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VPW to Honor Trigiani at Fall Conference in Richmond Sept. 29

Author Adriana Trigiani will be honored as VPW's Newsmaker of the Year at the fall conference on Sat., Sept. 29 in Richmond.

Trigiani, who delivered the keynote message during the spring conference, will take a break from directing the movie of her first novel, the best-selling and

highly acclaimed "Big Stone Gap."

Her second book, "Big Cherry Holler," was recently published and is also receiving excellent reviews. She is currently working on a third book in the trilogy, which takes place in her native Southwest Virginia.

"Big Stone Gap" Author Trigiani Weaves Wit and Wisdom at Spring Conference

By Peggy Weston

Adriana Trigiani loved the diversity she found growing up in Southwest Virginia's Big Stone Gap.

"You forge relationships, as an Italian, with other minorities," she told attendees of the Virginia Press Women spring conference April 21. The experience gave her a "rich, rich tapestry" from which she drew emotional security and an appreciation for the uniqueness in people.

Similarly, the characters of her highly acclaimed first novel, "Big Stone Gap," spin their eccentric charm around the life of main character Ave Maria Mulligan.

Trigiani's dream to write motivated her to leave the Appalachian hills at 20 and venture to New York. She said she



owes her success to the dedication of her girlfriends and the impact of the experiences they shared in New York City in the mid-80s.

Her versatile talent is evidenced by her credits as an award-winning playwright, documentary filmmaker, novelist and television writer. She gave conference attendees an honest, humorous insight into the world of television writing, highlighting her experiences on "The Cosby Show."

Trigiani also recounted her struggle with starting her first novel. She realized,

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President's Column

By Pamela Stallsmith



We recently wrapped up one of the most successful spring conferences ever and now we're planning for what we intend to be a fantastic fall meeting.

Mark your calendars for Sat., Sept. 29, the date of Virginia Press Women's fall conference. The meeting will take place once again in Central Virginia at the Richmond Times-Dispatch's production facility in Hanover County, about 10 miles north of Richmond.

Cynthia Price and Julie Campbell did an outstanding job in planning the spring conference. Now Christina Nuckols, Patricia MacDonald and I will carry the baton for our September meeting.

We will invite members from National Federation of Press Women affiliates in the surrounding states to the meeting. Our meeting comes two weeks after the national convention in Indiana, so we hope that members in the Mid-Atlantic who didn't make it to Indianapolis will come to Virginia.

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Covering White House Not as Glamorous as One Might Think

By Christina Nuckols

Covering the White House looks like a glamorous job on the television show "The West Wing," but three journalists from that elite press corps said the reality is not all adventure and intrigue.

"There's glamour, but there's also a lot of gruntwork involved," said Marsha Mercer, White House correspondent for Media General News Service.

Mercer participated in a panel discussion at the Virginia Press Women spring conference in April along with two former White House reporters. Andrew Cain, now with the Richmond Times-Dispatch, covered the presidency for two years for the Washington Times. Ann Gearan of the Associated Press recently

During press conferences, reporters are assigned spots in the tiny, 50-seat auditorium.

"You can see who the White House thinks is important by who's on the front row," Mercer said.

Cain, who worked for a newspaper that frequently criticized President Clinton, said the former chief executive called on him to ask a question only once in two years.

A handful of "pool reporters" are selected to follow the President on his travels. A stint in the pool may entail a van trip to a local church or a flight to Central America.

Most slots in the pool rotate among



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she said, that "if you want a book to be good . . . you have got to tell the truth." She discovered that "if you can go to a place in your soul, that is what writing is about; your true essence will come out."

Asked about her process of writing a novel, she responded that when she sits down, she knows where she is going with the writing. The character's motivations and choices and the plot's twists are all there before her hands hit the keys, she said.

Trigiani said that most of her "writer thinking" is done while she is sleeping. She recommended reading George Murphy's book, "The Power of the Subconscious Mind," to get the most from this creative time.

She shared wisdom for writers, emphasizing the importance of counting the moments for yourself, grabbing a photograph, an image, an article to save in your date book for further inspiration. She stressed the importance of finishing your novel before sending it to an agent. And her gift for comedy peaked when she imparted words of wisdom for preparing for that important book tour. Her tips included "never check your luggage" and "(when you fly) you balloon in the air; you know, swell; so get a long jacket."

And, she added, pack basic black. ✓

Note: Be sure to snatch up a copy of Big Stone Gap as well as its recently published sequel (and second in a trilogy), Big Cherry Holler, at your local book store or online.



Current and former White House correspondents field questions during session at spring conference.

switched beats to cover the U.S. Supreme Court.

All three journalists said covering the President can be exciting, but it's also tedious and frustrating at times.

"Some of the luster wore off when I first went in to use the bathroom in the West Wing and I had to use a coat hanger to flush the toilet," Cain quipped.

White House reporters are kept on a short leash. They have free run of the driveway, the press room and the office suite for the press secretary's staff, but they must have an escort to venture beyond those bounds.

members of the press corps, but the wire services are always represented. That meant Gearan got in more than her share of traveling. Her most memorable trip took her to Switzerland, where she survived a "four-hour motorcade of death through the Alps" on icy, winding roads.

Journalists left behind in the press room write their stories using detailed transcripts of the President's speeches and reports from those in the pool.

"It's a remarkable life experience," Cain said, "but it's not a great experience in reporting." ✓

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