Field, her best friend, says Pege would take out segments and place the film in bins. Somehow the clips would vanish.

“Pege single-handedly altered many classic movie endings with her missing clips!” Joni says.

In 1978, Pege entered the world of news as the station moved from film to videotape and she became a tape editor. Then her crew manager, Britt Arrington, made a radical decision that changed her life.

“His philosophy was shooters should learn to edit and editors should learn to shoot. The idea of strengthening each skill was eons ahead of its time. Once in the field,” says Pege, “I was hooked.”

In the years that followed, Pege captured it all. She covered Washington from the White House to the crack house. She traveled to Hong Kong and Rome with great reporters like the late Dale Solly and Jack and Susan Bowden. She went to Nigeria with D.C. Bureau Chief Sam Ford.



PHOTO BY BONNIE WOOD

Pege and Sam have been partners in WJLA’s Washington bureau for the past 12 years. They chase cops and robbers and city politicians in her mighty Crown Victoria, which moves around the city faster than just about anything — except the speed cameras that keep catching her.

Under Sam’s guidance, Pege is now even speeding along the information superhighway.

As much as she loves news coverage, her passion is teaching the craft. Three times in the past six years, WJLA has assigned Pege and Sam to teach news to Ballou High School students as part of the “Prime Movers” program. At the end of their first tour, Lavelle Jones, a 6-foot-3, 300-pound 15-year-old, told Pege and Sam that he wanted to work at Channel 7 for the summer. To Sam’s shock, Pege insisted that it happen — and they got WJLA brass to approve it. Tragically, days later, Lavelle was gunned down as he sat in a car, waiting for a traffic light to change. It was a lesson on the difficult lives our children lead.

Pege remains Ballou’s biggest fan. She’s there for each fundraising car wash and every championship basketball game. Pege and Sam won an Emmy for following the struggle of its marching band to raise funds and travel to a competition in California. They were there when, years later, President George W. Bush honored the band at the White House.

With her skirt, boots and outdated battery belt, Pege has long been a familiar sight on the streets of her beloved Washington. She is a member of the Washington press corps where camaraderie is an unspoken source of pride.

A longtime member of the WHNPA, Pege appreciates the unwavering support of the video committee members who make the contest not just possible but fun. She is honored to stand along with other esteemed Lifetime Achievement recipients.