

From Geophysics

by Roban Johnson

“I came in as a geophysics major and went through three years of that before I decided I needed more people in my life.”

—Lisa Tabor
 Editor in Chief, *Collegiate Times*

She’s been called a natural leader and role model. And at age 26, Lisa Tabor has touched the lives of many. She has climbed the ranks at Virginia Tech’s *Collegiate Times* to become the paper’s first African-American editor in chief.

Add to that her role as vice president of Educational Media Company at Virginia Tech, the corporation that runs most of the student media organizations on campus.

This summer, Tabor is one of 25 college students chosen to take part in the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund internship for copy editors. She is interning at *The Macon Telegraph* — a Knight Ridder daily in Macon, Georgia.

“I’ve always had an eye for text and was always an avid reader,” said Tabor. Yet journalism was not her career choice when she first arrived on Virginia Tech’s campus.

“I came in as a geophysics major and went through three years of that before I decided I needed more people in my life,” she says. She saw an advertisement for a copy editor at the *Collegiate Times*. “I was about 50 feet away from the office and went ahead and applied.”

Tabor got the job, and soon felt comfortable in her new role, even without a background in journalism. “I was picky and determined that the right things be changed at the right time,” she explains. In just two months she was named head copy editor.

Later, as managing editor, she helped expand the paper’s focus, bringing in more

articles relating to the Blacksburg, Virginia community. With a circulation of 14,000, the *Collegiate Times* became the daily paper for many in the Blacksburg area.

Faculty adviser Lynn Nystrom has watched Tabor develop as a journalist over the years. “I attended a number of editorial meetings, where students discussed what editorial issues they would like to tackle and how they would tackle them,” she said. “Tabor always came through during those meetings as one of the clearest thinkers in the group.”

Yet Tabor’s time as editor in chief has not been without challenge or controversy. Last December, she found that lax business practices had lost the paper, and the corporation, thousands of dollars in revenue. “Rather than take her semester break, Tabor went into the business office with another person and straightened everything out before the next semester began,” Nystrom recalls.

The hottest issue Tabor has had to face has been the controversy surrounding the David Horowitz advertisement titled “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea – And Racist Too.” Although the *Collegiate Times* had not received the ad, Tabor was asked by C-SPAN what her position would be if she had received it.

“I told them we would not run it,” she says.

Tabor took heat for her position, and as a guest on the D.C. call-in show, *Washington Journal*, stressed two major points in her

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defense. "A difference exists between editorial content and advertising content, and independent college papers have a right to make a decision about the advertising they accept," Tabor explains. "Second point is that as a college newspaper editor, you have a responsibility and accountability to your readership. To be responsible and not go out of your way to offend them substantially."

Kelly Wolff, general manager of Educational Media Company, sees Tabor as a role model and natural leader. "She's always been very involved in the community, and helped start a summer camp for underprivileged children.

The summer camp was a student-run, three-day, overnight science and mathematics camp for rising, underprivileged fifth and

sixth graders. Tabor's role was not only as the founder, but fundraiser and trainer. She raised more than \$4,000 to finance the camp, enabling students to attend free, and trained the staff to provide continuous care for the children.

"She is extremely intelligent and extremely thoughtful. It's hard to imagine her not having an impact." ■



Lisa Tabor's love for the written word has taken her from Geophysics to the top spot at Virginia Tech's Collegiate Times. The first African American to hold the position, she is spending the summer as a copyeditor at the Macon Telegraph in Georgia.