Ten questions for publicist Fred Sternburg of Sternburg Communications, Inc., who was honored with the 2004 Marvin Kohn “Good Guy” award this spring by the Boxing Writers Association of America at its annual convention in Las Vegas.

Among others, Sternburg has worked with Shane Mosley, Oscar De La Hoya and Riddick Bowe. He does some events for Top Rank, and he’s presently working with promoter Gary Shaw and with fighters such as Jeff Lacy, Winky Wright and Diego Corrales.

TheSweetScience.com: How did you get into your present line of work?

Fred Sternburg: Most of my business is boxing right now, but I’ve done almost every sport there is. I’ve done major league baseball, basketball, women’s tennis, the PGA and LPGA tours. I’ve even represented doctors. But I seem to be doing a lot of boxing. It all started back in November of 1985. I started as an intern with a gentleman named Charlie Brotman. He was famous in boxing for being Sugar Ray Leonard’s publicist. He had a sports and entertainment public relations agency in Washington, and for me it was a grass roots education where I just moved my way up and learned the business watching him with Sugar Ray. Then we got Riddick Bowe and did several fights with him and then a few accounts were handed over to me. When you work with people like Sugar Ray Leonard, Riddick Bowe and Simon Brown at that level, you get hooked pretty quickly because they are such fun guys to be with.

TheSweetScience.com: What’s the toughest part of your job?

FS: Keeping it fresh and keeping it interesting for the media and myself and keeping the client on track. You try to keep it fun. It’s very easy to make it routine, You just have to stay creative.

TheSweetScience.com: What’s the best part of your job?

FS: I get a kick out of everyone’s reactions. With me, it’s seeing the story in the paper. If something works, there’s nothing better to me. I’ll use Winky Wright as a case in point these past 10 days (prior to Wright’s fight on Dec. 10). We had him everywhere. It took a lot of planning to get to that point, but when the plan works out, it’s personal pride because you know you’re doing a good job for a client. I’m the first line of defense. If I fail, the promotion already has one foot in the grave. Fight week, they should be worrying about the logistics, not selling tickets.

TheSweetScience.com: How many fights do you attend in a year?

FS: I travel just over 50,000 miles a year. I’m on the road at least two weeks of every month. That two weeks also includes training camps, media days and press conferences. It averages out to one or two events a month. It takes a toll. It’s nice to have a very understanding family.

TheSweetScience.com: Of all the fights you've seen, is there any one fight that stands out in your mind?

FS: This year alone, the first (Diego) Corrales – (Jose Luis) Castillo fight. I still can't believe what I actually saw. It's like, you rub your eyes. It was such an unbelievable fight going into the tenth. What made it so remarkable is how that tenth round ended. I'm looking at my guy (Corrales) going down twice, and I'm thinking, "Well, he put up a great fight. He's got nothing to be ashamed of." And the next thing I know, I'm in the ring congratulating him. I still can't believe it. Another great fight this year was Winky and Felix Trinidad. I thought that was an unbelievable exhibition on Winky's part.

TheSweetScience.com: Any good stories to tell?

FS: There's been a million of them, but a terrific story is when Gary Shaw and I were retained by Mosley to promote him for the second De La Hoya fight. Here's De La Hoya with this huge entourage and this big promotion machine and, literally, it was just Gary and me and the camp going against them. And we went toe-to-toe with them in terms of all the PR. We had a lot of fun at all the press conferences. If you remember, there was a side bet of like $500,000 or something that De La Hoya was going to give Mosley if he won, and we came to the final press conference with a giant deposit slip already filled out. We tried to give it to De La Hoya but he wouldn't even touch it. It was like a jinx to him.

TheSweetScience.com: What did it mean to win boxing's good guy award?

FS: Wow, I'll tell you, because I'm really not a good guy. I had to step on a lot of people to win that award (laughs). It was terrific because I was accepted by my peers. I am nowhere near the level that these guys are at. What they do day in and day out on a deadline, churning out great stories. For them to give me any kind of award! It was a terrific day in my life. I was thrilled because it came from the writers I respect. And they were genuinely happy for me.

TheSweetScience.com: What is your primary responsibility as a publicist?

FS: To sell. I am a salesman. I am selling a client, I'm selling an event or a personality. I have to sell a story and make it newsworthy, because that's what you guys are all about. If it isn't newsworthy, what do you care? It's my job to find that hook. I've got to research it. I've got to not just talk to the client, I've got to talk to you and see where the fit is. That's basically it. It's selling the story and researching the story and presenting it and letting you guys run with it. That's why people come to me.

TheSweetScience.com: If you weren't in this business, what would you be doing?

FS: I really enjoy doing [public relations]. I love looking for new things and twists. It's almost like picking a lock. You find that certain combination that opens the door. I have a pretty good sense of what's newsworthy and what makes a good story. I enjoy that process. I enjoy making the pitch and getting a little success.

TheSweetScience.com: What did you dream of being when you were growing up?

FS: In college, I thought the biggest kick in my life would be to become a ring announcer for wrestling matches, because I thought those guys had a blast. How much fun that would be to be half actor and half ham. I had no aspirations to be an athlete because I wasn't that good. Broadcasting was always something I fooled around with in college (at Syracuse University). I never took the TV part seriously, and I wish I had now. But you know, I love what I do. I fell into it by accident. A good friend of mine introduced me to Charley (Brotman) and said "this is what you should do." And I said, "all right," and sure enough, they were right. I just love it.