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USFSP ALUM RECEIVES PULITZER FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM



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Charleston Gazette-Mail reporter Eric Eyre, left, speaks with Executive Editor Rob Byers after Eyre won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. Photo credit: Kenny Kemp, Charleston Gazette-Mail.

Petersburg journalism alumnus, was named a [Pulitzer Prize winner](#) this week. The prestigious award in the category of Investigative Reporting was given for his story series on the opioid drug crisis and related overdoses in West Virginia. The report uncovered that drug wholesalers unloaded 780 million hydrocodone and oxycodone pills into the state over a six-year period, during which time 1,728 West Virginians fatally overdosed on the medications.

“It’s really a testament to years of grinding it out as a beat reporter doing investigative projects on the side over the course of 25-plus years,” said Eyre, 51, a statehouse reporter for the [Charleston Gazette-Mail](#) in Charleston, W.Va. Eyre began working there after receiving a master’s degree in mass communication from USFSP in 1998. He has reported on topics that include education, health, business, and state government and legislature. “So many people, including the professors at USFSP, have helped shape my reporting.”

After graduating with a bachelor’s degree from Loyola University of New Orleans in 1987, Eyre worked as a journalist for several years before enrolling at USFSP in the late 1990s. He was the recipient of a Poynter Fund Fellowship, which paid for his tuition and provided a stipend.

“Eric was an outstanding student and research assistant,” said Jay Black, emeritus professor, who chaired the university’s Program for Ethics in Education and Community. Black was one of three faculty members—including department founders Bob Dardenne and Mike Killenberg—who taught classes for the journalism program in the late ‘90s. Eyre, along with another graduate student, assisted Black with a book project and the Journal of Mass Media Ethics.

Eyre credits Black, Dardenne, and Killenberg for contributing to his success as a journalist. “You’d be hard-pressed to find a better trio of journalism professors.”

“When he applied to our program, I was very impressed by his interest in stories that impact ordinary people. His reporting and writing were always excellent,” said Killenberg, emeritus professor and founding director of the [Department of Journalism and Media Studies](#). Killenberg described Eyre as one of his favorite students. “I’ve been following his career, and I’m not surprised that he’s reached the highest level of accomplishment for a journalist. The fact that he did it in a smaller newspaper market against strong competition from larger news organizations makes his achievement all the more impressive.”

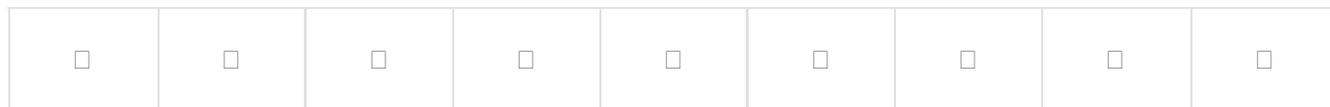
During the time at the university, Eyre interned at the St. Petersburg Times, making a lasting impression with his supervising editors.

“We had a lot of interns over the years at the Times, and Eric stood out as one of the best,” said Rob Hooker, an adjunct instructor in the [USFSP Department of Journalism and Media Studies](#) who served as Metro Editor for the St. Petersburg Times at the time. “He was there as a grad student, so he already had a little gray in his beard. He was a good digger, a good writer, and his attitude was ‘put me in, coach,’ on anything.”

In 2006, Eyre was named an Ethics Fellow at The Poynter Institute.

[Read the Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative series](#) in the Charleston Gazette-Mail.

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