

# grassroots editor



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# Newspaper front-page ads

## — the good the bad and the ugly

By **John R. Irby**

*Quill*, the magazine of the Society of Professional Journalists, in an article published at the beginning of 2001, credited Gannett Newspapers with leading the charge toward front-page advertisement. But that distinction must be shared with others, as front-page advertisement has been around since ink-permeated paper.

But while most U.S. newspapers stayed away from front-page advertisement since the mid 1900s, it has been, and is, common in many countries around the world, prominent in places like Great Britain, Latin America and Canada. The United States, however, does have a front-page newspaper advertisement history.

Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, in excerpts of an opinion published in 1996 by *The Washington Post*, wrote: “. . . Advertising has been a part of our culture throughout our history . . . Early newspapers displayed advertisements for goods and services on their front pages, and town criers called out prices in public squares . . .”<sup>1</sup>

In a 1999 *New York Times* story about front-page advertisements, Felicity Barringer wrote: “European papers, including the staid *Financial Times*, the British paper with growing American circulation, have long run advertisements alongside front-page news. But newspapers in the United States have shied away from this practice, although *The New York Times* has long run classified advertisements of as long as four lines at the bottom of its front page.”<sup>2</sup>

Jim Grahn, advertising director of *The Daily Independent* in Ashland, Ky., responded to this study by writing: “Ben Franklin ran the original classifieds on his front page. Where in our evolution did the front page become sacrosanct? Front-page ads are common in Europe. Why is it a big problem in the land of capitalism to increase revenue with the most visible ad spot in the paper? All of our on-line editions have ‘front-page’ advertising. Let’s sell every section front and dog-ear and use the extra revenue to strengthen our content. TV has ads before the show starts. So do movies. Our readers wonder more about why we don’t have ads on the front page than they fret about it when we finally do.”

A front-page ad revolution in America, particularly over the past few years, can indeed, be attributed, in part, to Gannett Newspapers. But a chief conspirator was the now-defunct Thomson Newspaper Group, whose newspapers published front-page ads before many of those newspapers were sold to Gannett.

Gannett, however, began publishing small color ads in the upper right-hand corner of *USA Today*’s Money, Sports and Life section fronts in 1993.

*The Quill* reported in early 2001: “Since *USA Today* began running one-inch strip ads across the bottom of Page One a year ago,” (in October 1999) “more newspaper ad directors are looking at their front pages and seeing a new way to grow revenue.”<sup>3</sup>

Gannett reportedly makes \$5 million annually from front-page ads in *USA Today* — with a waiting list of advertisers wanting the costly but prominent space. And, Gannett has nearly 100 daily newspapers that have been encouraged to exercise the option of publishing front-page ads.

Thomas Curley, president and publisher of *USA Today* when it began running front-page ads, told *The New York Times* he got the idea in 1994 of using the color strip on *USA Today*’s front page for advertisement.<sup>2</sup>

Among other large and recognizable newspapers that publish front-page ads are *The*

*Arizona Republic* and *Orange County Register*. *The Republic*, purchased by Gannett in 2000, is one of the fastest-growing major metropolitan newspapers in the country. It ranks 15th among U.S. dailies with a circulation of 440,000.

In January 2001, *The Republic* began publishing front-page advertisements.

"Many papers are doing this, and consequently it's become a prime advertising position," said Sue Clark-Jackson, CEO of *The Republic*, in a 2001 news story in *The Christian Science Monitor*. "Given newsprint prices in double digits over last year's costs and the significant slowing of the economy, now is as good a time as any."<sup>4</sup>

*The Orange County Register*, owned by Freedom Communications, Inc., is the fourth largest newspaper in California. It is acclaimed by many as one of the top newspapers in the country. It began running front-page ads on March 5, 2001. Those ads, the first in 96 years of publication, have come in the form of a daily money-saving coupon. It was suggested by a readership focus group.

*Palm Springs Desert Sun* (Gannett) Advertising Director Dar Brown told *Editor & Publisher* in 2001: "It's long been asked for by advertisers. I think you'll see a lot of newspapers take it on."<sup>5</sup>

*The Desert Sun* began publishing front-page ads on Oct. 19, 2000.

In May 1997, long before Gannett opened up its front pages to ads, Thomson Newspapers started the revolution when *The Herald Bulletin* in Anderson, Ind., was the first of Thomson's American newspapers to publish front-page ads. It only took a matter of hours for the newspaper to sell the front-page space for the rest of the year — at three times the regular rate. A few months later, Stuart Garner, Thomson CEO, told *Editor & Publisher*: "We're not sacrificing our journalistic virginity." Thomson later issued an edict to all of its newspapers, and soon after, every newspaper carried front-page ads — and added revenue.

Northwestern University Media Management Center's Steve Duke looked at 100 newspapers in 1999-2000 and found that about 12 percent included front-page advertisement. "Ads might start appearing on more front pages as papers look for ways to offset rising newsprint and health-care costs," said Michael Smith, the Center's managing director.<sup>5</sup>

While the Northwestern study postulated that about 12 percent of the newspapers it studied were publishing front-page advertisements, the percentage today is much higher. More than 26 percent of those responding to this survey indicated their newspaper publishes front-page advertisements. This survey, however, included a small duplication of response. But when those responses are factored (nearly twice as many did not publish front-page advertisements), the percentage drops only one point to 25 percent. It appears clear from this survey that substantially more newspapers are publishing front-page ads than the earlier study discovered. And it also seems likely that the trend will continue.

## The Questions

### No. 1 — Does your newspaper publish advertisements on the front page?

One hundred and eighty respondents indicated "no" and 64 indicated "yes."

Of those that indicated their newspapers do not publish front-page advertisements, 113 worked at dailies and 67 at non-dailies (82 percent of those worked at weeklies). Fifty-nine responses came from independent newspapers, 114 from group-owned newspapers and seven declined to indicate a newspaper ownership classification.

Of those that indicated their newspapers publish front-page advertisements, 50 worked at dailies and 14 at non-dailies. Sixteen responses came from independently owned newspapers, 47 from groups and one declined to indicate the classification.

### No. 2 — How long has your newspaper published front-page ads?

Of the 64 who indicated they publish front-page ads, 55 gave the length of time. More than 72 percent have published front-page advertisements for less than five years, lending support to the Gannett/Thomson influence. Seventeen — nearly 31 percent — have published for less than a year. Nine — or an additional 16 percent — have published one to two years. Fourteen — 25 percent — have published two to five years.

Seven percent indicated they have published front-page ads for five to 10 years, and 20 percent claim to have published front-page ads for more than 10 years. Of those, the duration included 135 years, 100+ years, 40 years, 35 years, 30 years (two responses), 21 years, "decades," "several years," and "forever."

A true average could not be obtained because of the non-numerical responses. An average without the non-numerical responses could be obtained, but it would be skewed by the seven lengthy periods listed above. But of 45 responses of fewer than 10 years, the average is one year and nine months.

### No. 3 — Do you receive a premium price for front-page ads?

Ninety-five percent of newspapers publishing front-page ads receive a premium price (61 of 64 respondents; two were not sure and one indicated the newspaper did not receive a premium price).

Forty-one respondents listed the percent of price increase — eight claiming a 100 percent increase. The largest percentage of increase was 750 percent. Other increases above 100 percent included 620 percent (one), 500 percent (two), 380 percent (one), 300 percent (one), 150 percent (one) and 110 percent (one).

The average premium price increase was 118 percent.

The other responses were as follows: 88 percent (one), 75 percent (one), 60 percent (one), 50 percent (four), 48 percent (one), 40 percent (two), 30 percent (four), 25 percent (three), 20 percent (five), 15 percent (one) and 10 percent (two).

### No. 4 — Does your newspaper have any restrictions on front-page ads, such as size or product?

Sixty-three of the 64 respondents have restrictions, but there are no consensus restrictions on size, placement or product.

Several respondents volunteered general or specific restriction information. It includes:

"... Strict control over content and design."

"... Ads must be not-for-profit"

- “ . . . Standard banner and ear sizes”
- “ . . . Banner ad across bottom of page”
- “ . . . Size is always the same (31/4 x 2)”
- “ . . . Limited to 2 x 3 size in bottom right corner”
- “ . . . Limited to Saturday only”
- “ . . . We only allow strip ads 6 col. x 3/4”
- “ . . . Anchored daily with our index in a 1-inch by 1.5-inch space”
- “ . . . The max and standard is 3-inch-by-6-col”
- “ . . . Must be 1.5-inches deep, but can vary in width to as wide as 4 columns”
- “ . . . 3 col. by 1 inch, at the bottom of the page each week”
- “ . . . No coupons, only image advertising”
- “ . . . No reverses and no screaming headlines”
- “ . . . Contracts only”
- “ . . . No issue ads, merchandise only, good taste, can't detract from news”
- “ . . . Must be 4-color”
- “ . . . We cannot use price points”

**No. 5 — Is your newspaper considering front-page advertisements?**

One hundred and eighty respondents answered Question No. 1 by saying their newspaper did not run front-page advertisements. Of those, 13 percent — or 24 respondents — indicated their newspaper is considering front-page advertisements. Five had no response. One hundred and fifty-one indicated their newspaper was not considering front-page ads.

**No. 6 — Do you believe the current economic climate will be a consideration in moving toward front-page ads?**

While only 13 percent of respondents indicated their newspaper was considering front-page advertisements, nearly 40 percent felt the current economic climate would be a consideration in moving toward front-page ads (71 responded “yes,” 104 indicated “no” and five did not respond).

Of those responding “yes,” 52 indicated their newspaper was not considering front-page ads and 19 indicated their newspaper was considering front-page ads. Of those responding “no,” four newspapers were considering front-page ads.

*Questions seven through 13 gauged how strongly respondents felt about specific statements concerning front-page advertisements. A Likert scale was used with the following ratings:*

- 1 strongly disagree
- 2 somewhat disagree
- 3 neutral
- 4 somewhat agree
- 5 strongly agree

**No. 7 — Front-page ads do not upset readers.**

Newspaper readers can voice many complaints. Circulation — or late delivery — has always been upsetting. Issues of credibility and believability have also surfaced over the years. Even though readers seldom complain about front-page advertisements, some journalists believe readers are concerned about ads on the front page of newspapers.

“This is an issue on which it’s hard to separate tradition from genuine concerns about journalistic integrity,” wrote Durham J. Monsma, publisher of *The (Stamford) Advocate* and *Greenwich Time* in Stamford, Conn. “Many editors fear that relatively innocuous institutional ads would soon give way to more aggressive promotional advertising and sponsorships, similar to what appears on many newspaper Web sites. They also note that newspapers with front-page ads don’t win design awards. Personally, I think that any premiums for front-page ads would be outweighed by the negatives in our market. We serve very affluent communities in which *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* also have high readership. Our readers expect high quality local news coverage (our newsroom is twice the size of what is typical for our circulation category) and I would be loath to do anything which could negatively affect reader perceptions.”

But not all share the same belief about a market or readers’ lack of acceptance.

“We’ve published front-page ads long enough to have heard most of the (industry) concerns . . . (but) no reader has ever questioned our policy,” wrote Stedem Wood, publisher of *The Skagit Valley Herald* in Mount Vernon, Wash.

“In two years of publishing front-page ads we’ve never had a reader complain about them,” wrote Peter Horvitz, president and publisher of *The Eastside Journal* and *South County Journal* in Bellevue and Kent, Wash. “Readers know the difference between news and advertising and are far more accepting of front-page ads than journalists are. This is not an issue to readers.”

Half of the 242 respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that front-page ads do not upset readers, and another 39 percent were neutral or in somewhat disagreement with the statement. Only 10.7 percent strongly disagreed. The average response rate was 3.3 — (neutral).

Strongly disagree . . . . .	.26 (11%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	.49 (20%)
Neutral . . . . .	.46 (19%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	.68 (28%)
Strongly agree . . . . .	.53 (22%)

**No. 8 — Readers like front-page ads.**

Many readers tend to view advertisements as information, as they do news, but can generally, as mentioned above, differentiate between the two. Asking if readers like front-page ads is a much different question than asking if front-page ads upset readers. Still, the results were similar.

“I have not received a single complaint about our front-page ads since we started them,” wrote Tom Brooker, editor and general manager of *The News Chronicle* in Green Bay, Wis.

The risk, however, is too much of a gamble for some.

“ . . . I am very sure moving ads to the front page does not build credibility, or elevates the importance of our journalism,” wrote Jim Osteen, executive editor of *The Gainesville Sun* in Gainesville, Fla. “We are living in an age of the online Wild West, where information is abundant and truth hard to find. Good, honest, reliable journalism does matter today more than ever. Taking a risk, even if it is a small one, of undermining our core journalistic values is a price too high to pay.”

Nearly 48 percent of 242 respondents somewhat or strongly

agreed that newspaper readers like front-page ads. Only 17 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed. The remaining 35 percent were neutral. The average response rate was 3.4 (neutral).

Strongly disagree . . . . .	13	(7%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	29	(12%)
Neutral . . . . .	85	(35%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	69	(28%)
Strongly agree . . . . .	46	(19%)

**No. 9 — Journalists are neutral about front-page ads.**

When front-page ads are considered or implemented at a newspaper, the loudest voices of complaint are from journalists. One journalist who is anything but neutral is Tim Franklin, editor and vice president of *The Orlando Sentinel*.

“Critics will call editors like me sanctimonious and old fashioned,” Franklin wrote. “Well, there’s nothing old fashioned about credibility. That’s the most important asset we have. Inevitably, in local and regional newspapers, the front-page advertiser is going to be a local company that the newspaper covers. So, the first time your readers even perceive that you’ve given favorable treatment to that company in the newspaper, you’re going to get quizzed about a conflict of interest and the integrity of your coverage is in question.

“We should be in the business of avoiding even the appearance of a conflict of interest. Moreover, the front page is the public face of the newspaper. Readers place an intrinsic value on front-page news.

“. . . putting an ad on the front page is not like putting an ad on page A11. Let me cast it this way: Putting an ad on the front page is the equivalent of Tom Brokaw starting his newscast by saying, ‘This is the NBC Nightly News brought to you by Pizza Hut.’

“I’ve heard some editors argue that front-page ads are common in European newspapers, so why not in American newspapers? My counter is that some European newspapers also run pictures of topless women, and I don’t think we want to do that.”

Bill Kunert, publisher of *The Daily Record* in Ellensburg, Wash., believes morale is an issue. “Although front-page ads may not bother the readers as much as we may think, it does become a morale issue with the news staff,” he wrote. “There’s a sense that the paper has sold out and that advertising is more important than the news. It may also affect recruitment — a journalist would think twice about going to a newspaper which runs front-page ads.”

“I have worked at a newspaper that had front-page ads — and staffers regularly cited it as a reason for their departure during exit interviews,” wrote Ken Robertson, executive editor of *The Tri-City Herald* in Kennewick, Wash.

While this study showed much diversity of opinion, there was great agreement that journalists are not neutral about front-page ads. Nearly 93 percent of 242 respondents strongly disagreed (191) or somewhat disagreed (33). The average response rate was 1.4 (strongly disagree).

Strongly disagree . . . . .	191	(79%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	33	(14%)

Neutral . . . . .	3	(1%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	3	(1%)
Strongly agree . . . . .	12	(5%)

**No. 10 — Front-page ads pander to advertisers.**

One of the arguments against publishing front-page ads has been that they pander to advertisers. The context, some suggest, goes as far as to border upon the definition of one who procures customers as a prostitute, in this case a newspaper selling its character or soul for significant profit.

Doug Cabral, editor and owner of *The Martha’s Vineyard Times* in Vineyard Haven, Mass., doesn’t believe front-page ads pander to advertisers. “I think the use of front-page ads is merely a matter of taste,” he wrote. “I don’t like to give up the news and picture space, so I don’t use them. I don’t think there is any journalistic morality involved, and I don’t think the placement of front-page ads is a symptom of pandering. If the news coverage and editorials are plainspoken, tough, and straight, readers will have plenty of reason to respect the paper, front-page ads or no. If the coverage is wishy-washy, keeping ads off the front page won’t help.”

Others, and a high percentage in this survey, feel ads pander to advertisers.

“I am not ready to prostitute the news by selling out the front page,” wrote Debbie Berto, publisher and vice president of *The Issaquah Press* in Issaquah, Wash. “Readers should be demanding more news of their newspapers, not less. Keep front-page ads to post-it notes and plastic bags.”

Fifty-one percent of 241 respondents strongly agreed (30 percent) or somewhat agreed (21 percent) that front-page ads pander to advertisers. Thirty-three percent, however, strongly or somewhat disagreed the ads pander to advertisers. The average response rate was 3.3 (neutral).

Strongly disagree . . . . .	34	(14%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	46	(19%)
Neutral . . . . .	38	(16%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	50	(21%)
Strongly agree . . . . .	73	(30%)

**No. 11 — Newspapers lose independence by publishing front-page ads.**

The argument is often made that if a newspaper publishes front-page ads, it will be less aggressive in pursuing truth in stories where those advertisers may be involved. While the survey didn’t suggest a significant concern in this regard, some comments were certainly cautionary.

“In this country, the front page says what you’re about as an enterprise,” wrote Dave Zeeck, executive editor of *The News Tribune* in Tacoma, Wash. “If you’re using that space to sell ads, that tells you something about the underlying values of the company.”

Tom Lawrence, editor of *The Pilot* in Whitefish, Mont., doesn’t believe ads should be a part of the front-page equation as “the front page is where we place the most important items in the paper.”

"I believe the front page should be sacrosanct," wrote Tony Doder, editor of *The Daily Pilot* in Costa Mesa, Calif. "The money gleaned from advertising does not make up for the loss of perception among readers that the paper has sold out. Also, once we start selling even a sliver of the page, what's to stop an advertiser from asking for more — one third or even one half. Unless we can provide research that shows readers are apathetic toward front-page advertising, or even find it useful, I really believe newspapers should declare the front page off limits."

But Mark B. Evans, editor of *The Northwest Explorer* in Tuscon, Ariz., doesn't believe a lack of independence is linked to publishing front-page ads. "To say that front-page ads affect credibility is to say that all ads on inside pages affect the credibility of the stories on those pages," he wrote. "That's nonsense. News credibility is only affected by advertising when stories are softened or killed to please an advertiser, or written to please an advertiser."

"I do not believe that readers will look at an ad on the front page and assume that the advertiser has bought and paid for those stories, any more than they believe an advertiser on B-4 has paid for the stories on that page. I suspect that readers who have a cynical belief that their newspaper will never bite the hands that feed it, probably have a good reason to believe that about the newspaper they read, which means that newspaper has a far larger credibility problem than the debate over front-page ads."

"Credible newspapers that write news stories without regard to political or economic influence, or the size of an advertising contract, should have nothing to worry about if they choose to put ads on the front page . . ."

More than 55 percent of 240 respondents strongly (33.7 percent) or somewhat (21.6 percent) disagreed newspapers lose independence when publishing front-page ads. Thirty percent, however, found this as a concern, 17 percent in strong agreement and 13 percent somewhat in agreement. The average response rate was 2.6 (somewhat disagree).

Strongly disagree . . . . .	.81	(34%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	.52	(22%)
Neutral . . . . .	.34	(14%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	.32	(13%)
Strongly agree . . . . .	.41	(17%)

**No. 12 — Front-page ads devalue front-page news.**

Some claim front-page ads cheapen the news; the significance of "real" news — the value — goes down when the two are mixed. This statement, maybe more than any other, demonstrated a great divide on the issue, possibly pointing to the fulcrum of the debate.

"I think that front-page ads devalue front-page news and the newspaper loses credibility," wrote Jay Lee, editor of *The Democrat* in Senatobia, Miss. "Newspapers who run front-page ads are prostituting their papers."

"It's a misuse of 'reader space' and devalues the newspaper and its credibility," wrote A.L. Alford Jr., editor and publisher of *The Lewiston Morning Tribune* in Lewiston, Idaho.

". . . the newspaper, first and foremost, is an information source," wrote Terry Greenberg, editor of *The Truth* in Elkhart,

Ind. "News and advertising are both equal and important in terms of information. But the front page has historically been a place for news. Advertising has many other choice positions throughout the paper. My concern about front-page advertising, though, is not that most of us have never done it that way, my concern is once you start, where do you stop? And can you get enough money to make it worth your while to establish that precedent? I think not."

Susan Pryce, advertising director of *The Fauquier Citizen* in Warrenton, Va., wrote: "While reporters and editors feel that advertising on the front page devalues front-page news there is little real evidence to support that myth."

More than 50 percent strongly (26.6 percent) or somewhat (23.7 percent) agree that front-page ads devalue the news. But, more than 43 percent strongly (25.8 percent) or somewhat (17.5) disagree. The average response rate was 3.1 (neutral).

Strongly disagree . . . . .	.62	(26%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	.42	(17%)
Neutral . . . . .	.15	(6%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	.57	(24%)
Strongly agree . . . . .	.64	(27%)

**No. 13 — Newspaper credibility becomes a concern with front-page ads.**

Losing credibility and finding ways to restore it have been major considerations for newspapers over the past decade. Some claim front-page ads are a credibility concern. Others don't agree. The survey, again, demonstrates the great divide.

"Many papers have them and it does not seem to make any difference to readers," said Thomas Kelsch, publisher of *European and Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Washington, D.C. "Objection to them is mostly an internal journalism issue. I have worked at papers that had them, had healthy readership, and no complaints about them. Our credibility or lack thereof comes from a lot of things — accuracy, objectivity, awareness of community — but I see no evidence it comes from front-page ads. Our paper does not allow them, but I don't fear any serious repercussions (outside the newsroom) if we went to them. Quality of news coverage is a much bigger issue than where the ads are. Unfortunately, in many cases, coverage is sloppy at best."

John Cate, editor of *The Cleveland Post* in Garner, N.C., believes newspaper credibility is a concern with front-page ads. "The front page of the newspaper is for news, not for advertising," he wrote. "My newspaper is a free publication, but even we would not consider running ads on the front page. Those who do run a serious risk of loss of credibility with their readers and this is the most important thing a newspaper must possess. It's simply not worth it for the premium cost of running an advertisement on the front page."

"I find it interesting that we treat the news on the front page differently from the news inside," wrote Cindy Tucker, advertising director of *The Athens Banner Herald*, in Athens, Ga. "It is as credible as we are and we have always been a credible news source. *The National Enquirer* does not place advertising on its front page — does this make its news credible?"

Forty-six percent of 242 respondents strongly (27 percent) or somewhat (19 percent) agreed that newspaper credibility is a con-

cern with front-page ads. But a large number — 42.5 percent — strongly (26 percent) or somewhat (16.5 percent) disagreed. The average response rate was 3 (neutral).

Strongly disagree . . . . .	.63 (26%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	.40 (17%)
Neutral . . . . .	.26 (11%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	.47 (19%)
Strongly agree . . . . .	.66 (27%)

### The Survey

A 14-question survey was sent via e-mail in the spring of 2001 to 1,005 e-mail addresses at newspapers across the United States. One hundred and five could not be delivered, reducing the sample to 900. Two hundred and fifty-six individuals responded, for a return rate of 28 percent (survey results were tabulated from 244 responses, however, for a 27 percent response rate, as 12 arrived after coding was well under way).

The survey was sent to individuals at newspapers who held the titles of publisher, editor or advertising director, or had a different title, such as general manager, assistant advertising director, business manager, executive editor or managing editor. The survey sought input from those with the primary job function of a newspaper top executive, top editorial and advertising managers.

The National Newspaper Association (NNA) Web site lists 409 newspapers with Internet links (80 would not open). Several did not identify avenues of e-mail correspondence, or that information could not be found within a reasonable time check (up to three minutes). More than 300 e-mail surveys, however, were sent to individuals at NNA member newspapers.

The *Editor & Publisher* Newspaper Sites in the United States Web page lists more than 3,200 daily and weekly newspapers. A random pattern of selection was used, approximately every 10th newspaper on the alphabetical list. Approximately 500 e-mail surveys were sent to individuals at more than 300 newspapers.

An additional 123 e-mail surveys were sent to 72 newspapers in the state of Washington, from *Editor & Publisher's* Media Links Online Media Directory. The respondents were included in the general population, but were also broken out for a look at a specific state's front-page newspaper advertisement direction. For comparison, only 19 percent of Washington newspaper respondents are publishing front-page advertising.

In total, 900 e-mail surveys were sent to individuals at more than 600 newspapers (daily and non-daily), with 256 individual responses.

### The Respondents

Of 244 coded responses, 177 were from males, 58 were from females and nine did not identify gender. The average and median age was 47, with the youngest respondent being 25 and the oldest 65. The age distribution between males and females was fairly equal.

One hundred and three editors responded, followed by 88 publishers and 47 advertising directors. Six did not identify job title or area of responsibility.

Gender response by title/job function included:

Advertising Director — 22 females and 23 males (two declined to indicate).

Editor — 16 females and 86 males (one declined to indicate).

Publisher — 19 females and 66 males (three declined to indicate).

Unknown/Other — 1 female and two males (three declined to indicate).

While the average and median age of all respondents was 47 (23 declined to indicate age), the following is average age by title/job function:

Advertising Director — 43.3 (three declined to indicate).

Editor — 46.85 (six declined to indicate).

Publisher — 48.61 (10 declined to indicate).

Unknown/Other — 37 (four declined to indicate).

Average age by gender was 44.35 for females (three declined to indicate) and 47.44 for males (11 declined to indicate age).

Nine respondents did not give age or gender.

As well as simple survey prompts, respondents were allowed one open-ended question: "Share your thoughts about front-page ads." Seventy-seven percent commented (187 of 244). The responses totaled 20 pages of quotes — more than 15,000 words. The longest response was 1,048 words. The shortest was one word. In a business that traditionally has shied away from anonymous comments, nearly half asked for anonymity (92 of 187).

### The Newspapers

The highest number of responses (67 percent) came from individuals working at a daily newspaper (163). There were 64 responses from those working at weekly newspapers, 10 from those working at newspapers published twice a week, four from newspapers published three times a week, one from a newspaper published four times a week, and two from newspapers published once every other week.

One hundred and sixty-eight responses (69 percent) came from individuals who work for newspapers owned by a group. Seventy-six responses came from individuals working at independently owned newspapers.

The average circulation of the newspapers where respondents worked was 39,053, skewed slightly upward by a handful of responses from newspapers with extremely high circulation. The median circulation of respondent newspapers was 20,500. Respondents worked at newspapers ranging from a 1,850-circulation weekly to a 765,000 daily. Response by newspaper circulation included:

#### Daily

9,999 and under	— 24 - 9.8 percent
10,000 to 19,999	— 31 - 12.7 percent
20,000 to 29,999	— 36 - 14.8 percent
30,000 to 49,000	— 30 - 12.4 percent
50,000 to 99,999	— 24 - 9.8 percent
100,000 to 499,999	— 17 - 7 percent

500,000 or more	—	1 - 0.4	percent
Total	—	163 - 66.9	percent

**Weekly/Other**

4,999 and under	—	15 - 6.2	percent
5,000 to 9,999	—	35 - 14.4	percent
10,000 to 19,999	—	13 - 5.3	percent
20,000 to 49,999	—	9 - 3.6	percent
50,000 or more	—	9 - 3.6	percent
Total	—	81 - 33.1	percent

While 76 responses came from individuals working at independent newspapers, the highest number of responses from major newspaper groups came from Gannett with 12, followed by nine from Morris Communications, eight each from MediaNews Group and Lee Enterprises, seven from CNHI, 5 from Scripps, and four from McClatchy. Three each came from Knight Ridder, Copley and *The New York Times*, and two each came from Cox and Freedom Communications, Inc. Ninety-four others came from regional or lesser-known groups. Eight respondents did not identify themselves as independent or with a group.

The only states not represented by individual respondents were Delaware, Maine and North Dakota. The highest number of responses — 42 — came from the state of Washington. The high rate can be attributed to the fact that 123 e-mail surveys were sent to a majority of newspapers in the state in an effort to get a more comprehensive look at one individual state.

The second highest number of responses from a single state came from California (17), followed by 10 each from Minnesota, Oregon, Texas and Wisconsin, and nine from Indiana.

A remaining state-by-state breakout follows: Kentucky, North Carolina and New York (seven); Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio (six); Colorado, Kansas, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania (five); Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, (four); Arizona, Mississippi, Montana, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah (three); Alaska, Georgia, Iowa, South Dakota, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, D.C., Wyoming (two); Alabama, Hawaii, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, West Virginia (one).

**The Good**

Mark E. Laskowski, publisher of *The Potomac News/Manassas Journal Messenger* in Woodbridge, Va., believes front-page ads are a significant step for the industry. “The time has come to provide our readers with the best local information we can and that includes advertising,” Laskowski wrote. “While I do not think front-page ads should decrease front-page news hole, they can be tastefully presented in the nameplate or in a banner at the bottom of the page without compromising the news.”

“I have no problem with front-page ads,” wrote Pete Van Baalen, regional advertising director, CNHI Newspapers, Anderson, Ind. “We have positioned them in such a way that they do not dominate the front page, and are generally tasteful. They do not hurt the integrity of the paper any more than ads on any other page would throughout the paper. The first advertiser to purchase

the ads was a local liquor store. We did make it clear that if a serious drunk driving accident occurred and was to be on our front page, we reserved the right to pull his ad. That client completely understood our position and agreed.”

Front-page advertisements bring a significant amount of revenue, and advertisers are often required to sign a 13-, 26- or 52-week contract. The ads can bring double, triple or more than the usual advertising rate. In difficult economic times, it is much needed revenue, and can make the difference in annual profit margin demands, possibly eliminating layoffs or other cutbacks. Demand for front-page ad space has been so great at some newspapers that advertisers are being turned away. “It’s one way for journalists to keep their jobs and readers to keep their news, but both groups give the practice a mixed reception.”<sup>74</sup>

Richard D. Hall, managing editor of *The Deseret News* in Salt Lake City, Utah, understands the economics and realities of the issue. “I don’t think readers care much either way,” he wrote. “But journalists, of course, care greatly. The front page is very valuable real estate. Because it is so valuable, in a perfect world it should be reserved for news only. But the world is not perfect and I like getting a paycheck as much as the next guy. Therefore I can live with having a small piece of split section fronts sold — maybe two or three times a week and at a premium price.”

Howard Kleinberg, a former *Miami News* editor and now a columnist for Cox Newspapers, wrote the following about his local newspaper, which had advertised on its front page a coupon booklet claiming more than \$500 in savings:

“That the newspaper used part of its front page for promoting advertisement is an issue between the various departments of the newspaper, and its publisher. The sad truth likely is that more readers turned to that coupon-filled booklet than to the editorial page.”<sup>76</sup>

“I doubt if readers care that much either way,” wrote Scott Sines, managing editor of *The Spokesman-Review* in Spokane, Wash. “There will be some who already think the newspaper is too influenced by advertisers and some who don’t care. Many international newspapers have front-page ads today.”

Most newspapers formulate strict policies for front-page ads. For instance, “price-point” pitches to promote a sale or price are usually banned. And, many policies lean heavily toward institutional advertising and away from what some could consider controversial products, such as alcohol and/or adult entertainment.

Tom Callinan, editor of *The Arizona Republic*, wrote in a story in his newspaper on Jan. 28, 2001: “I assure you that these front-page ads in no way affect the journalistic integrity of *The Republic*. Working with our advertising department, we’ve developed strict guidelines that will dictate the content and look of the front-page ads. The layout or typefaces will not mimic editorial design. The copy will be tasteful, and the design will be compatible with the front page.”<sup>77</sup>

Karl Ziomek, managing editor of *The News-Herald/Heritage* in Southgate, Mich. believes journalists are too concerned about advertising content and placement in general. “We have never seriously considered front-page advertising,” he wrote, “. . . but I feel that journalists have to understand that advertising is a key ingredient of any newspaper and, therefore, should have significant space and placement. Does that include the front page? It might, depending on the venue and the ad itself . . . The bottom line is that anything, given enough thought, can be tastefully done.

And if it's done properly, the editorial on the page should not be effected."

### The Bad

"The front page really is the sacred document of the newspapers," said Ken Bode, dean of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. "We all know about the pressure for profits, but is the added value of the front-page (ads) so important that you give that up?"<sup>4</sup>

Is the front page sacred? Geneva Overholser, a syndicated columnist for *The Washington Post* Writers Group, former editorial writer at *The New York Times*, ex-editor of *The Des Moines Register*, past ombudsman for *The Washington Post*, and nine-year Pulitzer Prize board member, has a slightly different view.

"Having an ad on the front page may look tacky," she wrote. "It may take away news hole. But it is not corrupting; it's straightforward, not deceitful. The public likes ads. They also like news, of course. And they want clarity about which is which. Beyond that, our conventions about where ads appear are just that: our conventions. Protecting them may suit our fancy; it doesn't maintain our credibility."<sup>8</sup>

A clear negative to publishing front-page ads is newsroom staff morale. Mixing news with advertising disturbs many reporters and editors. And, many are concerned that a relatively small ad will eventually grow.

Neil Pinchin, newsroom team leader for innovation at *The Orange County Register*, tried to calm those fears when his newspaper began running a front-page coupon as part of a redesign in March 2001. He defended the move as part of making the paper more useful and rhetorically asked: "Will it grow and become this enormous thing? No, it won't."<sup>9</sup>

Mike Shepard, publisher of *The Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*, in Walla Walla, Wash., isn't a fan of front-page ads, but he has a realistic view. "This is more a debate about aesthetics and perceived encroachment on editorial independence than what readers think," he wrote. "Readers know the difference between advertising and news content. A newspaper's editorial integrity doesn't ride on this issue. Will it be the end of the world if we put ads on our front page some day? No. I just don't like how they look."

Kelly Hawes, managing editor of *The Facts* in Clute, Texas, wrote: "I'd just as soon not have advertisements on my front page, but it's more a matter of aesthetics than ethics. I honestly can't say that there is a journalistic reason for keeping the front page free of ads. I'd like to keep the front page free of ads, but as long as we don't start selling sponsorship of specific stories, I don't see an ethical issue."

"Our largest advertiser (a very strong local bank) has approached us about running front-page ads," wrote Norene Prosocki, publisher of *The Ozark County Times* in Gainesville, Mo. "We've put off making the decision to go ahead because we do have a vague feeling of losing our independence and credibility. Being able to buy the front page just feels wrong. I'm tempted to charge an astronomical amount just so they won't buy it. The whole idea bothers me and infuriates my editor, but truthfully with the economy going the way it is, I feel like it's a no-brainer. We should sell the space."

### The Ugly

Kim de Bourbon, editor of *The Pocono Record* in Stroudsburg, Pa., wrote about front-page ads: "Not a good idea. I will fight them to my death."

Her publisher,Carolynn Allen-Evans, agrees. "We plan to avoid them at all cost. There are far more innovative ways to speak to the needs of the advertiser, without introducing front-page ads and we have the brainpower to develop those initiatives. Loyal and fringe readers, as well as management and employees, believe front-page ads would indicate a sponsorship of the news and most certainly harm the credibility of one of the three pristine news pages. If it undermines the credibility of those pages, it would seem it would do the same to the newspaper as a whole."

Rufus Woods, publisher-editor of the *Wenatchee World*, in Wenatchee, Wash., was clear in his statement about front-page ads: "In my view, front-page ads make perfect sense in a world in which journalism is only a means for making money. I don't think they necessarily upset readers, but it lends a commercial air to the product that I find distasteful. Isn't it interesting that in these 'economic times' newspaper chains are making 20-plus percent margins and laying off staff? God help us!"

"Page-one ads are like Dan Rather reading the evening news wearing a John Deere baseball cap and drinking a can of Pepsi," wrote Teresa Tsalaky, publisher of *The Daily Triplicate* in Crescent City, Calif. "As ridiculous as that sounds, it will happen some day . . . Dollars talk loudly. But higher profits can also be generated by improving the credibility of your brand. If readers perceive that advertisers control you, regardless of whether it's true, you'll lose market share."

Jay Thorwaldson, editor of the *Palo Alto Weekly* in Palo Alto, Calif., is concerned about perception. "A huge percentage of readers (increasingly non-readers?) see papers as being advertiser-dominated already, and some papers are in fact so dominated. I think this would drastically further that perception. When readers lose trust in the integrity of the editorial product then there is usually a decline in readership, or in the importance readers attach to a paper's content . . . I think this is a very crucial question.

". . . slapping ads 'in your face' on the front page smacks me as way over the line if you want to sustain credibility and the perception that you are putting out something in the readers' interest, as opposed to the advertisers' interest."

"When asked how much it would cost to put an ad on the front page, I've told them they would have to buy the newspaper first," wrote Peggy Parks, publisher and editor of *The Challis Messenger* in Challis, Idaho. "I don't believe they belong there under any circumstances."

"I consider them an error, a giant leap backward to the days when yellow journalism proclaimed with a nod and a wink that it didn't really matter if there were ads on the front page since neither the advertising of that period nor the journalism felt any serious obligation to truth," wrote George Pica, editor of *Business Examiner* in Tacoma, Wash.

But Nancy McGuire of *The Nome Nugget* in Nome, Alaska, summed up "the ugly" best when she wrote: "Front-page ads suck."

## The Conclusion

Laurence J. Peter, in *The Peter Principle*, wrote, “Competence, like truth, beauty and contact lenses, is in the eye of the beholder.”

Front-page newspaper advertising has been presented by many as an issue of integrity. Some would go as far as to claim those that publish front-page ads are not competent, or truthful with readers. Others claim front-page ads aren’t esthetically pleasing.

It is truly a matter of “the eye of the beholder.” Some are so strongly against the movement they have made powerful statements. Others seem resigned to what appears to be a new way of life:

Frank Fellone, deputy editor of *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Little Rock, Ark., feels front-page ads are a bad idea. But, he wrote, “we’ll see more of it because chain newspapers dominate the landscape, and bean counters dominate chain newspapers.”

“I’d rather not have them, but they help pay the bills,” wrote Jennifer Schartz, managing editor of *The Great Bend Tribune* in Great Bend, Kan.

“News, information and advertising — that’s what newspapers are all about,” wrote Larry Atkinson, publisher of *The Mobridge Tribune* in Mobridge, S.D. “Ads can be run on the front without detracting from the news.”

“Our competitors (broadcast) have done it for years,” wrote Steve Beasley, ad director of *The Globe-News* in Amarillo, Texas. “I think it’s an idea whose time has come.”

“We’ve been publishing front-page ads for several years and the sky hasn’t fallen,” wrote Terry McCollough, publisher of *The Daily Dispatch* in Brainerd, Minn. “A few news staffers see them as a sell out, but most don’t see the harm; nor do I.”

The front-page advertisement revolution will continue. The number of newspapers publishing front-page ads has grown over the past decade, dramatically over the past two years.

The debate, like most, has strong positions, points and voices on all fronts. There is formidable opposition, but even so, it is unlikely it will be able to withstand the proponents’ momentum and the bottom line — which is the bottom line. The trend is likely to continue for several reasons, including five key ones — group influence, premium prices, current economic climate, annual profit margin expectations and readership acceptance.

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# One toke over the line?

## *When the watchdog becomes the guard dog*

By Jock Lauterer

### Introduction

Editors and publishers of smaller papers are accustomed to the vagaries of public opinion — what General Electric CEO Jack Welch calls “going from prince to pig, pig to prince, prince to pig.”

But publisher Greg Allen of the *Wake* (N.C.) *Weekly* had no idea how much solid waste matter would hit the climate control device when he took the law into his own hands in the name of public service, civic duty and journalistic crusading.

Allen, who purchased the thriving weekly (circ. 8,200) from his parents almost three years ago in a booming part of the state, says he became suspicious when the new mayor alleged that the local police department was soft on drug trafficking. Allen says he too had a bad feeling that the local police were turning a blind eye to drug dealers — or even worse.

Allen says he couldn't help but notice the increased drug traffic in his charming hometown (pop. 12,000). And here's the kicker, he says: “Drug sales were going on right in the heart of main street — where little girls in leotards go for ballet lessons.”

To test his frightening theory, Allen, with the help of the mayor, hired a private investigator in June 2000 to go undercover and attempt to purchase drugs. It was a cinch; it was too easy. But later that fall, when the story hit the media, it split the town right down the middle, and Allen and the *Wake Weekly* have become the target of much public, business and media criticism.

People either love or hate Allen and the *Wake Weekly*. Critics, especially the local cops, business owners and the town council, say the paper crossed the line, having no business meddling in a law enforcement issue. A few supporters quietly cheer Allen for taking such a gutsy risk, but most are reluctant to go public. Allen concludes doggedly, “I did what I thought to be the right thing at the time.”

Allen's case begs the question: How far should a community newspaper go to find the truth?

Now, over a year later, the pot is still boiling, a few arrests have been made, but the controversy is far from over.

Here's how it's played out:

### “We got trouble...”

The four-block area of downtown Wake Forest could serve as the set for the Broadway musical “The Music Man,” but the trouble in River City isn't pool. It's a stew of drugs, politics and journalism ethics.

But appearances can be deceiving. Even now, looking at the main drag, White Street — lined with dance studios, specialty shops and restaurants, trees and benches — it's difficult to imagine such a donnybrook going on in such a wholesome-appearing setting.

Greg Allen, 43, was raised at his parents' newspaper, the *Wake Weekly*, in a town where kids could roam freely and safely. But in the last 10 years, the population has more than doubled to 12,000 as new folks from the nearby Research Triangle Park have made Wake Forest an affluent, transient bedroom community. Allen notes sadly that many of these out-of-state newcomers are not attuned to local history, customs, mores — and they don't care about Wake Forest as a traditional, hometown-style community. It's just a place to sleep and play golf.

Adding to the political mix: The town is also the original site of Wake Forest University, before it moved to Winston-Salem, N.C., in the 1950s. Southeast Baptist Theological Seminary now occupies the stately old campus just across the railroad tracks from downtown. SBTS has a typically conservative bent and has historically been at odds with Allen and the liberal-leaning *Wake Weekly*.

### How it started

Allen bought the paper in January 1998, about the same time a new mayor, George Mackie, took office on the platform that he was going to “clean up the bad parts of town and rid the town of drug traffic,” Allen says.

“In March '98 the mayor went public with a list of accusations of problems within the police department,” Allen explains. “He battled that for more than a couple of years...with no help from the town board...and if George doesn't get what he wants then (he) sort of makes it public, which didn't endear him to the police department, the town administration or the town board. So it's safe to say they hate his guts.”

According to Allen, “The town board and Mayor Mackie don't agree on anything. If George is for it, then the town board is against it. It's that ugly.”

On the other hand, the paper has had a healthy relationship with Mayor Mackie, whom Allen considers a political ally (though the paper has written stories critical of the mayor in the past). The publisher scoffs at accusations that “I'm in the mayor's back pocket — or that he's in mine...” Allen reasons. “*The Wake Weekly* has always welcomed and expected Wake Forest political leaders to explain their side of the story. (But) of the five town board commissioners only two have ever been in my office... George is the only one who comes down (regularly) So...I don't know how they (the commissioners) form their thoughts...much of it seems to be made up before they come to meetings.”

So, two years after the mayor's accusations, Allen secretly agreed with the mayor that they would hire a private detective named Danny Barham to investigate the claims that the local authorities were soft on drugs. Barham in turn hired a series of undercover informants.

Allen says, “Our original mission was not to go out and to buy drugs,” but that the informant would have incriminated himself if he hadn't. Allen explains, “He would have looked silly if he was out there just talking and not buying.”

By July 2000, that effort netted the private investigator both powder and crack cocaine, which were delivered to Allen at the paper.

Meanwhile, nobody at the newspaper knew a thing about the undercover operation or the “stuff” in the publisher’s office. “They knew I was up to something — they just didn’t know what,” Allen says, alluding to so many closed-door meetings at his office at the paper.

By September 2000, Allen says he knew he was in over his head, and arranged a meeting with Wake County Sheriff John Baker and Capt. W.L. Rowe where Allen handed over the drugs and told the officers everything he knew.

“I was a happy man,” Allen recalls, “I turned the whole thing over — and the only thing I would get out of it was that when they made the arrests, that it would be on a Tuesday so I (the *Wake Weekly*) could get first dibs over the *N&O* (the *News and Observer*, the McClatchy-owned major metro daily in Raleigh and Allen’s main competition).”

### Now things get messy

In October 2000, Allen claims that “somebody got wind of the story...turns out somebody in Wake Forest leaked it to the *N&O*.” And the story was that Mackie and Allen’s drug probe was derailed. After complaints from two local businessmen, the state suspended the private investigator’s license for six months because he supervised the purchasing of illegal drugs. The N.C. Private Protective Services Board, which oversees private investigators, ruled that the private detective’s behavior was inappropriate.

The lid blew off on Halloween 2000. And as irony would have it, Allen didn’t even get the scoop on his own story. “Channel 5 rolled up in front of the building, and began shooting the front...” Allen grins ruefully, recalling how he realized his hand was forced. “I called the staff together and explained what we’d been doing.” Later that evening another TV crew tracked Allen down at home as he was handing out Halloween candy.

That night, TV aired the first coverage on the story. The next morning, Nov. 1, 2000, the *N&O* broke the story in print under the headline:

“*Wake Weekly* Hires Private Eye, Detective Suspended in Drug Probe.”

*N&O* reporter Kristin Collins quoted Allen as saying “I felt it was a part of my journalistic duty to pursue what the mayor said was happening in downtown Wake Forest.”

The *N&O* also reported Wake Forest Police Chief Greg Harrington calling the drug probe illegal and unethical, saying, “It’s a vendetta against the police department instigated by the mayor and Greg Allen.”

By the following day, Nov. 2, 2000, the *Wake Weekly* staff rallied to the cause (something they really didn’t have to do, Allen notes in retrospect). Under the headline “Probe Finds Drugs in Downtown,” staff writer Suzanne Rook quoted Allen in the *Wake Weekly*’s first story on the investigation, “Because of the lack of activity in drug arrests in Wake Forest...I decided the best way to verify the apparent drug problem was to conduct an investigation ourselves...” and Allen continues speaking to his reporter, saying, “I love Wake Forest. I am proud to say I have lived here all my life. I am proud of our downtown area. It should be major concern for all of us — for the safety of our children — that drug dealing is stopped in Wake Forest.”

That same day, the *N&O* published its follow-up story with reporter Collins’ lead: “People in this northern Wake town are reeling from what they discovered this week: A private detective, hired by the local newspaper and aided by the mayor, prowled the downtown business district for months brokering drug deals.”

The *N&O* story called the investigation “botched,” and quoted town

commissioner Vivian Jones as saying, “I think it’s really scary...when prominent citizens think they can take the law into their own hands. We might as well have a vigilante club... Who else are they trying to trap? Who else are they trying to accuse?”

But Mayor Mackie praised the publisher for having the guts to stand up for his town, telling the *N&O* reporter, “I think (Allen) has really done a public service. To me, he gets Tar Heel of the Week.” Allen himself commended that initial coverage by the *N&O* as “fair.”

### Trading editorial blows

*Wake Weekly* Editor Carol Pelosi put her editorial shoulder to the wheel in the Nov. 2, 2000, edition of the *Wake Weekly*, supporting publisher Allen’s risky stance: “Uncovering wrong is something that newspapers do. We try to be the eyes and ears for our neighbors. We try to find the truth.

“This week’s truth is that White Street has been a drug market within two blocks of the police department. The only drug arrests Wake Forest police have made in months have been when some drugs were found during a traffic stop.

“This week’s truth is that the *Wake Weekly* uncovered a bit of the action, surely not all, and stirred up a hornet’s nest of reaction.”

Pelosi’s editorial also contained a paragraph that would later result in the threat of a lawsuit against Allen and the paper:

“When even I — a 63-year-old white woman — can glimpse what looks like stereotypical drug-dealing behavior in downtown Wake Forest when I am just driving down White Street, there is something wrong. Why, other than dealing drugs, would someone be standing on the sidewalk, decked with gold, talking on a cell phone? Why was there constant traffic in and out of some White Street businesses that should have a low volume of customers?”

Allen says the individual described has threatened a lawsuit, claiming that local folk could identify him and his business by Pelosi’s description, even though, as Allen says, “we never mentioned his name and never mentioned his business.” A retraction was demanded, but Allen refused to write one, leaving everything hanging in limbo.

Allen says that later he found out that about this time, the Wake Forest police chief called the DA “to see if they could press charges on me for possession of cocaine,” — in reference to the drug evidence Allen’s private investigator had bought and delivered to the paper office. But no action was ever taken.

The following day, Nov. 3, 2000, the *News and Observer* weighed in with a broadside of editorial criticism, under the headline: “Snooping out of Bounds.”

The *N&O* editorial writer said that while Mackie and Allen’s probe “may have come from some deep devotion to civic duty...it was devotion carried to excess and infringing on jurisdictional territory properly covered by the town’s police force.”

And the editorial closed with this salvo: “...Drug investigations are best left to the proper authorities. If citizens, be it the mayor or anyone else in town, have suspicions about drug dealing, they should take those suspicions to police or other law enforcement officials. Independent investigations like this one can easily run amok and raise questions as to what motivated them to begin with and how credible they are. This collaboration between mayor and publisher, however well-intentioned, was an ill-advised step by both.”

Reading that editorial, Allen just shakes his head. The *N&O* recently started a direct competition product, the *North Raleigh News*, which looks a lot like a community newspaper and is vying for readers and advertising in the *Wake Weekly*’s backyard.

## A busy month

But the tit for tat between the *Wake Weekly* and the *N&O* paled by comparison when the story was carried nationwide by the Associated Press on Nov. 7, 2000, under the heading: “Weekly Newspaper Publisher’s Drug Probe Foiled.”

Writer Estes Thompson quoted the mayor as saying, “I saw a child being sold drugs and I looked around and my town wasn’t what it ought to be.”

Thompson then quoted Allen: “I don’t give a hoot about the differences between the mayor and police chief...I do give a hoot about what happens in downtown Wake Forest. At 5 o’clock today, we will have a couple of hundred little girls in leotards going to dance studios right in front of these businesses.”

And AP quotes an irate local businessman, William Joyner, whose Shorty’s Famous Hot Dogs is in the middle of downtown: “The allegations of drugs being sold is just totally unfounded. We sell hot dogs, hamburgers and cheeseburgers. I’m here every day and I don’t see it.” Joyner called the undercover investigation “totally out of bounds. It sounds to me like a vigilante group.”

Publisher Allen told the AP, “We intended to do an investigation we could write a story about exposing a drug problem in downtown Wake Forest...I’m not in the newspaper business to make news. But we don’t think we’re crazy and we don’t think we’re wrong. We think we’re right to make people aware there is more of a problem than local and county law enforcement people believe.”

During the next months, the *Wake Weekly* pursued the story, which often painted the paper in a bad light, under headlines such as: “Detective Found Drugs and Fear,” “Downtown Wake Forest Business Owners Say Area Has Received Unwarranted Bad Publicity,” “Most White Street Merchants Say They Have Not Seen Drugs,” and “Wake DA Calls Probe Ill-advised.”

## Stranger than fiction

By January 2001, fences had been mended to the extent that the town of Wake Forest, along with the local police, began working together with Allen, who privately paid for the services of another undercover informant who began buying drugs, while wearing a wire, and being witnessed by local police.

That same month, Allen says another faction in town, led by a “local big-wig” who Allen claims is “frightened he will be implicated in the drug investigation,” attempted to discredit Allen by “putting out trash about me — that I had bought some coke with two buddies in ‘84 — and I admitted it,” says Allen, who writes the incident off as a youthful peccadillo. “It was just a wild-haired thing...three single guys on a summer afternoon...though you never imagine how it will come back to haunt you,” he says with a grin.

But when that story started going around town, “that I was a drug-user...” he says, “I called my parents, my wife and said, ‘Look, here’s what you’re gonna hear...’” That seemed to defuse the crisis.

Meanwhile, by March 2001, a couple of arrests were made by the local police, but progress stalled. A drug-related shooting in April allegedly involving one of the suspects has thrown a wrench in the investigation’s process.

By June 2001, Allen sensed a reluctance from the Wake Forest police department to go forward because the local cops don’t believe Allen’s drug informant. But Allen has a box full of tapes of incriminating conversations between the drug informant and suspected dealers. Finally, to establish the credibility of his agent, Allen says, “We’re try-

ing to get him to take a lie detector test, but he’s fed up” and has been hard to locate. So a year after Allen’s undercover investigation began, the pot still boils.

Not exactly a normal day at work for your average small town community newspaper publisher.

## Q&A for a crusading publisher

### Q: Isn’t this police work? What business does a newspaper have going undercover to buy drugs?

That’s what my lawyer asked me,” Allen says with a rueful grin, adding, “There’s a fine line between police-work and newspaper work...”

### Q: Why’d you do it in the first place?

Greg Allen was raised in a newspaper family, was in high school during Watergate and attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the mid-to-late ‘70s when the country was still flush with the journalistic notion of Woodward and Bernstein at the *Washington Post*: the crusading hard-digging reporter on the trail of dirty pols and shady public figures.

Allen says, “Back in the ‘60s, when a reporter went undercover to expose (a crooked politician) it was a wonderful thing. I wasn’t out to be the hero...it escalated...it just sort of happened. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that... I’d have.... (be buying cocaine) ...that it would go this far.”

Secondly, Wake Forest is his hometown and the image of little girls going to dance class in the shadow of suspected drug dealers was just too much for Allen. He’s used the metaphor before, but this time he goes into detail: “There are three or four dance studios uptown. From 5-7 every evening, downtown is completely full (of kids). Someday, some kid in her leotard is going to finish her dance lesson, and...” he pauses, envisioning a drug-deal gone bad, a shoot-out on White Street. On HIS main street. “Even if the child isn’t hurt...Even for a child to witness something like this is a whole lot worse to me than the fact that I’ve (supposedly) hurt downtown Wake Forest (businesses).”

“If I knew it (drug trafficking) was there and I didn’t do anything — what does that make me?”

He wonders aloud how long a prostitute would last on main street before the cops hauled her away. “About 30 minutes,” he says with a grim chuckle, “...but drug trafficking is OK because you don’t see it going on?” He questions, adding, “Can we condone drug selling because we don’t see it?”

“By golly!” pounding the table, Allen exclaims, “I’m completely fed up with people saying it (drug trafficking) happens everywhere...!”

### Q: Can you describe the newspaper staff’s reaction to your summary announcement that you were sponsoring an undercover drug investigation?

Allen says Editor Carol Pelosi is “100 percent behind me.” And that this steel magnolia “caters to no one,” — meaning that if she were opposed to Allen’s tactics, she wouldn’t hesitate to be honest with him.

Of cops reporter Suzanne Rook, Allen says, “She loves it. She enjoys the excitement it’s generated...of course, they (the cops) were cold to her for a while, but she’s overcome that.”

**Q: Can you describe the town's reaction?**

"Public opinion has been mixed," Allen says candidly. "When the story initially broke, many people speaking out were against what we had done and their main concern was that we were making downtown look bad. All the downtown business owners were perturbed. They called Mayor Mackie and me (names) because (they thought) we were trying to scare people off from coming downtown and shopping at their businesses."

Allen says most critics say that the *Wake Weekly* coverage and drug investigation was "extremely bad publicity" for the town and "embarrassing to Wake Forest."

He continues, "Of course the town board rebuffed the whole thing — called us vigilantes; we had no business doing what we were doing, especially because we didn't we bring the Wake Forest police into it." And the reason is that at the time Allen says he felt he couldn't trust the local cops.

Allen describes "the abuse my wife and 11-year-old son took," including one store owner buttonholing his wife at a local shop where she "chewed my wife out, bad-mouthed me and the paper every chance she got, public and private."

When he sees that same woman these days, Allen admits it's "tough to muster up a smile and wave to her..."

But he does.

"People (supporters) would come up to me in private and say 'keep up the good work,' but nobody would go on the record (in support of me). They didn't want to be connected with it."

(Community journalism student Elizabeth Landvater, a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, wrote her final project on the *Wake Weekly* and interviewed several *Wake Weekly* readers about the subject. She reported: "Unfortunately some members of the community are not as supportive as Allen thinks. One person said she was 'not in favor of a newspaper getting involved in investigative matters.'" She felt that his actions could have caused the paper "more harm than good." Several other community members also felt that Allen overstepped his boundaries in the community by trying to uncover a drug scandal in Wake Forest. These people thought that the paper was one-sided in how it reported the drug scandal. The *Wake Weekly* printed material about corruption in the police department,

**Q: How has the drug investigation affected you?**

While Allen says his business is still good, the events surrounding the drug investigation "really hurt my enthusiasm for the newspaper business. You know, we used to think we could fix anything with journalism... This has taken a lot out of me, I dunno..."

**Q: If you knew what you were getting into, would you do it again?**

Allen responds, "I would do the same thing over again if I had to. You have got to do what your heart says is right."

And he throws in a Zen saying, "When you've shot your last arrow and your quiver is dry, then shoot, shoot from your heart."

And, he adds with the satisfaction only a publisher can appreciate, "I (still) made money last year." And his circulation is up. Now, he half-jokes, when the phone rings, he doesn't know if it will be a call from the Pulitzer committee to congratulate him for public service or someone coming to haul him off to jail.

**Conclusions**

The salient points in this case study seem to be this:

- The *Wake Weekly* is an exemplary community newspaper, placing in the top five spot consistently in the North Carolina State Press Association's annual competition for decades. This year they won third in general excellence and first in sports.

- Publisher Greg Allen regards himself as a community activist, a journalist putting his community before self, a publisher whose means justify the ends — that even though his undercover investigation crossed the line into uncharted ethical territory for a community paper, the results of successfully exposing the drug problem in his hometown have been worth the risk. And, he has come to terms with that role of watchdog/guard dog, in spite of the fact that community support for him and the paper seems timid.

- During the one-year period that this case study was examined, the author found no North Carolina newspaper people willing to say they would do what Allen did in Wake Forest. Typical reactions to the story are slack-jawed amazement, incredulity and perhaps just a little admiration. But not a single newspaper person said he or she would have done the same thing, given the same conditions in his or her towns. Universally, the attitude encountered seemed to be this: Whether you agree with Allen's tactics or not, you have to admire his chutzpah.

- It really doesn't matter to Greg Allen what anybody thinks. He is comfortable in his own journalistic shoes. He's proven himself as a fearless, self-assured publisher of his own paper and he's running a quality, profitable community institution with a news staff that seems to be on board for the ride. If Allen is to be faulted as a leader, it's for getting so far out in front of his troops in the newsroom that they had no idea where he was taking them. But that transgression seems rectified. Allen is convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that he has done and will continue to do the right thing for his hometown. In the long run it's a safe bet that they — the town, the police, the county sheriff's department, the town council, the mayor and the paper — are going to work through this issue. Because one thing's for certain: publisher Greg Allen and the *Wake Weekly* are there for the long haul.

Who was it who said, "It's the newspaper's job to print the truth and raise a little hell"...?

Probably some publisher like Greg Allen.

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# Kansas newspaper publisher reaches out to African and Latino communities

By Danedri Thompson

Don't tell Albert Rukwaro that the editorial focus of *The African Voice* and *La Presencia Latina* is to help immigrants assimilate.

The focus of both papers — one a Spanish paper and the other targeted to African immigrants — is to help immigrants and Spanish speakers connect with their greater Kansas City metro community and to assist them with U.S. bureaucracy.

"A lot of Africans aren't even interested in assimilating. So that's not our intent," Rukwaro, managing editor and staff writer of *The African Voice*, said. "Hopefully we can make things easier by printing how to get involved in the community. But it's not assimilation."

In an editorial about the Olathe, Kan., diversity task force in *The African Voice*, Rukwaro wrote:

"Immigration offers challenges both for the immigrant and for the host. The immigrants have to deal with a new culture and system that almost always ignore them. It is with this in mind that the city of Olathe needs to be commended for including in its strategic plan a vision for the city that seeks to include every community."

He views both newspapers as a tool for people who have just arrived in the United States.

"They don't know the system. These papers help them get a feeling of community," he said.

Tri-County Newspapers, Inc. publishes *The African Voice* and *La Presencia Latina* along with four other community newspapers in Johnson, Miami and Franklin counties, including the *Gardner* (Kan.) *News*, *The Spring Hill* (Kan.) *New Era*, *The Wellsville*

(Kan.) *Globe* and *The Southwest Journal*.

Rhonda Humble, publisher of Tri-County Newspapers, kicked around the idea of a Spanish paper when she started noticing more and more Spanish speakers in her hometown of Gardner, but it took a special request from a Spanish-speaking man to prompt her to start *La Presencia Latina*. It helped



that Humble already had a Spanish speaker on her staff. Spanish is the second language of Nita Murillo, who sold ads for *La Presencia Latina* during its first year or so of publication.

Delaney Haley, the editor of both *The African Voice* and *La Presencia Latina*, assigns the stories and photographs and designs the pages. She and Elida Chavez work closely together to come up with ad sales and marketing ideas for *La Presencia Latina*. Chavez translates stories written in English to Spanish for the paper.

*La Presencia* has grown ever since it hit newsstands in 2001. The tabloid started at four pages, but now has 12, and it celebrated its one-year anniversary in June 2002. It started out breaking even, dipped down a bit, and then came back up, so it is now making a small profit. *The African Voice* is breaking even.

Humble said she expects both papers to change a little over time. For instance, *La Presencia Latina* started out as a monthly, but has been published twice a month since May 2002. That change came on the heels of several small changes to both papers since their inception.

For example, the Tri-County Newspapers staff changed *La Presencia Latina*'s name before it ever hit the newsstands. They planned to use "Hispanic" in the paper's flag, but changed it when they learned the term "Latina" is more inclusive.

Currently, *The African Voice* covers stories of interest to black, Sub-Saharan Africans, but Humble said black Americans are taking an interest in the paper as well. So, now the news staff adds a few stories specifically for black Americans in *The African Voice* each month.

"We've had a lot of black Americans calling us about it," Humble said. "They say, 'No one talks about slavery and you guys do.'"

It has created a crossover audience for *The African Voice*. So in addition to writing stories like "East Africa forms regional assembly," Rukwaro also did a story about a black school in Olathe, Kan.

"Africans and black Americans share a history," Humble said. "So from now on, we try to do stories on black Americans with a continuing focus on Africa."

Humble said she eventually expects to expand *The African Voice*'s target audience to include northern, Arabic African immigrants in the future.

"There are really two different cultures in Africa," Rukwaro said. "There's black Africa and Muslim Africa. We concentrate on Sub-Saharan Africa or black Africa right now."

The news staff meets the challenges of producing such diverse papers by writing stories that can be used in both *The African Voice* and *La Presencia Latina*.

"Albert writes a lot about immigrant issues," Humble said. "He wrote about immigrants driving illegally. They can't get Social Security numbers, so they can't get drivers' licenses."

The story ran in both papers.

"Sometimes we can use one story in all of our papers," Humble said.

Mark Kimaru, former layout/design editor of *The African Voice* and reporter for the other Tri-County newspapers, thought of at least one story that fit perfectly into every paper.

"We did a story on a local company, Gonzales Communications, providing phone service in Gambia," Kimaru said. "It's an international story with a local twist that crosses over to all our newspapers."

When the staff can't find stories that fit in all the newspapers, they face some extra time constraints.

"We don't always make deadline," Rukwaro said. "But we always are close."

Considering the size of the staff and the vastness of their task, meeting deadline is a major concern. *La Presencia Latina* is published twice a month and *The African Voice* is published monthly, while the other papers in the Tri-County family are published once a week. That's about 19 papers a month, including one paper published in another language.

However, the small staff survives by performing multiple tasks. Reporters on Humble's staff also do page design, and designers might be asked to sell ads.

About 5,000 copies of both *La Presencia Latina* and *The African Voice* are printed. Staff members deliver them to newstands in the Kansas City area and even as far as Wichita, Kan., about three hours away. Rukwaro and Kimaru even took the first issue of *The African Voice* to Oklahoma and Houston, Texas.

Selling ads is a challenge and an opportunity

Selling ads is a special challenge for the staff.

"How do you sell ads when you don't speak the language with a largely white, English-speaking staff?" Humble said. "But we're starting to do better."

Humble recently hired a Nigerian woman to sell ads, and all of their work is beginning to pay off.

Monica Kangethe decided to advertise in *The African Voice* because she thought the paper would reach her target market. Kangethe braids hair at Hairlines Salon in Kansas City, Kan. But reaching her target audience isn't the only reason she wanted to advertise in *The African Voice*. She doesn't own Hairlines Salon and usually has no say in where the salon advertises, but she had an ulterior motive in making sure the beauty parlor advertised in the paper. Kangethe is from Kenya and reads

the paper herself.

"I wanted to make sure Albert (Rukwaro) would be able to get this paper together," she said. "It brings the African community here together."

Although *The African Voice* is breaking even and *La Presencia Latina* is making only a small profit, both papers are finding loyal readers and advertisers.

"People are responding to us from as far away as Britain," Kimaru said. "We're getting e-mails from around the world."



All the Tri-County newspapers have a Web presence. When readers click to Gardnernews.com, they will find a few stories from each of them, along with contact information.

But Humble said growth in the current economy is challenging.

"Look at our papers," she said. "We don't get ads from Sprint or the big guys. We get advertising from mom and pop stores. When the economy is down, they're down."

Humble also said the two niche publications are sometimes hurt by prejudice.

"People have this 'we-don't-want-them-in-here' attitude," she said. "People (are) thinking 'they don't speak English,' or 'they don't have money.'"

### An opportunity from a friend

Humble started at the *Gardner News* as a copy editor, but Bill Bond, a Gardner businessman and former owner of the paper, promoted her when the regular editor left.

"Bill looked at me one day and said, 'You know, you could run this paper,'" Humble said. "I said, 'I know.'"

Bond pestered her for several weeks.

"He came in one day and said, 'Are you going to buy this paper or not?'" Humble said.

She wanted it, but she didn't have any money. That's when Bond said he had money.

"He financed me to buy it from him," Humble said. "Who am I? A housewife. A bank wasn't going to give me any money."

### Starting *La Presencia Latina*

Humble noticed there were a lot of Spanish speakers in the area long before she started *La Presencia Latina*. But it wasn't until a troubled man approached her that Humble decided to publish the Spanish newspaper serving the greater Kansas City metro area.

"This gentleman came to me saying he had \$30,000 in checks for work he had done that he couldn't cash," Humble said. "He was told if he cashed them, he'd be deported."

He asked Humble to give Spanish-speaking immigrants a voice, because he said they know very little about U.S. bureaucracy and how to work within the system.

"He came up with the name," she said. "We were going to use 'Hispanic' in the name, but he said there are a lot of different Hispanics. 'Latina' is a more inclusive term."

Although the man who helped Humble create *La Presencia Latina* was arrested, held in Canton County, Ohio, and then deported, the paper is still going strong.

Starting the *African Voice*

Bond had no idea what he'd helped create when he turned the reins of the *Gardner News* over to Humble, but she said finding journalists to work on such diverse publications is a challenge. When she needed a new reporter, Murillo, who used to work at *La Presencia Latina*, introduced Humble to Kimaru, former design editor of *The African Voice*.

"I can't find journalists to hire," Humble said. "They come out of college and want to go to bigger papers. Nita said she knew these guys and sent Mark. In talking to him, (I found out) he's intelligent and he said he'd do anything if I'd give him a shot."

Kimaru, a Kenya national, attended Emporia (Kan.) State University where he studied communications. Finding a job in journal-

ism was difficult for a man who counts English as his third language. Kikuyu is his native tongue and Swahili is his second language.

When Humble needed a second reporter, Kimaru introduced her to Albert Rukwaro, another Kenya national and Central Missouri State graduate. Rukwaro wrote for a large Nairobi newspaper before he immigrated to the United States about four years ago. He also wrote for the Central Missouri State student paper.

"Albert was selling signs," Humble said. "Here's a guy with a master's degree in communications, and he's selling signs. He writes in English, his third language, better than many American college graduates."

Rukwaro approached Humble about creating *The African Voice*.

"We did some research and realized how ignorant Americans are of Africa," Humble said. "We're so Euro-centric. All of our international news is based on Europe."

The Tri-County Newspapers staff also realized there are many African immigrants in the Kansas City area. Although the staff was unable to get exact numbers, Humble estimates there are 10,000-15,000 African immigrants in the Kansas City metro area.

"It's just that we only see black," Humble said. "(African immigrants) are an unidentified group. In the census, they're ID'd as black. There are more around than we're aware of."

So Humble told Rukwaro that if he could sell some ads, they'd publish *The African Voice*. And in its first few months, the paper won several awards.

The paper received three awards from the Kansas Press Association for 2001. Rukwaro had a hand in all three — writing a first-place feature story, a third-place feature story and a first-place column in the non-daily category. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were a common theme in two of Rukwaro's award-winning writings. His first-place feature story was about a Kenyan woman who survived the terrorist bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, in August 1998. She lost a leg and was transported to Kansas City, Mo., in a coma to be treated after the attacks.

"We told a very moving story that people could relate to after Sept. 11," Rukwaro said.

His first-place column discussed U.S. foreign policy in Africa and how it changed in the wake of the terrorist attacks. Rukwaro said immediately following the terrorist attacks, the United States changed its stance toward the Sudanese government. The government of Sudan was supportive of the U.S. war on terrorism, he said.

"African governments are using the new-found leverage to get foreign aid," he said. "We feel the U.S. needs to look more carefully at the governments rather than who's on our side and who isn't."

He said prior to the attacks, Sudan was on an American list of governments that sponsored terrorism. The Sudanese government has since been added to that list again.

Rukwaro's third-place feature story focused on children from Sierra Leone who went to the Kansas City metro area for medical treatment.

"Some of them, their arms and legs were cut off with machetes," Rukwaro said.

Rebel soldiers in Sierra Leone's civil war are fighting over control of diamond mines.

"These kids are used as weapons of the war by rebel soldiers," Rukwaro said. "You either join them or they'll hurt your children. We thought people here should know the diamonds they are wearing may be tainted with children's blood."

Rukwaro received a certificate of appreciation May 31 from Yusuf Nzibo, a Kenyan ambassador to the United States, for his journalism work. Nzibo visited Olathe in recognition of the city's diversity efforts and to launch a community service organization established by Kenyans in Kansas City.

### Niche publications growing

Jeff Burkhead, executive director of the Kansas Press Association, said Humble has a strong interest in the area of target publications. Humble serves on the KPA board of directors.

"She's been very ambitious in starting the Spanish and African papers," he said.

"I believe in newspapers," Humble said. "A community is no longer Gardner, Wellsville or Spring Hill. It's a community of people interested in particular things."

Many publishers are catching onto that idea. Burkhead said there are a number of targeted newspapers in Kansas.

"I think more and more people are recognizing the opportunities for stories and ad revenues," Burkhead said.

The majority of Kansas' niche market papers are Spanish newspapers, but the state also boasts newspapers that target Jewish communities and senior citizens.

Burkhead believes *The African Voice* might be one of a kind, but Rukwaro said he knows of another paper, *The African Times*, on newsstands in New York and Los Angeles.

"But it's a national paper. It's not really a

small community," he said. "You're not going to hear about people in Chicago or L.A. in our papers. They're about stuff happening here."

Brian Steffens, executive director of the National Newspaper Association, said traditional community newspapers are usually non-daily just like *La Presencia* and *The African Voice*. Where they differ is that traditional community newspapers target people in the same geographic areas while today's community papers often target politically or demographically similar people.

"Community has been morphing since then to include communities of interest," Steffens said. "That's what magazines have been doing for decades. They started with *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Those were general interest. But now, if you go to Barnes and Noble, you'll find masses of very targeted publications, and the general interest magazines are dying."

Steffens said statistics show the trend toward geographical newspapers is changing, too.

"The number of dailies and metros has been declining for the last 20 years, while weeklies are growing," he said.

But he said metro newspapers, daily papers and traditional community newspapers can and do target niche markets, just not in the same way as papers like *The African Voice* and *La Presencia Latina*.

"They're all figuring out how to target specific audiences in their own markets," Steffens said. "For example, a business page is kind of a niche market for a metro newspaper. And smaller papers do the same thing with things like annual bridal sections."

But don't expect the traditional, community newspapers to die out, Steffens said.

"You're not going to lose the old newspapers, but niche markets is where the growth is," he said.

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# What a difference 50 years makes in newspapers ...or does it?

By **Dr. Gerald Stone**

As a project to compare older dailies to their present counterparts, an editing class looked at matched pairs of dailies: an edition from 2001 and the closest, same-day edition from the early 1950s. The objective was to compare size, graphic design and aspects of writing, and this study presents those findings.

Textbooks discuss changes in newspapers over time, although few make comparisons as distant as those offered here. In fact, one objective of this study was to confirm some of the generalities that appear in modern texts. For example, one editing text compares today's newspapers with those of 1955 on several rather specific points: "But newspapers themselves are no larger ... media operations make a profit by maintaining a careful balance between the space they give to advertising and the space they give to news, and that balance has not changed ... Thus journalists are in the strange position of having more to say than ever before, and less room in which to say it."<sup>1</sup>

Brooks and Sissors quote James L. Kilpatrick on the lack of editing in today's newspapers and agree that language skills have generally deteriorated. But they say, "Kilpatrick's fond memories of the good old days probably are enhanced by the passage of time."<sup>2</sup> This is a more general observation suggesting that things were different — and better — in the old days.

Yet another text compares the eight columns of yore with today's six-column standard and notes that vertical layout yields a high story count on page one.<sup>3</sup> This represents one of the many generalities about newspaper layout that is taken for granted without much substantiation.

## Method

To verify some of these speculative points, a class of journalism editing students was given what amounted to a two-hour assignment. The university library was a microfilm source for the state's daily newspapers. To qualify for inclusion in the study, a daily had to be available on microfilm prior to 1957 and still be published as a daily in 2001.

Nineteen newspapers qualified, and students completed a coding sheet for two microfilm editions during the first year in the 1950s their paper was available. Specifically, a student assigned to one town's daily completed coding sheets for the first Monday and Friday in October of 1952 (if that was the paper's first '50s microfilm year), and completed a duplicate coding sheet for the same first Monday and Friday in October 2001. Data from the two days were averaged, and these constituted comparisons for the study.

Is the study generalizable to other papers in other states? Research design says no, because this is only a small convenience sample of newspapers from a single state. However, the author is confident that this study's general findings would be replicated if the same procedures were used regardless of the locale or early-1950s year selected. These are, after all, only general comparisons of how newspapers were designed and edited in the 1950s versus today.

## Findings

The town populations and circulations of these sampled dailies (see Table 1) are skewed toward the lower levels, which is not unlike the national averages of either. Daily newspapers' mean circulation is 38,760 (the median would be lower),<sup>4</sup> and the 2000 census places average size of U.S. cities at 22,800.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Town population and circulation categories in 2001**

	Town Population		Circulation	
Under 10,000	47%	(n=9)	58%	(n=11)
10,000-50,000	32%	(n=6)	21%	(n=4)
50,000-plus	21%	(n=4)	21%	(n=4)

The descriptive data show vast differences in some major categories, differences that make the nearly 50-year comparison seem almost to reflect two types of daily newspaper. The most notable difference is overall size. Dailies were smaller in the 1950s with half the number of pages and sections. There was even less news hole than there is today, because nearly seven of the 14 pages were advertising. Today's papers provide an average of 17.3 pages of news with only 9.7 pages of advertising.

The advertising comparison may not be accurate, because it was a rough estimate based on two news pages inside the first section with the caveat that the pages could not be full-page ads. It is likely that today's newspapers carry more than 36% ads, but it is also possible that the 1950s newspapers carried more than 47% ads.

**Table 2: Descriptive data on papers  
(two issues averaged)**

	1950s	2001
Number of sections	1.7	3.4
Number of pages	14.3	27.0
Number of page-one columns	7.6	5.4
Page-one stories	9.6	4.5
Page-one staff written stories	4.4	2.8
Average words in lead	28.9	27.2
Multiple-sentence leads	.8	.4
Passive voice leads	1.8	1.0
Feature stories	1.1	.8
Page-one stories with subheads	.6	.4
Page-one photographs	2.5	2.7
Number of local page-one photos	1.4	2.1
Percent ads	47.1	35.9

Along with overall size, the front page of older newspapers was strikingly different visually from today's front pages. The 1950s papers in the sample had close to the eight-column standard of the time, while modern dailies average closer to the six-column standard. The greater number of columns is one suggestion that 1950s papers may have carried a greater number of stories than their smaller news hole suggests because the columns were narrower. A six-column format provides nearly as much space for content as an eight-column format, but the layout allows for more stories. Indeed, there were nearly twice as many front-page stories in the 1950s as today, verifying the Bowles and Borden statement.<sup>6</sup>

The number of columns and stories is where the striking front-page differences end. The 1950s front pages have a somewhat smaller percentage of staff-written stories than the current (46% vs. 62%), but the older papers actually have 1.6 more staff-written stories (57% more than the current) on average.

The findings from these page one stories can be compared with similar findings from a study of modern U.S. dailies.<sup>7</sup> Here there is little difference in lead word length (at about 28 words), but both are higher than the average 22 in the Stone 2000 study. There is little difference here in the number of feature stories on page one at about one story each, but this means older papers had 12% front-page features while modern papers have about 18% features.

The same is true for staff written stories, with each having about 50% staff written, although the older papers had twice as many. Likewise, the papers are similar in terms of the percentage of active- versus passive-voice leads, with 18% and 22% respectively, although the older papers had twice as many. Stone found about 30% passive voice in U.S. dailies.<sup>8</sup>

Older and modern papers were equally likely to use subheads or boldface in body type, and both carried the same number of page one photographs. However, the modern papers' page one photos were much more likely to be taken by staff members.

## Observations

This mini-study of a small, convenience sample of 1950s versus modern newspapers offers symbolic evidence at best. Still, it provides a general basis of comparison about differences over a 50-year period. What it demonstrates most convincingly is that the overall size of newspapers has increased dramatically. Papers today have twice the number of sections and pages as those of the 1950s. Because of the eight-column format, the 1950s papers carried twice as many stories on page one, but other aspects of page one story treatment are similar.

Is there a lesson here? If anything, smaller size might have had a positive effect on readers who could easily "finish" a 1950s newspaper in 20 to 30 minutes. Readers might have felt more satisfied having fulfilled their civic duty to be informed. Conversely, today's readers certainly have much more content to choose from in their dailies. The other lesson is that the journalistic conventions of story presentation have remained remarkably unchanged in the past 50 years.

A Rip Van Winkle reader would be bowled over by how distinct the two front pages look, but would hardly notice a difference in reading the stories.

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8. Gerald Stone, "Lead length and voice in U.S. newspapers."

Sampled Southern Illinois and adjacent papers, with 2001 circulation, used in study:

*Carmi Times, West Frankfort Daily American, Flora Clay County Advocate-Press, Benton Evening News, Du Quoin Evening Call, Lawrenceville Daily Record, Mount Carmel Republication Register, Olney Daily Mail, Marion Daily Republican, Harrisburg Daily Register, Edwardsville Intelligencer, Mount Vernon Register-News, Centralia Sentinel, Carbondale Southern Illinoisan, Belleville News-Democrat, Springfield State Journal-Register, Chicago Tribune, Louisville (KY) Courier-Journal, St. Louis Post-Dispatch.*

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# Building community by building a school newspaper:

## *A case study of one daily's cooperative project*

By Dr. James Mueller

### Introduction

In the fall of 1998, Carl Junction High School had not published a student newspaper for about 10 years. The school, which is located in the Joplin area in southwestern Missouri, has about 750 students, and is certainly big enough to publish a paper. Although Principal Pam George believed the school should have a newspaper, she couldn't find a qualified journalism teacher or students with the initiative to start one.<sup>1</sup>

All that changed during the 1998-99 school year when an industrial arts teacher interested in newspapers and a transfer student who wanted to study journalism worked with a local daily to launch the *CJHS Express*. Within two years the *Express* grew from a haphazardly published newspaper produced during students' free time to a monthly that had a record 12-page edition at the end of the 2000-2001 school year. At least five of its staffers have written stories for local commercial newspapers, several are studying or planning to study journalism in college, and the school has hired a journalism teacher to offer classes specifically for the newspaper.<sup>2</sup> The *Joplin Globe*, which inserts the *Express* in zoned editions of its regular paper, has reaped what Editor Ed Simpson described as largely intangible benefits yet ones that help it achieve its core mission.<sup>3</sup>

It is hoped that this story of the founding of the *Express* can provide some lessons for other newspaper editors who want to cooperate on such a project.

### Background

The newspaper industry faces several major problems at the beginning of the 21st century, and they don't all have to do with the fear that the Internet and computers will somehow kill the printed page before publishers can figure out how to turn a regular profit on their Web sites. More serious problems are that young people generally don't read newspapers and few want to work in the industry. While there are some indications that overall readership is good, readership among young people is down. A recent *Editor & Publisher* poll, for example, showed that the most dedicated readers are that age 65 and older, while only 20 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 34 years old are regular readers.<sup>4</sup> Some newspapers are establishing teen Web sites to fight what one editor called "the age gap" and get people hooked on the newspaper habit at an early age.<sup>5</sup>

Not only do newspapers have difficulty attracting the attention of young readers, newspapers also have trouble convincing them of their quality. *An American Journalism Review* study showed that reader attitudes were not as gloomy as the magazine expected, but it still reported that young people (defined as those 18 to 29 years of age) were more likely than other age groups to say that journalists don't know the communities they cover. And 64 percent of those surveyed overall said news stories were biased.<sup>6</sup> Add the negative attitudes of young people toward newspapers to the traditional reputation of low pay, and it is no wonder that newspapers are having great difficulty attracting people to the profession. Things have gotten so bad that the Newspaper Association of America sponsored a Newspaper Career Day last year to, in the words of NAA

President and CEO John F. Sturm, "position itself as an attractive job choice in today's competitive market."<sup>7</sup>

One way to attract people to newspapers is to get them involved when they are in high school. Both biographies of individual journalists and scholarly studies on the profession as a whole have demonstrated the importance of high school journalism to a successful professional career. Dave Berry, Walter Cronkite, and Abigail Van Buren are just a few famous journalists who started their careers on high school newspapers.<sup>8</sup> An American Society of Editors study found that 55 percent of newsroom employees had worked on a junior or senior high school paper.<sup>9</sup> Other research has shown that students who participate in high school journalism do well in college, particularly in writing courses.<sup>10</sup>

But despite the benefits of high school journalism for both the industry and the students, scholastic programs are non-existent or are at risk at many schools. Part of the reason may be that fewer universities are offering programs that certify journalism teachers.<sup>11</sup> The trend toward block scheduling in high schools has cut the opportunity to offer electives like journalism, and other districts simply don't have the money to devote to programs that educators don't think are essential.<sup>12</sup>

Some in the newspaper industry are trying to help. For example, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) has launched a program to attempt to revitalize high school journalism through training teachers and supporting partnerships between professional and high school newspapers. The ASNE program, which is funded by a \$1 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, has provided some money for things like

equipment for high school newspapers.

Other newspapers are doing projects on their own. An ASNE membership survey received about 80 responses from editors who were doing a variety of projects to support high school journalism in their areas. The projects help in a variety of ways ranging from scholarships and part-time newspaper jobs to youth sections written at least in part by local students.<sup>13</sup>

## Case Study

Carl Junction High School (CJHS) is an example of a school that benefited from an informal newspaper partnership. The Carl Junction story is unique because the growing and exciting journalism program it has now was basically started from scratch by a handful of interested people at the school and *The Joplin Globe*, which has a daily combined circulation of about 34,000. (Joplin is a town of about 40,000 in southwestern Missouri; Carl Junction has about 5,000 people and along with several other small towns is in the *Globe's* circulation area.)

The story of the CJHS paper actually begins at Joplin High School, where Tom Trewyn was teaching industrial arts during the 1997-98 school year. While at Joplin, Trewyn was accepted into the Education in Business and Industry Summer Internship program sponsored by Crowder College in Neosho, Mo. Trewyn, a big believer in the idea that schools and businesses should work together to help students, considered interning at a TV station because he teaches video technology. But he changed his mind when he saw *The Joplin Globe* was a participant. "I thought I just don't know a doggone thing about the newspaper business, and I wondered how all the new technology is affecting the newspaper business and how they get their information — that was my interest," he said.<sup>14</sup>

In the summer of 1998 he went through a two-week internship at the *Globe* that covered virtually all facets of the newspaper business including reporting, advertising and printing. Although Trewyn started the program with an interest in technology, his notes of his experience shadowing a reporter revealed his growing excitement about the news business. "I happened to be on staff to witness a hot breaking story — the ICI explosion. Although the newsroom is not typically slow-paced, things definitely started hopping as news reporters hustled to get information for the next

day's edition. The process involved quick action to secure a photographer and make contacts with Mizzou Aviation to attempt an aerial shot, good teamwork between reporters and news analysts as they determined interview options and lined up the phone interviews, and timely decision making of the page-one team to redesign the front page to play this story as the lead story."<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, CJHS recruited Trewyn from the Joplin district. His new school hadn't published a newspaper for about 10 years, and its last effort had been "a couple of 8 x 11 sheets stapled in the corner," but Principal Pam George gave him permission to discuss starting one with the *Globe*.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, he had no time to work on the project. "In the education business, your first year (at a new school) is like starting over again," Trewyn said. "I was so busy I had no time to attack it. Then Mickey walked into my office in March, and we cranked out a newspaper in April. It was as simple as that."<sup>17</sup>

Michelle (Mickey) Thomas was a junior who had transferred that year from Austin High School, a school with about 2,000 students, including the twin daughters of then-Texas Gov. George W. Bush. Thomas, who was interested in current events and wanted to work on a school newspaper, was shocked that her new high school had none. She asked the principal if she could start one.

George was initially cautious. "Mickey came in and talked to me and had all these great ideas, and at first I didn't know Mickey very well, and I listened to her and gave her a list of things to do . . . With a lot of kids, when you give them that, you never see them again. Well, Mickey was back in like two days. She'd done them all . . . and before long we had this newspaper."<sup>18</sup>

Of course, it wasn't that simple. Thomas had to overcome skepticism and some outright hostility to get the project going. The school had a creative writing magazine, and several students and teachers told her she should work on that. But Thomas was interested in hard news and persisted in starting a newspaper. "I had friends say, 'That is ridiculous, and one teacher told me flat out 'You shouldn't do this.' That made me angry. I don't like being told I can't do something."<sup>19</sup>

Trewyn said one of Thomas' main contributions was enthusiasm, particularly in recruiting about 20 other students for the

staff. She "took the organizational monkey" off Trewyn's back, which gave him time to iron out the technical details with the *Globe*. He used an educational discount to purchase 15 copies of QuarkXPress for about \$1,200 so the students could use the same software as the *Globe*, which agreed to print the paper and insert it in editions zoned for Carl Junction.<sup>20</sup>

The *Globe* has a strong Newspapers In Education (NIE) program, with more than 5,000 papers a week going to area schools, including those in the Carl Junction district. But the *CJHS Express* was not part of the NIE program or a strategic plan. "It was more of a reaction to the teacher approaching us, and we looked at it, and we thought 'What a good thing to do,'" Simpson said. "It just makes sense to support the local kids in their journalism efforts if we can."<sup>21</sup>

The *Globe* supported those efforts by, in addition to printing the paper, providing technical and editorial advice — so much that the first few issues were designed by professionals and had too much involvement from the newspaper, according to Simpson. "That was never the intent. The intent was more to advise — to let the kids do it and experience it even though we knew it wasn't nearly as professional . . . But this is a common mistake made by a lot of high school advisors — they want to jump in there and do it themselves, either for time or efficiency or because they think the kids aren't doing it right. And it's hard to let go, particularly in a new program starting out."<sup>22</sup>

After the first few issues, the students took more control of the paper. "The *Globe* had really helped us to see what we could do with a newspaper, so we had something to shoot for; we had quality to shoot for, we had colors to shoot for — it didn't have to be black and white. All of a sudden possibilities started splashing around the room. 'Gosh, could we do this? Could we do that?' The kids were very excited to use this technology to make an impact," Trewyn said.<sup>23</sup>

The impact has been positive overall. No one interviewed for this article could recall any serious controversy over a specific story, although Trewyn admitted that it's scary for the students to know their work is evaluated by the whole school. "Every student in the school has got a different opinion of how that story should have been written or how that picture should have been taken, and they will read-

ily tell each other, ‘You know, that was the dumbest thing in the paper I’ve ever seen in my life.’”<sup>24</sup>

During the first year, the criticism, particularly nitpicking over every grammatical error, hurt staff morale. Thomas pointed out that in the first year, the students were doing the paper not as part of a class but as a volunteer extra-curricular activity in addition to their homework and other activities. “We were doing all this work and not getting anything out of it except the satisfaction of putting out the paper. A lot of students wanted a pat on the back and they didn’t get it. It was frustrating the first couple of times.”<sup>25</sup>

The first year’s staff also had a loose structure without clearly defined roles for the staffers. Personality clashes and arguments about job duties led to further frustration. One of Thomas’ biggest problems as editor was trying to keep the volunteers motivated because they were not working for a grade. She said the staff now has much more incentive because the paper is part of a class.<sup>26</sup>

The most recent staff published the paper as part of a yearbook class so students received course credit for their work. Current staff members have gotten a lot of positive comments about the paper. Amy Szczepanik, a sophomore and the current editor, said most people at the school like the *Express*. “A lot of teachers say it looks really nice and has a nice variety of articles. The students seem to like it because in seminar when we had it out they always seem to be reading it.”<sup>27</sup> George, too, said she had heard nothing but positive comments about the paper, although she pointedly said she would not let the students publish controversial stories. “A lot of people have said, ‘That was really nice.’ The school board was very impressed with it, of course, and the story of how it started with one of our students just coming in an saying, ‘I can’t believe we don’t have a newspaper here.’”<sup>28</sup> One other indication of success is the growth of advertising, which includes a number of local businesses ranging from JC Penney’s Salon at Joplin’s Northpark Mall to CJ Balloon Service & Gifts in Carl Junction. The February 2001 issue, for example, included seven display ads in a four-page paper.

Shying away from controversial content and emphasizing sports news may be one reason for the paper’s popularity. In fact, the student journalists may get more self-criticism than criticism from the outside. For example, Derek Lahm, a sopho-

more who writes mostly sports stories, said readers “love” the sports news and color photos but he said he thought the paper could be improved with more writers to cover more varied subjects.<sup>29</sup>

Trewyn said the students regularly compare their work to that of other school newspapers and professional papers, and that the self-critiques are extremely valuable. “The kids don’t want to turn out a newspaper that is ‘good enough.’ I don’t see any of that. You see a lot of that in school — ‘This will be fine.’ All I see is kids sweating over a computer keyboard or Photoshop and seeking my approval that this will be all right. But some of that is also a desire to make that paper the best they can make it. That in itself is wonderful. Everybody, every teacher has been complimentary — just overboard.”<sup>30</sup>

The students get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from producing the paper, and the camaraderie of sharing a common interest with each other. “It’s a lot of fun,” said Andrew Green, a senior who does layout and writes movie reviews. “When you see a product like this being put out, it gives you a nice feeling ... It makes me feel better about myself; putting out something neat looking.”<sup>31</sup> Ryan Thompson, a junior, said he likes being able to express his ideas in editorials and write fun feature stories.<sup>32</sup>

The students said working for the paper improved their writing skills. “I started reading newspapers and magazines more to get new techniques — see how sportswriters use different words — you kind of understand what they go through as they write stories,” Lahm said.<sup>33</sup> Thompson agreed that the journalism experience increased his appreciation of newspapers. “I read them all the time — *The Sporting News*, *The Joplin Globe*, *USA Today* ... I read the *Globe* before because it was right there. But when I started writing for the newspaper, it became a habit. You have to pick it up. ‘Hey, let’s see what this guy had to say.’ You can see it in Derek’s and my stories . . . I think we have just gotten a ton better at writing, just loads.”<sup>34</sup> The quality of Thompson’s writing is evident in one of his favorite stories, a feature he wrote about the football team’s offensive line. The piece is lively with short paragraphs and sentences and includes a variety of quotes from players and coaches. Here is a quote Thompson used to convey the personality of offensive lineman:

“As a lineman we have three objectives: fly off the ball, hit ‘em in the mouth and run your feet,” said (right guard John)

Fanoole. “It’s the best feeling in the world, when you roach somebody, (drive a guy straight to his back) look him face-mask to face-mask and he knows who the better lineman is.”<sup>35</sup>

Because it explained the football’s successful season after years of frustration, it was newsworthy, a quality the students struggle to achieve because they publish monthly but must cover events that happen much more often — like football games. In the beginning of the *Express*, meeting deadlines was also a struggle but it is a lesson the students have learned well.

“I don’t think the kids understood what a true commitment it was,” Simpson said. “You have to learn computer programs, you have to meet deadlines, you have to learn if you say you’re going to have it at the printer at 4 p.m. on Thursday, you can’t bring it in at 3 o’clock on Friday. It’s just not the way business works, and it took us a few issues to resolve.”<sup>36</sup> Trewyn said working with professionals like Simpson helps the students see the value of education. “It’s not the same old school garbage from the same old teacher all the time. They see that — it’s a validation for education. It validates that there is a real world out there somewhere. So that’s been really, really good.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, teaching students about the work world was one of the main goals of the cooperative project with Carl Junction High School, said Cathy Wheeler, former administrative assistant to the *Globe* publisher. Wheeler, who was instrumental in developing the CJHS project, said she hoped the students would learn good work practices, including how to talk, dress and behave on the job. “All of those things are important on the job, and I just don’t think kids come out of school with a good work ethic. I hoped that if nothing else they would be exposed to people who live it everyday and have deadlines everyday and just can’t take off on a whim or when they don’t feel like it,” she said.<sup>38</sup>

That students have learned business lessons from the *Express* is evident in the fact that so many are working part-time. Cody Thorn, who worked on the paper its first year, wrote stories for the *Globe* before he graduated from high school and now — at age 19 — is working full-time as assistant sports editor at the *Carthage Press*, a daily about a half hour from Joplin. He occasionally uses Thompson and Lahm as stringers. Another CJHS grad and former *Express* staffer, Josh Dillahay, is a systems administrator working part

time in the *Globe's* production department. Both are also attending Missouri Southern State College in Joplin, where Thorn is studying journalism and Dillahay is studying computer programming.

Both Thorn and Dillahay are examples of students who entered the newspaper business because they had the opportunity to experiment on a high school paper. Thorn's main interest had always been sports, but when he realized during high school that he couldn't play professionally, he knew he wanted to get some kind of sports-related job. He joined the *Express* as a sportswriter to stay involved in sports and credits the experience with helping him find "the perfect job."<sup>39</sup>

"I can sit down and watch baseball for three or four hours a night and get paid for it..." Thorn said. "I never really thought you could do that. For me it's kind of like a dream job that's still involved with sports. I'm so glad I somehow fell into it because I really thought I'd maybe write for the paper a little bit. I knew I wasn't very good. I just needed a chance. People worked with me, and I got good enough to get this job (in Carthage)."<sup>40</sup>

Dillahay also fell into newspaper work. He joined the *Express* because he wanted an after-school activity, and the paper allowed him to work with computers by doing layout. Working with *Globe* personnel led to his part-time job at the paper, and although he is undecided on a career, he is considering working in the newspaper field after college. He said the main benefit for him in working on the *Express* was a feeling of accomplishment. "Personally, the thing that benefited me more than anything was self-esteem. I had a feeling like I was involved in something. I really had, I guess, an important job because I was on a deadline to get the thing put together, and just going from on a screen to an actual product that was distributed . . . I found real gratifying," Dillahay said.<sup>41</sup>

Ironically, Thomas was considering a career in journalism when she launched the *Express* but decided it wasn't for her after serving as editor for a year. Still, she said the experience was valuable because it taught her leadership skills. The paper also taught her how journalists report and write stories, which will be valuable for the career in government or politics that she plans to pursue after college.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the direct benefits for students, the *Express* has also helped CJHS teachers by promoting cooperation between business and educators. "What I

found when I was initially talking to the people at the *Globe* was that their impressions of what happened at school and my impressions of what happened in the business world were two entirely different things," Trewyn said. "(They think) the average teacher starts their day late and ends their day early, has three months off to do absolutely nothing, whatever they want to do, and they gripe about their pay. (Teachers think) the average businessperson, however, sits behind a walnut desk with their feet propped up all day and takes as many coffee breaks as they want and two-hour lunches. And so there are just these misconceptions that keep business people and education people from talking with each other. And man, we need to fix that really bad."<sup>43</sup>

The CJHS project helped get people from both sides working together. "The main benefit I think we've gotten is knowing our communities better," Simpson said when asked what the *Globe* got out of the project. "The result for us has been we get to know the kids, we get to know some of the teachers. We get into the schools so we understand a little bit of what is going on now."<sup>44</sup>

Wheeler, who was largely responsible for scheduling *Globe* staffers to work with the kids, agreed that getting journalists involved helped them learn about their community. "The biggest thing the *Globe* probably learned from it through working with those kids is that they understand what it is people don't understand about a newspaper. They were able to pick up on some of that lack of knowledge, and they can see areas where they need to improve or communicate better with the public to let them know exactly what is happening out there."<sup>45</sup>

She said the program also helped area residents appreciate the *Globe* more. "I think it has improved their image — certainly in the Carl Junction community. I think they feel a great sense of pride in (the *Express*). People see they are not just a big corporate giant out to make a few more extra bucks. I think it certainly developed an interest in kids, especially since they hired a few . . . kids are always asking Tom (Trewyn) 'Do you think I could get a summer job there?'"<sup>46</sup>

Simpson said although the *Globe* has hired several promising students part-time, the program has not been in existence long enough to be a recruiting tool. But he said that would be an important long-term benefit, especially since the *Globe*, like many

newspapers, is having trouble hiring "good, energetic folks." Simpson said the program had no effect on readership or advertising and that most of the benefits were intangible.

"The school district gets a bit of a warm fuzzy for the newspaper; we get a bit of a warm fuzzy for the kids we work with," Simpson said. "It's longer-term benefits identifying potential employees and then knowing what's going on in the school. But there is no immediate impact."<sup>47</sup>

The community relations impact is somewhat muted because the *Globe* does not actively publicize the program, mainly because its coverage area includes about 80 high schools and it can't print that many newspapers. Still, word got out and other schools — even some that already had newspapers — asked the *Globe* for the same kind of help it was giving Carl Junction.<sup>48</sup> As of the spring of 2001, the *Globe* was printing papers for Webb City and Diamond high schools as well as Carl Junction at cost, which is about \$125 per issue for ink, paper, plate and negatives. It could not afford to do the same for Joplin High School because it has considerably more students and thus more circulation than the other schools.<sup>49</sup> Simpson said the *Globe* would continue its relationship with the three schools and would examine its core market to see if there are any other high schools it could work with. The *Globe* could not expand it to all schools in the area, however, because of the number of schools that includes.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

All of the people interviewed for this article said they would do the project over again and would recommend it to other newspapers and schools. On the basis of interviews with the participants, the program is a success. Carl Junction High School students are now producing a newspaper regularly and are able to enroll in journalism classes for the first time in about 10 years. *Globe* staffers have gotten directly involved with high school students' journalism careers, and the *Globe* has already gained some part-time employees. Community good will is hard to quantify, but judging by feedback reported by the participants, it is reasonable to assume the *Globe's* image has improved. The project was also a major contributor to the *Globe's* first-place win in a Community Services division contest

sponsored by its then-parent company, Ottaway Newspapers Inc.

All communities have unique characteristics, but some general lessons from the Carl Junction High School project should be useful to others who want to start similar programs. Perhaps the most important element in establishing a paper is enthusiastic students. Carl Junction's principal and at least one teacher were interested in having a newspaper, but the program didn't take off until Thomas transferred from Texas. The *Express* became a reality when Thomas recruited enough other students to carry the project along. Although only a half dozen or so of her initial list of 20 stuck with the paper and contributed regularly during the first year, the group included a core of determined students like Dillahay and Thorn. Many students will drop projects when they discover how much work is required, especially if it is an extracurricular project with somewhat intangible rewards. It is crucial that a high school newspaper start-up be spearheaded by a tenacious student. Carl Junction had that in Mickey Thomas.

The tenacious students also need supportive, enthusiastic faculty, and once again, Carl Junction was fortunate to have Trewyn, who was praised in the strongest terms by the students interviewed for this article. Thorn credited much of the paper's success to Trewyn, whom he described as a teacher who understood students and advised without interfering.<sup>51</sup> Thomas said simply, "He was my favorite teacher in my entire life."<sup>52</sup> Trewyn's lack of journalism experience was not a problem because he made up for it with hard work and the support of the *Globe*. Trewyn had been through an extensive training program at the *Globe*, but he was still surprised at the amount of time it took to produce the *Express*. In fact, Trewyn decided to step down as advisor because he found he didn't have enough time to pursue his own educational interests in technology. His advice to a new advisor: "Be prepared for a lot of work and a lot of learning."<sup>53</sup>

In addition to enthusiastic teachers and students, starting a high school newspaper requires a commitment from the staff of the professional paper that is involved. Thomas was so eager to get the project going she considered producing it on 8 x 11 sheets, but the *Globe*'s cooperation allowed CJHS to publish a professional-looking paper immediately. The *Globe* was a huge part of the establishment of the paper (the *Express*'s masthead includes a thank you to the *Globe*) and it committed

an estimated \$5,000 in time and resources to it the first year, although it got part of that money back from a private grant.

Simpson suggested the relationship between the school and the professional paper be in writing so everyone will understand their roles. "If it's a monetary figure — fine. If it's one press run a month and eight hours of design time — that's fine. Whatever it is, get everybody on the team to buy in. Otherwise you are going to have conflicts. If your pressroom thinks it's stupid, and they're not getting paid for it — that's a problem, and quality is going to suffer. If your newsroom thinks it's stupid, then quality again is going to suffer. And if advertising is resentful of what they perceive as potential competition, that's going to be a problem. So you really do have to spend the time to make sure everybody in the newspaper is aware and on board with it."<sup>54</sup>

In fact, Simpson said if he were to start the project over, he would formalize it as a written business relationship so all parties had the same expectations. "It can be, even for a small high school that wants to do it every month, or even every other month, the beast that ate your newsroom if you're not careful what you're pledging to do. You don't want your city desk spending two nights a week editing high school copy. You don't want your design desk spending two nights a month producing this paper."<sup>55</sup>

Simpson recommended that the written agreement include an end date for the project. "Say 'We will do this for a year and then re-examine it because again you have expectations that the school just takes for granted that you are just going to keep doing this even though business conditions changed and you may examine that little bit of newsprint cost.'<sup>56</sup>

Simpson stressed that editors looking to replicate the CJHS program should not expect an immediate impact. It won't make money, boost circulation or have a measurable effect on community relations. But with those stipulations, Simpson was still a strong supporter of the program, which ties in neatly with the *Globe*'s mission statement printed daily on its editorial page: "Our mission is to be an essential part of people's lives by providing valuable information on what's happening in their world." Simpson asks what could be a better way of being essential to the community and providing information than by helping young journalists tell their community about their school?<sup>57</sup>

Although Simpson said he would recommend participating in such a program to other commercial newspapers, he warned that the benefits are not immediately apparent. "Newspapers are notorious for looking for quick, big returns," he said. "This is a long-term relationship, a building kind of program. The benefits are intangible, and you really have to kind of look for them. But the bottom line to me is a newspaper exists to serve, and I can't think of a better way to serve than getting your kids familiar with the First Amendment, getting them familiar with our business so they see it as a true career path, so we can educate and have access to the administrators — and a lot of high school principals sure need some boning up on the First Amendment. All of this kind of stuff can happen through a partnership like this."<sup>58</sup>

*Editor's note: Due to requests from alumni, the staff of the Express changed the name of the paper to The Ragout — the original name of Carl Junction High School's student newspaper — during the 2001-02 school year. The paper is now printed by the Neosho (Mo.) Daily News. Roy Jackson is the current advisor.*

## Notes

1. Pam George, interview by author, Carl Junction, Missouri, 2 May 2001.
2. Alas, the founding editor, Mickey Thomas, is majoring in political science instead of journalism at the University of Missouri. In the interests of full disclosure, the author must note that she is his stepdaughter. The author encouraged her high school journalism career but had no direct contact with the paper other than a one-hour seminar for the staff on newspaper reporting and news judgment.
3. Edgar Simpson, interview by author, Joplin, Missouri, 4 May 2001.
4. Joe Strupp, "New 'E&P' Poll Reveals Very Active Readership," *Editor & Publisher*, 25 September 2000, p. 7-8.
5. Erin Whalen, "Setting Their Sites on Young Readers," *Editor & Publisher*, 18 September 2000, p. i4.
6. Carl Sessions Stepp, "Positive Reviews," *American Journalism Review*, March 2001, p. 60.
7. Lucia Moses, "Ok, But Show Me the Money," *Editor & Publisher*, 2 October 2000, p. 8.
8. Linda Evanchyk, "Advice from Professionals to Student Journalists," *Quill*

& *Scroll*, April/May 1998, p. 11, quoted in Lyle Olson, "Student Publications Experience of Journalism and Mass Communication Educators," paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Phoenix, Arizona, August, 2000.

9. American Society of Newspaper Editors, *The Changing Face of the Newsroom: A Human Resources Report*, Washington, D.C.: ASNE, 1989, quoted in Tom Dickson, "Trends in University Support of Scholastic Journalism", *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 56, No. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 75.

10. Jack Dvorak, "High School Publications Experience As a Factor in College-Level Writing," *Journalism Quarterly*, 65, No. 2 (Summer 1988): 398. Jack Dvorak, "Publications Experience as a Predictor of College Success," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 No. 3 (Autumn 1989): 706.

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21. Simpson.

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23. Trewyn interview.

24. Ibid.

25. Thomas.

26. Ibid.

27. Amy Szczepanik, interview by author, Carl Junction, Missouri, 2 May 2001.

28. George.

29. Derek Lahm, interview by author, Carl Junction, Missouri, 2 May 2001.

30. Trewyn interview.

31. Andrew Green, interview by author, Carl Junction, Missouri, 2 May 2001.

32. Ryan Thompson, interview by author, Carl Junction, Missouri, 2 May 2001.

33. Lahm.

34. Thompson.

35. Ryan Thompson, "Pride in the Pit," *CJHS Express*, 10 October 2000, p. 4.

36. Simpson.

37. Trewyn interview.

38. Cathy Wheeler, interview by author, Joplin, Missouri, 3 May 2001.

39. Cody Thorn, telephone interview by author, 11 June 2001.

40. Thorn.

41. Josh Dillahay, telephone interview by author, 12 June, 2001.

42. Thomas.

43. Trewyn interview.

44. Simpson.

45. Wheeler.

46. Ibid.

47. Simpson.

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54. Simpson interview. He said that after the *Express* started getting significant advertising, the *Globe* studied its impact but found it had no effect on the *Globe's* own advertising.

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*Dr. James Mueller is an assistant professor of journalism at the University of North Texas. This article was originally presented to the Newspapers & Community-Building Symposium VIII co-sponsored by the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at Kansas State University and the National Newspaper Association Foundation in Portland, Ore., Sept. 12-13, 2002.*

# Letter to the editor

## PEG technique beats grips-and-grins

To The Editor:

Despite indications to the contrary in a story in your excellent Fall/Winter 2002 Issue (“Grip-And-Grin Photos: A Necessary Evil?”), such photos are necessary and far from evil. They are vital to every community newspaper who wishes to properly serve its readers. The problem is that most editors and photographers are too lazy to take some simple steps to make these “routine” items interesting.

Anyone who wants to donate a substantial sum of money to a non-profit or civic organization deserves to be recognized in the local paper. Such recognition encourages more such donations, builds public awareness of the group receiving the donation, and attaches names and faces with the donor and recipient groups.

We welcome requests for such photos, but I insist our reporter/photogra-

phers take the photos to avoid those horrible snapshots that editors too often get across their desks. And, to ensure the best possible result, my shooters are told to operate under what I call the “PEG” rule. “(P)rops, (E)levation, and (G)rouping.” Here’s how it works:

**Props** — Two guys in suits shaking hands with a check. Who are these guys? Hard to tell without looking at the caption, at which point you might as well not have taken the photo. So, why not put a prop in the photo? If the local soccer team is getting money, throw in some players dressed in their uniforms holding soccer balls. If the hospital is getting a check for a new X-ray machine, take the pix in front of the X-ray machine (not in front of the hospital, for gawd’s sake). If the local library is getting money for new books, bring out the books!

**Elevation** — A straight-on shot looks like a police line-up, plus short guys get lost behind tall guys. Just get up on a chair, or better yet, bring a step-ladder to get folks looking up. No chair? Stoop down and shoot upward (this works great for donations to the local animal shelter — you can always count on a mutt putting his wet nose on your lens).

**Grouping** — How many times have we seen people standing in a row holding their hands in front of them like the zipper had just broken on their flies? Sure, it makes it easier to get IDs with a straight line, but it is boring. Sit people at a table (who wants to look at legs anyway?). Put them in a circle. Get behind them and have them looking over their shoulders.

These are all simple tricks that only need someone to take a second to think, “How can I make this shot more interesting?” The result is a photo that readers actually want to look at.

So, get off your butt, photos, and get PEG!

Tom Grote  
Editor and Publisher  
*The Star-News*, McCall, Idaho



*The PEG technique is shown in this donation photo from the local Optimist Club to the local youth hockey team. The Props are the hockey shirt, stick and helmet (see the check taped to the helmet?). The Elevation has the photographer standing on a chair. The Grouping is getting the principals seated at a table, which is much more relaxed.*

Photo courtesy of *The Star-News*

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