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## Gaines lecture panel to focus on December tornadoes

By JOHN REECER [jreecer@bgdailynews.com](mailto:jreecer@bgdailynews.com)

Mar 29, 2022



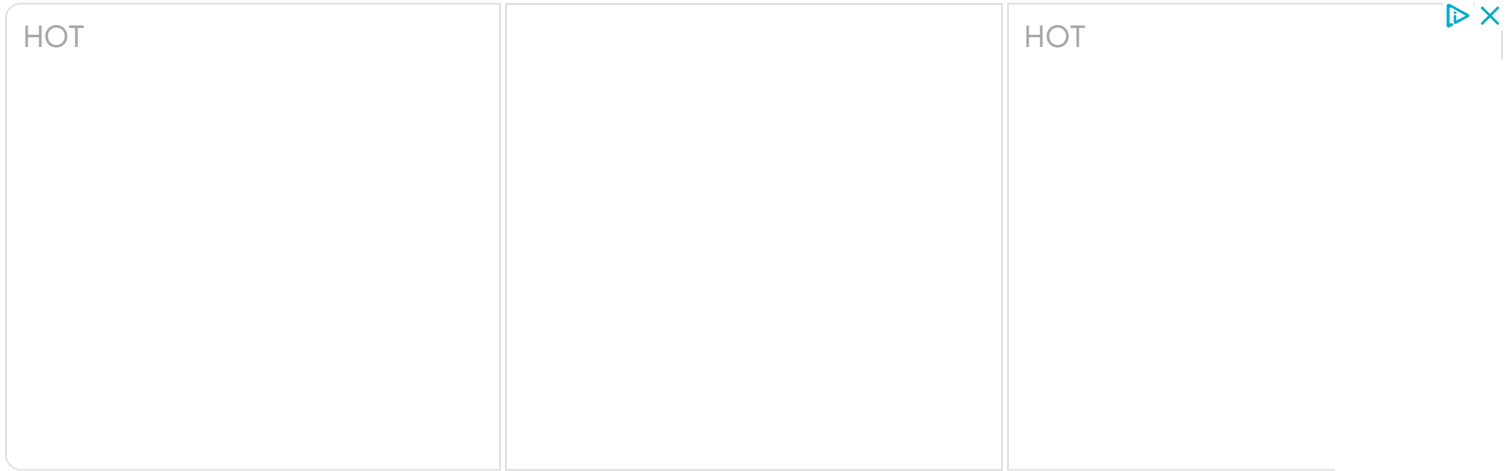
Local firefighters, EMS and first responders check for survivors trapped in home on Avenue after an EF-3 tornado with estimated 120 mph wind speeds tore through the area on Dec. 11, 2021. (Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

In its return from a two-year COVID-19 hiatus, the Western Kentucky University School of Media's 2022 John B. Gaines Family Lecture Series will feature local and national

journalists for a discussion centered on the December tornadoes.

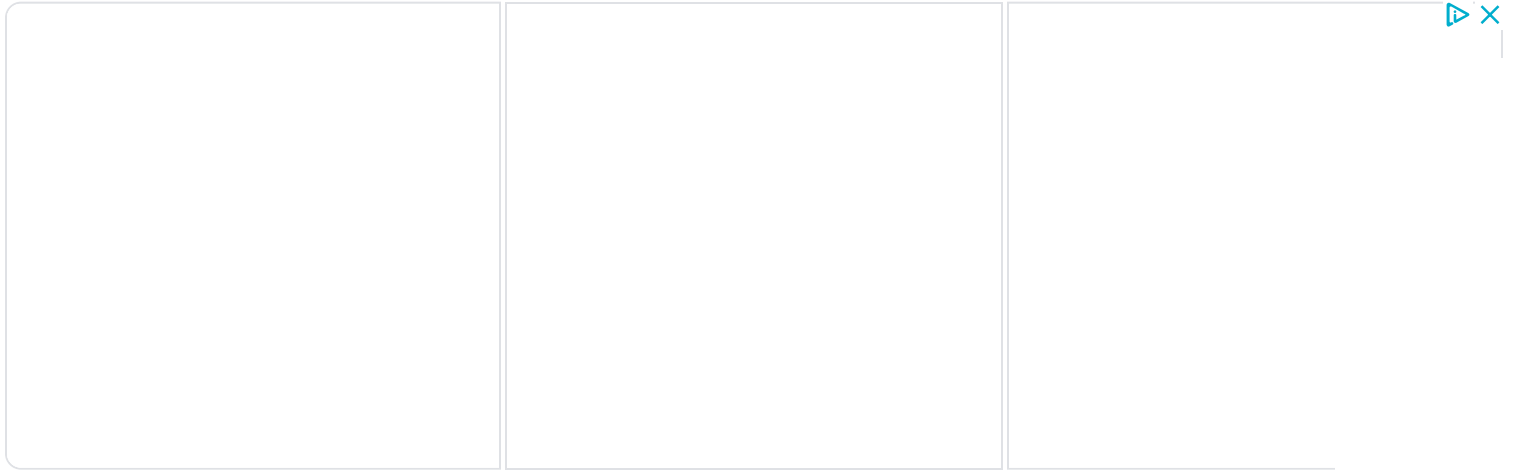
This year’s roundtable, “When Disaster Strikes,” will focus on how journalists from various outlets reported on the storm and their efforts to highlight the struggles people face while rebuilding.



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Jonathan Adams, WKU School of Media professional-in-residence and event organizer, said the panel discussion scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Thursday will aim to emphasize the importance of community journalism.

“It’s about having a community discussion about what took place, but also the realization that the story isn’t over,” Adams said. “The power of community journalism tells us what is still going on.



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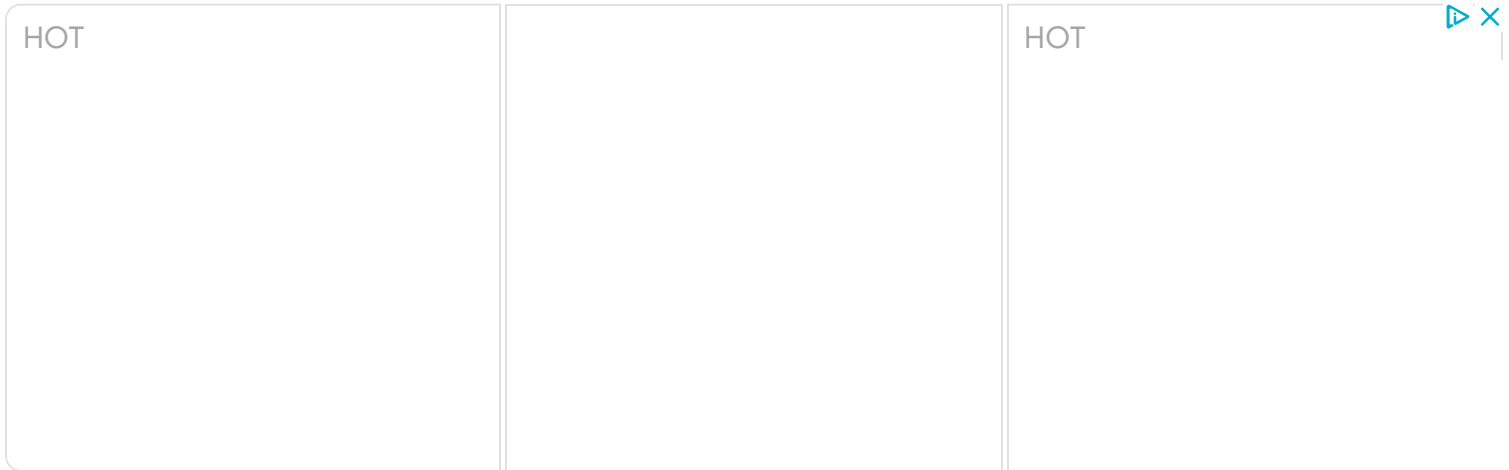
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“It’s a look back on the struggles that took place, and what went into telling those stories,” he said. “We don’t realize how important it (community journalism) is. We were looking for an authority to give us clear information.”

The late John B. Gaines was president of the Daily News. The newspaper is still owned, and the lecture series is sponsored, by the Gaines family.

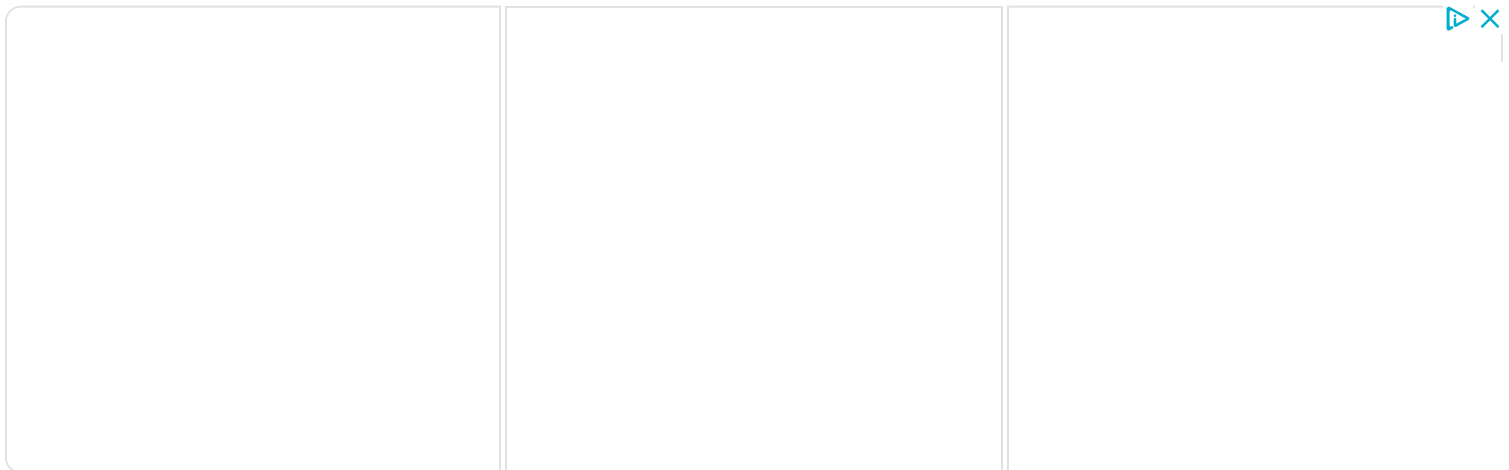
Representing local reporting on the disaster will be Daily News photojournalist Grace Ramey, whose neighborhood was struck by the storm.

Ramey immediately went out into the darkness to document the devastation as emergency workers showed up searching for survivors in the rubble left behind.



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She continues to tell the story of recovery for the Daily News as her community tries to rebuild.



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Paducah's WPSD-NBC chief meteorologist Trent Okerson will represent the statewide coverage on the tornadoes.

Okerson had been tracking the weather system days before it formed into the historic storm. He was broadcasting live as the storm made its way across his region, hitting surrounding communities.



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An advertisement for "Frontier Basementy!". The top part features the company name in large, bold letters. Below it, a row of four small images shows basement problems: "Wet Basements" (labeled "EWWW!"), "Wall Cracks" (labeled "OUCH."), "Structural Problems" (labeled "UH-OH..."), and "Crawl Space" (labeled "NASTY!"). A list of services includes Waterproofing, Concrete Lifting &amp; Leveling, Foundation Repairs, Humidity &amp; Mold Control, and Humidity &amp; Mold Control. The names "Judy, Dustin, &amp; Layne Gebers" are listed. At the bottom, it says "Frontier FREE ESTIMATES FOUNDATION &amp; CRAWL SPACE Repair 270.257.6383 frontierbasementy.com" and shows a photo of three people under an umbrella.

Rounding out the panel will be Rick Rojas, a journalist and Nashville bureau chief for The New York Times, who covers news throughout the south.

Rojas began reporting from Mayfield the morning after the storm, helping to inform the national audience on the destruction left in its wake. Rojas continues to write for a national audience on communities as they rebuild.

Alana Watson, local host for “All Things Considered” on WKU Public Radio, will be moderator for the event.

Adams said one of the main purposes of this year’s panel is to better connect to the humanity of what transpired on the night of the storm and its aftermath.

“The thing that woke me up in the middle of the night one night is that when you drive through Bowling Green and see the open wounds – it’s hard to understand what people went through,” Adams said. “We wanted to actually discuss the process of what the journalists went through as well.”

The discussion will be in the Jody Richards Hall auditorium at WKU. It will be free and open to the public.

Beginning Monday, a photo exhibit titled “A Community United” will also open to the public and focus on the devastation of the tornadoes.

The exhibition will feature 58 images from WKU students, faculty, alumni and local and regional media taken in the days after the tornadoes.

The photo exhibit will be on display March 28 to April 22 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday and 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Sundays in the Jody Richards Hall atrium.

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