



PHOTO COURTESY OF JON HANIAN

Boise State alumnus Hanian, left, was interviewed by NBC *Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw in New York and featured on a national telecast about the duPont Award winners aired on the Public Broadcasting System.

BY LARRY BURKE

Reporter wins top award for coverage of scandal

For most television reporters, especially those far away from the spotlight of a major media market, the Alfred I. duPont Award is an unattainable dream.

After all, what news in the nation's hinterland could possibly attract the attention of judges for the top award given in the broadcast journalism profession?

For the answer, tune to KBCI Channel 2 investigative reporter Jon Hanian (MA, history, '01), a key member of the news team that recently won the prestigious award for its work on "Shake Up at City Hall," the series of stories that uncovered fiscal misconduct by Boise Mayor Brent Coles and other city officials. (Hanian shared the award with fellow KBCIers Michael Keckler, reporter; Jeff Ray, producer; Clyn Richards, chief photographer; and Hank Nystrom and Chris Ceresa, photographers.)

After audits, investigations and court proceedings, Coles, chief of staff Gary Lyman and personnel director Tammy Rice all received jail sentences.

"It was a 'Eureka' moment for me to see the names of the winners of the duPont. We are one of the smallest stations that has ever won it. It was a very humbling experience," says Hanian, who also was featured in late January on a national PBS broadcast about investigative reporting.

His careful look into the arcane world of Boise city politics has left Hanian with mixed feelings. He isn't the least bit triumphant about his role in the award-winning story that was the talk of the town for more than a year.

"You don't get into these kinds of stories and not feel for the people you are covering," he comments.

"We wanted to just present what we found out; unfortunately, there is no way you can do that and not hurt people and their families. That's the hardest part — none of

us took any pleasure in it.

"Sometimes this job has tremendous power and responsibility. We have to be judicious and careful in its use. Getting at the heart of the truth is what this business is about ... that's the first cardinal rule. We got a lot of comments from people who thought we were on a witch hunt. But it wasn't about personalities — it had to do with the public's money and giving people a sense of how it was being misused.

"At this time when so many people are having a hard time making ends meet, they wanted the politicians to pay attention to this," he continues. "If anything comes of this, it is the message that 'this is what will happen if you misuse the public's money. You do so at your own peril.'"

As a graduate student at Boise State, his long hours in the library taught him some important lessons that helped in his job, he says. "Boise State taught me a lot about researching and documenting sources. I learned the mechanics of investigating things, and it was tremendously valuable," he says.

With more than 20 years at the microphone, Hanian has seen his share of human nature. And he offers some advice for people who might be tempted to play fast and loose with the facts.

"There are two things that get me going — when somebody lies to me and I catch them, and hypocrisy, somebody saying one thing and doing another. That alerts me that there is something to look into."

Hanian is today as refreshingly idealistic about the role of local television news as he was the day he started. "I like feeling we are impacting people's lives in a way that is beneficial," he says. "This is a difficult job to do because of the pressures. But what makes it worthwhile is when you do a story that really helps somebody. I've had the great fortune to do stories that have done that."