

grassroots editor



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for newspeople*

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What editors can learn from the ethnic and minority press:

A case study including schools, riots, weddings, and Jeffrey Dahmer

By Stephen R. Byers

Shortly after Milwaukee police uncovered the horrifying life that serial murderer Jeffrey Dahmer was leading in the early 1990s, the city's black newspapers were outraged when details of an incident between the police, Dahmer, and a 14-year-old Laotian boy became public. Dahmer had drugged the boy and started to carve him up when the boy broke free and ran, naked, down an inner city street. Neighbors found him and called police. Dahmer arrived at the scene, and, over the protests of black neighbors, talked the three white policemen into releasing the boy into his custody. Later that night, he killed the boy.

The incident became a hot topic in the black press because neighbors felt the white policemen had ignored their pleas to investigate further, which would have prevented several other deaths later. Black editors turned it into a major issue.

This is an excellent example of the leadership role being taken by today's ethnic and minority community newspapers. Their coverage was extensive, supplying details and taking the community's side in what turned into a major dispute between the community and the city's establishment.

This came half a decade after editors, historians, and sociologists agreed that these community newspapers would die out. Faced with declining numbers of immigrants and African-American migrants to the North in the 1930s, most experts predicted the decline of the ethnic and minority press would continue until they were gone. They were wrong. Not just wrong, but spectacularly wrong. Today we see an explosion of the ethnic and minority press of unheard of proportions. New newspapers are being founded continually, and the old ones aren't dying away. The reasons for that explosion have far-reaching effects on American society, and on the business of community journalism.

The American myth is that of the melting pot. In 1904, playwright Israel Zangwill's play, "The Melting Pot," introduced a myth that American society was becoming a mixture of all ethnicities. This nation — a nation of immigrants with a society in which "all men are equal" — was evolving into a society where our differences would dissipate in Zangwill's "great crucible." It didn't happen, and your presence here is proof.

Maybe you don't think of yourself as proof that the melting pot doesn't work, but you are. This is a conference of community newspapers, and I want to emphasize the word *community*. Your newspaper exists because that melting pot failed, and our nation is one of communities. Rather than a melting pot, I like the metaphor "salad bowl." Like a good salad with its mixed greens, radishes, carrots, onions, oils, and vinegars, American society today offers us a rich mixture of many flavors — white, black, brown, Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, rich, poor, rural, urban, suburban. These disparate people live within a society, but each in his own particular niche — often forming communities with others in similar circumstances.

This paper is a synthesis of a number of studies I've undertaken to examine why those dire predictions of the demise of ethnic press were so wrong, and exactly what role today's community press fills. My goal was to determine what it is that makes community newspapers connect with their readers while mainstream newspapers are facing declining audiences. I concentrated on the ethnic and black press because I wanted to determine what lessons could be found in these often widely-separated communities, lessons that could be adapted to all kinds of communities. The projects involved an analysis of the history of America's ethnic press, then a concentrated analyses of the Jewish and black newspapers located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

I paid special attention to the last 35 years of Milwaukee's black press because this

is the most successful period ever for those newspapers — four different publications have survived more than 20 years each in a city that, up to the late 1960s, didn't have even one newspaper publish continuously for more than a decade, and never had more than a single successful black newspaper at a time. Even more startling, this stability came at a time when Milwaukee's African-American population was battered by social and economic setbacks of major proportions. Jobs fled to the Snowbelt. Schools first were integrated, then went into a severe decline. It was a time marked by three major racially-infused disruptions — a riot in 1967, massive demonstrations in 1981 when a black man guilty of nothing more than walking down a street died in police custody, and the 1991 incident involving mass murderer Dahmer and the boy.

From the results of these studies, I have gleaned 10 observations that editors and publishers should note. Four are them are the keys:

- Know your community.
- Know how your community communicates.
- Represent your community.
- Change or die.

I'll talk more about each of them later, and I'm going to repeat a lot of what you already know. But it's important to re-examine some of our basic beliefs viewed through the context of what is actually working in that vigorous black and ethnic press.

Let's think about community for a moment. You are the community press. Use that melting pot myth to think about the press. It's certainly not a melting pot or else we'd all be owned by Rupert Murdoch and offering a Fox-world vision of what's going on in our world. But what makes your community a community? I love the definition of community newspapers used on your Web site:

The community is defined by the community's members and a shared sense of belonging. A community may be geographic, political, social or religious. A community newspaper may be published once a week or daily. Some community newspapers exist only in cyberspace. Any newspaper that defines itself as committed to serving a particular community may be defined as a "community newspaper."

A sense of community, I believe, is of more importance to our society today than most of us understand. One finding in the studies of ethnic newspapers is that they thrive during uncertain times. As one black editor noted: "When business is good for the black press, the news is not." We as a nation are in uncertain times, and sociologists have noted that in periods of change and instability people reach out to their perceived shared communities.

This directly applies to community newspapers because community newspapers are institutions of community formation; they are tools of unification, building our sense of community and its identity. Often a "community" seems an abstract concept, but news is not abstract. People can understand news, and they cling to it. The news you carry in your newspapers provides a solid link to their neighbors and the values they treasure.

Before we get into specifics, let's look at a little theory that we probably haven't thought about much. Earlier I mentioned the melting pot myth. I'd like to talk about how important mythology has been to America. We live by myths and symbols. The very concept of "ethnicity," for example, was socially constructed in America. For instance, if you are Irish and live in Ireland, you don't need shamrocks, leprechauns, and green beer to feed your Irish heritage. But if you're Irish and living in America, those

potent symbols declare your Irishness to the world.

Americans have used such symbols from the first. And, often those symbols were in conflict. The frontiersman was a rugged individual. So are those Texans of the Alamo, and the myth of rugged individuality lives today, especially in our rural West. But, at the same time, we believe in our all-American ideals. We can be rugged individuals, but we expect others to be like us. The ethnic press has battled that from the first. Our most potent unifying symbol — one still the subject of battles today — is our language. English-only laws and rules came from the first in America. Other symbols of what we believe composes America have been added over the years. Newspapers have been important instruments of building those symbols into instruments

Often, these were a weapon used against immigrants and ethnic peoples. Americanize, we insisted. Be like we all are. This worked as long as those immigrants were from western Europe and looked and lived like us real Americans. It began to fall down with immigrants from southern Europe, with their darker skin and Catholic religion. Then came Jews, Africans, other darker skinned immigrants, and it wasn't so easy for them to be just like us. They formed their own communities, with their own community-building institutions like churches and temples, schools and clubs, and newspapers.

As a community editor or publisher, you are the instrument of building your own community. Maybe it's just the Independence Day editorials, or listings of school lunches, or reporting on the high school sports teams. But these are symbols of community interest. Your readers are unique, and your livelihood depends on their buying into the community identity.

I have discovered 10 factors that tie together successful ethnic and black newspapers. You already know many of them, but I urge you to carefully rethink your newspaper and its mission in the light of each. Maybe you're not doing as good a job of meeting your goals as you might think.

1) Know what your readers really care about.

Unfortunately most newspaper readership surveys run along these lines. A question: "Which of the following would you like to read more about?" Followed by a list like a) local news, b) state news, c) sports, d) lifestyle, etc. Or, "as you read the ———, did you read these stories?" followed by a list of stories. This research is perfectly valid in showing what was read, but it misses a lot. First of all, it measures what's already in the newspaper, not what readers who aren't reading the paper want. Even the question about what you'd like to read more about relies on what already runs in newspapers. Secondly, it misses how important an item or feature is.

Several years ago, *The Milwaukee Journal* conducted a major survey like the one mentioned above. It determined the best-read feature in the paper — a local advice column written by an elderly columnist that had run for 60 years. It also found that, among the least-read features, were the stock tables. After getting the results, our editors decided to move the advice column to a section front and drop the stock tables. The reader reaction was swift and decisive. After more than 2,000 readers complained or dropped their subscriptions, the stock tables were back in. Another survey later in the year found the same readership results, but this one also asked "If this feature was not in your paper, how much would you miss it." Stuningly to the survey people, the highest-rated (meaning would be missed the most) feature was the stock tables

while the advice column was the lowest-rated. In fact, when the advice columnist retired a few years later, we didn't get a single complaint.

But you don't operate on research, or at least not research alone. You have your sense of the community. I urge you to find out, either with good surveying techniques or just using your own sense of the community, *what issues the community most cares about*. Often you'll find they aren't issues that your paper is currently covering. When was the last time you wrote about the problems of dealing with aging parents? I'll guarantee you that this is a major issue for many in your community, especially the baby boomers. How about losing (or finding) cleaning people or services? This is a major issue for today's two-income families. How about aging well? Again, a major issue for today's baby boomers.

Much of my work involving Milwaukee's black press was measuring how those papers covered five issues that surveys in the 1960s found were vital to the community. In the earliest years, they weren't covered well — and the papers weren't as well read as they are today when those five issues dominate the papers' news pages. I broke the period I studied into roughly five-year time slots. The first period saw an average of 21 stories a year about the five issues; the last an average of 88 a year.

Identify what the community cares about, not what you or even your community's elites care about. You have to sell papers to a lot more people than those in the Chamber of Commerce, or parents with kids in your schools (don't forget a lot of people in your community don't have kids in schools, resent paying high school taxes and, often, resent your school coverage), or working people. You want to reach your entire community with stories that they care about.

Again, remember you aren't selling to a melting pot community, unless you're very lucky, but to a salad bowl community, with lots of people of many backgrounds seeking different things in their newspaper. That means, among other things, that you can't rely on press releases to do your reporting. You have to get out and find out what's what in your community.

2) Repeat stories; this means effective and numerous follow-ups.

If your readers really care about an issue, they want to know everything about it. Here's the place where you can — and should — blow away that TV or daily competition. During the early coverage of Jeffrey Dahmer's arrest, the story emerged of his encounter with police over the Laotian boy more than a month before his arrest. Because the victim was minority, and minority neighbors had urged the three white police to investigate further, the incident became racially-infused. The black press howled in outrage, basically taking the position that white policemen had ignored minority residents because Dahmer was white and the victim was minority. Had police investigated further, they claimed, Dahmer would have been stopped then, saving three other black victims who were killed after the earlier incident. The black press kept up the drumbeat for weeks after the incident, and their readership soared during this period. Hopefully you won't have a Dahmer in your community, but you will have issues that are one-day stories in the major media, but resonate within your community. Jump on them. Week after week. Cover every possible angle.

I could cite other issues. A police raid seeking illegal sales of over-the-counter drugs at Milwaukee's leading Mexican grocery

was a one-day story in the mainstream, but fed our growing Hispanic press (now up to at least six newspapers) for weeks. In fact, the Hispanic press scored a significant beat on the mainstream with a twist still not reported by TV and the daily paper. It turns out the police — who had gone in with a SWAT team, guns drawn, and had forced everyone in the store, including customers, at least one of whom was eight months pregnant, to lie on the floor with their hands on their heads — had been working on a tip that the store was a distributor for hard drugs, even though the warrant said the search was for illegal sales of prescription drugs.

As long as people in your community are talking about something, it should be in your newspaper. Generally, as in the case mentioned above, you'll have significant things to say long after the mainstream media are gone.

3) Take sides.

That doesn't mean to deceive, but it does mean aim your coverage in a way that your community wants. Take a page from cable TV's Fox News. It's the most-watched cable channel. And despite its slogan, it is fairly open about its bias. Remember Rush Limbaugh is the most popular talk radio personality, and he certainly takes sides.

Objectivity in news dates back to the late 19th century and early part of the 20th century when urbanization brought a lot of diversity to our cities and towns. According to Robert Park, Michael Schudson, Morris Janowitz, and others, editors turned to "objectivity" to lessen conflict among their readers. Unfortunately, this meant a change to agendas driven by "establishment elites" in the community away from agendas driven by the community residents who were the newspaper readers. Sure it's safer to just quote the city manager or the head of the PTA, but looking at successful minority and community newspapers finds that, while those views are reported, "non-traditional" sources like community residents, activists, ministers, even arrestees find their voices. In the heyday of the American newspaper — the 19th century era of the penny press where Americans read two, three or more newspapers daily — the biggest change sparking that surge in readership was that newspapers aimed to reflect their readers, not any of the "elite" business, political, or social groups that had dominated newspapers earlier.

Again, the study following the Dahmer incident is instructive. While Milwaukee's two daily newspapers relied on "non-traditional" sources for 33 percent of their direct quotes, community newspapers relied on "non-traditional" sources for 59 percent of theirs. Frankly, the community press did a much better job of reflecting their community than the mainstream because it took sides.

In Milwaukee, school Choice has been a big issue with a well-funded legislative initiative passing the nation's biggest school Choice program. It mainly affects minority students, and has been consistently supported by the black press. With headlines like "In school Choice, students excel," "Scare tactics and Choice opponents," and "Boost in integration after religious schools join Choice," the black press has strongly pressed its views. In the Ernest Lacy case — when a community member died in police custody — one newspaper devoted 10 stories and an editorial to the incident in a single issue with news headlines like "Community: Milwaukee Police murdered Ernest Lacy." Its outrage was reflected in the largest demonstrations ever in Milwaukee.

Does being outraged pay off? Reading the newspapers' letters

columns showed that when a community paper took strong stands, its readers got far more involved. Choice, for example, has prompted many letter writers who haven't otherwise engaged with the newspaper. The Lacy case resulted in more than a dozen letters (in a press that generally doesn't have any). And certainly it's paid off for Fox News and Rush Limbaugh.

4) Be proud to be different.

Your paper is unique. Emphasize that. Many minority papers look funny. Often their design varies widely from what we teach in design classes. They speak to their audience in this manner, saying, "We're not that mainstream newspaper," we're "your" newspaper. Let your design instantly tell readers what you're about. If you have a local column that takes sides, feature it.

Never forget that outrage I mentioned earlier. Use it. You're on the side of your community resident, not the other papers. Let your editorials and columnists take their sides.

Let me give you two examples from Milwaukee and its suburbs of columns that speak directly to readers. The *Milwaukee Community Journal*, the area's best-read black paper, regularly runs a column by Manning Marable, a columnist who I don't think would mind being described as a socialist. The *Whitefish Bay Herald*, representing a community that votes 9-1 Republican, carries a column by a local talk radio host whose views have been called fascist by some. Frankly, I support both decisions. Both columnists not only represent their papers' readers, but they give those newspapers a different voice, and give readers a reason to reach for those papers.

Studies have consistently shown that readership jumps during times of conflict, especially when newspapers take strong positions. And readership is what your paper is all about.

5) Localize your news.

You know this. You preach this. It's probably the first thing you tell new employees. But it can mean much more than just covering the local PTA or Kiwanis club. You are generally the second or third place people go for news, but you are the most local of them all.

It means taking national stories that impact your community and reporting them — from your community's perspective. Never forget that your paper represents your community residents. You have a duty to interpret the world to your community and your community to the world. When the *Jewish Forward* was published in Yiddish in the early years of the 20th century, it was the most important newspaper in America for Jews. But most importantly, as one commentator said, it interpreted the outside world for Jews and interpreted them for the outside world — leading to a strong sense of community within the immigrant group.

Recognize that readers might well get their news from other sources, but you will tell them what it means. And, while we're at it, let's look at what news really is. Dictionary definitions include the one traditionally used in newspapers: "reports of recent happenings." But they also list the larger definition that I prefer: "new information about anything." Anything that people care about and don't know, is news to them. So go back to my number one tip and never forget to know what people care about. Anything on those issues can be news to them.

An example of local focus was found in the 1960s. No one would deny that civil rights was a major issue for black newspa-

pers during this time. But Milwaukee's most successful black paper of the era, the *Star*, refused to report on civil rights unless it could localize them. Thus, when Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at a huge 1963 rally in Chicago — one covered by Milwaukee's two daily papers — the *Star* didn't mention it. When he slipped into town and spoke at a small gathering of black Milwaukee church leaders, the *Star* screamed the news.

And here's the place to repeat what you already know. Weddings, social notes, local sports, lists of all sorts are *only* going to be found in your newspaper. When I was in the newspaper business, I used to say that anything we ran in agate wasn't going to be on television, our competition. Most of what you run in your regular body type isn't going to be in any of your competitors'. As one black editor put it: "Just as sure as day follows night, the average black man or woman will never make the daily newspaper unless he commits a crime, and a serious one at that." So successful black papers write about that "average" black man or woman. This holds true for your community as well — keep those names in your paper.

6) Know how your community communicates.

This is not easy, but it is important. Communities communicate in different ways, and the medium they choose depends on factors as diverse as how a community formed (by religion, by ethnicity, by lifestyle, by social status), how it operates (is your paper's audience that of a working class suburb, a bedroom community, a city residential area), or even its economic status (a wealthy bedroom community of McMansions is going to communicate differently than a bedroom community of apartment or condo developments). You need to know how residents talk to one another.

For example, black editors know much information in their community is passed by the grapevine, informal word-of-mouth news repeated by people who often don't trust authority figures. They must take that into consideration and go to the barbershops and churches and weekend picnics. Editors of gay publications know their readers rely primarily on gossip because most news of interest to their readers isn't going to be reported elsewhere. So they report on gossip. Editors in the religious press know their news may well first be mentioned in sermons or in conversations at services or events at churches, synagogues, or temples. That's where they have to go to gather news.

Know your community and your readers. Know the demographics, but also determine how news is passed. When I grew up in a small rural Indiana town, the local barbershop was the only place to find out what was happening — except for the pool hall, but I wasn't allow to go there. If the town had a local newspaper, the reporter would have had to go to the barbershop — and the pool hall — to really know what was happening.

Another potential growth area fits in here. Are you a Sunbelt community newspaper with, perhaps, a large group of people from one faraway city? Think like America's early ethnic editors, and see if there is a way to get news of their place of origin on a regular basis. Are you a Snowbelt community newspaper? Again, you might want to think of those retirees as potential subscribers. Maybe offer special deals around the holidays for children and friends to purchase subscriptions as gifts. You have a good reason for sales: you offer news from their old community. Again, know how your audience communicates, and use that knowledge.

Here's a place to make a pitch for local people as reporters. I, as a university teacher or in my previous life as an editor, can train

someone how to report and write news and send them to you, the editor or publisher. Hopefully, they can also learn how to relate to your local community. But often the best reporter is someone from the community who knows how it works and who can be trained in the ways of journalism. *The Wall Street Journal* long ago decided it was easier to teach economics to trained journalists than it was to teach journalism to economists. It's the content more than the form, so don't overlook that local would-be reporter.

7) Don't forget the education function.

This is one of the traditional functions of newspapers, but one that I believe has more power than many community editors and publishers realize today. The earliest newspapers in America were community newspapers, and their community was largely an immigrant community most interested in learning not only what was happening in their community but how to fit in. Black newspapers from the time of freedom following the Civil War through the Great Migration to the North and even today find educating their readers on how to operate within our complex society is a major function. Today's fast-growing Hispanic and Asian community newspapers follow the same path.

The key — and what applies to most of you — is education on how to fit into your community. The average American moves every 4.3 years. You have many newcomers in your community. While you might not think of your social notes column or your Community Bulletin Board as educating people on how to operate in your community, that's what they do. They teach newcomers who does what, what's important, and how to go about becoming a part of the community.

This is the function of the paper that builds a sense of community, and a community-building institution like a newspaper become very important to residents. The more connected you can get your community to feel, the more receptive an audience it is for your readers and advertisers. Information ties scattered communities into a whole.

8) Be a leader — make news yourself.

This is a tricky role, like being confrontational, because it may involve offending some in the community. But I think it is a vital one. A strong newspaper economically almost always takes a strong leadership position, especially a strong community newspaper. Strong local opinions, hopefully personalized in the editor or publisher, pay off.

Let me cite two examples from the past.

The Jewish *Forward* was founded in 1897 as America was in the midst of its largest Jewish immigration, especially Jews from Eastern Europe. It was a Yiddish-language daily newspaper founded by the legendary Abraham Cahan primarily as a newspaper to teach trade unionism and democratic socialism to those new immigrants. It quickly became the most-influential Jewish newspaper and one of the most important ever. Cahan became one of the most important Jews in America, even as it evolved away from that union-socialist paper into the Jewish mainstream.

The second example is from Chicago. In the early part of the 20th century, *Defender* editor Robert Abbott seized upon promoting the migration of African Americans from the South to the North as a potential circulation builder. Some historians give him full credit for the Great Migration in which fully 90 percent of the nation's African Americans became residents of the North, and that's probably too much credit. But the point is that he led on the

issue, and turned the *Defender* into one of the nation's most profitable newspapers of any type during Abbott's period.

Milwaukee's *Jewish Chronicle* and its black newspapers are in front of issues, not behind them. Mikel Holt, editor of the *Milwaukee Community Journal*, the city's most well-read black newspaper, is perhaps the city's most-recognized African American. He's on the board of directors of many agencies and corporate boards, and regularly appears on two different television shows. He always promotes his community.

Become identified with changing your community, not just reflecting it.

9) Never forget your readers — your advertisers will follow.

As I tell students and professionals whom I am advising, never forget that our press is a commercial press. All newspapers must make money to exist — even those subsidized by an organization find themselves pressed to turn a profit. So you can't forget your profit base, which inevitably depends on advertising.

Advertisers might tell you that they'd like your paper to be, say, more boosterish, or maybe to drop that controversial columnist, or whatever. Bring them readers, and they'll be happy. Let readers slip away, and they'll not.

So make sure your paper writes for the community, not just for a business or social elite. Determine and promote their issues. Make your paper useful, and the readers will follow, as will the advertisers.

Your readers are unique, that's why you are a community newspaper. Your community is unique. Your readers are "the other" in the sociologists' term — they aren't just like everyone else, so work to establish their identity because it is also yours.

10) Change or die.

I once wrote a history of America's ethnic press, and titled it, "Change or Die." That has been true of not only the ethnic press, but America's news media in general. In fact, I would suggest that's one of the problems with daily newspapers today — they have not sufficiently changed even though their audience has.

Traditionally, ethnic newspapers changed as groups acculturated — requiring their newspapers to change along with that acculturation. As an example, most of today's readers of the Jewish *Forward* read it in English, although a smaller Yiddish edition still exists. And now it is also published in Russian, reflecting the recent large immigration of Russian Jews.

Let me give you some examples of how Milwaukee's black press has changed over the last thirty years — and I emphasize again that this is its most successful period ever. I tracked five issues over 34 years by measuring their occurrence in stories and editorials: jobs, education, social services, police-community relations, and housing. I split the period up into roughly five-year periods, and spotted immediate changes. The first period ranked like this: education, jobs, police-community relations, housing and, well at the bottom, social services. The last period ranked like this: jobs was first, followed by social services, education, then a big drop-off to police-community relations, and housing. They correlate with changes in the community. Papers responded to the Ernest Lacy incident in 1981 by making police-community relations the top issue by a sizeable margin; to economic downturns in the 1980s by boosting jobs to the top of their priorities, and to

school Choice controversies by making education the leading issue in the 1990s, just as it was at the start of the time measured when the community was seeking integrated schools.

These papers changed dramatically over time.

Your community has changed. Your readers have changed. Milwaukee's suburb Whitefish Bay that I mentioned previously has had a demographic sea change, turning younger and more family-oriented in recent years with a healthy mix of those Russian Jewish migrants mixed in with the virtually all-white population it had 30 years ago. If its *Herald* doesn't change, it will become irrelevant to its readers, and die.

You might not even realize your community is changing. If your newspaper represents part of a metropolitan area, I'd recommend reading a book, *Metropolitcs*, by Myron Orfield. You might not agree with his conclusion — he favors a metropolitan government — but his observations about changes in suburbs and their interdependence are vital to understanding what's going on in American metropolitan areas these days.

As I've said, we really don't live in a melting pot, but a cultural salad bowl. The same is true for communities in the larger context. We all are different, but we all comprise the greater whole that is America. Those newspapers that adjust to the cultural change in our society will prosper. Those that don't, won't.

Change or die. It's the natural system for community newspapers. And it's inevitable.

SOURCES

This paper draws upon studies conducted by the author of five Milwaukee newspapers — the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, the *Courier*, the *Milwaukee Community Journal*, the *Times*, and the *Star* — as well as research from the following books and publications. For more details, please email byers@uwm.edu.

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¿Hablamos Español?

(Do we speak Spanish?)

Case studies: How six mainstream community newspapers have started covering their new Latino communities

By **Jock Lauterer**

While the American Southwest has a long history of Latino presence and acculturation, in the East this demographic is a relatively new phenomenon.

In North Carolina, where the Latino population has increased a dramatic 400 percent over the last 10 years, several mainstream (read: mostly white newsroom) community newspapers have begun experimenting with coverage of Latino issues. Some of these traditional community papers have started bilingual columns in their core product. Others have introduced special bilingual pages; and still others have created entirely new and separate Spanish-language publications.

But for every enlightened community newspaper that has addressed this issue, there are a dozen others, that for whatever reasons, have done little or nothing. Publishers of such passive papers often cite a fear of reader and/or advertiser backlash — yet pioneering publishers of pro-active Latino coverage papers say there's a moral imperative at work in their decision-making process: It's the right thing to do. And the new demographic, they say, is just too large to ignore.

While the growth of the Latino press itself is important, a more pressing issue for existing traditional community newspapers is how they deal (or don't deal) with the stunning influx of Latinos into their communities. This case study examines six examples of "best practices" across the spectrum of community newspapers in North Carolina, including a 4,500-circulation family-owned weekly in a conservative rural farm community; a 9,000-circulation chain-owned six-day-a-week daily in a farming market town; a 12,500-circulation chain-owned daily in a bustling county seat; a free 22,000-circulation chain-owned semi-weekly in a liberal university town; a chain-owned 30,000-circulation daily in the media-rich Piedmont, and a 57,000-circulation family-owned daily in a blue-collar city.

Editors and publishers were asked to candidly address the following issues: What prompted them to initiate the change? Who at the paper was the driving force? How did they arrive at their format decision? Examples of challenges, "speedbumps" and "war stories." Who is helping out? Volunteers? Pro's and cons. Financial and distribution considerations. Has it been worth the effort? And feedback from readers, advertisers and the Latino community.

Just a weekly, just doing great things

Robert Dickson is publisher of The Raeford *News-Journal* of Hoke County, an independent, family-owned 4,500-circulation

weekly published in a small, rural town of 3,386; county population of 35,000. Part of the reason for the start-up was economic. Dickson explains, "Hoke County is typically number 100 out of 100 counties in per capita income in North Carolina. So we have to always look out for ways to generate new sources of income. We have to scratch out a living any way we can."

Dickson said they decided to launch *Acento Latino* "on a shoestring" in September 1999 after he began noticing changes in the labor force spilling out of the poultry processing plant in town.

"We saw them changing," says Dickson, "from predominantly African-American to Hispanic, and we wanted to reach this market to serve our readers — and we hope they're our readers..." Dickson explains, "(because) I think the Hispanic community has just become part of the fabric of our community."

Describing how he found his first Hispanic editor, Dickson gladly concedes, "We got lucky." He said he found Elena Askey when she approached him about running a Latino column in his paper. Dickson says "Hispanic Corner" began appearing in his paper and the *Fayetteville Observer* in 1999. Later that year, Elena Askey would become editor of *Acento Latino*. (The current editor is Liliana Parker.)

Acento Latino began as a free 5,000-circulation 12-page tabloid-format monthly covering Hoke and three adjoining counties of Cumberland, Moore, and Robeson. Dickson chose to locate *Acento Latino* 22 miles away from Raeford in the city of Fayetteville, which he describes as "a tremendous market," in part because of the "Army post (Fort Bragg) and its traditionally high number of Spanish-speaking people."

Dickson explains, "We operate (*Acento Latino*) as a completely separate operation. It has its own separate office; it has its own separate staff. I won't let our (*News-Journal*) staff sell Spanish paper ads and I won't let our Spanish paper staff sell weekly ads; they don't cross. And we consider (income generated by *Acento Latino*) to be new dollars to us that we wouldn't get any other way."

The new Spanish-language paper was a success from the get-go. "And we immediately started getting calls from all over requesting papers," Dickson says. Four years later, *Acento Latino* has doubled in size to 32 pages, with a circulation of 15,000, published twice-monthly and distributed to "a couple of hundred sites in eight counties," Dickson says. The publication's success seems to be a result of Dickson's commitment as well as aggressive partnering with a variety of agencies including chambers of commerce, public libraries, and Latino centers, as well as a holistic approach to involvement with the Latino community.

Dickson's paper has sponsored events such as fiestas and Hispanic Day at the Cumberland County Fair, held forums and

government fairs. One session at the public library in Fayetteville attracted 600 people, Dickson says. It was such an eye-opener that Dickson says the librarian described the audience's reaction like this: "Their eyes were on stalks."

Acento Latino's content is almost all local, Dickson says. "We have tried to use our knowledge of community newspapers to our advantage. We don't know how to do anything but a community newspaper." So *Acento Latino* runs items such as birthday pictures, social notices, employment opportunities, immigrant information, and stories helpful to the Latino community that might not appear in any other publication. "We try to highlight things going on in our area; we're trying to be the hometown newspaper. Most of what we do is local," he says.

Reaction from his community has been relatively good. "We've run into very little resistance from our community," says Dickson. "I think maybe that's because our paper has been around for 100 years. We don't hear anything but positive stuff." And he adds, "(besides,) It's hard to bad-mouth people who are supporting your economy."

From the business angle, Dickson says *Acento Latino* is holding its own through some tough economic times, though the publisher notes, "We're going not as strong as we'd like with our ad sales...We were doing better a year ago...it's been a little flat lately." But most publishers would agree it's that way across the board.

Dickson adds optimistically, "But we continue to add new advertisers which I think is a great sign for a new publication."

"It's a very interesting mix," muses Dickson with a grin, "...the redneck newspaper and the Hispanic newspaper." Dickson says he recently saw a local T-shirt that summed it all up for him. The shirt read, "cómo está, y'all."

For more information, Dickson may be reached at robert@the-news-journal.com. The paper's Web site is www.acentolatino.com.

El Heraldo Hispano de North Carolina

Ironically, one of the counties that Dickson's Latino paper covers is Sampson County, where two years ago the local community paper, the *Sampson Independent*, started its own regional Latino tab.

El Heraldo Hispano de North Carolina is overseen by Sherry Matthews, editor, and Andy Rackley, marketing director, of the *Sampson Independent*, a 9,000-circulation six-day a week daily, chain-owned by CNHI (Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc.), in a rural farming and market town of 5,000 and county population of 47,400.

Rackley says the 2000 Census report was their wake-up call. "The birth of the publication came from a marketing study our staff was completing for Sampson and neighboring counties in southeastern North Carolina," Rackley explains. "As the publisher and I began researching the 2000 Census report, we learned that our main coverage area now included a rapidly-growing Hispanic community. We were shocked to see the 890 percent growth of our Hispanic base."

Early in 2001, the *Sampson Independent* ran some Spanish language articles in the main newspaper, Rackley says, "just to test the response we would get from both the Hispanic and the English sectors of our community."

Rackley says they got very few complaints from their traditional readers, but then again "we found the Spanish articles did-

n't attract any new readers from the Spanish-speaking sector."

In further research, Rackley says they learned that Latinos accounted for 10 percent of their county's population, and 15 percent in neighboring Duplin County.

"We knew we had to address this sector of our community," Rackley says. That catalyst came in the form of Enrique Coello, a former Honduran doctor and current Hispanic local business owner, who approached Matthews and Rackley about starting a Spanish language paper. Partnering with Coello, who was put in charge of editorial content, the *Sampson Independent* launched *El Heraldo Hispano* in September 2001, a free 8,000-circulation 32-page tabloid monthly going to eight counties in southeastern North Carolina. Rackley estimates that the area is home to 100,000 Latinos.

The arrangement between Coello and the *Sampson Independent* works because Coello is a "well-educated gentleman who was highly respected in our community by both English and Spanish speaking residents," Rackley says. "We print the product and sell the advertising and he supplies the copy. In return for his efforts, we provided him with advertising space for his three businesses." The new publication was greeted with enthusiasm, Rackley says. "We were thrilled as we nearly profited from the first publication even after buying enough newspaper racks to cover eight counties."

Rackley also says the *Independent* felt they had "beaten all the other (traditional community) newspapers out of the starting gate." (Rackley made no mention of Robert Dickson's *Acento Latino*, which began publishing two years prior to *El Heraldo Hispano*.)

However, Coello and his counterparts in Clinton quickly learned that just taking copy from the *Independent* and translating it for *El Heraldo Hispano* didn't work. The Latino readers wanted "stories from their homes in Honduras, Mexico, and El Salvador," Rackley explains. "They also wanted information from the Department of Motor vehicles... stories about immigration... so we adapted our product to fit their needs."

While the *Sampson Independent* and *El Heraldo Hispano* succeeded in finding the formula for editorial content, the same cannot be said for the advertising area. A Latina ad representative made good progress securing ads from the Hispanic businesses in the area, but Rackley says "she felt uncomfortable approaching English business because her English was at best 'fair.'" After several months, she left to continue her education. And since that time, Rackley says *El Heraldo Hispano* has struggled to find a competent bilingual ad salesperson, possibly because their ad salespeople work entirely on commission.

"For the last year we have tried five different methods of soliciting ads from the Spanish community," Rackley notes. "But today our Hispanic publication is basically 85 percent funded by English businesses. However our goal was to draw in undiscovered revenue from new advertisers — not move around funds from current advertisers."

In the last year, *El Heraldo Hispano* has grown in circulation by 1,000 copies and expanded into three more counties toward the coast. An online edition was also launched. Rackley says proudly, "Our Hispanic print product still produced a profit," and, "We are thrilled about our new venture."

In spite of these accomplishments, *El Heraldo Hispano* is in jeopardy at the *Sampson Independent*. "We have reached a crossroads," Rackley concedes. "We are currently analyzing whether

our efforts should continue with this publication or should we place these efforts into other products like the Internet where we have witnessed some re-energized growth.”

It is reasonable to speculate that this has to do with the core newspaper's ownership status. Fueling this uncertainty is the reported on-again-off-again sales of CNHI's North Carolina properties, including the *Sampson Independent*. This insecurity is most likely having a chilling effect on all operations at the Clinton papers, both English and Spanish-language. Until the ownership situation stabilizes, everything in Clinton appears to be on hold.

For more information, Rackley may be reached at sipromo.intrstar.net. The Web site is www.elheraldohispano-nc.com.

More than just ink-on-paper community journalism

The *Chapel Hill News*, a free 22,000-circulation chain-owned (McClatchy) twice-weekly, has a long history of groundbreaking community journalism in its liberal, university town of 38,000.

Not long after the 2000 Census figures got everyone's attention, the *News*, led by Publisher Ted Vaden and Editor Sharon Campbell, began publishing front-page bilingual columns by local Latino advocate Maria Palmer. That was followed by simple, illustrated Spanish lessons that appeared regularly in the paper supplied by a local Spanish-language advocacy group.

From the beginning, the *News'* Latino coverage has been folded in to the mother product, because Vaden says he knows his typical reader, who he describes as “probably the wife of a UNC faculty member.” So the *News* is covering the Latino community for its traditional audience, and unlike Raeford and Clinton, is making no real pretense at courting Latino readers or advertisers with a stand-alone Spanish-language publication.

Speaking to the N.C. Press Association summer convention in July 2003, senior writer Kirk Ross explains, “We've tried for several years to involve writers and people from the Latino community in the newspaper. We find it's a two-way street. Not only do people in the Latino community want to know what's going on, but people in the traditional community want to know what's going on with their new neighbors. So we took that approach and did a lot of work with a series on how churches and schools have changed with new members of our community.”

But the *News* really got in the trenches in 2001 when it became clear that local businesses were laying off many Hispanic workers because of improper paperwork. Ross says, “In late November 2001 a local minister told me that she had heard about wholesale layoffs at the grocery stores of Latino workers...and we found it had to do with 9/11. Basically it was a Social Security double check that had been tightened up — and we're talking hundreds of people who are losing their jobs. It involved a thing called a “no-match letter” which basically says your Social Security number doesn't match the one we have on file.

“And you find this a lot. People get hired. They have a number. They may have obtained it illegally; it may be their brother's number, or something like that. But the employers were getting these letters, and it wasn't just the major employers. It was going to restaurants, grocery stores, construction companies. And so we found that a lot of employers who had integrated Latino workers into their workforce and who were moving along nicely, were suddenly faced with losing half their people or in some cases almost all their people.”

“El Dilema Laboral” — the award-winning 20,000-word series involving as many as 60 stories for several weeks during Spring 2002 — dealt with what Ross describes as “the double standard in which we invited these folks to come be with us, but politically and legally we have put them into a black market system.” The entire series was translated into Spanish and re-packaged in a tabloid format. It won the first place Community Service Award, the top statewide award for community newspapers. Judges commented that the series was “sophisticated” and that any newspaper in the larger dailies in the state would have been proud to publish it.

Beyond ink-on-paper journalism, The *News* also got involved with the Latino employment issue by sponsoring a well-attended town forum. Publisher Ted Vaden moderated the forum, “El Dilema Latino: Seeking Local Solutions.” Ross says, “We really tried to bring together employers, immigration lawyers, community leaders, a representative from the Mexican consulate and congresspeople to discuss this issue.”

Ross is hopeful about the outcome, but has no illusions. “In the end change will have to come from Congress,” he says. “It won't come from the *Chapel Hill News* or the Chapel Hill Town Council.”

The labor story also opened the doors to other stories. “As we got into the labor issues,” says Ross, “we learned more about the cultural issues.” Reporters learned that many of the Latinos in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro area were from one little village of Guanajuato, Mexico. So the *News* sent its editor, Sharon Campbell, to Guanajuato along with Steve Thompson, a Spanish-speaking freelance journalism student-writer to “flesh out the human stories behind this.” Ross explains that in Guanajuato wives and children await “that check from Carrboro, N.C., or that phone call from Pittsboro, N.C.” He adds, “So there's a whole other story on other side of the border.”

Finally, Ross thinks there's a value-added component to the Latino coverage the *News* has done. He concludes, “We've really tried to look for resources within the community, and we've found that they're there. And it's that reaching out that helps lay the groundwork so that when a big story breaks in the Latino community, you have the resources, you can get out there, and you can make it relevant for folks.”

For more information, contact Publisher Ted Vaden at tvaden@nando.com. The Chapel Hill News Web site is www.chapelhillnews.com.

Because it's the right thing to do

Editor Bob Stiff describes his *Lexington Dispatch* as “a weekly newspaper that comes out six afternoons a week.” The 12,500-circulation daily, owned by the New York Times Regional Publishing Group, is located well west of Chapel Hill, Raeford, and Clinton in a bustling county seat town, pop. 19,000, famous for its barbecue.

Not long after the 2000 Census results came in, the *Dispatch* created *Nuestro Pueblo*, a bilingual news page, every third Tuesday of the month.

Explaining the page's origins, Stiff says, “A few years ago I noticed that we were having a lot of arrests for open container laws, and they were all Spanish-sounding last names. And it occurred to me that our visitors, who are now our residents, are probably not aware of a lot of our laws that would be different from how they are in Mexico, and that we should find some sort

of way of assimilating them in what we call nuestro pueblo, our town.

“So I thought why don’t we have a page with all this information in it that will help them? Let’s do a feature on them being here and something that they’re doing that can draw them to the page to get this information. We didn’t do it for any other reason than to make people feel a little more comfortable in our home.”

Like other editors and publishers, Stiff says he found the census numbers to be significant. “We’ve got a large percentage increase over the last census,” he says. Stiff estimates the county has an 11 percent Latino population, while estimates run as high as 16 percent for Lexington, prompting the editor to observe, “Those are significant numbers, and we want (Latinos) to feel comfortable with our community.”

For two years Ana Agud, a Spanish-speaking reporter, was responsible for *Nuestro Pueblo* until she left the *Dispatch* for a higher paying job. As luck would have it, Stiff discovered her replacement in his own backshop when he found a part-time ad make-up man with Spanish language skills. This summer Stiff is using a Spanish-speaking student intern from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to handle the bilingual page.

Says Stiff, “We do it in both Spanish and English because I knew our English-speaking readers would wonder what it was that they couldn’t read and understand. What were we doing that we weren’t making them a part of? So, I think it does what we intended it to do.”

The *Dispatch*’s effort is a low-key operation, according to Stiff. “We’ve done very little promotion. We do rack cards once in a while. And there’s been very little reaction.”

In spite of the fact that “it hasn’t made a penny for us,” Stiff remains committed to the monthly bilingual page, saying, “It’s just simply the right thing to do.”

For more information contact Bob Stiff at bob.stiff@the-dispatch.com. The paper’s Web site is www.the-dispatch.com

Speaking for our people

Steve Buckley is the publisher of the *Burlington Times-News*, a 30,000-circulation chain-owned (Freedom) daily in a city of 71,000 and a county population of 147,000 located in the heart of the busy Piedmont. Burlington is bracketed by the Research Triangle of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill to the east and the Piedmont Triad of Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem to the west. Even in this media-rich setting, publisher Buckley saw a need for a Latino community newspaper that would serve the Spanish-language readers in Alamance County.

La Voz de Alamance, a free 5,000-circulation twice-monthly, is unique in that it is the only broadsheet format Spanish-language publication in this study. *La Voz* also has a Web site. Buckley created *La Voz* almost two years ago for several reasons. Reflecting the statewide growth, Alamance County’s Latino population also mushroomed, and now is estimated at 10 percent. Latinos’ impact on his county can’t be overstated. To illustrate, Buckley says, “Two years ago I was traveling with a friend who owns a hosiery mill, and he said ‘Oh boy, do I have trouble. I just heard from the Department of Labor that I’ve got 115 invalid Social Security numbers.’”

“I said, ‘How many Latinos do you have working down there?’”

“And he said, ‘about 120.’”

“I mean this was gonna shut his plant down!” exclaimed Buckley.

Latinos now make up the bulk of the work force in the construction, landscaping, and food service industries, Buckley says, adding, “I’m convinced that in Alamance County we’d have a huge problem if suddenly there was a huge sweep and all the Latinos were picked up and taken away. We’d have things that wouldn’t open the next day. Period.”

Buckley acknowledges that many Latinos are in the U.S. illegally, but he is a staunch believer in being supportive, explaining, “They’re all contributing to the society. They’re making a positive economic impact on a lot of things in Alamance County that wouldn’t be happening if we didn’t have our Latino population...It’s more important as far as I’m concerned to talk about them as people.”

Buckley says Latinos’ traditional distrust of government has hampered their advancement in American society. He cited a recent Latino issues community forum held at Elon University attended by the head of the local Latino advocacy group, the governor’s director for Hispanic/Latino affairs, as well as local community and school leaders. But according to Buckley, “The only thing they didn’t have was very many Latinos in the audience — because they thought the INS would be outside the door, ready to pick people off!”

As a newspaper publisher who must run a successful business, Buckley also saw the creation of *La Voz* as a “great marketing niche.” But he is quick to add, “There’s a moral obligation to do this, as well. Here is a significant segment of the population who needs to be served with information and needs access to honest information, and we felt it was important to do that.”

Not all of Buckley’s traditional readers agree, he says candidly. “It is not warmly received by all of our white readers. There’s this one guy, for example, who has told me he’ll re-subscribe (to the *Times-News*) as soon as we stop publishing this paper (*La Voz*). We’ve got a county commissioner who frankly I’ve come to the point where I had to say (to him), ‘Look, I’m not going to change my opinion, and you’re not going to change your opinion, and I can’t argue with a bigot, so stop calling me about this.’”

Buckley seems unfazed by his critics. “It’s a real issue,” he says, vowing, “but we’re going to continue to do this.”

A typical eight-page edition of *La Voz* has a splashy color front, with the motto: “El periodico que habla por nuestra gente” (“The newspaper that speaks for our people.”) beneath the nameplate of the paper. The front page contains stories about soccer both in Alamance County and Latin America, pictures of local entertainers, reports about recent house fires that killed local Latinos, the opening of a new food distribution plant, a police report detailing the detaining of local illegal immigrants, and a feature about the three Latino athletes who play on the local minor league baseball team. Inside is a full, lively local editorial page including a personal commentary by *La Voz* Editor Jose Luis Arzola, one of two Latino free-lancers who provide the editorial content for *La Voz*. The other staffer is Graphics Editor Monica Meza, who Buckley calls, “our in-house advocate...my angel...my conscience as well...” Following two pages of the local Latino news, *La Voz* features wire service copy from “Latin America and the World.”

Buckley’s involvement with *La Voz* has pushed him to start learning Spanish. With a rueful grin he says, “Frankly, it’s a little bit disconcerting to publish a paper that you can’t read. I have minimal Spanish skills, and I listen to tapes in my car, and I’m trying

ing to learn more...(because) when (*La Voz*) arrives in my office I sometimes wonder what's in here....how am I going to get bitten on this deal? Fortunately we haven't had any problems, and the feedback has been really good. So I'm relying on Monica to be conscience as well...and she's done a good job. And when things aren't going well, if she feels she isn't getting the support or *La Voz* isn't getting the support it needs, I hear from her — and that's great, because she's the advocate."

From the economic side, Buckley says, "We are making money on it. We didn't make it overnight, but it's beginning to grow. The biggest setback we had in our advertising effort was using our regular sales staff to sell (*La Voz*). Buckley says the solution is a separate ad rep dedicated to selling *La Voz*. "When that happens," Buckley predicts, "we'll probably increase the publication frequency to weekly."

For more information, contact Steve Buckley at sbuckley@link.freedom.com. The Web site for *La Voz* is lavoz@link.freedom.com.

The granddaddy of them all

Durham Herald-Sun Executive Editor Bill Hawkins says he didn't have to see the 2000 Census to tell him what he already knew. "Most of us in Durham," Hawkins wrote in a column from March 2001, "didn't need the census to recognize this new wave of immigrants, who have played an important role in filling jobs that have fueled our booming economy over the last decade."

Hawkins' *Durham Herald-Sun*, a 57,000-circulation family-owned daily in the blue-collar city of 190,000, didn't wait for the census to get their journalistic attention either. As far back as 1997, the *Herald-Sun* initiated a series, "New Faces, New Voices." The pioneering series, written by Miriam Stawowy, a young reporter from Colombia, ran over a period of several months and addressed issues related to the then new phenomenon of the Latino influx in Durham.

Following the series, Hawkins asked Stawowy to write a column, which they named "Nuestro Pueblo." It became the state's very first bilingual column. The twice-monthly column was edited by then Night Metro Editor Mark Schultz. After Miriam Stawowy returned to Florida to be closer to her family, the *Herald-Sun* continued the bilingual column using a team of Latino writers, and Schultz became the driving force behind the *Herald-Sun*'s Latino coverage initiative. Describing what happened next in 1998, he says, "We took the page weekly...We added a new story and weekly calendar. All local, all bilingual." Schultz also added three more Latino writers, expanding what was once only a column into a bilingual full page, published on Fridays.

Hawkins observes, "The page has been very well received in our community and is a powerful teaching tool in our schools, especially in English as a Second Language classes. But we also knew that the column was not reaching many newcomers, for whom a newspaper in English is not yet an option. That in turn led to our monthly *Nuestro Pueblo* publication that is entirely in Spanish and distributed separately from the *Herald-Sun*."

Hawkins notes, "It started simply in the form of a four-page section distributed at La Fiesta del Pueblo in September 2000." Since that humble beginning, *Nuestro Pueblo* has grown to a free 8,000-circulation, 12- to 16-page tabloid going to 60 different

locations primarily in Durham and Orange counties.

Schultz was honored for his work on *Nuestro Pueblo* in October 2001 when the Latin American Resource Center of Durham presented him the media award for creating and editing the publication. At that time, Hawkins lauded Schultz, saying, "We are very proud of this award in that it recognizes the exceptional leadership of Mark Schultz in creating and editing our growing *Nuestro Pueblo* edition. It is really through his determination and his compassion that the *Herald-Sun* has been able to play a positive role in helping Latinos bridge the cultural gap in one of North Carolina's most diverse communities."

Schultz notes that when the 2000 Census did come out, it served as a validation. He explains, "Durham's Hispanic population had grown from just over 1,000 people (less than 2 percent) to 17,000 (nearly 8 percent) in 10 years. And by then we had already been doing our page for two years!"

Hawkins credits Schultz for assembling a talented team of eight local columnists, whom Hawkins calls, "smart people with really varied backgrounds. They hail from Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, and Bolivia, mirroring the multi-national face of our Latino community." Hawkins notes that translations for *Nuestro Pueblo* stories are provided by the Chapel Hill Institute for Cultural and Language Education, with final proofreading by editorial assistant Leonidas Cordova.

Schultz outlines the goals of *Nuestro Pueblo*: "to be a bridge between the Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish speaking communities, and not to 'ghettoize' Latino news. We did not want to say we had a Spanish or bilingual page once a week and be done with it. In fact having the weekly page has improved our coverage of Latino issues seven days a week."

But *Nuestro Pueblo* faces many challenges. What began as a public service must now compete successfully with other profit-driven Spanish-language media that have sprung up in Durham in the last four years, Schultz says, including several newspapers, a Spanish-language FM station, two Spanish-language AM stations, and a Spanish-language open-air broadcast station. Schultz, however, remains confident. "But none can provide the local content we do." Ideally, Schultz would like to have the resources to take *Nuestro Pueblo* to a weekly.

Hawkins concludes, "All of this is a big undertaking for a newspaper our size, and Mark is determined to see that it gets even bigger. We support *Nuestro Pueblo* wholeheartedly and know that our efforts place the *Herald-Sun* in an important leadership role."

For more information contact Mark Schultz at mschultz@herald-sun.com. *Nuestro Pueblo* may be accessed on the Durham Herald-Sun Web site at www.heraldsun.com.

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A case study reveals agreement...

Responsible editors should not let others read letters before publication or allow personal attacks in letters

By David Burton

Here are the facts of a recent event that took place at a weekly newspaper in Missouri. These facts were presented as a “case study” to 40 community journalists from different areas of the United States. These journalists were asked to e-mail their responses to the discussion questions; eight of the responses are shared here.

Case study

A taxpayer submits a letter to a weekly newspaper. The letter is critical of the financial decisions being made by the school district’s board and administration. The letter is not an individual attack (no names are mentioned), but it does question wisdom of the school district’s decisions.

The letter misses the deadline for the weekly publication (apparently) by just a few hours. A day or two later, the newspaper’s editor calls the school board president, “to check the facts.” That day, the board president visits the newspaper office to read the letter one week in advance of it being published. He is allowed to do so and the president may have even received a copy of the letter to take with him (different versions of the story exist on this point).

In the coming days, the board president works at “rallying the troops” to respond to the letter (which has not yet been published). The letter and its writer are both discussed at a board meeting and a community basketball game where the board president asks citizens to write letters in response to the “vicious attack,” which has not even been published yet.

The school superintendent even writes his own response (and submits it the same day the weekly newspaper comes out). That letter takes a personal approach and actually begins as an attack on the writer: “John Doe just doesn’t get it.” Subsequent letters follow from the board president and teachers, all taking personal aim at the writer of the letter. Interestingly, the editor never contacts the person being attacked in those letters to verify any facts or statements being made before those letters are published.

Case study questions

Here are the primarily questions this case study raises:

1. What are the ethics involved with an editor contacting a governing board (and/or its leader) in advance of the publication of a letter to the editor?
2. What are the ethics involved with letting someone actually read (and perhaps even have a copy of) a letter in advance of publication?

3. What are the ethics involved with elected officials responding to letters to the editor by attacking the writer instead of the issues?

4. Do you have any advice for either the editor of the newspaper, or the writer of the letter?

Reporting 101

“In Reporting 101, one of the first things student reporters learn is not to give prior review, no matter who the person is asking for it. As journalists, our loyalty belongs to the audiences who have given us their trust. And printing personal attacks is just opening up a Pandora’s box. I can hear the legal departments groaning from here,” wrote Beth Slusser, Student Publications advisor, Fairmont State College, Fairmont, W.Va.

Protect letter writer

“We never give a preview of a letter to a source because it just creates problems. I may check facts before printing if there is a question. We also ensure that the responses focus on the issues raised. We call the responder and go over the issues with the responder so he or she understands where we are coming from and also feels that they have been treated fairly. Our newspaper took a fight to the United States Supreme Court to protect the rights of letter writers under the New York State Shield Law. The commitment we have to those who place trust in us by writing us a letter is paramount. We do all we can to live up to that trust, especially when the writer is going up against a major force or government,” wrote Carolyn James, editor, *Massapequa Post, Amityville Record, Babylon Beacon* newspapers, Long Island, N.Y.

Check facts, watch tone

“I see no problem with the editor calling the superintendent to ask about facts in the letter. Letters, like other types of tips from readers, can often be the impetus for independent reporting and news stories. I am less comfortable with sharing the letter before publication. I’m not sure it’s an ethical issue but I do think it discourages people from writing letters critical of public officials. It is best to put both parties on an equal footing and allow them to have a dialogue in the letters column. When the letter writer voluntarily entered the public debate by sending his letter, he made himself fair game for criticism, including attacks on his intelligence, motives, and reputation. If the superintendent used a racial or ethnic stereotype in response to the writer’s criticism of a school budget, he’s clearly out of bounds. If he says John Doe couldn’t pass freshman algebra, that’s less clear. If you’re undecided, I’d err on the side of inclusion. Don’t forget the option of editing out the gratuitous nastiness and leaving the substance,”

wrote Cliff Richner, publisher, Herald Community Newspapers, Lawrence, N.Y.

Citizen right to question

“When I was editor and publisher, I would not have contacted anyone to alert them that a letter was coming. Citizens in our society have a right to express their viewpoints about the actions and decisions of their elected and appointed officials. After all, it is the taxpayers’ money and the taxpayers’ schools they are administering. One of the responsibilities of the press is to be a public forum for ideas, both popular and unpopular. Printing letters to the editor is part of the public forum process. Should the letter contain new facts, I would check out the facts as the basis for a news story. If it required contacting an official involved, I would not tell the person or persons that a letter was coming. The information sought would be for the news story, not for rebuttal to the letter or as a way to inform the official or officials about the letter. An editor should not favor elected or appointed officials. One of the functions of the press is to be a watchdog on government. It’s difficult to do that and play favorites with government officials. An editor should be as diligent about checking the facts presented in a letter whether it is from officials or a citizen. Actually, I think there is a greater responsibility to check information from a government official. That is part of being a watchdog and watching out for the citizenry. A letter writer should keep on writing. It is a citizen’s right and responsibility to question the decisions and actions of those elected and appointed to contact public business,” wrote Harry Hix, Engleman/Livermore Professor of Community Journalism, University of Oklahoma.

Keep it civil

“I would not share a letter prior to publication. We do not discuss letters outside of our office. Once published, it becomes public. Advance reading of letters is not the intent of a letter to the editor page. The paper is the forum. The writer knows the letter is for publication, but I’m sure they don’t anticipate the paper will be spreading it around before publication. What are the ethics involved with elected officials responding to letters to the editor by attacking the writer instead of the issues? Anyone, including elected officials, can respond to a letter to the editor. I find many people don’t want to stick to the issues. A lot of people want to criticize the person who wrote the letter. It’s up to the editor to keep the conversation civil,” wrote Stacy S. Chastain, associate publisher, *The News Observer*, Blue Ridge, Ga.

Small town problem

“Seems to me, a lot of this has to do with the size of the town. In a smaller town, an editor might approach the superintendent about a letter to give him a heads up. But I don’t think the superintendent ought to actually see the letter and the response should not come out at the same time as the letter. The procedure I’d use is this: 1) Contact the letter writer to make sure he wrote it. 2) You may or may not want to contact the school officials, but if you want to check facts, this may be the easiest way to do it. 3) I would not let the school read the letter. I would also not let anyone

respond to a letter that had not yet been printed. And, I would not allow an attack on the writer. It sounds like the editor is a little too cozy with the school people. This kind of thing can really hurt the credibility of the newspaper in the community, unless the writer is some well-known nut. And if that’s the case, then the readers ought to recognize it when they see the letter with his name on it. If the writer is a respected citizen and the paper allows the school to jump on him — a citizen and taxpayer — it could lead to lots of bad feelings for the school and the newspaper,” wrote Jim Sterling, professor of community journalism, University of Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, Mo., and former publisher of three weekly newspapers.

Don’t curry favor

“Letting someone in government read the letter in advance of publication is flat out unethical. There is no reason to give a public board or public leader a heads-up on a negative letter. If they hold public office, attacks go with the job. Frankly, it sounds to me like the editor is courting those in power in the community, the antithesis of what the editor of a good community newspaper should be doing. An official making an attack on the writer instead of the issues isn’t unethical. It just says to me they couldn’t attack the letter on its substance. Sounds like the letter writer did just what a good citizen should do — raise issues about the policies and financial decisions of a governing board. The editor could borrow a little of this critical judgment, rather than trying to curry favor by blunting a negative letter,” wrote Vicki Simons, former editor, *The Independent* of Columbia County (N.Y.), a twice-weekly community newspaper, and former director of The Center for Community Journalism.

No-look policy

“While we have not specifically documented a ‘no prior look’ policy at our newspaper, it is understood by our staff that such an action would be a breach of trust. Our letter-to-the-editor writers have the expectation that their letter will be shared, with the public, in the venue of their choice — the editorial page. Occasionally we will check facts, if we feel that there might be libel or ethical issues involved. That fact checking process can include a conversation with the letter writer but we do not contact the subject of the letter. This process, although time consuming, can yield a stronger, more focused letter from the writer,” wrote Mary Beth Jones, *Tioga County Courier*, Owego, N.Y.

Join in the discussion

Feel free to join in the discussion by sending an e-mail to the author at burtond@missouri.edu.

David Burton is civic communication specialist for University of Missouri Extension in southwest Missouri (see <http://outreach.missouri.edu/swregion/news>). A member of ISWNE, he was an award-winning managing editor of a weekly newspaper for six years and he remains an active letter writer to the newspaper where he now lives: Cross Country Times, Willard, Mo.

Editors' and young reporters' differing views on community news

By **Kim Landon**

Introduction

As the newspaper industry continues to struggle to attract and retain the best young journalists, many discussions focus on salaries and working conditions as the factors that drive these young people away. A two-part national survey of editors and young reporters at newspapers under 100,000 circulation suggests that there is more to the story.

One factor that is not often discussed is that of expectations. What do the editors expect the young reporters to know and to value? How do the editors' expectations compare to those of the reporters? How well do editors communicate their expectations? This study reveals that editors and young reporters have some expectations in common, but great differences in others, including how highly they value different types of community news.

This paper will compare the editors' and young reporters' views of reporting community news: budgets, police news, and public policies. It will also discuss how these two groups are alike and how they differ in their assessment of how important it is to know one's community, its leaders, and its history. Finally, the paper will offer some conclusions about how the differences in editors' and reporters' perceptions and values may be affecting the retention of young journalists in the newspaper business.

Purpose of Study

Various studies reveal that feedback from newsroom managers strongly affects young journalists' job satisfaction. Much evidence exists showing that editors think they communicate well with these employees, while the reporters in general feel that they receive inadequate comments from their editors.

Research shows that this is not the only difference in perceptions between editors and reporters. This study endeavors to further the inquiry into the differences between editors' views and those of their staff members in hopes of closing the gap and perhaps retaining young journalists in their jobs longer. In particular, this paper reports survey results showing some disparity in how editors and young reporters rank the importance of knowledge about their communities, discusses some likely root causes and suggests ways that these two groups of journalists could improve their understanding of each other.

Literature Review

In 1993, the Associated Press Managing Editors Journalism Education Committee surveyed newspaper managing editors as well as recent college graduates working in newsrooms. They asked each group to rank the topics journalism schools should emphasize in preparing future journalists.

"Learning to listen to readers" ranked third on the editors' list, but was ranked fifth by the young journalists.¹ Subsequent studies, both small and nationwide, continually reinforce this finding that editors and young reporters hold different priorities and also misperceive each other's priorities. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) studied "The Changing Face of the Newsroom" in 1989, and

again in 1996. The second, expanded study is reported by Paul S. Voakes in "The Newspaper Journalists of the '90s."²

Another set of nationwide studies of journalists began in 1976 with the publication of *The News People* by John W.C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, and William W. Bowman,³ and has been built upon by researchers David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, first in 1986 in their book, *The American Journalist*,⁴ and again in 1996 with *The American Journalist* in the 1990s.⁵ They were among the first to alert the industry to two significant trends: that the average age of journalists was increasing and that those at the beginning of their journalism careers were more likely to leave the field than in previous studies.⁶ They found that too little job autonomy and a general disillusionment with the field were predictors of younger journalists leaving. However, they also learned that employees who reported receiving frequent feedback from their supervisors were predictably more satisfied with their jobs and careers. Other research indicates that editors do not necessarily know about their impact on young journalists. The implications of this relationship will be explored further in the discussion section of this paper.

Editors and first-time reporters also often misperceive each other's news values and how they rank the importance of various aspects of their jobs. A *Columbia Journalism Review* survey of editors in 1999 asked respondents to compare their recent hires to previous generations. Two thirds of the editors said they believed that the newcomers had less knowledge of public affairs than in the past, and more than half believed they had less writing talent and motivation. Editors complained that the younger generation of journalists does not understand government, nor do they have a historical perspective on the news.⁷

A possible explanation for this perception might reside in the news media itself. Weaver and Wilhoit's study of journalists of the 1990s showed a distinct shift in what is considered news. Asked what news topics provided their best work, journalists surveyed in the 1980s most frequently reported state and local government and crime news. In the more recent study, news of celebrities and personalities ranked first, nearly tripling in its frequency of response from the decade before. It was followed in ranking by news of social problems and protests, while government dropped from first among 1980s topics to fourth in the 1990s.⁸ This change to a much "softer" news environment quite probably forms young journalists' news values and may be behind what some editors perceive as less knowledge of public affairs issues.

Methodology

Three questionnaires were mailed to managing editors at 200 randomly selected dailies of under 100,000 circulation. One questionnaire was designated for the editor who worked most closely with young reporters. Editors were instructed to give the other questionnaires to the two reporters most recently hired into their first newspaper jobs. (It should be noted that not every newspaper in the sample had two or even one reporter fitting that description.)

Results

Fifty-five editors and 86 reporters returned questionnaires. The respondents represented 64 newspapers, or 32 percent of the selected

newspapers, 28 percent of the editors surveyed and 22 percent of the reporters. Most reporters (65%) were between 21 and 24, and nearly all (86%) were under 30. They were predominantly white (88%) and female (58%).^{ix} Three-quarters of the editors who responded were over 30, with the largest segment in their 40s. In contrast to the reporter respondents, the editors were mainly male (78%) and even more predominantly white than the reporters (95%).^x Editors largely held the titles of Editor or Executive Editor (35%) or Managing Editor (44%). The remainder of the respondents held various titles including City Editor, News Editor, and even Features Editor. Half of the editors had earned bachelor's degrees in Journalism and 13 percent held master's degrees in Journalism, but nearly a quarter held degrees in fields outside of Journalism or Communications, with English being the most frequently mentioned other discipline. Nearly the same proportion of reporters as editors held bachelor's degrees in Journalism (46%) but far more reporters (18%) held bachelor's degrees in Communications than did editors (4%) perhaps reflecting the relatively new popularity of the generic Communications degree. Only about half as many reporters as editors held masters degrees in Journalism, perhaps a function of their ages, but nearly the same proportion of editors and reporters held degrees outside of Journalism or Communications.

Reporters were given a list of 20 activities that might be required of a reporter, including the six on the chart below that are directly related to covering community news. They were asked how important they expected each to be when they were hired. Given the same list of journalistic skills and activities, editors were asked the importance of each item in hiring a reporter for his or her first full-time newspaper job. The reporters' responses are in the chart, followed by a chart of the editors' responses. (In both charts, the totals do not include the "no response" category. Also, the percentages have been rounded to the next highest number and will total more than 100 percent in some cases.)

An interesting additional survey result was in regard to why reporters leave journalism. The young reporters were asked to indicate their top three reasons for leaving journalism. The top responses were: low salaries, stress and job burnout, lack of control over schedules, no opportunities for advancement, and needing more time for

Editors' ranking of the importance of community news			
Journalistic Activity	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not important or don't know
Know local history and geography	6	59	32
Know names and titles of community leaders	9	51	38
Explain complicated policy issues to readers	47	42	9
Explain government budgets	22	60	17
Understand police and court operations	41	40	20
Understand FOI laws	22	58	13

personal interests. Asked what they thought the top three reasons would be that young journalists leave the field, the editor's answers almost matched those of the reporters with two significant differences. The editors overestimated by half the number of reporters who indicated that stress and job burnout would be reasons to leave — perhaps reflecting their own level of job stress — but hardly mentioned the need for time for personal interests, one of the reporters' most frequently mentioned reasons after salary.

Discussion

This study reveals that, in terms of knowing information about their communities, young reporters have higher expectations of themselves than their editors do. Far more reporters ranked "knowledge of local history and geography" and "know names and titles of community leaders" as very important than did the editors. In fact, totaling both categories of "very important" and "somewhat important," editors ranked both categories of knowledge as significantly less important for the new reporters to know. Eighty-three percent of the reporters gave the "history/geography" some level of importance, and 89 percent gave the "names/titles" category importance. Only 65 percent of the editors gave the "history and geography" knowledge any level of importance and only 60 percent gave the "names/titles" category importance.

One conclusion one might draw from this is that editors expect the young reporters to have reporting skills in covering their communities, but perceived that specific knowledge of the community will need to be acquired over time. Or, as one study suggests, frequent turnover among newsroom employees leads to a lowered expectation of how much community knowledge a young reporter will obtain before moving on.^{xi}

Another explanation might be that journalism educators emphasize specific community knowledge more than editors. Further study might indicate that higher classroom priority ought to be placed on "explaining budgets," which 82 percent of the editors ranked as very important or somewhat important, while only 64 percent of the reporters said they expected that skill to be important in their first jobs.

The other disparity in responses that this surveyed revealed which could have significant implications is that editors virtually missed the

Young reporters' ranking of the importance of community news			
Journalistic Activity	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not important or don't know
Know local history and geography	26	57	17
Know names and titles of community leaders	44	45	10
Explain complicated policy issues to readers	46	36	18
Explain government budgets	24	40	36
Understand police and court operations	41	40	20
Understand FOI laws	28	56	16

factor of “need more time for personal interests” as one of the major reasons young reporters say they would leave journalism. Many explanations could be proposed for this. One that will be given here is backed up strongly by several other studies, and that is that editors overestimate the amount they communicate with their staffs, and underestimate the importance of their feedback to reporters’ job satisfaction.

In this survey, 98 percent of the reporters said they expected to get regular feedback from their editors. While insufficient feedback from editors did not show up as one of the major reasons these reporters said they might leave the field, it has proven a factor in other studies. Weaver and Wilhoit found that frequency of comment from supervisors was the second most important factor in job satisfaction. They also found differing perceptions of how frequently editors comment on reporters’ work. In their most recent nationwide study, editors report an increase in how frequently they comment on their staffs’ work, while newspaper journalists report an 11 percent decrease in how often they receive feedback from their editors.^{xii}

The importance of supervisor communication was reinforced in a study of newsroom change at CNN Headline News. The study showed that communication from managers eased the staff’s way through changes and kept the organization from losing staffers. “The more the management communicates with them, the more positive they tend to feel about management and their company.”^{xiii}

Other reports of this topic reinforce the role editors play in retaining employees, and point out that most editors either do not realize the importance of their feedback or have little time to provide it. “At the heart of ...criticism is the sense among rank and file journalists that managers can’t or won’t communicate with them.”^{xiv}

This phenomenon was also reported in the first ASNE nationwide study of journalists. “Of particular concern to editors should be the disparity of opinion between newsroom managers and their staffs over the effectiveness of management and the quality of the newspaper. Editors don’t think feedback is a problem, but their underlings do.”^{xv}

However, rather than heap all the blame on editors for young journalists’ job dissatisfaction and for the communication gap between supervisors and staff, it might be useful to note that editors themselves are lately reporting high job dissatisfaction and are also beginning to leave the newspaper industry, some involuntarily. Said one industry official, “Being an editor is not a comfortable place to be anymore.”^{xvi} An examination of the plight of editors by *American Journalism Review* reveals the increasing pressures on editors from publishers and readers alike. However, the report still blames editors for much of the erosion of newsroom priorities.

Editors across the country have allowed the space allocated to news to diminish and have stood by while journalists have abandoned newspapers for higher paying jobs in new media. In many newsrooms ... reporters complain about having little contact with the top editor, who rarely attends regular news meetings. “Most of America’s top editors are not editing anymore,” says Poynter’s (Jim) Naughton.^{xvii}

Recommendations

Awareness seems to be growing in the newspaper industry that if newspapers are going to attract and retain young reporters, there is going to have to be a change in the newsroom culture as well as in salaries. Within two years, according to the responses in this survey, 67% of the young reporters plan to be gone from their current newspapers and community. This paper, while initially focusing on how editors and reporters differ in their ranking of the importance of community knowledge, also reveals that editors and reporters are not

communicating well with each other in general. For editors to not know that one of the top four reasons journalists give for leaving the field is their need for more time for personal interests indicates that these two groups do not know each other. Perhaps it is too late at most newspapers to reorder the editor’s priorities away from budgets and circulation. But if the heart of the newspaper industry — its young journalists — are to thrive, someone in the editorial structure needs to start talking to them and paying closer attention to their needs.

i Presentation to the Administrators Workshop, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, December 1994, St. Petersburg, Fla.

ii Voakes, Paul S. “The Newspaper Journalists of the ‘90s,” *American Society of Newspaper Editors*, April 1997.

iii Johnstone, John W. C., Slawski, Edward J., Bowman, William W. *The News People: A sociological portrait of American journalists and their work*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1976.

iv Weaver, David H. and Wilhoit, G. Cleveland. *The American Journalist: A portrait of US news people and their work*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1986.

v Weaver, David H. and Wilhoit, G. Cleveland. *The American Journalist in the 1990s*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996.

vi Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, p. 113. The Weaver and Wilhoit study, which was conducted in 1992, showed the median age for journalists had increased to 36 from 32.4 a decade earlier.

vii Hickey, Neil. “Rating the Recruits” *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 1999, p. 38.

viii Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, p. 219.

ix. In Voakes’ nationwide study, half the under-30 respondents were female and 85 percent were white. Voakes, p. 6.

x Voakes reported 11% of newsroom supervisors as minorities but did not provide a specific breakdown of ethnicity for this category. There were 69% male respondents who were newsroom supervisors. Voakes, p. 29.

xi Tharp, Marty. “Turnover and Mobility at Small Daily Newspapers,” *Newspaper Research Journal*, Winter 1991, pp. 78.

xii Weaver, David H. and Wilhoit, G. Cleveland. “Daily newspaper journalists in the 1990s,” *Newspaper Research Journal*, Summer 1994, pp.10.

xiii Daniels, George. “The Relationship Between What Managers Do and How Newsroom Workers Respond in Times of Change.” A paper presented to the Media Management and Economics Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Conference, Phoenix, AZ. August 2000, p. 10.

xiv Pease, Ted. “Blaming the Boss: Newsroom professionals see managers as Public Enemy No. 1,” *Newspaper Research Journal*, Spring 1991. p.1991.

xv Pease, p. 3.

xvi Paterno, Susan. “Risky Business,” *American Journalism Review*. July 2000. p. 36.

xvii Paterno, p. 41.

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Building bridges in Wisconsin

PARTNERS connects collegiate and professional journalism communities

By **Bill Haupt**

"PARTNERS is breaking the ground to be a national model."

*Peter Fox, secretary
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development*

"PARTNERS, as a collaborative effort between industry and higher education, can be a model, not only for the news business nationwide, but also for other businesses."

*Rolf Wegenke, president,
Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities*
"In the last 10 years, I have done about 500 workshops in 46 states, and the program in Wisconsin is the most energetic and far-reaching that I have seen. The program is a flat-out winner, with nothing but good coming from it."

*Clarke Stallworth,
writing coach and journalist, Birmingham, Alabama*

Seeds of thought

For more than 17 years as the editor and publisher of the *Lodi Enterprise* weekly newspaper in Lodi, Wis., I religiously attended Wisconsin Newspaper Association conventions. As a small, independent operator, I eagerly anticipated these meetings to connect me with colleagues and alert me to industry trends and happenings.

As veteran convention attendees are aware, much of the "real learning" at these confabs occurs in the bars, restaurants, or social settings at the host location. That's where folks share their unvarnished stories, dish a little gossip, assist their colleagues, build personal bonds, and offer their visions for a more perfect world. It's nice work, if you can get it.

One theme seemed to repeatedly echo at our informal WNA gatherings: the challenge of recruiting qualified journalists to our newspaper operations. This generally led to a related discussion about college journalism programs, and a host of generally caustic editorial observations. Editors and publishers would routinely complain that students weren't gravitating to print journalism, teachers weren't promoting it, schools didn't care, and it was time for another drink anyway.

Then somebody would talk about Bry Kearn, Les Hawkes, or Blake Kellogg, all longtime friends of WNA and former professors at UW-Madison. They loved newspapers and our industry. And we loved them. They had each contributed so much to our state and our industry through their involvement with us. Why didn't our industry continue to foster these valuable relationships? Why didn't the collegiate community step to the plate? Why weren't we connecting with such a natural partner? Whatever happened to the "Wisconsin Idea," the progressive notion that the educational and professional communities would nurture each other?

Good questions. In fact, they were such good questions that

nobody ever satisfactorily answered them. Or even really tried. Everybody could recognize the potential of this relationship, but nobody could determine how to connect the dots. We needed a matchmaker. When I became president of WNA in the summer of 1998, I appointed myself to this role.

Building the foundation

It was my view that the WNA was uniquely positioned to promote a dialogue with Wisconsin colleges. It was also my view that it was incumbent that WNA assume the initiative. We were foolhardy as an industry to expect some college representatives to magically appear on our doorsteps. We would need to aggressively pursue this relationship.

I felt qualified to lead this charge. By 1998, I already had 15 years of experience as an editor and publisher. I had developed a strong network of personal contacts with state publishers through my involvement with WNA, and felt confident that I understood the temper of our times. More importantly, I had 15 years of experience organizing a countless array of newspaper and community programs. To be successful, a small town publisher must learn to "connect the dots" and build a network of community support. The same fundamentals, I reasoned, would apply on a statewide basis.

Living near Madison, I also had the privilege of working closely with a number of outstanding college journalism instructors over the years. I was impressed with their enthusiasm for journalism, their commitment to free speech, the talents and skills they offered, and their willingness to offer assistance. I considered them a tremendous resource for our organization, and wonderful friends as well. We simply needed to expand the wealth.

Presidency as a platform

I was determined to use my year as WNA president as a platform. I knew we'd need to "hit the ground running" with such a wide-ranging initiative in order to build interest and enthusiasm. At the WNA board meeting on the day of my induction as president in June 1998, I outlined my vision to connect our industry to the university community. I discussed the importance of this venture and the mutual rewards that could be reaped. I also asked for \$10,000 to invite students and faculty from campuses throughout Wisconsin to attend our annual convention as the guests of WNA. Fortunately, the WNA board was extremely supportive of the entire concept and also agreed to underwrite the convention costs.

Later that summer, a meeting was held at my Lodi home with a group of educators, newspaper folks, and WNA staff. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the possibility of creating an ongoing program that would connect newspapers and the university community in a way that would create dividends for everyone.

Significantly, we came to the meeting with money in our pocket and a proposal for our academic friends. We proposed that WNA would provide up to \$10,000 to invite two students and one advi-

sor from each campus newspaper in Wisconsin to attend our annual winter convention. Our intent was to “break bread” together, begin a dialogue, and discover opportunities to work together. The hope of establishing a campus membership category, creating a college newspaper contest, and conducting job fairs was also considered. The ultimate objective, we stressed, was to ultimately create a fluid network between the educational and professional communities.

Our college friends, representing 59 post-secondary public, private, and technical colleges in Wisconsin, warmly received our proposal. Our commitment of \$10,000 indicated our seriousness and clearly impressed our guests. They knew we meant business. And they knew that we had a legitimate vision that we could collectively realize. They were more than willing to support us. The enthusiasm began to build.

Planning for success

During the summer and fall of 1998, we began to build an administrative foundation to support this effort. A group of educators and interested newspaper folks worked as a de facto oversight committee. This was essentially the group that had gathered in my Lodi home earlier in the summer.

We divided Wisconsin into six separate regions, and recruited a weekly and daily representative as leaders in each region. These regional leaders would be asked to host meetings with student and faculty representatives from colleges in their region to serve as resource people in their areas. We decided at that time to implement a regional approach, mainly to connect newspapers with colleges in their geographic neighborhood. The WNA office would serve as the administrative hub.

We also decided on a name: PARTNERS 2000: Building Success in News. This effort would be an equal partnership among the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System, the Wisconsin Association of Colleges and Universities, UW-Extension, and the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. And it was focused on the future — a quickly approaching new century.

About 60 state education leaders and recently appointed regional directors then gathered in Stevens Point in November. We met, broke bread, shared ideas, discussed convention plans and outlined our vision. PARTNERS was clearly gaining momentum.

Bully pulpit

As part of my presidency, I had been writing a weekly column in the WNA Bulletin. I used this forum to repeatedly promote PARTNERS and update the membership on our related activities. Relying on my weekly newspaper background, I routinely included the names of anyone involved with the PARTNERS program. A genuine sense of community was building.

A great sense of momentum was building for our January 1999 convention and the formal inauguration of PARTNERS. In the 1999 WNA convention brochure, I wrote: “PARTNERS 2000 is designed to build bridges between our educational institutions and the newspapers in Wisconsin. Through internships, externships, joint training efforts, and simply building the lines of communication, we think this will prove to be an exciting and fruitful relationship. It officially commences at this convention.”

First WNA/PARTNERS convention

That first convention featured a special programming track for college students, 60 “best and brightest” student grant recipients and advisors selected by the participating schools, a résumé job bank and a student-produced convention tab. The convention was also notable for the banquet attendance of the state’s top post-secondary educational leaders, who publicly and enthusiastically endorsed the PARTNERS concept.

The buzz at the convention was extremely favorable. Newspaper folks and educators were routinely inclined to suggest that this was a “great idea” and wondered why we hadn’t been doing this for years. The infusion of young people at our convention was especially welcome. They were so bright, and interested and fun. It was wonderful to be around them. People began to think of possibilities and a sense of momentum continued to build.

This interest did not escape the attention of the WNA board. We clearly sensed that PARTNERS was a winner. At our board meeting during the convention, WNA agreed to fund PARTNERS at the \$10,000 level for the next two years. The board also established a campus membership category and agreed to add a college student representative to the WNA board and the WNA sales advisory committee. We were beginning to really pour some cement in our foundation forms.

Foundation is set

By the end of my presidency, PARTNERS enjoyed a firm foothold on the WNA landscape. The key at this juncture was to begin recruiting schools as formal WNA members and to build on the framework we had established throughout the previous year.

A membership agreement was forged that would allow schools to become WNA members in exchange for complimentary advertising space in campus newspapers. This arrangement would allow schools to join WNA with full membership benefits and no out-of-pocket costs. In turn, WNA could use the ad space to promote the newspaper industry and student journalists. By January 2000, 15 of Wisconsin’s 47 schools with student newspapers had joined the association.

By the 2000 convention, we had also commenced a job fair and began a single category college newspaper contest that was expanded to 10 categories in 2001. Faculty advisors at participating schools were also formally gathering for the first time. The pieces were falling in place, pretty much as we had envisioned.

Challenges in 2000

What we hadn’t envisioned was the economic downturn of 2000 and unusual turnover among our regional directors. This resulted in staff cutbacks at the WNA office and a lack of direction in various regions of the state. PARTNERS was established and popular. However, like anything, it would need to be nurtured to grow and remain strong. Who was to assume this role?

In December 2000, my wife and I sold the *Lodi Enterprise*. I decided that I would dedicate time and effort in 2001 to personally visit schools throughout the state to promote the program and recruit new members. I would also assume all costs associated with this effort.

By January 2001, 29 schools were officially members of the association and about 170 students and advisors were attending our annual convention. The program was continuing to grow and flourish.

The good news was that PARTNERS was extremely popular.

However, a concern was growing among WNA members that the program would stumble without my personal involvement. At the WNA convention in 2002, Foundation President Larry Tobin (*Tomahawk Leader*, Tomahawk, Wis.) shared these concerns with me. He asked me to design a position that would largely incorporate the duties I had undertaken as a volunteer to sustain the program. Tobin said the Foundation did not have money to underwrite the position, but we needed to be concerned about the future of the program if something should happen to me.

WNA Foundation support

In June 2002, I presented the WNA Foundation with the outline for a position to coordinate the PARTNERS program. I detailed the anticipated job responsibilities and projected a total cost of about \$45,000, including benefits and expenses. I also offered to personally fill the role for \$30,000 as an independent contractor, including my expenses. Additionally, I agreed to return \$5,000 to the Foundation to establish a possible prototype scholarship program at UW-Eau Claire, where our Hall of Fame is headquartered.

While the Foundation lacked the funds to support this venture, an anonymous newspaperman in the state learned of the proposal and said he'd underwrite the \$30,000 cost of the program. That gratifying gesture perhaps reflects the genuine support for PARTNERS in the state of Wisconsin. With that support, I commenced an active schedule of visiting colleges throughout Wisconsin and promoting PARTNERS. I also started to write monthly columns in the WNA Bulletin, updating members on our activities and progress.

By June 2003, our college membership included 40 schools, attendance at convention was steady at about 170 registrants, the college newspaper contest was established, the job fair was a fixture, and meaningful bonds have developed between the newspaper and education communities. PARTNERS is a solid success story.

WNA a progressive leader

Our support for PARTNERS positions WNA as a progressive leader in private-public partnerships. This role has spawned synergies within the educational and professional communities. Proposals for scholarships, a capitol bureau for student political reporters, WNA involvement with high school and minority journalists, and other opportunities have been prompted through PARTNERS. Perhaps most significantly, some of our member colleges credit PARTNERS for reviving or dramatically elevating their campus publication.

At the WNA Foundation meeting in June 2003, I offered to continue coordinating the PARTNERS program for one additional year. I personally felt that one more year of focused effort was desired to recruit the few remaining uncommitted schools and strengthen the platform we have established in the last five years. The WNA Foundation members agreed and will fund the program for an additional year. At the conclusion of that year, I recommended to the Foundation that the position be re-evaluated and that greater resources be provided to the WNA office to undertake these responsibilities.

PARTNERS will continue to be overseen and directed by WNA's Education Outreach Committee. This committee includes several folks who gathered in 1998 to found the program, and a mix of journalists, educators, and interested pals from throughout the state. Together, we honestly believe we are partnering for brighter future for all of us.

Bill Haupt is a former president of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors. This article was originally presented to the ninth annual Newspapers and Community-Building Symposium, sponsored by the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media and the National Newspaper Association Foundation, in Kansas City, Mo., Sept. 24-27, 2003.

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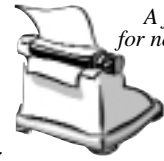
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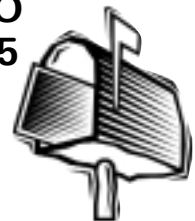
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