

Sunday Sentinel

Denver's 'backpack journalist' began climb at DeWitt Clinton and Holland Patent High

By Kim Farrell
Staff writer

And the Emmy goes to...

Growing up in Rome in the 1990s, Kevin Torres never thought that one day he might hear those words followed by his name. But on July 23, the now 27-year-old news reporter for KUSA in Denver, Colo. got to live that magic moment when he was announced the winner of the television honor for "Best Live Reporter" of the Heartland Region, covering Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado and Kansas.

"My mom hadn't traveled outside of Central New York in more than 20 years until July," Torres said. "My partner and I flew her out to Colorado with her friend Joan (Mammosser), so she could be here for the Emmys. To tell you the truth, I didn't think I was going to win. But the moment the announcer said, 'And the Emmy goes to... Kevin Torres,' I turned to my mom and saw a huge smile on her face, she gave me the biggest hug and a huge kiss."

Torres' mother, Gloria Valentine, then phoned home to Hillside Drive in Westernville to share the good news with her husband, Torres' stepfather, Cleo Valentine, and his sister, Angel.

"They were really happy as well," Torres said. "The following week I flew back home with my mom. I brought the Emmy with me and showed it to my uncle (Frank LaBuz of W. North St.) and my grandmother (Nancy Malek, same address). My grandmother has watched the Emmy Awards on TV, but I don't think she ever thought she would hold one."

Winning the award is just the icing on the cake for Torres, who is living his dream of working in television news broadcasting. The reporter says that his start in life may have been a humble one, but his dreams have always been supported by his family and a couple caring teachers.

"I knew I wanted to be a reporter when I was a little kid," Torres said. "Each week my mother and I would watch 20/20 from the living room in our Rome apartment. I remember thinking to myself, 'I want to do that when I get older.'"

Torres attended DeWitt Clinton Elementary School before transferring to the Holland Patent school district for middle and high school, graduating in 2002. He credits teachers Anthony Lanzi, in Rome, and Brian Ure, at Holland Patent High School, with recognizing his potential and nurturing his dreams.

"Growing up in that part of Rome was tough," Torres explained of his elementary school experience. "You had nothing, absolutely nothing, and you knew it. But when I first entered Mr. Lanzi's class in the 6th grade,



EMMY WINNER — Kevin Torres, originally from Rome, received an Emmy award for "Best Live Reporter" covering the Heartland Region of Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado and Kansas. Torres is a "Backpack Journalist" with KUSA in Denver, Colo.



FORMER COLLEAGUE — On a recent trip home, Kevin Torres showed off his Emmy award to former co-worker Rod Wood at WSyr in Syracuse. Still good friends, Torres said Wood had the biggest impact on his career of anyone he has worked with. (Photos submitted)

he let me know how special I was. Not just me, the entire class. He made all of us feel important. Outside of his classroom students had to deal with low income housing, family issues and bullies... but when you were in Mr. Lanzi's class, he made you forget about it. You were special in Mr. Lanzi's eyes."

And of Ure, Torres said, "He was my high school communications/photography teacher. He got me really involved in broadcast journalism. Each year, Brian would take us on field trips to New York City, where we got to shadow television journalists such as Tom Brokaw and Barbara Walters. For a kid who wanted to get into the business, meeting Tom Brokaw and Barbara Walters was absolutely amazing. I wanted to be just like them."

With that goal in place, Torres studied broadcasting and mass communications with an emphasis in journalism at SUNY Oswego. From his first year of college, the aspiring news reporter began looking for ways to advance his career.

"I was heavily involved at the college TV station at Oswego," Torres explained. "During my first year I auditioned to be an anchor, and I was fortunate enough to get the Sunday night slot. During the week I would report for other newscasts. I pretty much lived at the station (WTOP) my first year of school there."

With his extensive student experience, Torres set out to get his first professional job before he even had his college diploma in hand.

"When my junior year rolled around, I saw a job posting on WWNY's website for a part time 'Backpack Journalist.' WWNY is the CBS affiliate in Watertown, (about an hour north of the Oswego campus). I knew it would be a long shot, but I decided to apply for it anyway. It's very rare for a college student to get hired at an affiliate while they're still in school. Two weeks after I sent a resume tape to the station, the news director called me in for an interview. He liked my stuff and offered me a job. I remember getting the phone call from him. I was walking through the quad at SUNY Oswego. When he offered me the job I had the biggest smile on my face."

Torres worked for WWNY for two years before accepting a job at WSyr NewsChannel 9 in Syracuse. "It was a big deal for me to get hired at WSyr," he explained. "That's the station I grew up watching. Rod Wood and Carrie Lazarus were my heroes. To this day, Rod Wood is still one of my best friends. We had this unique friendship at the station. It's hard to explain. Even our co-workers got a kick out of it. He called me 'Chico' I called him 'Cheeks.' When it comes to former co-workers, Rod Wood has made the biggest impact on my career."

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WINSTON'S PET PERSONALS

Laid back & lovable Brook a sweetheart kitty

Dear Winston,
Hi, my name is Brook! I'm a gorgeous, 2/3-year-old, spayed female, tiger/calico kitty. I have pretty, golden eyes and beautiful stripes through my patches of orange and black! I'm easy going and friendly and I love to gaze out the window and watch the birds twitter around outside the shelter. I enjoy being talked to and petted, and I knead my paws and purr softly when I get attention.



Winston

Winston, I arrived as a stray at the beginning of March, and I am now the shelter's longest term resident. I am a really sweet girl, but I'm kind of quiet, and the longer I stay here, the quieter and more withdrawn I become. People walk past my cage, but they don't seem to see me sitting and waiting...I hope someone notices me soon!

Laid Back & Lovable,
Brook

Dear Brook,
You are a very pretty kitty—I love the



unique markings in your fur! It's hard to believe that no one has adopted you yet. Cats who meow and reach their paws out to grab people do tend to find homes more quickly, but gentle and quiet cats like you make such nice, polite companions. Someone just needs to give you a chance! Because you have been at the shelter so long, your adoption fee has been reduced. I hope this helps you to find a home!

There are lots of ways to help animals like Brook. We are always looking for more volunteers and foster families—if

you're interested, come to the shelter and fill out an application! Our annual "Paws for a Cause" Walkathon & Festival will be held on Saturday, September 24th from 10:00-2:00 at Bellamy Harbor Park. We are pleased to announce that Animal Planet's Shorty Rossi the Pit Boss and his service dog Hercules will be our guests of honor! Pledge forms are available at the shelter or on our website. There is still vendor space available. A huge thanks to our major sponsor, Booz Allen Hamilton! We are still looking for more sponsors for the walkathon, so please call Susan at 337-1434 if you would like to be a sponsor, or if your business would like to set up a booth! "Dine For the Dogs (Cats & Kittens Too)" at Coalyard Charlie's on Tuesday, September 27th from 4:30-9:00!

Adoptions have been awfully slow lately, all our kennels and cages are full, and there is a list of animals waiting to come to the shelter. If you have been thinking of adding a furry friend to your home, please come in now and adopt! Eddy and Flower, the pretty pair of lovable kitties, have not been adopted yet. Buggy, the baby beagle with the eye infection, is doing much better. His stitches have been removed, his halo is off, and he is ready to go home! I hope these wonderful animals find their forever families

soon, and I hope you do too, Brook!

Adopt A Sweetheart,
Winston

The Humane Society of Rome is a non-profit organization that depends on the generosity of people like you. All donations to the shelter are tax-deductible. We really need canned dog food and canned cat food. We also need dry brown cat food and dry brown kitten food. We could use dish soap, laundry detergent and bleach. The dogs would love some rawhide chewies, and the cats would like some new kitty toys—feathery wand toys and fuzzy mice are favorites around here! If you have an unwanted car, RV or boat, consider donating it to the shelter for a tax deduction. Call the Vehicle Donation Program at 1-800-240-0160 and they will take care of the details. We are collecting and recycling old cell phones, PDAs and ink cartridges, so if you have them, please bring them to the shelter. We are also collecting Purina weight circles and Dad's labels. We have accounts at D-N-B 5 Cent Return Center at 302 E. Dominick St. & at Kirkland Can & Bottle Return on Rt. 5 in Kirkland. Please consider donating your bottle refunds to us.

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Emmy winning journalist writes, shoots and edits his own stories

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Working as a "Backpack Journalist," Torres does it all. "I love marrying beautiful words to beautiful pictures. Aside from writing my own stories, I also shoot and edit them," he said. Today, he not only gets to do what he loves, he is doing it at a station he has long dreamed of working for.

"KUSA has always been my dream station," Torres said. "I learned about it from a reporter I shadowed at WKTU my senior year of high school. The reporter told me, 'If you like good storytelling and good photography, check out KUSA in Denver.' So I did. And I fell in love with it immediately. In my opinion, KUSA is the best local TV station in the country. We've won so many NPPA, Emmy and Murrow awards. The station is well known for its incredible photography and storytelling. I knew at a young age it's where I wanted to work. The news director at KUSA and I had kept in touch while I worked at WSYR in Syracuse. When the timing was right for both of us, she offered me a job. Without hesitation I accepted it. Two weeks later I packed up my car, said goodbye to Central New York, and moved out West. It was the best decision I've ever made."

It was a decision that ultimately led to Torres' Emmy success. He explained that he won the award was for a compilation of his live work in the field.

"Half of the compilation focused on my coverage of the Deer Creek Middle School shooting," Torres explained. "Last year, a gunman opened fire on middle school students and injured two of them. The school is located less than a mile away from Columbine High School, so you can imagine how scary the situation was. That's a day I'll never forget. I still remember seeing the students run from the school into their parents' arms in tears. For a reporter, it's hard to keep your composure live on the air during a situation like that."

For Torres, covering everything from heart stopping terror to heart breaking events is all part of his job.


"Every day I get to cover something new and I learn a little more from it," he said. "It means a lot to me when I can cover a story and make a difference in someone's life. This one time I was covering the death of a little girl who passed away from a rare brain tumor. At

her candle light vigil, this lady, who I had never met before, came up to me and said, 'Thank you. Thank you for doing what you do. You probably don't realize it, but your stories have made a difference in people's lives. They've made a difference in

mine.' Don't get me wrong, winning an Emmy was nice, but it pales in comparison to that moment."

To learn more about Torres, visit his website: www.kevintorres.com

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