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From Madison College to an unexpected Pulitzer Prize

KELLY FENG
Managing Editor

In the early morning of June 24, a 12-story condominium in Miami, half of Champlain Towers South, collapsed. Miami Herald investigative reporter Sarah Blaskey woke up at 5:45 a.m. and learned the news.

While she didn't know the specific details, she knew that a building falling in a city where she worked as an investigative reporter would change her life forever, she said.

After hearing the news, Blaskey immediately contacted her editor. Minutes later, Casey Frank called back and assigned her as the lead investigative reporter, tasking her to explore why the building fell.



JOSE IGLASAI

Sarah Blaskey, a Madison College journalism student, was part of a Pulitzer Prize winning team.

Blaskey, a Madison College journalism student and 2010 Clarion Managing Editor, covered the 2017 Mexico

earthquake and the 2018 Miami bridge collapse. From her experience working in disasters like these, she knew there would be a high death toll, with information and details unfolding slowly.

Investigating and Partnering

As Blaskey's colleagues were at the Champlain South Towers interviewing witnesses, Blaskey was at the newspaper offices placing the first records request before 7 a.m. (The Champlain Towers South would later be referred to as the "Surfside Condominium.")

She learned everything she could about

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Breast cancer is genderless

ANDERSON CORCORAN / CLARION

The Madison College Peer Health Educators gave out breast cancer screening kits on Oct. 5 in the Madison College Health Building to highlight Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Self-awareness is the first step in prevention

MICHELLE MEYER
Staff Writer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among female born people (after skin cancer). According to Cancer.gov, 12.9% of female born U.S. citizens will develop breast cancer sometime during their lives. That is a 1 in 8 chance of being diagnosed with breast cancer.

While the main risk factor for breast cancer is being born female, cancer shows no bias. Breast cancer affects people of any gender, race or age.

To stand up against the risk of breast cancer, Madison College Peer Health Educators have designed a program to empower students with information. The program, "Breast Cancer is Genderless," is designed with inclusivity in mind, under the direction of Denise Holin, Student Health Educator.

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3 STEPS

Summary of Early Detection Guide

- 1. Breast Self-Awareness.** Know your breast so you can notice changes. Don't be afraid to speak to your care team.
- 2. Well-Person Exam.** Get a yearly well-exam, which includes pelvic exam, pap smear and a brief breast exam.
- 3. Mammogram.** The National Breast Cancer Foundation recommends that all female born people get a mammogram annually if over the age of 40. If under 40 with high risk factors, you are also eligible. Speak with your health care team about any concerns.

For more information, talk to your health care provider and visit <https://www.nationalbreastcancer.org>.

**Summary paraphrased from Jakubowski and Pophal's highlights of the 3 Steps to Early Detection, published by the National Breast Cancer Foundation.



CLARION STAFF PHOTO

Staff members talk to students about the new student website.

Changes are coming to the college's student website

BRYCE DAILEY
Staff Writer

The updated Madison College website is set to launch Oct. 26, with student accessibility and ease of use a top priority in the redesign.

Students.madisoncollege.edu (which differs from madisoncollege.edu, a separate site for recruitment and prospective students), has been in the process of an update since October 2021. As some students find the

current site to be cumbersome, the update was developed with five specific goals in mind: to better guide students through the enrollment process, to connect students to on-campus and virtual resources, to showcase student involvement opportunities, to support each student's academic success and to link student with tools necessary for their success, according to a series of articles which documented the new site's progress.

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PULITZER

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reinforced concrete and was immersed in a crash course on structural engineering.

The Herald contracted Dr. Dawn Lehman, University of Washington professor of civil and environmental engineering, to assist them with the reporting. Leham studied photographs, videos, drawings and permits to understand why the condominium collapsed. Blaskey and Lehman talked for hours every day for six months.

Blaskey can't say enough about Lehman's patience in explaining engineering concepts repeatedly.

"It was a really unique experience for me working so closely with somebody who was not a journalist and trying to blend those two worlds," she said.

Blaskey is fascinated with interdisciplinary work, where journalists partner with experts to create something better than journalists can give their readers. "Partnering with those experts can be really valuable to elevate what we're able to give to our audience," she said.

"House of Cards"

In addition to Lehman, several engineers donated their time to help the staff understand structural concepts.

Eventually, the Surfside Condominium collapse death toll came to 98 residents dead. The Herald investigative team worked around the clock for months to get the answers as to why the building pancaked. When it wrapped up, it took about 13 months.

The team presented the final form of their investigation titled "House of Cards," an animated scrolling article with visual metaphors that helped explain extremely complicated engineering concepts.

"House of Cards" presented thinking outside of that traditional print box and allowed them to create something that resonated with many people.

The reporter said that there was something about this step-by-step presentation, with compelling visuals, that drove home the point to readers.

"It's back to that concept of innovation. Maybe we can see this moment where we can explain better than we've been able to explain in the past. That



PEDRO PORTAL/MIAMI HERALD/TNS

View of the land that once housed the Champlain Towers South in Surfside, Florida after the rubble was cleared out, on Aug. 10, 2021. The condo located at 8777 Collins Avenue in Surfside collapsed early Thursday morning on June 24, 2021.

was a really good experience for me to present the information like that," Blaskey said.

An Emotional Journey

Blaskey explains that when tragedies like the Surfside Collapse happen, an investigative team becomes a quick unit that has to dig into why something happened. As an investigative reporter, she had to put her emotions aside to do her job, but eventually, she had to cope with her feelings.

"There is a balance between not making the story about you and not becoming the story, keeping some objective perspective. But these are my neighbors. This happened 17 blocks down the street from my house," Blaskey said.

"This is on my running route. I ran past this building every day. I knew people who knew people (in the building). This is my community, my neighbors."

She says it hits hard for local reporters when tragedies happen in their backyard, which was true of Surfside. Reporters have to balance reporting objectively and quickly, and they can't let their emotions overwhelm them, but they also must feel them.

"Emotions can be our strength as

reporters. Having a connection to the community allows me to tell the story in a unique way. It allows my colleagues to tell the story and walk away. It also gave me a sense of motivation and purpose."

She says she endured long hours and no weekends off because she felt the service and the drive to give her community answers.

"It's my contribution. It's how I give back. It's how I honor the people who lost their lives. That means everything to me."

A Team

Last May, the Miami Herald won the Pulitzer Prize for breaking news reporting on the Surfside Tower collapse. The prize was awarded to about 40 different journalists in the newsroom.

Blaskey points out that not all journalists are journalists in a typical way people think of them.

She points out there are journalists on the field who are interviewing people at the scene. Then there are journalists like Blaskey investigating, requesting records and compiling data.

Along with traditional journalists, copy editors, photographers and social media producers collected stories, told

the stories and engaged with the community.

In addition to appreciating her colleagues, Blaskey says she values her editor Casey Frank.

"I could not have done any of the work I do without him and his support and faith in me," Blaskey said, noting the long hours and times she was completely baffled. "He's just been incredible."

Winning a Pulitzer, "Never comes down to one person. That's the point I want to make. This is not about me," Blaskey said, "I'm a member of a much bigger team, and that team is fantastic, and every single one of them poured their hearts and souls into this coverage."

Blaskey is proud to work on the Herald, a legacy paper.

"Despite having staffing problems, budget shortages and reductions over the years, the staff came out and represented their community. They did this for the love of their community."

Editor's note: To see the "House of Cards" presentation, along with the Miami Herald stories, computer model and podcast see: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/special-reports/surfside-investigation/article256633336.html>



ANDRES SANCHEZ / CLARION

Intercultural Fall Social

Comedian Lafayette Wright performs at the annual Intercultural Fall Social held in the Intercultural Exchange on Sept. 28.

CANCER

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Jaxyn Pophal, Peer Health Educator, says: "When it comes to breast cancer, most people automatically assume it only affects women. However, that is far from the truth."

About 1 in 800 or 0.13% of male born U.S. citizens are diagnosed with breast cancer sometime in their lives according to Cancer.gov.

"Breast Cancer is Genderless" goes beyond the statistics to make information accessibility inclusive.

The program places tangible power in the hands of students through a Breast Cancer Awareness Kit. Rheanne Jakubowski, Peer Health Educator, says "We're hoping these kits will remind people that it's never too early to get proactive about your own

health." The kits may include Pink Ribbon pins, stickers, bracelets, a "Breast Cancer Fact Sheet" and "3-Steps to Early Detection Guide."

Jakubowski explains the three steps to early detection as breast self-awareness, well-woman exams and mammograms.

Breast self-awareness is getting familiar with the look and feel of your own breasts. Jakowski urges, "Don't be afraid to speak with your doctor if you're unsure or simply have questions."

Yearly well-woman exams are important regardless of your health, says Jakubowski. The well exam includes a routine pelvic exam, pap smear and a brief breast exam.

According to the National Library of Medicine, mortality from breast cancer decreased 39% from 1990 to 2015. This decrease is due, in part, to

improved early detection methods and empowering active self-care with information.

That is why Peer Health Educators have implemented the "Breast Cancer is Genderless" program. As Jakubowski observes, "Most traditional college age students aren't thinking about breast cancer, unless they know someone personally who has suffered. The kit is all about creating and reinforcing awareness."

The Peer Health Educator program takes a genderless approach to empowering students to know their bodies, be informed and speak confidently about their healthcare.

The message from Student Health is clear: Breast cancer is an everyone issue, be informed and save a life, your own.

WEBSITE

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A few practical applications include "one-click" access to Blackboard, myMadisonCollege, student email and more from the home page of the site, as well as a streamlined enrollment process for new students with specific checklists. Landing pages for the

many student services will now be searchable, with the "Find Services and Resources" feature.

"This is content now just for students. Prior to this new launch, there's still information on there that's more for marketing or promotional purposes, there's information meant for faculty and staff," said Jody Hartwig, Madison College Web manager. Hartwig

also said there will be greatly improved responsive design for mobile users.

Hartwig promises a seamless transition during the update's debut, which is set for Oct. 26.

Questions and difficulties on the new site can be directed to Madison College library staff, who are being trained to support students with difficulties.