2012

A YEAR IN REVIEW
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The Lens
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Photography credit:  Danielle Bell, Derek Bridges, Bob Butler, Karen Gadbois, Steve Myers & Jessica Williams
THE MISSION

The mission of The Lens is to engage and empower the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast by providing the information and analysis necessary to advocate for more accountable and just governance.

With a staff of experienced investigative reporters and pundits, The Lens merges the accuracy, fairness and thoroughness of traditional journalism with the speed, urgency and interactivity of online media. This hybrid model is well-suited to New Orleans, a city where residents count media watchdogs as allies in the struggle to rebuild a better community in the face of limited resources.

FOUNDERS
Karen Gadbois
Ariella S. Cohen

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
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Steve Beatty, Secretary

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Anne Mueller .............. Development Director

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Karen Gadbois ............. Staff Writer
Tom Gogola ................. Staff Writer
Bob Marshall ............... Staff Writer
Mark Moseley ............. Engagement Specialist & Opinion Writer
Jessica Williams .......... Staff Writer

The Lens 2012 Annual Report
TheLensNola.org
Promises made promises kept. At our inception we promised that we would provide this community with information and analysis that could be used to make informed decisions. We promised that we would be the independent voice that New Orleans and the Gulf Coast could rely on. We have kept that promise.

The evidence includes Karen Gadbois whose reporting about the New Orleans Police Force's double standard regarding exposing records of murder victims, resulted in her being the 2012 recipient of the Society of Professional Journalists’ annual Ethics in Journalism Award.

The evidence includes reporting on and providing analysis of the forty odd school systems operating in the City of New Orleans. The Lens is determined to continue this effort of educating the community about our fragmented public education system. What The Lens has created is a one-stop resource for meaningful and specific information about charter school governance in New Orleans.

The evidence includes a dedicated and expanded environmental section lead by a seasoned reporter devoted to the kind of analyses that The Lens is noted for.

The evidence includes an in-depth analysis of political structures that surround this community both on a local, state and national level, always with the intent of providing information that helps to create an informed public.

The Lens remains committed to providing New Orleans and the Gulf Coast with information and analysis necessary to advocate for more accountable and just governance.

This is where The Lens is today and where The Lens will forever remain.

Retired Judge Calvin Johnson, The Lens Board Chairman
Dear Readers,

As we enter another year here at The Lens — our fourth — there have been some exciting changes. New partners, new hires and new offices. You’ll find the details in other parts of this annual report.

In 2012, we said goodbye to my friend and fellow co-founder Ariella Cohen. She moved to Philadelphia last March to take on a new challenge as executive editor of Next American City. We wish her well!

Ariella played a crucial role in the creation of The Lens and continues to lend us her wit and wisdom by serving on our board of directors.

The Lens’ mission is unchanged: We remain committed to finding news where others don’t—or won’t. We try to engage citizens in government and to force government out of the shadows where corruption and flawed policy breed.

The Lens staff continues to be widely honored for these efforts. For my part, in August I was grateful to be awarded the Ethics in Journalism Award by the Society of Professional Journalists.

The award came our way after I reported on the New Orleans Police Department’s practice of releasing the arrest records of victims of violent crime. The implication — often inaccurate and always distasteful — was that “they had it coming.” While the rest of the news media focused on reporting the tragic details of a violent and deadly carjacking, I discovered that the victim, a Samaritan shot by carjackers as he tried to rescue the woman whose car they had targeted, also had an arrest record, a record the NOPD had chosen not to make public.

The obvious inequity we had identified led to a change in NOPD policy.

It wasn’t an easy story and it wasn’t a universally popular story, given the Samaritan’s death, but it was an important story. With your continued support as a Lens reader and member, we will continue to do stories like it — stories that probe issues ranging from land use to criminal justice, from government finance to the fight to save our vanishing coast. And we will remain the only news outlet comprehensively covering the city’s numerous charter schools.

I thank you all for your support and engagement.

Karen Gadbois, Founder of The Lens
WHO WE ARE

1. MARK MOSELEY
mmoseley@TheLensNola.org | @moseleyLensNola

As The Lens’ opinion writer I attempt to tackle issues in an insightful way that stirs reflection and conversation. My motto is “No friction, no thought.”

2. JESSICA WILLIAMS
jwilliams@TheLensNola.org | @williamLensNola

I do what I do here because I want my son to have more than just a handful of options for good public schools, an issue that many parents struggled with in the pre-Katrina era. The stories I write inform educators of the problems in the new charter-dominated system, note that system’s successes, and – I hope – drive conversations geared towards positive change.

3. TOM GOGOLA
tgogola@TheLensNola.org | @tgogolaLensNola

I have worked a lot of different jobs in journalism over a 25-year career, but one beat I’ve always wanted to cover is criminal justice and I’m grateful for the chance to do so in New Orleans. In covering the courts, the jails and the cops, I strive to provide insight and analysis on a subject of great interest and import to the citizens of this city.

4. BOB MARSHALL
bmarshall@TheLensNola.org | @BobMTheLensNola

I cover the issues, policies and people of Louisiana’s coastal wetlands, the habitat that has been my office and refuge most of my life.

5. KAREN GADBOIS
kgadbois@TheLensNola.org | @gadboisLensNola

Living in New Orleans is an infuriating privilege. It is a city that entices, beguiles and enrages. It seems there is no middle ground in New Orleans but sometimes there is something a little more elusive and that is a clearer understanding of the way local and state policy works. The Lens aims to provide that clarity and comprehensive reporting.

6. JED HORNE
jhorne@TheLensNola.org | @horneLensNola

I pay particular attention to the opinion section as both an editor and occasional contributor.
7. STEVE BEATTY
sbeatty@TheLensNola.org | @beattyLensNola
The work we do at The Lens is aimed at making a difference in the community. Our goal is to find stories that give readers the information they need to make informed decisions or take action they deem appropriate. Taking the time to look for stories no one else is covering – and taking the time to report them well – is something few news outlets can do these days.

8. ANNE MUELLER
amueller@TheLensNola.org | @muellerLensNola
As a native New Orleanian I have a deep appreciation for the complex richness and diversity of this city and am committed to its ongoing revitalization. The Lens plays a key part ensuring our community remains informed about the issues vital to a healthy democracy. My role is to raise awareness and support for The Lens. This allows me to build relationships with readers and supporters whose commitment to New Orleans mirrors mine.

9. TYLER BRIDGES
tbridges@TheLensNola.org | @tegbridges
I’m trying to take a close look at the governor and the state Legislature, to dig below the surface to get the real stories. What are they doing and why? Those are the questions I ask every day in my reporting.

10. REBECCA CATALANELLO
rcatalanello@TheLensNola.org | @CSRCLensNola
The charter school movement in New Orleans is unlike any educational experiment anywhere. As a New Orleans native, Orleans Parish public school graduate and the mother of a future student, I have a passionate interest in how we educate our children in this town. I’m excited to be overseeing the innovative citizen journalism project that is the Charter School Reporting Corps in the city I love best.

11. STEVE MYERS
smyers@TheLensNola.org | @myersnews
I’m enjoying getting my hands dirty, helping The Lens produce high-impact investigative journalism that addresses the needs of the New Orleans community.
Our driving ambition at the Lens is to engage the public to enhance awareness of public issues – and to highlight patterns of corruption when we find them in our reporting.

We believe that citizens who are well-informed are better equipped to remain connected to participatory democratic governance. We also believe that corruption begets corruption – and our aim is to stop it in its tracks, whenever and wherever we see it.

We’re committed to people-centered accountability, whether we’re writing about corrupt charter school administrators embezzling public money or elected officials misusing public funds in their private business dealings.

Bottom line: When accountability is lost, the entire community pays a price. When public officials engage in unchecked shenanigans, the price is paid on the backs of taxpayers left footing the bill. It’s paid in the form of cynicism and mistrust of public officials and those entrusted with public money.

Working with our colleagues in the New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance, we identify areas of public concern and provide the in-depth reporting that provides a basis for intelligent and informed decision-making. In turn, the NOCOG coalition of advocacy groups use our stories to educate and work with the community to bring about change.
No city in America has a greater percentage of students in charter schools than New Orleans. The explosion in charter schools since Hurricane Katrina has changed things for everyone involved, including the news media. Newspapers accustomed to assigning a single reporter to cover the school board now must contend with 42 autonomous boards, charter schools, and 73 additional schools in the Recovery District and Orleans Parish School Board – all which meet monthly, and sometimes in defiance of state open meeting laws. No other newsroom in the country has endeavored to follow charter schools this comprehensively. The Lens covers every one of those charter meetings and posts a report on the page we have built on our site for each school. New Orleans is not only an incubator for innovation in education – we’ve made it an innovation in reporting on education.

RESULT:
More engagement, greater parental involvement in schools, greater accountability for charter-school operators
Land Use

The Lens reported on a Deslonde Street property owned by then-City Councilman Jon Johnson that had received $166,000 in state and federal loans – but nine months after getting money under the state’s Small Rental Program, the property remained derelict, violating the terms of the loan. Johnson was also previously involved with a nonprofit in the neighborhood that continued to do nothing with blighted properties.

RESULT: Johnson subsequently got necessary permits and began work on the Deslonde house. But then in July, he suddenly resigned from the City Council and pleaded guilty to federal charges that he misused recovery money sent to a nonprofit called Ninth Ward Housing, which should have cleaned up those blighted properties with the money.
In April, The Lens reported on a curiously cozy employment arrangement between the respective wives of Orleans Parish Sheriff Marlin Gusman and Municipal Court Judge Paul Sens. The close friendship between the Sens and Gusman families extended into their professional roles, as The Lens discovered that Renee Gusman was hired by Sens as a drug counselor, while Ann Sens was hired by Gusman to perform real estate appraisals for the civil division. The worker wives were hired at around the same time, raising questions about whether this was a no-bid quid pro quo arrangement between friends in high places.

RESULT:
New Orleans Inspector General Ed Quatrevaux issued a report in July that said the twin hires reeked of impropriety, even if they did not rise to the level of criminal activity. Even in the absence of a demonstrable quid pro quo arrangement, Quatrevaux’s report noted that “the appearance of impropriety leads citizens to believe that the criminal justice system is corrupt and exemplifies questionable government practices.”

Photo by Karen Gadbois
Departing from its frequently criticized practice of releasing the criminal records of homicide victims, New Orleans police did not quickly disclose Henry Ainsworth’s police record in January after the Algiers good Samaritan was killed while trying to stop a carjacking. The Lens’ reporting revealed this apparent double standard of police procedure. Ainsworth was white and volunteered with the NOPD; most other homicide victims in the city are black, and regularly had their rap sheets read at the scene of their killings.

RESULT:
Many news outlets in New Orleans, as well as nearly two dozen nationwide, reported on the incident and the uneven application of the department’s procedures. Under growing community pressure to stop the practice, the police ended the policy of releasing criminal records of victims, instead, compiling a monthly report without individuals’ names. Lens co-founder Karen Gadbois won the prestigious Ethics in Journalism Award from the Society of Professional Journalists for her report.

AWARDED:
2012 Ethics in Journalism Award from the Society of Professional Journalists
In March, The Lens reported on extravagant spending by the founder and director of the educational nonprofit Operation REACH, as well as poor financial controls at the agency. The organization had earned acclaim for its work tutoring thousands of New Orleans students – but drastically cut back on its programs because of the financial problems, with groups such as AmeriCorps no longer funding the activities.

RESULT:
Federal auditors determined that Operation REACH hadn't properly accounted for $900,000, and further action by the federal agency that gave it grants is pending.
In the aftermath of Hurricane Isaac, The Lens revealed myriad failures in the multi-million-dollar system for measuring the depth of water in the New Orleans storm water outfall canals – the primary source of Katrina-related flooding. Gauges provided erratic readings or none at all during the storm – at a cost of $5.4 million.

RESULT:
The Army Corps of Engineers promised a full forensic analysis of the outfall canal sensor performance, and pledged to read the instruction manual next time it is installing gauges.
In late December 2011, The Lens’ Jessica Williams, in conjunction with Bob Butler of the G.W. Williams Center for Independent Journalism, posted a story about struggling 9th Ward homeowners Jewell and Kisa Holmes, who lost their house after complying with their mortgage company’s suggestion that they pay off their bank note with post-Katrina insurance money – instead of first rehabbing the house.

**RESULT:**
The Holmes’ were compelled to demolish the dilapidated home but got a new house from Project Home Again in exchange for the land on which their demolished house stood. The Lens won a prestigious regional 2012 Edward R. Murrow Award for our initial story detailing the Holmes’ post-storm struggles.

**AWARDED:**
Edward R. Murrow Awards

Photo credits: Bob Butler / Jessica Williams
OUR PARTNERS & COLLABORATORS

American Public Media
Neighborhoods Partnership Network
Next American City
New Orleans Citizens Diplomacy Council
Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana
Puentes

Rethink
The Institute of Southern Studies
The People Say Project
WTUL
WWOZ

2012 AWARDS

Society of Professional Journalists
2012 National Ethics in Journalism Award

Edward R. Murrow Awards
2012 National Winner for Online News Operation, Local Market, Audio Investigative Reporting

Outstanding Citizen Diplomat 2012
New Orleans Citizen Diplomacy Council

2012 Excellence in Journalism Awards
Sponsored by the Press Club of New Orleans

Best Local News Website
Best Investigative Story in Print
Best News Affiliated Blog
INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

Special thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their generous support of The Lens.

GIFTS $10,000 +
Laitram LLC, Mary Zervigon *

GIFTS $5,000 – $9,999
Amy Jean Boebel *, Michael Sartisky, Ph.D. * +

GIFTS $2,500 – $4,999
Larry Blake *, Calvin Johnson * +, Bob Redmond *, Linda Usdin & Steven Bingler *, Swelltone Labs *

GIFTS $1,000 – $2,499

GIFTS $500 – $999

GIFTS $250 – $499

GIFTS $100 – $249


GIFTS $50 – $99

GIFTS $35 – $49
INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

Special thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their generous support of The Lens.

GIFTS UNDER $35
Elizabeth Blankenship, Sarah Bolton, Robert & Mary Burch, June Butler, Debra Calmes, Barbara W. Carlton, Merrill Collett, Bonnie Dwyer, Rebecca Houtman, Stefan Kamph, Kerry Maloney, Nathan Martin, Charles Maldonado *, John T. O'Connor, Ryan Pepper, Elizabeth Jane Rolling, Stephen Wade Rathke, Katherine Senter, Alexandra Simmons, William Sothern, Zoe Sullivan, Superior Alarm, Paul Waldman, Jessica Williams #

* Indicates multiple gifts have been given by the donor.
+ Lens board member (current or former)
# Lens staff member

TRIBUTE GIFTS

Merle Albers
In memory of Mrs. Merle S. Marshall.

Florence Andre
In honor of Linda Usdin and Anne Mueller.

Millie Ball & Keith Marshall
Thank to Steve and the gang.

Amy Jean Boebel
In honor of Jean B. Boebel who believed in the power of clean government practices.

The Burka Family, The Steven W. Usdin Family, The Thomas M. Usdin Family
In honor of Linda Usdin's birthday.

Jewel Bush
In honor of my fellow journos who take the craft seriously and remember life before blogs.

Lynn Chao
In memory of Robert C. Meder, Jr.

Nathan Chapman
In honor of Nathan Bolton and Bill Chapman, former newspaper publishers.

Ariella Cohen
In honor of Portia Rotkin, my grandmother who always taught me to ask questions and pay attention.

Arlene Cohen
In honor of Ariella Cohen.

Keith Crawford
In honor of John McDonough, 1779-1850.

Barbara Forrest
In honor of independent, truthful reporting.

Karen Gadbois
In honor of Aida Schooler.

Roberta Gratz
In honor of Karen Gadbois.

Michael Gray
In honor of ace journalist Steve Beatty.

Ingrid Hearns-Alexander
In honor of Louis, Verna Mae & Kerry Hearns. In memory of Kerry Hearns.

Paula Hoffman
- In honor of New Orleans, city of my birth, and in pride of its and your indomitable spirit! Good luck!!
- In honor of Monica Edelstein & Kenneth Hoffman.

Tessa Jackson
In honor of those who have lost their lives speaking the truth to power. Thank you Lens staff for being the "truth tellers" of the Gulf Coast!

Eric Jensen
In honor of the incredible reporting of Matt Davis!

William Kirby
In honor of Ashley Morris.

Meg Lousteau
In honor of Karen Gadbois.

Margaret Ross-Martin
In honor of Mary Ellen Ross.

Marjory Russakoff
In honor of Elaine Lauriat, Wesleyan Class of ’09

Linda Santi
In honor of the tradition of daily news in this myopic and great newspaper city.

SEIU
In honor of SEIU Local 21 LA.

Holly Wiseman
In honor of Karen Gadbois for her Ethics in Journalism Award.

The Lens 2012 Annual Report
TheLensNola.org
We here at the Investigative News Network are committed to fostering nonprofit organizations that serve their communities with independent, in-depth investigative and public service journalism. Given the recent pullback of the commercial media in the New Orleans market, there is no better example of how a vibrant nonprofit news organization can step-up to help fill the specific information needs of its community than The Lens.

KEVIN DAVIS, CEO, Investigative News Network
New Orleans is a big league City with big league issues, events, and challenges facing it seven days a week. Plus a whole bunch of people with really ... unique ... stories to tell.

The Lens staff are consistently ready to do the hard work to adequately cover a time-sensitive story while also developing the necessary expertise to give valuable context.

I’m a daily newspaper reader who’s sad and angry about recent changes in local news transmission. But the way The Lens is going about its business gives me hope about journalism’s future. It’s nimble, it’s thoughtful, and it deserves to be around for the next 175 years.

LINDA SANTI, frequent reader and supporter
WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

Eli Ackerman @eliackerman
Proud member! RT @theleensnola first broke the story that exposed the blighted properties owned by Johnson’s nonprofit. is.gd/BtG6CN

Edtilla the Pun @edtilla
@TheLensNola Hehehe
I really appreciate y’all puddin up wit’ me ‘-) Forgotten to add, y’all are big reason I got daily delivery @GetTheAdvocate

ChateauDuLacNO @chateauDuLacNO
RT @HumidBeings: RT @TheLensNola The state of marching bands in New Orleans Public Schools. bit.ly/S5yHBu nola music

Cheryl Gerber
I envision a thicker gambit, a stronger Lens and a beefed up citybusiness, all of which will utilize the talents of the fallen and suck the life’s blood out of advance. and i predict that tv and radio will absorb what’s left.

Yomi Akinyemi
Kudos on the new website. It looks really good and definitively more pleasing to the eye. Nice font also.

Knight Foundation @knightfdn
@TheLensNola report triggers city investigation into #neworleans nonprofit http://bit.ly/jXv4Gr infoneeds

Dear Jessica,
I just have to spend two minutes to write you and tell you your article on the Lens website RE: Money, control and perception really gave me a ton of answers to questions I have had regarding our schools. Thank you for a fine piece of informative journalism. I will be sure to keep my eye out for more of your work.

Lurana Hahn aka lbanana

Kelsey Foster
“Love the new site!”
What People Are Saying

Laura Browning Crochet
Your work over the last 18+ months on Councilman Johnson and the purported theft of FEMA dollars from the Ninth Ward Community Housing Development nonprofit is what great investigative journalism was, is and will always be about. Good job. Thanks.

Jen L. @blathering
Great local reporting – school music programs, marching bands, staging post-Katrina comeback @TheLensNola is.gd/q9kqMj

Nannie Bernard @nanniebernard5
amazing show @TheLensNola the other day I’m shocked it’s @CapriGa212 free

Edtilla the Pun @Edtilla
@TheLensNola Done! Thanks from one happy old news hound ‘:) I love the way you’ve grown, kept the focus and kept the faith on New Orleans

Meg Lousteau
HUGE props to The Lens for breaking the early stories about (former?) Councilman Jon Johnson’s blighted property misdeeds in New Orleans East! Y’all were way ahead on this story.

Richard A. Webster @RichardAWebster
@TheLensNola has done amazing work on this topic from the very beginning and everyone should check out their comprehensive coverage.
2012: BY THE NUMBERS

FOLLOWERS

Twitter: 5,275  Facebook: 2,439

250+
LENS MEMBERS

(2011: 100)

10
STAFFERS WORKING AT THE LENS

20
CHARTER SCHOOL REPORTING CORPS REPORTERS

FOUNDATION
INDIVIDUAL
PARTNERSHIP

5%
2%
93%
150+ GIFTS MADE TO THE LENS (INDIVIDUAL & FOUNDATION)

147,334 PEOPLE VISITED THE LENS WEBSITE

972 COMMUNITY-BASED ARTICLES PRODUCED

50+ REPUBLISHED OR ADAPTED PIECES IN LOCAL & NATIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS

Since 2009: 2,972
2013: LOOKING FORWARD

INDIVIDUALS / MEMBERSHIPS

FRIENDS OF QUALITY REPORTING

ROLLOVER

ON-AIR APPEARANCE FEES

FOUNDATIONS

DONORS/MEMBERS

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Mildred Ball
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Wilson Johns
Calvin Johnson
Thomas Klekamp
Jay Lapeyre
Carolyn Leftwich

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Virginia Miller
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Wayne Neveu
Ray & Bev Nichols
John O’Conner
Lawrence Powell
Donna Rachal
Stephen Rathke
Joann Ricci
Tim Ruppert
Marjory Russakoff
Michael Sartisky
Alexandra Simmons
Samuel Spencer
Joanna Sternberg
Patricia Stokes & Dan Shea
Rebecca Theim
Paul Waldman
Lisa Williams
Harley Winer
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