



CENTER FOR MEDIA INNOVATION

Point Park University



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Doris O'Donnell: A media pioneer

Doris O'Donnell spent more than 50 years as a journalist, fulfilling her childhood dream.

"The only thing I ever wanted in my life was a newspaper job," she said in her 2006 memoir, "Front-Page Girl."

From high-profile crimes to international reporting and embedded work, O'Donnell's 58-year career started and ended in Cleveland, with 15 years in between at the Tribune-Review in Greensburg, Pa.

She earned the respect of her sources, colleagues and competition with her determination and dedication when it came to getting the facts at the Cleveland News on the police beat and later as a general assignment reporter at the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

"My cleanest, purest, targeted thoughts were: just get the story," she wrote in her memoir. "I never knew in advance, but I knew, just knew, I'd get it."

O'Donnell's reporting career, from 1944 to her retirement in 1996 at age 75, had her covering stories all over the country and the world:

- Sam Sheppard murder trial in 1954 that made national news, inspiring a TV show and film "The Fugitive"
- Two months in 1948 spent living with a black family to humanize issues of diversity and race for readers
- Day-in-the life "stunt" stories in 1951 as a cab driver, prison matron, welder, tank driver and circus performer
- The state of the Soviet Union, when "in the thaw" of the Cold War in 1956, she was the third American newswoman admitted there
- An "eastern swing" with the Cleveland Indians, when she became the first woman admitted to sit in the press box of Washington D.C.'s Griffith Park. She was barred from the press boxes of the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees.

In 1973, Richard Scaife hired O'Donnell to work at the Greensburg Tribune-Review. O'Donnell also served a brief stint as editor of Pittsburgher Magazine and covered a 1981 NATO trip through Europe, interviewing German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

She married Cleveland News editor Howard Beaufait in 1957. They were active in the Cleveland chapter of the American Newspaper Guild and Press Club of Cleveland. He died of cancer in 1976.

O'Donnell was inducted into the Press Club of Cleveland Hall of Fame in 1984, having won state and regional awards throughout her career. She also was [one of the founders of Ligonier Valley Writers](#) and spent 30 years as a trustee of the Allegheny Foundation.

She died at age 94 in 2015.

A 2007-2009 television series based on her memoir, ["Doris O'Donnell's Cleveland,"](#) was produced by StoryWorks.TV and won local Emmy Awards.