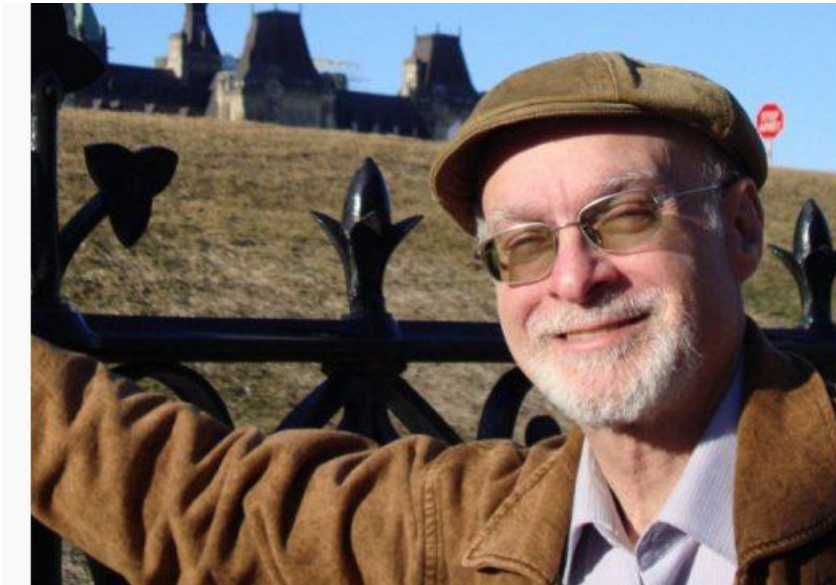


# He digs for information in the public interest

By: [Kathy English](#) Public Editor, Published on Fri Nov 27 2015

## Ottawa public interest researcher Ken Rubin will receive inaugural investigative award from Canadian Journalists for Free Expression

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Debbie Rubin

Ken Rubin laughs easily now about the time when the Star mistakenly referred to him as “an Ottawa farmer with a passion for government accountability” in an article about Canada’s culture of secrecy.

We subsequently published a [correction](#) to make clear that the article had understated Rubin’s qualifications significantly, and, in fact, he is “an Ottawa-based investigative researcher considered one of Canada’s leading access to information activists.”

Indeed, [Rubin](#) has been leading the charge against government secrecy in Canada for some five decades – since well before 1983 when then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau introduced Canada’s first Access to Information Act. On Wednesday, Rubin will be honored by journalists across Canada at the [Canadian Journalists for Free Expression](#) annual gala in Toronto.

Rubin will receive CJFE’s first-ever “Investigative Award.” This award goes to a journalist, investigative researcher or media worker who has made a significant contribution to advancing investigative public interest reporting in Canada.

By the way, when he is not unearthing government secrets, Rubin also runs an organic farming operation in Quebec, close to Ottawa, so the Star’s characterization of him as a farmer was not entirely inaccurate.

“I dig for dirt. I raise hell. I squash secrecy,” Rubin joked this week.

Rubin has spent much of his adult life digging up public information that has been hidden or blocked by governments in Canada. He stopped keeping track of the access to information requests he has made to governments of all levels in this country when he reached 30,000 several years ago.

As the Star reported in 2006, Rubin even found documents that indicated he had been identified by name in a memo to Canada’s then public safety minister that outlined some aspects of his history of access requests, what Rubin then characterized as “profiling” him as a potentially troublesome requester.

Rubin is well known to journalists throughout Canada, having worked closely with many, particularly Ottawa’s political reporters. His research has resulted in hundreds of stories in Canadian media about public matters governments would have kept secret from the public, if not for his digging — government misspending, human rights, health, safety and environmental issues. He has delved into the treatment of Canada’s First Nations, investigated the military and probed the auto, aviation, food and telecommunications industries, always going after the government documents that reveal the story.

He advocated for Canada to create access to information laws and has launched court actions to challenge our right to information. He is now part of a coalition pushing this new Trudeau government to overhaul access to information laws and practices to ensure that public information is indeed public and is not blocked by bureaucrats and politicians.

Rubin points to a fact that all journalists know and too few Canadians are aware of — access legislation governing public information in Canada “tilts toward secrecy.” Having fought this battle for so long, he is not optimistic that Trudeau’s promise of “sunny ways” will lead to a substantially more open government in Ottawa.

“We have a long way to go,” Rubin told me. “We have to get out of the dark ages of secrecy and take on the issue of real freedom of expression and information.”

Rubin, who regards himself as a “public interest researcher” and “Canada’s information warrior,” is pleased to be recognized with the inaugural investigative award from an organization of journalists dedicated to free expression and transparency in Canada.

In talking with Rubin and looking at his successful record of seeking out information in the public interest, it is clear he has the persistence — or rather, the obsessiveness — required of the best investigative journalists. And, as he himself makes clear, “I am nosy and I am curious” — core qualities of all journalists.

“I continue to dig for data and fight secrecy practices motivated by the belief that what you don’t know can hurt you,” Rubin wrote in an article included in a recent book about Canada’s freedom of information laws.

Rubin was the unanimous choice to receive the CJFE’s inaugural investigative award, Tom Henheffer, executive director of CJFE, told me this week.

“The access to information system in Canada is one of our biggest problems and one of our least known. Ken’s work has been tireless,” Henheffer said. “He is one of the chief critics of the access act but more than that, he has used the system to tell important stories. His work is incredibly valuable to the public interest.”

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