

Jacobs: North Dakota celebrates the Pulitzer Prizes

By [Mike Jacobs](#) on Sep 20, 2016 at 3:53 p.m.



GRAND FORKS—The Year of the Pulitzers: That is how I hope to remember 2016.

This is the 100th anniversary of the Pulitzer Prizes. North Dakota has much to celebrate about the prizes, and we have been celebrating exuberantly. I've been involved in four such celebrations so far, at the Grand Forks Public Library, on the University of North Dakota campus, at the North Dakota Newspaper Association convention in Crosby and at Prairie Talks in Rugby.

All of these have been supported in part by the North Dakota Humanities Council, and the series comes to a crescendo in Bismarck on Saturday, when the council holds its "GameChanger Ideas Festival" at Legacy High School. The event will bring prize winners and finalists together, seven of them.

I get to be there because the Herald won the prize for Public Service "for continuing coverage" of the 1997 Red River flood. I was editor at the time, and I'm proud to have been in the room when the prize was won.

The Herald's prize was the second for public service won in North Dakota. The Bismarck Tribune won in 1938 for its series of articles about the drought and depression. In 1958, The Forum — it was called the Fargo Forum then

— won for reporting on deadline for its response to a tornado that killed several people. The storm struck at twilight; the morning edition had full coverage.

UND produced two other Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists. Mel Ruder, a Bismarck native, won for local reporting in 1965, when a flood overwhelmed Columbia Falls, Mont., where he published "The Hungry Horse News." Bill Ketter, a UND graduate who grew up at Fisher, Minn., was publisher of the Lawrence (Mass.) Eagle-Tribune when its staff won for its coverage of the drowning of four local boys in the Merrimack River.

Richard Aregood won in 1985 for his editorial writing at the Philadelphia Daily News. He was Charles Johnson Professor of Journalism in UND's Program in Communication for six years ending in 2014. Mark Trahan, his successor in the chair, was a finalist in 1989 for national reporting about Native American issues. He's currently on the UND faculty, and he'll be at the GameChanger event.

Rob Kuznia, a graduate of Red River High School in Grand Forks, was one of three on the staff of the Daily Breeze in Torrance, Calif., who won the local reporting award in 2015 for exposing corruption in an impoverished school district. Kuznia delivered this year's Hagerty Lecture in Contemporary Media Issues at UND in April.

Eric Hylden of the Herald staff was a named finalist in photography in 1998. Herald readers will remember his dramatic photograph of the burned-out Security Building standing in flood water in downtown Grand Forks. He's still on the Herald staff.

Michelle Roberts, a Hazen native, was on the staff of Portland's newspaper, The Oregonian, when it won a Pulitzer for breaking news reporting in 2007. The paper's prize for editorials, won in 2006, was based partly on her reporting.

That makes 10 Pulitzers for journalists with North Dakota connections.

The state's first Pulitzer Prize winner was a playwright. Maxwell Anderson grew up in Jamestown, attended UND, taught high school English in Minnewaukan and married a woman from Bottineau. He won for drama in 1933. Anderson remained close to UND, writing "A Love Letter to the University" in 1958, less than a year before he died.

North Dakota subject matter has garnered prizes, too.

The first of these went to Edmund Morris. His book, "The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt" won for biography in 1980. His subject necessarily led Morris to the North Dakota Badlands, where Roosevelt heard birds, herded cattle, hunted buffalo, wrote books and developed his character.

Another North Dakota character was the subject of the history prize winner in 2016. This was "Custer's Trials" by T.J. Stiles. Custer's North Dakota sojourn — longer than Roosevelt's — is remembered chiefly because Custer didn't return from a trip to Montana.

The history prize winner in 2015 was "Encounters at the Heart of the World" by Elizabeth Fenn. This remarkable book broadened and deepened our understanding of the Mandan people, great traders whose villages were the metropolitan areas of the continent at their flowering.

Novelist Louise Erdrich was a finalist in 2009 for "A Plague of Doves." She's written more than 20 books, most of them with Native American themes. She's an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Tribe.

This makes a total of 15 prizes.

There is a North Dakota connection to another prize winner, though this is more tangential. Jay Norwood Darling, known as Ding Darling, won for cartooning in 1924 and again in 1943.

That would give a North Dakota connection to 17 Pulitzer Prizes.

Darling lived in Des Moines at the time of his awards. But Lake Darling on the Mouse River north of Minot is named for him—not because he was a prize-winning cartoonist, however. He was Franklin Roosevelt's director of the U.S. Biological Survey. This later became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the national wildlife refuge system.

Lake Darling is the key feature of Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge. It was one of my father's favorite fishing holes.