**Alberto Ibargüen ⁠— a vision to reinvent local news**

*This month, we’re exploring the impact of the* [*2022 Free Expression Award*](https://mcas-proxyweb.mcas.ms/certificate-checker?login=false&originalUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.freedomforum.org.mcas.ms%2Ffreeexpressionawards%2F%3FMcasTsid%3D20892&McasCSRF=82982ca89d613a19ac5af0512740513bfeca7a52d6015d3642871adb999453f1) *honorees, including Alberto Ibargüen, president and CEO of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, who will receive the Al Neuharth Award for Excellence in the Media. These are the stories of how the First Amendment advocates we’re honoring have used their voices to uplift others.* [*Watch the Free Expression Awards*](https://mcas-proxyweb.mcas.ms/certificate-checker?login=false&originalUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.freedomforum.org.mcas.ms%2Ffreeexpressionawards%2F%3FMcasTsid%3D20892%23watch&McasCSRF=82982ca89d613a19ac5af0512740513bfeca7a52d6015d3642871adb999453f1) *live at 8 p.m. EDT on Thursday, April 28.*

One afternoon in May 2009, a handful of leaders in the media sat before a congressional committee discussing how to save journalism.

Among them was **Alberto Ibargüen**, president and CEO of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, who had a different idea. “The question in my mind is not how to save the traditional news industry, but how to meet the information needs of communities in a democracy so that the people might, as **Jack Knight** used to put it, determine their ‘own true interests’,” Ibargüen said.

Ibargüen had long held that a functioning democracy needs an informed citizenry, and traditional media was falling behind the pace of digitization, misinformation and disinformation, losing the public’s trust. He laid out a vision of a different model for local news: community-centered, nonprofit and digital.

He also cautioned that he didn’t have a quick answer to whether news could look more like this ideal in 10 years. But if anyone could bring this vision to bear, it would be Ibargüen.

“We will be a nation of media users, not consumers.” — Alberto Ibargüen, president and CEO of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in congressional testimony in May 2009

He was already a mentor and leader in newsrooms. [Washington Postassociate editor and MSNBC anchor **Jonathan Capehart**](https://mcas-proxyweb.mcas.ms/certificate-checker?login=false&originalUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com.mcas.ms%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dp3RVSJMNSaI%26McasTsid%3D20892&McasCSRF=82982ca89d613a19ac5af0512740513bfeca7a52d6015d3642871adb999453f1), who met Ibargüen while working at a New York radio station, said he learned from Ibargüen “what it means to be a leader, what it means to ensure that everyone feels welcome, no matter who they are.”

During Ibargüen’s tenure as publisher at The Miami Herald and El Nuevo Herald, his leadership inspired journalism that earned three Pulitzer Prizes, including one for discovering voter fraud in a Miami mayoral race.

As head of the Impunity Committee of the Inter-American Press Association, from 1998-2004, he was at the forefront of the global press freedom movement, focusing on journalist safety and creating a network to investigate unsolved deaths of journalists in the Americas.

Ibargüen also saw a need for a broader movement to reshape the journalism profession, adapt to new digital realities and reinvent news altogether.

“Our information systems helped define American communities and helped give them individuality and character. Those systems have changed. The new systems are digital and mobile and not bound by geography.” — Ibargüen in congressional testimony in May 2009

With Knight, he has made that possibility a reality for many communities. He leads the foundation’s efforts to support and fund experimentation, innovation and new business models for news.

From California to Maine, he’s led investment in growing local, trusted news organizations:

* Grants to CALmatters have helped counter shrinking statehouse coverage and create a statewide network of content sharing among local, independent and nonprofit publishers in California.
* Funding for the Bangor (Maine) Daily News, a leader in the transition to digital, helped it shore up online platforms to reach a largely rural audience.
* In Chicago, Ibargüen’s vision for local news has been realized at: City Bureau, where more than 1,000 “documenters” have been trained to cover public meetings, making the information more accessible; Block Club Chicago, which covers underserved and urban communities and delivers its content in new digital ways; and Muslim Journal, whose future is more secure with an online circulation, continuing a legacy of more than 40 years.

Ibargüen’s bold mission to not save traditional news delivery, but to reinvent it, has meant changing the face of the news media, too, through funding for Native media, Black-owned publications and avenues to further grow diversity in journalism, like the new [Knight Chair in Race and Journalism at Howard University](https://mcas-proxyweb.mcas.ms/certificate-checker?login=false&originalUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.freedomforum.org.mcas.ms%2F2022%2F04%2F06%2Fnikole-hannah-jones-reviving-voices-lost-to-history-and-empowering-communities-today%2F%3FMcasTsid%3D20892&McasCSRF=82982ca89d613a19ac5af0512740513bfeca7a52d6015d3642871adb999453f1).

In February 2019, the Knight Foundation announced a five-year, $300 million grantmaking program to grow the vision Ibargüen laid out 10 years before and helped the industry to fulfill.

“We’re not funding one-offs,” [Ibargüen says](https://mcas-proxyweb.mcas.ms/certificate-checker?login=false&originalUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fnonprofitquarterly.org.mcas.ms%2Fknight-foundations-networked-funding-strategy-is-well-worth-watching%2F%3FMcasTsid%3D20892&McasCSRF=82982ca89d613a19ac5af0512740513bfeca7a52d6015d3642871adb999453f1). “We’re rebuilding a local news ecosystem, reliable and sustainable, and we’re doing it in a way that anyone who cares can participate.”

*The* [*2022 Free Expression Awards*](https://mcas-proxyweb.mcas.ms/certificate-checker?login=false&originalUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.freedomforum.org.mcas.ms%2Ffreeexpressionawards%2F%3FMcasTsid%3D20892&McasCSRF=82982ca89d613a19ac5af0512740513bfeca7a52d6015d3642871adb999453f1) *are on April 28 at The Anthem in Washington, D.C. and streamed live online. Ibargüen will become the 35th recipient of the Al Neuharth Award for Excellence in the Media.*