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WITH MULTIPLE PHONE LINES RINGING, POLICE SCANNERS CRACKLING and reporters checking in at any moment, Skowrya must make split-second decisions about where in greater Boston to send reporters, camera crews and “live” trucks to cover breaking news. An assignment editor at WCVB Channel 5 since 2004, she works off-camera at the speed of light at the station’s news desk, called by some the ‘heartbeat’ of the news organization.

“All the information flows through here,” Skowrya said. “I work with another assignment editor and we have a good team. We do a lot of quick decision making, which includes tons of logistical decisions, as we move crews around. There’s a lot going on here all the time.”

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In many and unexpected ways Skowrya’s undergraduate years prepared her well for the controlled chaos of working a broadcast news assignment desk.

“I always felt like I was doing a million things at Assumption,” she said. “I changed my major after two years and took lots of different classes, plus I worked on *The Provoc*, so I was pulled in many different directions at once. Working long hours and juggling a lot was good preparation for my job today.”

Skowrya has experienced dramatic changes in the way broadcast news is gathered, packaged and reported since she joined the assignment desk team at Channel 5 five years ago.

“So much has changed in such a short time,” she said. “Today, people are going to different sources for their news and to different media, like Facebook and Twitter, for breaking news. Most people aren’t waiting until 5 p.m. to turn on their TVs to see the news. There’s a lot more immediacy with breaking news. People want to know right away what’s going on.”

Also gone are the days when reporters and camera crews would bring breaking news back to the station to be edited for the evening news broadcast.

“When it’s breaking news, we need to get a crew to the scene immediately in a live truck,” Skowrya said. “They need to get the video back to us right away to get it on air and on the Web site. It’s not like it was even five years ago. Everybody is doing more. It used to be that reporters went out with one story to cover. Now they have two or three assignments in a day. It’s challenging, but that also makes it exciting.”

Skowrya, who grew up in Quincy, would not have predicted as an Assumption freshman that one day she would be employed at ground zero in the newsroom of WCVB-TV.

BY ELIZABETH WALKER

I was a psychology major my first two years and I minored in writing,” she said.

“I thought I would be a child psychologist or a guidance counselor, but I really liked to write. I joined *The Provoc* and took a journalism class with Professor Mike Land. Also, I had an internship in the public affairs office on campus. I was leaning toward writing, so I changed my major to what was then called ‘business communication,’ which I think is now called organizational communication.

Right after graduation, Skowrya took a part-time job selling advertising at the *Quincy Sun* newspaper, where the publisher also let her write stories.

“I did a lot of interviewing and writing,” she said. “At the end of the summer I applied to be a part-time editorial assistant on the city desk at the *Boston Herald*. My two part-time jobs eventually turned into one full-time job at the *Herald*, where I was fortunate enough to cover stories and develop quite a few bylines during my time there.”

The next year Skowrya moved to Channel 5.

“I applied for an assistant assignment editor position that I thought sounded similar to what I was doing, but in broadcast rather than print,” she said. “It was quite different. The deadlines were more immediate and the technical side of news seemed so involved. It was quite an adjustment in the beginning. Now I’m an assignment editor, but I also inherited the planning editor responsibilities when that job was eliminated, and I produce a weekly entertainment segment. I have a lot more responsibility than when I started.”

Since February 2008, Skowrya has been producing a weekly program, “Boston’s View,” with Channel 5 meteorologist JC Monahan.

“Every week JC sits down with interesting, influential people with local connections to Boston to talk about current events and hot topics,” she said. Some guests Skowrya’s booked for this segment have included comedian Lenny Clarke, Bruin’s great Cam Neely, Aerosmith’s Joey Kramer and Chef Ming Tsai. “There are so many great people from this area that it’s nice to be able to share their stories and this segment with our viewers.” Originally intended just for the Web, Boston’s View now airs on the weekend morning newscasts.

Quick decisions, unexpected events and long hours have always been part of the assignment desk job, but in today’s broadcast news environment added responsibilities, new technology and an ever-accelerating pace heighten the challenge of breaking solid news stories first.

“The change of pace in the past five years has made the job more demanding, but it also adds excitement,” Skowrya said. “Everything is fast-paced and immediate now. We’re trying to cover more. The reporters all have BlackBerrys now to get information back immediately for the Web site. It’s hard work and everybody’s doing more. It’s also a real commitment. When I come in in the morning, I’m never sure when I’m going to leave work. If there’s major breaking news, you can’t walk out the door.”

When Skowrya finally leaves the television station at the end of a long day, she heads to Weymouth to spend a quiet evening with her husband AJ Skowrya '03 in their new home. ❖