PROFILE: Lea Thompson

Correspondent, Anchor, Manager, Editor, Speaker, Teacher, Trainer, Blogger

Lea Thompson is best known for her hard-hitting investigative pieces focused on consumer, finance, health, senior, safety and environmental issues. She continues a long tradition of giving viewers an in-depth look at subjects that affect their daily lives and continues to bring about change. She is also on the Board and Treasurer of the Investigative Reporters and Editors and chaired it’s 2008 Conference in Miami in 2008 – 900 journalists taking part in 127 training panels and programs.

At NBC News and WRC-TV in Washington, Thompson won every major journalism award in broadcasting, including: two Peabodys, two George Polks, a Columbia Dupont, three National Emmys, two national Edward R. Murrow Awards, six Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Awards, and a Loeb. She is the recipient of dozens of other national journalism awards and numerous civic and lifetime awards, including an Honorary Doctorate and Washingtonian of the Year.

Lea Thompson is a journalist who makes a difference. Her work was the driving force behind three acts of Congress. Her Peabody Award-winning "Deadly Mistakes,” an investigation into doctors' office errors that cause unnecessary surgery and death, helped bring about the Medical Laboratory Improvement Act. Her National Emmy winning investigation of children harmed by the DPT vaccine not only spurred the passage of the Vaccine Compensation Act, but Thompson is widely credited for the use of a new DPT vaccine. The Infant Formula Act came as a direct result of Thompson’s testimony before Congress about her discovery that some children had been brain damaged by their baby formulas (Columbia Dupont.)

Her reports have initiated more than two dozen Congressional and governmental agency hearings and prompted investigations by dozens of federal, state and local governments, including legislation in California requiring all home health aides have background checks, and all bedding and mattresses be flame retardant. In South Carolina it is now illegal for very young Irish Travelers to marry older men and the State’s Attorney General says many Travelers were jailed after Thompson’s expose on the group. Her investigations brought new warning labels on Infant Tylenol and new procedures at Sears to keep used batteries from being sold as new.

Many of Thompson’s stories involve testing. Testing showing hairdryers emitting high levels of cancer-causing asbestos helped bring the recall of 25 million hairdryers. Companies changed vitamin formulations after testing showed the pills never dissolved and passed right through, testing on hamburger showed it was adulterated so some of the nation’s largest grocery chains set new policies, West Virginia’s AG forced water filter companies out of business after testing showed their tests were bogus. Thompson’s stories are being used as training films by the Secret Service, police departments, banks, home care agencies, auto dealers and the shellfish industry.

A number of made-for-TV movies and three books feature Lea Thompson’s work. The Babymaker (Nelson, 1994) details how she and producer Rick Nelson exposed Dr. Cecil Jacobson, the fertility doctor who fathered dozens of children using his own sperm. DPT: Shot in the Dark (Coleman/Fisher, 1984) and A Stolen Life (Grant, 2005) tell of Thompson’s findings on the DPT vaccine.

For 15 years (1992-2007) Thompson was a Chief Correspondent at Dateline NBC, NBC News. During that time she was also a regular on NBC Nightly News, The Today Show, CNBC and MSNBC and did work for The Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel and Court TV. In 2007, Thompson anchored and served as Executive Editor on a series of hour magazine shows featuring investigative and human interest stories, anchored a finance program and did a series of Presidential candidate specials for RLTV and PBS, and anchored an hour program for Sirius Radio 140.

Before going to Dateline, Thompson co-headed the Investigative Unit and ran the Consumer Unit at WRC-TV (NBC) in Washington, D.C., and also anchored WRC’s newscasts (15 years.) During much of that time she was a Contributing Correspondent to The Today Show and NBC Nightly News and also produced and for a time hosted a weekly half-hour magazine show, Byline: Lea Thompson.