

**MEDIA**

# Thank a journalist this Labor Day week

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**W**orkers across Connecticut are enjoying a shortened week, thanks to the Labor Day holiday. But as we honor the work of everyday men and women, let’s give a special thanks to one group that’s had a tough time recently: local TV news reporters and producers. It’s a job that, despite what the president says (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/832708293516632065>), isn’t at all “fake news!”

Local journalists must be on-call 24/7, as we saw with disasters like Hurricane Harvey ([https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4332?utm\\_source=hp\\_promo&utm\\_medium=web&utm\\_campaign=disaster](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4332?utm_source=hp_promo&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=disaster)) last week in Houston and in 2012 with Hurricane Sandy (<https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4087>) here in Connecticut. Before the storms hit, news stations go into what’s called “continuous coverage” – broadcasting 24-hours a day, without commercials, for days on end. Instead of preparing themselves, their families, their pets and their homes, reporters and producers pack suitcases to live at the station until the danger has passed.

If they're lucky, the station reserves a block of nearby hotel rooms for everyone to share, two to a room. But often, it means sleeping on cots in spare offices or unused studios, eating buffet-style food, and showering in restrooms while "off duty."

In the control room, producers are working five to eight hours straight, constantly looking for new live shots to take, checking with reporters to see if they have new information, putting the anchors and meteorologists on-air, setting up phone interviews with emergency officials and storm victims, and making sure it all happens seamlessly. But they're the lucky ones. At least they're dry and warm inside.

Reporters and photographers are out in the storm and flooding for eight to 12 hours at a time. Between live hits, they're walking around getting video and interviews, only retreating into live trucks, businesses, or homes when they have enough elements to put a story together. They also have to be ready to move to a new location at a moment's notice as news breaks – often driving through the very same conditions the anchors are urging people to avoid.

But even on typical news days, there's nothing easy or glamorous about producing and reporting TV news. Gone are the days when reporters would work as a team, covering events with a seasoned photojournalist, video editor and live truck operator. Instead, most stations, including those in the Hartford / New Haven market (<http://www.dishuser.com/TVMarkets/City%20Maps/Hartford.gif>) (the 30<sup>th</sup> largest in the country (<http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/docs/solutions/measurement/television/2016-2017-nielsen-local-dma-ranks.pdf>)) now use "one man bands" to cover the news. Reporters go out into the community alone, shooting their own video, finding and conducting their own interviews, writing their own stories, editing their own video, and often setting up their own live shots far from the comfort of the TV station. While this approach saves the station's owner money, it makes the job of reporting more difficult and stressful than ever before.

The hours TV reporters and producers work are also among the most difficult in any profession. Have a "9 to 5" Monday through Friday schedule is rare. For a typical morning newscast, for instance, producers arrive at 11 p.m. the night before and work all night long, until 7 or 8 a.m. Sunshine becomes their enemy. They have to train their bodies to sleep during the day and stay awake all night long. Other shifts aren't much better. Journalists routinely give up their weekends, evenings at home with their families, and even major holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas and the Fourth of July, since news happens 365-days a year, not just on days when it's convenient for journalists.

On top of all this, TV reporters and producers are paid less than most people think. According to the Radio Television Digital News Association ([https://www.rtdna.org/article/rtdna\\_research\\_salary\\_survey](https://www.rtdna.org/article/rtdna_research_salary_survey)), salaries in small TV markets like Springfield, Massachusetts or Burlington, Vermont hover about \$26,000. In markets the size of Connecticut, often a second or third job for most journalists, reporters only make about \$55,000 per year. Producers and photographers make even less. Only high-profile anchors crack six figures. So in other words, few people get rich reporting the news.

But despite all this, TV news is still an amazing profession, and there are more people who want to be TV journalists than there are jobs available. Why? Because, like nursing, art, or teaching, it's "a calling."

Journalists love the energy of a newsroom, the excitement of breaking news, and the ability to see first-hand the things most people only read about or watch on TV. They get to cover a new story each day, talk to interesting people, and love the idea of running towards things (like hurricanes) that most people run away from. They can't imagine sitting in an anonymous office working 9 to 5 and doing the same thing hour after hour, day after day. They do it not for money or comfortable hours, but to help the public.

So this holiday week, let's take a moment to thank and appreciate the people who work long sometimes dangerous hours for low pay, all to keep the rest of us safe and informed.

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*(<https://www.qu.edu/academics/colleges-schools-and-departments/school-of-communications/>)*

