



Cynthia Barnett

Road Racket

Florida Trend, 8/1/00

Review of Florida Department of Transportation files showed taxpayers spent millions more than projected as some contractors underbid jobs and then sought profits through supplemental claims, settlements and lawsuits.



Fred Schulte

Vanity medicine: Hope, hype and risk

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 12/12/99

Fred Schulte and Jenni Bergal used Florida Department of Health records to reveal that doctors with histories of disciplinary action or suspect training were flocking to Florida's booming vanity and anti-aging medical industry.



Steve Patterson



John Dunbar

40% of homes lack inspections

The Florida Times-Union, 3/20/98

More than 74,000 inspection records showed at least 4 of 10 recently built Jacksonville homes had not been fully inspected. The stories prompted an overhaul of the inspection process.



Pat Moore

Martin settled lawsuits in private

The Palm Beach Post, 2/28/98

Records showed politicians in three counties regularly broke the law by settling lawsuits in secret. The newspaper documented that commissioners authorized more than \$4.1 million in settlements in secret proceedings.



Sydney P. Freedberg



Dan Keating

System doesn't prevent felon voting

The Miami Herald, 2/13/98

Sydney P. Freedberg, Dan Keating and various other *Herald* staff used records to show that at least 2,800 ineligible felons were registered to vote in Dade County. This story and others on voter fraud earned *The Miami Herald* a Pulitzer Prize.

Miami Mayoral Crisis

The Miami Herald, 12/9/97



Manny Garcia



Karen Branch-Brioso



Joseph Tanfani



Andres Viglucci

Investigation found dozens of fraudulent absentee ballots cast in mayoral election.



David Ballingrud

Two more VA center deaths revealed

St. Petersburg Times, 2/23/97

David Ballingrud and David Dahl's investigation showed a pattern of waste, mismanagement and malpractice that shocked the conscience of people in the Veterans Administration, Congress, and, in one case, police investigators.



Barbara Boyer

Toddler beaten after taken from home

The Tampa Tribune, 1/27/97

Barbara Boyer obtained public records on an abused child, but a judge demanded the files be sealed from the media. Citing public interest, *The Tribune* ignored the order and went on to discover breakdowns in the system.



Scott Glover



Evelyn Larrubia

Quick cash with few questions

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 11/24/96

Fort Lauderdale pawnshops operated as fronts to convert stolen goods to quick cash. The articles shed light on the exemption for pawn slips from Florida's Public Records Law.



Lynn N. Duke

Board won't free desegregation files

The Ledger (Lakeland), 6/4/92

The Ledger sued for DOJ desegregation files stored on the school board's computer. *The Ledger* challenged a gag order and won. The DOJ and NAACP were about to seek a more limited gag order but backed down.



Margo Harakas

Above the law: Cops who betray the badge

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 7/21/91

Fred Schulte and Margo Harakas unmasked hundreds of problematic Florida police officers: some got jobs amid unresolved rape accusations, recent illegal drug use and even an arrest for assault with intent to murder.



Jenni Bergal

Crisis in Care

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 11/12/89

Fred Schulte and Jenni Bergal combed through thousands of pages of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) reports, audits and other records and found that many foster children were placed back with abusive families, and some even lost their lives.

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The Story Behind the Stories

*The Top 30
Freedom of Information
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“The Story Behind the Stories” recognizes more than 60 journalists and 11 Florida newspapers for their use of freedom of information laws in hard-hitting investigative journalism. The articles illustrate the importance of open government laws and reflect how these stories benefitted the public. Learn more about the investigative work of Florida's finest journalists at www.brechner.org/top30.



John Maines

License to Carry: Florida's flawed concealed weapons law

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 1/28/07

Three-day series by Megan O' Matz and John Maines used public records databases to reveal how concealed weapons permits were issued to criminals and that a Public Records Law exemption now makes the database secret.



Carol Marbin Miller

Officials release video of boot camp beating

The Miami Herald, 1/06-12/06

Carol Marbin Miller and Marc Caputo investigated how a 14-year-old boy held at a boot camp died of asphyxiation after guards overtook him. Together with CNN, the paper filed suit for release of the video of the boy's death.



Patrick Danner



Dan Christensen

More cases uncovered in Broward court

The Miami Herald, 04/06-09/06

More than 300 civil cases filed in Broward Circuit Court were kept secret. At the newspaper's request, the Broward clerk's office located another 314 cases.



Jack Dolan



Scott Hiaasen

Firefighters earned millions in fire-watch duty

The Miami Herald, 6/21/06

Public records showed Miami-Dade County firefighters made \$4.3 million on "fire watch," an ostensible public safety program that never saved a life. The Miami-Dade Fire Chief was asked to review the fire-watch policy.

Cases kept out of the public record

St. Petersburg Times, 6/16/06



Curtis Kreuger



Steve Nohlgren



Chris Tisch



Jamal Thalji

More than 200 Pinellas County civil cases were hidden from the public for years and some of them were improperly sealed by clerks.



Tom Dubocq

County commissioner hides multi-million dollar land deal

The Palm Beach Post, 4/9/06

Thousands of records gathered from 16 government agencies exposed a Palm Beach County commissioner's secret multi-million dollar land deal. As a result, he resigned and plead guilty to honest services fraud.



Sally Kestin

FEMA: A Legacy of Waste

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 9/05-10/06

Sally Kestin, John Maines and Megan O'Matz revealed that FEMA paid out \$31 million in Miami-Dade County for a hurricane that actually struck more than 100 miles away.



Joe Adams

We're No. 1 (Gasp)

The Florida Times-Union, 9/25/05

The editorial page examined 20 years of crime reports to reveal Duval County led the state in murder rates for 12 of the last 17 years, drawing national attention, including from President George W. Bush.



Mike Hoyem

Deed scam leaves mess for state, counties

Fort Myers News-Press, 8/1/05

The late Mike Hoyem used records to identify seven companies and individuals filing forged deeds worth well over \$1 million. The stories helped spark investigations and five federal indictments in other scams.



Connie Humburg

Wandering weapons

St. Petersburg Times, 5/11/03

Connie Humburg and Sydney P. Freedberg investigated public records and revealed that explosives, mines, mortars, grenades, firearms and rounds had been lost or stolen from U.S. stockpiles since the 1991 Persian Gulf War and that the weapons may have been misused.



Megan O'Matz



Diana Marrero

Lost kids found easily

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 8/11/02

Sally Kestin, Megan O'Matz and Diana Marrero used records to locate nine missing children that Florida's child welfare system had been unable to locate for as long as eight years.



Paige St. John

Lobbyists bundle their contributions

Gannett News Service, 7/13/02

Records show how Florida associations and companies pool money they give to political candidates and causes in order to bypass a \$500 spending limit. These records help the public evaluate political decisions.



Peter Franceschina

Case file shows how church dealt with priests

South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 3/23/02

Court files offer a rare look into how the Catholic Church handled abusive priests over the last 40 years. They were often sent to other parishes while parents struggled with requests from church authorities to remain silent.



Henry Pierson Curtis



Pamela J. Johnson

Autopsy: Suspect dies of asphyxia

Orlando Sentinel, 9/7/02

Medical examiner's autopsy report shows a man shocked 13 times with a Taser gun by Orange County sheriff's deputies suffocated after being strapped facedown on a stretcher.



Ronnie Greene

\$500,000 spent on MIA lobbying

The Miami Herald, 12/9/01

It took two years and more than \$330,000 in legal costs to find the staggering amount of money that high-powered lobbyists earn helping private companies keep public contracts, including Dade's massive airport expansion.

NASCAR idles while drivers die

Orlando Sentinel, 6/15/01



Ed Hinton



Jim Leusner



Mike Bianchi



George Diaz

The investigation revealed NASCAR driver deaths shared a common link, resulting in increased safety requirements.



Amy Driscoll

Dade undervotes support Bush win

The Miami Herald, 2/26/01

In a review of votes not detected by counting machines in the 2000 presidential election, Amy Driscoll and Martin Merzer found that Al Gore's recount effort probably would have failed to stop George W. Bush.



Sean Holton



Ramsey Campbell



Robert Sargent

Small districts profitable

Orlando Sentinel, 10/15/00

Jim Leusner and others investigated developers who levied a tax to unknowing residents in order to recoup their own costs.