

grassroots editor



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When the national spotlight hits:

How should the hometown paper respond?

By Don Corrigan

Introduction

When a horrendous crime takes place in your own backyard — and the national news media descend with cameras, satellite dishes, 24-7 coverage and twenty times more reporters than you have on your own news staff — how does your community newspaper cope, never mind compete?

This paper and presentation were to be originally based on the events surrounding the apprehension of a kidnapper and molester, Michael Devlin, who terrorized two boys in his Kirkwood, Mo., apartment while carrying on a normal life in the community by day. When he and his crimes were discovered in January 2007, the national news media went into frenzy mode and also targeted a small community with some tough criticism.

In the Devlin case, one of the kidnapped boys, Shawn Hornbeck, was held captive for five years and sexually abused. A second boy, Ben Ownby, was kidnapped and held in the same Kirkwood apartment for several days until police caught up with Devlin. When the case broke, the national news media blanketed the St. Louis suburb and also called on the community newspaper, the *Webster-Kirkwood Times*, to provide background, photos and interviews.

The length of Hornbeck's captivity prompted troubling questions: Why didn't neighbors notice that Shawn was not attending school? Why did it take four years for police to crack the case? Fox Cable's Bill O'Reilly of the "No-Spin Zone" suggested that captive youngster, Hornbeck, enjoyed playing video games and using a computer so much at Devlin's residence that he did not mind being a prisoner of the sexual predator.

As shocking as the Devlin case was in all its disgusting detail, it was overshadowed a year later, when a lone gunman entered Kirkwood City Council Chambers in suburban St. Louis on Feb. 7, 2008, and continued a shooting rampage that began outside Kirkwood City Hall. When the shooting spree at city hall finally ended, six people were dead, including the perpetrator, Kirkwood resident Charles "Cookie" Thornton. Two more were wounded, a reporter shot in the hand and the Kirkwood mayor who was shot twice in the head.

This paper will now necessarily focus on the more recent incident and the coverage of the Kirkwood City Hall Massacre — and the questions and issues raised by that coverage. Among those questions:

- What is the community newspaper's responsibility to its own reporters who are eyewitness to murder? Can an editorial staff experience both short and long-term post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of a horrendous crime?
- When community officials ask the hometown paper to not print all the information that its staff knows — until prosecutors act and formal press conferences are held — what is the paper's obligation?
- What is the community newspaper's obligation to the national news media — CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN, FOX and more — as their requests for background and interviews pile up?
- How can the community weekly compete on the crime story, when the national dailies are on-site and the cable news channels are covering the story on a 24-7 schedule? What advantages does the community weekly have in this competitive atmosphere?
- What role should the community newspaper play toward healing a community and furthering reconciliation and understanding after a crime that is racially charged and divisive?

Journalism and trauma

It should be noted that although this is an academic paper and the author is a professor of journalism, this paper is also written from the perspective of the author's role as newspaper editor of the weekly *Webster-*

Kirkwood Times. Much of this paper is a first-hand account of the events of Feb. 7 in Kirkwood, Mo., and what followed. When news of the city hall massacre began airing on local radio and television, the first concern was for the *Times* reporter, Marty Harris, who regularly covered city hall. Although the reporter was not injured, she was directly behind the city public works director who was killed execution-style.

After a debriefing by police officials, Harris was shielded from media interview requests, allowed to take as much time off as she deemed necessary and also offered counseling — as many employees of the city of Kirkwood also were offered. However, the tragedy had an impact on the entire newspaper staff, as those who lost their lives were well known and, in some cases, friends of staffers. In the case of this editor/academic, two of the victims were scheduled as college class speakers the week of the murders. The city council member, Connie Karr, spoke to a community journalism class several days before her murder. The police officer who handles media relations, Tom Ballman, was scheduled to speak on Friday morning, but was murdered on the February Thursday night before the class.

A local Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) meeting was very helpful in the aftermath of the Kirkwood shootings. A number of editors and reporters who covered the Feb. 7 incident were in attendance. Terri Weaver, a trauma expert and professor of psychology at St. Louis University, said whole towns can be traumatized, as well as individuals, in the aftermath of extreme violence. Weaver, a Virginia Tech alum, is very familiar with the trauma that the town of Blacksburg, Va., has been going through as a result of the 33 shooting deaths on the local campus.

Professor Weaver acquainted reporters and editors with information on tragedies and journalists compiled by the University of Washington's Dart Center For Journalism and Trauma. It would, of course, be far better if journalism organizations were familiar with the Dart Center and its work before major tragedies hit and reporters find themselves in the middle of horrendous situations. The center provides a useful guidebook for all media organizations with tips on how to cope during and after the coverage of tragic events.

Among the Dart Center's observations: "Journalists have a history of denial. There is a perception that you are unprofessional if 'you can't handle it.' Journalists claim they are unaffected to their colleagues. But this false bravado takes its toll." The Center advises professional counseling and offers techniques for reducing stress after immersion in covering tragic events.

Community journalism vs. sensationalism

Community journalism operates, almost by necessity, with different ethical standards than the

national news media, and that became most apparent in both the Devlin kidnapping and the Kirkwood City Hall massacre cases. In the Devlin case, Oprah Winfrey provided the parents of son, Shawn Ownby, with a free trip to Chicago and other enticements for an exclusive TV interview. A *New York Post* reporter used deception and posed as a good friend of the kidnapper to get a jailhouse interview. Several cable outlets went with stories about sexual molestation before such charges were brought against kidnapper Devlin.

In the case of the Kirkwood shootings, the *Times* and the downtown St. Louis media outlets restrained themselves from naming the victims of the shootings in initial stories. Some national news media outlets did not show such restraint, despite repeated requests to wait until a morning news conference by Kirkwood and St. Louis County law enforcement officials. In fact, the community newspaper, *Webster-Kirkwood Times*, was in a position to name most of the victims in its Web site coverage, but deferred to official requests related to notification of next of kin.

The question arises as to whether this restraint is an ethical issue or a practical issue. Obviously, there are some ethical concerns in disseminating unconfirmed reports — and in focusing more on journalistic scoops rather than the sensitivities of family relationships and notification of next of kin. On the other hand, community newspapers have to be sensitive to burning bridges with local officials. The national news media pack up their satellite dishes and move onto the next tragedy, often without concern as to who may have been crossed or compromised in their quest for the journalistic scoop.

Obviously, the community newspaper, *Webster-Kirkwood Times*, generated a certain degree of goodwill by cooperating with officials during the tragic events. Also obvious is the importance and continuity of the community newspaper's good relationship with its readership by avoiding sensationalism and pressures to go with unconfirmed material

CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN, FOX...

It is this journalist's feeling that there should not be a double standard when it comes to granting interviews and being cooperative with the news media. If we feel the general public should be cooperative with community newspapers, then shouldn't we in the community press be cooperative and willing to be interviewed by the national news media?

In the aftermath of the February 7 Kirkwood shootings, the *Webster-Kirkwood Times* cooperated as much as possible by sharing past stories and pictures with the national news media. A front-page feature photo from almost a decade earlier of the killer, Charles "Cookie" Thornton, was shared and seen around the world. In most cases, the national news media credited the *Times* with the photo as requested, but not always. The *Times* also shared past stories on Thornton's history of run-ins with city hall, as well as more positive stories about the deceased and a seriously wounded Kirkwood mayor.

There comes a point, however, when the community newspaper has to do its own job and resist all the requests for interviews by the national news media. The job of reporting and shooting photos at six different funerals was overwhelming. The newspaper had to rely on stringers in many cases, part-time reporters and photographers whose assistance was invaluable.

Two anecdotal stories that will stay with me forever from the terrible events of February 7, involved the national television news media. The first involved a CBS "Good Morning America" employee who called me at home at 1:30 a.m., just hours after the shootings, and pleaded with me to give her the phone number of our reporter, Marty Harris, who witnessed the city hall shootings. When I told her I would not give up the phone number and that I would talk to Harris in the morning about whether she wanted to comply with this interview request, I was told about the deadline demands of "Good Morning America."

When I refused to give up the phone number, the CBS employee told me that "Good Morning America" and all of the United States "wanted to reach out to Marty and express sympathy." Then I was told that CBS Anchor Katie Couric wanted to reach out to Marty. Finally, the employee told me that "my boss is going to kill me if I don't get this interview." I hung up, but I was tempted to tell her that the *Webster-Kirkwood Times* would reach out to her family if her boss did, indeed, kill her.

A second anecdote regarding the national news media involves Chris Bury of ABC's "Nightline", formerly hosted by Ted Koppel. Bury wanted to interview the editor of the local community newspaper for a story on the Devlin kidnapping case in January 2007, and I complied. We met in front of the iconic Kirkwood Train Station. In February 2008, Bury called again requesting an interview in Kirkwood about Charles "Cookie" Thornton and the murders at city hall — and what our newspaper knew. Unfortunately, we could not work out a time that worked for either of us, largely because I was attending funerals, including one unrelated to the murders.

"Don't worry about it. Forget it," Bury said. "It's more important now for you to be human."

Competing on the story

Twelve years ago it would have been inconceivable for the community weekly newspaper, The *Webster-Kirkwood Times*, to compete on a big story such as the slayings at Kirkwood City Hall. The downtown St. Louis TV stations were on the scene live for days. National networks also covered the story for several days — some seemed to leave only after another shooting spree later in February at Northern Illinois University. The daily newspaper, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, also had far more resources to cover the killings and the aftermath with in-depth accounts.

However, the weekly newspaper has a Web site

and utilized it more than on any other story in its 12-year presence on the Internet. The Kirkwood community came to rely on the site and posted dozens of letters and expressions of sympathy. On the night of the shootings, the Web site posted original stories and photos, which scooped the print daily, although the *Post* did utilize its own Web site as well.

The community newspaper had an advantage in two areas: First, the *Times* was able to post archival material that no other media possessed, because no other media have covered the community so closely for 30 years. Second, the *Times* could personalize and humanize the story, because the newspaper is an integral part of the Kirkwood community. Staffers knew all the major characters in the tragedy on a personal level and had written about many of them for years.

On the first count, the *Times* had an extensive archive of stories to post, including a feature profile on the killer in happier times when he volunteered as a tutor in a local school reading program. Later stories focused on Charles “Cookie” Thornton’s altercations with Kirkwood City Hall after the city annexed his minority neighborhood and began enforcing zoning ordinances that affected him.

Also, the paper was able to post a four-part series on the history of the annexation of the Meacham Park neighborhood in which Thornton lived. This history was helpful in dispelling some of the racially charged accusations made in the aftermath of the shootings. These accusations included charges that the city did a land grab of the neighborhood strictly for commercial development purposes, while neglecting the needs of the minority residents and providing them with poor services.

On the issue of personalizing the story, columnists for the newspaper genuinely shared the grief of the community, both the city of Kirkwood’s grief and its annexed neighborhood known as Meacham Park. Memorials and private funerals were covered. Biographies of the victims’ lives were included in memorial stories. Acts of kindness were regularly reported in the paper following the shootings in an effort to provide hope for all those affected.

Healing the community

Many readers applauded the community newspaper’s extensive coverage of the terrible days in Kirkwood following the shootings. Many readers also advised the newspaper that it had a heavy responsibility in healing the community and promoting understanding with its future coverage. Part of this was a reaction to editorial columns and coverage by the daily *Post-Dispatch*, which some residents felt was fanning the flames of hostility, rather than encouraging an atmosphere of communication and reconciliation.

In fact, some readers became disenchanted with the *Times* coverage in the aftermath of the shootings. Some readers said the community newspaper wasn’t doing enough to cover a broken community and its attempts at understanding what happened in Kirkwood. A smaller number accused the newspaper of siding with the “powers that be” and not providing enough context for the events that led up to the shootings.

Others accused the newspaper of dragging out and sensationalizing the coverage of what was an aberration — the act of a madman — and that it was time for all of the news media to move on. A smaller number accused the newspaper of siding with extremists and loud mouths. A blogger even set up a Web site, in part, to accuse the community newspaper of giving voice to angry minorities who were engaging in attacks on the city.

Actually, the community newspaper and its Web site hosted a series of forums — a series that still continues — in which all kinds of opinions were expressed on the shooting incident and why they occurred. As often happens in journalism, the newspaper was accused by the various parties in these forums of taking one side or the other. Most readers, however, expressed support for the community paper for covering the forums and for allowing all voices to be heard.

Terri Weaver, a trauma expert and professor of psychology at St. Louis University, told an SPJ meeting in the aftermath of the shootings that the door cannot be readily or easily closed on an event as cataclysmic as what happened at Kirkwood City Hall.

She said it’s unhealthy for a community to not ask questions and to not talk through and “make meaning” of traumatic events. Weaver said a coping mechanism, which can be quite healthy, comes when survivors try to initiate positive change after a traumatic event.

As a community newspaper, The *Webster-Kirkwood Times* has tried to initiate positive change through stories and columns. It also has tried to follow the advice on trauma coverage of Tom French, a journalist with the *St. Petersburg Times* and the Poynter Institute.

“Find a human focus,” advises French. “And if you can, try to gain altitude. Rise above the rubble, above the devastation — both physical and emotional — and find the deeper meaning that’s rippling through all of our lives.”

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The bulk of this paper was drawn from information that actually appeared in *Webster-Kirkwood Times* coverage of the two major crime events that occurred in 2007 and 2008 in the city of Kirkwood, Mo.

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Seeking the essence: Community journalism meets the digital age

By Jacquelyn Lowman

The promise

Some view the Internet with fear, the death knell of community journalism. But what of its opportunities, its ability to serve as a venue to enhance what community journalism does best: give hyper-local coverage, find the unique in each place, give every voice a chance to be heard?

I did a pilot project with one of my classes in which students created simple multimedia packages for online: as any paper with a Web site could. We teamed up with our daily paper (circ. 30,000). Students adopted outlying small communities that the daily served marginally.

The adopted communities were within roughly 30 minutes of the university. The students' assignment was to find their communities' essence. The students were to visit their communities at least every other week and chronicle this in blogs that they published on the online version of the daily. The blogs were to get the students into the communities early and often so they could build the relationships that would lead to rich stories and easy filming. The packages were to have video-audio clips, stills and text. Despite the hype of the video, the text was still key.

There were challenges, but the technology was not high on that list. The students quickly mastered that. No, the biggest hurdles involved old-fashioned journalism. The students didn't have a neat assignment with clear-cut ends: how would they know the essence, they asked. They found it hard, initially, to get out of their cars and initiate conversations with strangers. They had to juggle other schoolwork and jobs with the black hole of this project.

Ultimately, though, the results exceeded my wildest dreams. The students produced amazing work and will be better community journalists, more equipped for the future. The adopted communities gained recognition and had their voices, literally, heard, gaining an infusion of life. The daily tapped groups and used content and methods it otherwise would not have.

Everything but the kitchen sink

The class, Writing for Electronic Media, tends to be small and eclectic. Students come in with various preconceptions. Some enter expecting a class teaching broadcast writing. Others anticipate a Web design course. I think of it as my "everything but the kitchen sink" class. It was the only journalism writing class in the department not explicitly for print.

So I'm continually trying to adapt it to reflect evolving media.

The course is never the same twice. Each year we try to embrace and utilize some newer form of technology, some more up-to-date application. Yet we do not use technology for its own sake. We look upon it as a tool to reach more people, a way to make work easier and more effective. My students sometimes become fixated on the high tech. But I remind them at every opportunity that good writing is good writing. Yes, you need to continually adapt to the medium and the audience. But if you know what you need to say, where you're saying it and to whom, those good writing skills are easily transferable.

I frequently nudged my students not to become fixated on a particular technology. I repeated the old adage that as soon as one brings home or downloads the latest thing, it is already out of date. If their work lives span the typical range of many decades, by the time they're ready to retire, they'll be using technology that we can't begin to imagine now. The things I wanted my students to gain from their tech encounters were flexibility, adaptability, faith in themselves and their abilities to effectively grapple with however media evolves.

Although the audio-video clips drew the most student attention, the heart of the assignment was telling the stories of places and people who are often overlooked and marginalized. At some level, they were giving voice to the voiceless. Initially, the students thought that filming and editing video would be the hard parts of the project. This posed varying challenges.

But by far the most difficult aspect was going out with such a nebulous assignment to an unfamiliar place and having to establish enough rapport and familiarity to discover its essence and let its people tell its story. *This* was very difficult for people. All the students had demanding schedules filled with other classes, work and an attempt at a personal life. Finding the time to make the biweekly trips could be hard. At a time of soaring gas prices, during harvest time and inclement weather, getting to the communities could be hard. Hardest for most, though, was getting out of the car and initiating conversation with complete strangers. What to talk about? How could they find the essence? How would they know when they did?

At one point or another, nearly everyone had a meltdown. My oldest student, afraid of technology (he did not even own a computer), blew up in class one day. He shouted, then pouted, intimidating the

rest of the students. For the balance of the students, THE big problem was initiating conversation with strangers and interviewing without a clear-cut topic. Interestingly, the student who had the most trouble with this was also my most experienced journalist who was already working full time for the regional daily paper. But in his job, he always had definite assignments. This project was terrifyingly amorphous. For weeks he gave me wire-service-based stories rather than the requisite blogs chronicling community visits and experiences. It became obvious that he was not visiting his adopted community. So we talked and adjusted the assignment so that he could complete it successfully.

Each community and its essence is unique, as is each student's experiences with the project. Thus, I'd like to share a bit of each student's project narrative and their reflections on what the project meant to them.

All about the people

Kurt,¹ in his thirties, was our oldest class member. He had been working on his degree, sporadically, for more than a decade. But now he was nearing the finish line: this was to be his last semester. He was taking a heavy load to finish and dreamed of a career in radio. He was a large man with a big, booming voice and strong opinions. He was also an unsure writer and a technological neophyte. He did not own a computer, but got by using those in the union. His classmates and I worked with him one on one and gave him extra time and instruction so that he could succeed. His was the biggest learning curve and despite our encouragement, he occasionally strongly vented his frustrations in class.

Despite some rough patches, Kurt stretched and grew enormously. His final verdict: "As my mother always told me 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.' I would recommend this course to anyone, not just communication majors."

Kurt's adopted community was Manvel, a town of about 350 roughly 10 miles north of Grand Forks. He wrote movingly about its essence, particularly in his concluding paragraphs.

The new hockey arena's unveiling was a true Manvel highlight. The Jason Stadstad Hockey Arena had its grand opening Sunday, November 4, 2007...Jason Stadstad died of cancer on December 17, 2006. This is a way to remember him...Some of Stadstad's friends helped put up the boards around the arena. As Stadstad's best friend, Kyle Beckstead, said, "It's all in loving memory of a very smart kid who wanted to come to UND and pursue

a degree in business and eventually become a successful business owner..."

People in Manvel come together, share, find the best in any situation and triumph. And they never let go of a great sense of humor. The patrons of the American Legion, for example, have renamed the four North Dakota seasons. "We have four seasons: spring, road construction, cold and colder." Yet there's nowhere they'd rather be.

Manvel is a small community with genuine people and a wholesome attitude. Spending time there reminds you of what really matters. It's all about the people.

More than meets the eye

Jan has the dubious distinction of having taken as many classes with me as anyone else at the University of North Dakota: five. She has a background in radio, is a born organizer and advocate, and has strong journalism instincts. She didn't need the class but chose it for very personal reasons.

I knew that I wanted to take this class from the time I heard the description. It wasn't because of the outcome or the media package that we had produced by the end of the semester. I wanted to create something that would help me in the future, but I wanted to push myself to a higher level of what I thought I might be able to do.

The most important things I learned from my trips to Larimore were things I had not learned as a reporter before. I've always relied on the paper and pencil to get me through and I've had good luck with people being responsive. When I was armed with a video camera, it was a lot different than when I was just carrying my paper and pencil...

My biggest challenge was approaching people to talk to because, although I'm friendly, I have a hard time initiating a conversation with people. It's even more difficult when you have to explain who you are and what you're doing. Building trust usually takes some time and, in this case, I had to learn about people and build the relationships quickly...

Education can take you on many journeys; this class really sent me on trips. I made weekly trips to a small town that I didn't expect much out of, but I got a lot more than I could have ever expected...

Jan's adopted community was Larimore, N.D. Here are some of her essence highlights.

Larimore lies three miles off U.S. Highway 2, about 25 miles west of Grand Forks and a short drive from the Grand Forks Air Force Base. The town offers more than some people would expect from a small community.

From the Larimore mansion hidden on Washington Avenue to the Larimore School District and the Good Friends Bar and Café, there's a lot to see. The bowling alley in Larimore offers some evenings just for kids, and Good Friends Bar and Café has a dart league on Wednesday nights and a pool league later in the week. There's even Moonless Golf at the golf course in the summer and early fall...

Most recently, the community banded together to

raise more than \$100,000 for a new playground at the elementary school. And the Larimore Booster Club raises money for school activities such as after-prom supplies and the speech team. If you look around Larimore, you will see many other indications that the community is giving and vibrant...

Larimore might be small, but it's a strong community that continues to defy the trend toward declining population that many other small towns in North Dakota are experiencing. This is probably because of its welcoming atmosphere and location. It's a small town that's just far enough from Grand Forks, but close enough at the same time.

Dog paddling all the way

I was probably more concerned about Tim than any other student in the class. I had had him before and knew that he was a gifted writer. But he was just starting to work full time at the regional daily paper and was trying to go to school full time as well. My courses are demanding and he was taking two of them. I wondered how he would bear up.

Tim made it through with some creative scheduling, pushing, pulling, and encouragement. Although it may seem surprising, he found conducting interviews with strangers harder than any other of the students. While part of his livelihood depends on interviewing people, those conversations are always highly structured, for a definite purpose and with people he's been covering. This class demanded that he approach strangers about the amorphous essence of their community. Although he was never really at ease with the process, he navigated the deep water and kept himself afloat.

Tim describes what it was like.

Students quickly learned that the blogs were time-consuming. Personally, the hardest part of the blogs was the idea of going into a town without invitation and firing up a conversation for an interview. I'm not sure I actually ever got over that, but at least I got to listen to Ryan in class talk about what it was like to immerse himself in Buxton...

We also were able to learn the important skills of filming and editing film, as well as editing audio from our fieldtrip to the Red River Farm Network. Almost every daily newspaper in the country is beginning to incorporate video and audio more and more onto their Web sites. As easy as it sounds, there were definitely lessons learned in creating video for our projects. Personally, the experience is something that very soon I'll likely use often. It was nice to be in a class that focused on the future of a business, rather than the history. In this aspect, the class was able to draw from the expertise of different students. Ryan was able to show us how to use the cameras and Jan helped some edit the audio assignment.

At times, it's pretty safe to say we all nearly drowned in attempting to make it through Comm. 353. But the experiences we've gained have prepared us for the electronic age of journalism. Even for those not interested in media careers, the writing and editing are valuable and essential in all career paths that

a student may choose.

Tim adopted Thompson, N.D., a small town less than 10 miles south of Grand Forks. I hoped that Thompson's proximity and strong athletic traditions (Tim is a sports writer) would make the community essence project less onerous for Tim. Tim clearly based a number of his weekly blogs on online or telephone research, not on community visits, as was required. We had continual discussions about this. I wondered how his project would come together. Toward the end of the term, however, we tossed him a few lifesavers so that he could swim that final victory lap. I suggested that he interview the school baseball coach, whom he already knew from covering the team. Another member of the class connected Tim with a few Thompson natives who were now attending UND. With these elements of structure as a base, Tim put together some good interviews. Despite his initial reluctance to work with audio and video, he proved more than competent with both and put together a fine multimedia package.

As he described the essence of Thompson, his writing gifts were manifest.

Finding the essence of Thompson, N.D., doesn't often require leaving North Dakota Highway 15. That's the main drag through this town that sits about seven miles south of Grand Forks, along Interstate 29. From there, any passer-by can see the giant green billboard proclaiming Thompson High School's state baseball titles. At the same time, a look around would see that apart from Highway 15, there are no paved roads. By this point, a police car has probably cruised past.

No matter what people say about Thompson, they mention those three aspects of the town again and again: the apparent dynasty of Thompson baseball, the dusty gravel roads and the famously strict law enforcement...

Many...come to Thompson with plans of commuting to work in Grand Forks. Some, naturally, were born and raised in the city.

"My parents lived here," Thompson teacher and baseball coach John Dolleslager said. "And I guess I never left."

Thompson played a vital role during the Red River flood of 1997 that devastated Grand Forks and caused its residents to evacuate. Many Thompson homeowners housed the refugees, briefly doubling the town's population. Thompson School housed many Grand Forks students, as well.

Throughout North Dakota and the region, many know Thompson as an athletic powerhouse. But residents past and present appreciate additional virtues.

"We could run around and play at night and not worry about anything." (Thompson native Aaron) Johnsen said. "Other kids in Grand Forks might've had to worry..."

Thompson clearly inspires fierce loyalties among current and former residents. What is it that makes it so special? For some, it's prestigious athletics. For others, it's a warm, small-town feel. But above all, Thompson's booming community seems

wonderful home for all who love the peacefulness of the town and the proximity to Grand Forks.

Adventure and a big heart

Beverly became a communication major late in her college career. She had started out in physical therapy and nutrition. Then she decided that she wanted to become an events planner and communication seemed to be the best major for that career. Although she did not plan on a career in journalism/media, Beverly was one of our class's better writers. She was also reliable, hardworking and intensely motivated. If Beverly undertook something, you could count on it being done well and cheerfully.

A native of Minnesota, Beverly adopted a nearby Minnesota community: Fisher. Here, she reflects on her adopted community, the ties that she forged with it and other aspects of our class.

I made my first trip to Fisher the second week of school, and I just drove through eyeing up places I would visit the next time around. I got a good feel of the town and felt like I knew my way around after the first trip! Through this project, I learned a lot about the community of Fisher and the tremendous heart that overflows with kindness throughout the town.

Not only did I learn a lot about another community through this, but I also learned a great deal about writing for the Internet. We wrote weekly blogs that we posted on the *Grand Forks Herald* Web site, so we learned to turn our personal experiences into something others would want to read. I learned about the process you go through in putting stuff up online.

With the help of Dr. J and Kyle Dunnigan, I was able to learn how to edit video and audio, and create a video clip for online purposes. This is a skill that will just be nice to have. It allowed me to realize I can learn how to do anything...

Other struggles that the semester brought include, stepping out of my comfort zone for interviewing and video purposes, making a trip to Fisher weekly, and occasionally having a work overload. I must note that sometimes that work overload was, in part, due to my procrastination. Meeting deadlines was a challenge at times, mainly because things usually get put off until the last minute...As challenging as the class may have been, my overall experience was positive...I learned a lot about life experience and got a chance to brush up my writing skills. There are things I will take with me and use later on...There are also things that I will just always remember...

I used to say to my family and friends that if I didn't take this class, I'd have nothing to do. But since I was taking the class, I had *everything* to do. Though it was the class that generated the most work for me, and at times was the cause of major headaches, I really enjoyed it and am glad that I took it. I learned a lot and had a great time doing it.

Beverly was struck by the warmth of her small adopted community of Fisher.

There is nothing more inviting than a warm smile and a heartfelt welcome from a stranger. When you

enter the small community of Fisher, Minn., you will experience nothing less than that. The very small population figure of 453 says nothing about the heart of this community. This is something no set of numbers can measure...

Beverly got to see the big heart of her small adopted community of Fisher in action. She was there to see community members rally round one of their own, who was grievously ill. The town's main institutions, the American Legion and the school, along with most of the community members, stepped up to help.

American Legion Post 242 is an important place in the community. Its building houses a bar area with a pool table and a dart board and a large dining area connected to a kitchen. Members have fish fries, pig roasts, host benefits and have burger nights every Wednesday.

This fall, they had a benefit for a young man, Evan Korynta, who graduated from high school in Fisher in 2000 and is battling cancer. Scott Hjelmstad, the bartender and manager at the Legion, said, "We had a great turnout. It's great to see everyone in the community come together." Evan now lives in Lawrence, Kan. Yet the people of Fisher still came together to support him.

The high school is also a huge part of Fisher's large, beating heart. They paid a tribute to Evan this fall, as well. In addition to a benefit held there, students decided to dedicate their homecoming to Evan. The theme was "'07 for Evan." This was in honor of the 1999 football team, which was the first team to make it to state in 25 years. It was also one of Evan's teams. Evan was an athlete on both the football and basketball teams in high school.

"Because of the smallness of the community, you see a lot of outpouring of support, especially in times like this," Tami Newhouse, elementary coordinator and Title I instructor, said. She was referring to all the town had done in honor of Evan during homecoming....

As you can see, the community of Fisher may be small, but its large and warm heart makes up for that. The town is inviting and upbeat, and residents come together to meet the needs of one another.

As for a stranger coming into town, you will only be a stranger the second you enter the room. Instantly, someone will greet you and you will become part of the community.

Knowing everyone — and loving it

Amelia was truly my accidental student. She came into the class completely by chance.

I took this class out of a lucky draw. I was in Spain and I needed to register for classes. With an advisor on maternity leave and no plan of study in the country, I had no idea what to take. I called my sister and she told me four classes to take, none of which were in my plan of study. I changed my plan of study to fit in with the courses I was taking, but Electronic Media still wasn't required for me. I had fulfilled that requirement. I found that out after a couple of weeks

in class and I still didn't drop. I didn't want to drop because a voice was haunting me. "We will know and miss you if you're not here." A great quote from Dr. Lowman. Even without that quote, I would have stayed in the class because I enjoyed it.

Amelia had a double major: Spanish and communication. Although she had an affinity for communication, she didn't think that her writing was strong. She also was concerned that it came too easily to her: perhaps you should pursue a career in something that was hard for you. Her communication emphasis had been in broadcast: she had been involved with the student television program. It was there that people had criticized her writing, especially her ability to write leads. Amelia was a bit shy, incredibly sweet-tempered and completely dependable. Interviewing strangers is probably the most daunting part of journalism for her. And there was much of that in this class. But she stuck it out, learned to focus on her interviewees rather than herself and produced some very good work. Here, again, are Amelia's thoughts.

Then the adopt-a-community projects were being talked about. I still thought no big deal, I can handle this. The other students who have had Dr. Lowman before were upset about this and Wes said something about "every semester you just have to find something else to break us down." I didn't understand what all the fuss was about still. I thought, well if I can talk to strangers when participating in Studio One, I should be able to handle this. One thing that threw me off is that I had no subject to talk about. In Studio One, I'm assigned an assignment and if I am nervous I go over questions with my director to help. I had no certain topic to talk about with the people of Reynolds.

Walking up to the people of Reynolds and asking them about their community is more awkward than I thought it would be at the beginning of the course. My friends always told me that I could probably talk to a brick wall if I wanted to. I thought that some people would ask me why I was there, but no one was really interested. They were involved in what was going on in their lives and didn't really take an interest. I'm sure they thought if I needed something I would just ask, which I started doing at the end. This assignment did make me open up more and improved my interviewing skills...

The hardest part of journalism is interviewing for me. I feel like I'm prying into people's lives and I sometimes don't think it's my business. Some topics are very easy because they're just straight news. Talking to people about things in their past when they don't want to discuss it is hard for me. I feel like I'm more prepared for situations like these with my Northwood blog. (In addition to adopting unique communities, all the students in the class also spent a week visiting Northwood, N.D., a small town in the area that a tornado devastated in August. Realizing that the newspaper was essential to continue the town's identity and record for posterity, I had each student contribute features on the community's sur

vival and triumph to the town's weekly paper, *The Gleaner*. As with so much else in this class, that assignment called on students to tap reserves of strength they did not know they had.)

One of Amelia's problems was that her school and work schedule made it difficult for her to go to her adopted community, Reynolds, during times when people were available to talk with her. Reynolds is in a heavily agricultural area and during the fall when our class met, most people were out harvesting. She feared that she'd never make the sorts of meaningful connections that would lead to revealing conversations. But at length her persistence paid off and she wrote touchingly of Reynolds' essence.

Reynolds is a small, unique community in North Dakota. With a population of about 400, the people of Reynolds know one another well. The town has a Lutheran church and a Catholic church. A Catholic-based organization, the Knights of Columbus, hosts events for the community. There are also a post office, a fire hall, an auto-repair shop and a grocery store. The grocery store, Weber's, is also a butcher shop. Another popular place is the Beehive Café and Lounge...

All the people of Reynolds talk about how close their community is. They have events in the summer, such as a barbecue every week so that people can go and visit with one another. Having that sense of community is important to Reynolds' residents.

Brittany Rose is a senior in Central Valley School. She wants to keep the small town feel by attending college in Mayville. Brittany said she enjoys going to a smaller school because she is able to get to know everyone. She also said that everyone knows everyone in Reynolds: if someone new comes to town, people notice. Brittany works at Weber's (the local convenience store and butcher shop) and sometimes goes to Grand Forks (about 20 miles north) during the weekends.

Reynolds has an essence of closeness. All the residents treasure how well they know one another. Rita (Butler, owner of the Beehive Café) said, "I like being able to know everyone in town and I like the small town feel." They love being able to talk to everyone about the latest news. They can gossip to one another and it's OK because everybody already knows anyway.

The essence of Reynolds is relationships. Residents love their community and the people in it. Reynolds may have its problems, but what community doesn't? Its people love living there and several want to live there forever. Some families have been there for many generations. They want to keep passing their possessions down for their next generation of family. Relationships are what are important to Reynolds.

The generators of Buxton

Ryan was my first Norwegian student: UND draws many from that country. He had worked with the student television program for several years as a

photographer. Lately, though, he thought that he should also develop his writing. In some ways he faced the biggest challenges in the class. Although he was the most technologically proficient, he was having to interact with people in a second language. I wondered how he would do leaving his comfort zone of the Norwegian colony in Grand Forks. I need not have worried. Ryan threw himself into visiting his adopted community of Buxton with more gusto than any other of the students. Every week he sought out a different business or event. His weekly blogs chronicling his experiences were amazing and legendary. He taught us all. But he was also enriched by the project. He wrote articulately about the process and how it transformed him.

My social skills have been improved through the visits I have made to Buxton as I have been going there to collect information for my blogs and my final project. It was a little challenging for me in the beginning to find people to talk to in this small town, but as weeks went by and I started to both get to know a few people in Buxton as well as understand the small town culture, things began going much smoother. I have also noticed that I feel more comfortable around strangers now than I used to.

One other thing that I think the weekly trips to Buxton have helped me with is that I have been forced to find stories in what may seem to be ordinary society — a skill that certainly is important for anyone working within the media and communication. One particular example is the guys who always get together at the Buxton Café at three in the afternoon. It is certainly not a "hard" news story, but it can be quite interesting for anyone to hear about how this group of older gentlemen get together at the exact same time every day to share their stories with each other. They even play a couple of games of dice to determine who is going to pay for coffee and lunch. I am pretty sure that someone who wanted to get a good story out of this only has so sit in on the table for a couple of minutes before finding something to grab on to.

Since I am already talking about the Buxton trips, I might as well talk a little bit about how much I have both appreciated and learned from these visits, not just as part of the class, but also for me as a foreigner in the United States. Since there are so many Norwegians in Grand Forks, it can sometimes be hard to get out of the "Norwegian Circle" and to get out among the Americans to actually experience your culture. Through my visits to Buxton, I have been forced to interact with Americans outside of school, and then with other groups than just the students that I usually encounter.

Ryan's final project was wonderful. At first glance, the technological proficiency grabs viewers: the video has more assurance, there is a musical background. But the thing that really distinguishes it are the number of wonderful vignettes and beautiful, sincere stories and quotations that it contains. Ryan dug into the culture with the curious innocence of a child but the technical proficiency of an adult. Here

are just some of his eloquent observations.

It can take a little bit extra to live in a small town such as Buxton, N.D. But most of the people who live there couldn't imagine being anywhere else, and they know how to keep themselves entertained.

"The happiest in small towns are generators," Pastor Doug Norquist said. He explained that people need to come up with things to do by themselves when living in a smaller community.

"A cultural consumer is someone who always has to find a place where things are happening. But if you're a cultural generator, you can create what's interesting for yourself," he said.

In Buxton, people of all ages seem to be generators. They are good at finding something to do: the options and opportunities are really not as few as you might think...

"I think Buxton is a wonderful place to grow up," "it's kind of a warm, fuzzy town" and "a great place to live, work and raise a family" are things that the people living there have said about Buxton. The residents really like their town. Yet it is they who have made it into such a likable place.

Gary Fuglesten, of the *Central Valley Bean Cooperative*, put it this way. "There are friendly people here. They look out for each other and welcome new people to the community."

Doug Norquist also knew how to describe the people in Buxton. "We've got some really cool people here," he said, adding that it's a pleasure to be the minister in town.

Buxton may be a small community, but there's always something going on for those who wish to look for it. All it takes is for someone to be a generator, and this town sure has a lot of them.

Reflections on the journey

When I conceived the project, I didn't know how well students would buy into it. I knew that in order for them to produce packages on the essence of various small town communities, they would have to build relationships and experiences over a period of time. I also knew that having many mini deadlines along the way, for their writing, would make pulling that all together for the final project easier. The weekly blogs were the solution: the students could chronicle their journeys, have them published online, build a following and anticipation for the final packages.

Although the blogs were to average out to weekly, people did not have to post every week. By covering one experience per blog, people could get several blogs from one trip to their community. All my students worked, some full time. All of them had other classes and accompanying demands. Some also tried to have a personal life. So there were many other things vying for their time and attention. I was not sure how frequently students could get to their adopted communities.

The students all developed ties to and fondness for their communities. With the exception of Tim, for whom going to Thompson was always a struggle, they all made more trips to and spent more time in

their communities than I had dared to hope. Ryan and Beverly went nearly every week. Amelia was not far behind. Jan and Kurt went more than every other week.

Breaking down the assignments into steps was helpful. We learned in class how to post the blogs. Students had a weekly blog deadline. I would read the blogs and return them at the start of the following week so that the students could edit and post them.

We had deadlines for when the students needed to start filming, deadlines for when they needed to start editing their film. One of my former students, who is now a content producer for the online *Herald*, helped us edit the video and audio on Tuesday evenings. We used a freeware program and most of the students caught on quickly. We limited the video clips to no more than two minutes each to reduce file size and download time. We wanted the project to be truly accessible and were mindful that some of our audience still uses dial-up Internet connection.

The multimedia packages had their online debut on Dec. 13. The students had a celebratory unveiling at the *Herald* during their final meeting on that date. In a nice twist on the typical reverse publishing paradigm, the print *Herald* published the stories, individually, on consecutive Thursdays starting in late December. Reaction was positive but diffuse: the *Herald* is not very good at eliciting feedback.

Feedback from a pro

We did, however, get some constructive input from Tom Dutcher, the *Herald* online editor and our booster and supporter throughout the project. Tom has been a steadfast ally in trying to move our students into the digital age.

Dr. J,

It was a pleasure to work with you on the assignment for "Writing for Electronic Media."

When we were bouncing ideas about in the spring/summer of '07, I believed the community profile/study was a great project for the students. It was a project that if the students hadn't done it, I may have taken it on as a newspaper and online project.

The assignment accomplished a number of objectives.

1. *The project required the students to plan and execute the assignment.*
2. *The students needed to meet a deadline.*
3. *The students had the opportunity to use multimedia to accompany the story.*
4. *The students needed to write for the Web and newspaper.*
5. *The students needed to work with a newspaper*

staff member and Dr. Lowman in producing their video content. They got hands-on experience with video editing and worked at integrating their written work with other media. And, they had the opportunity to present their work to the class and staff of the Herald.

I believe projects such as this provide a real-world experience for the students — the newspaper gains from seeing how things can be done through different eyes and talents. The students have the opportunity to see their work published in a community (although it is a daily, the Herald views itself as a true community paper) newspaper and have their work posted on a Web site that gets a lot of traffic.

I am looking forward to the new challenge we can come up with for the 2008 class and the opportunity to work with aspiring writers.

This project was a win-win situation for everyone involved and brought about true synergy. The outlying communities gained coverage that they would not normally have. They got to bask in a spotlight on what makes them truly special, unique places. My students gained confidence and skills that will serve them well in life beyond the university. Regardless of whether they become journalists, the ability to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, the talent to be able to converse with anyone will help them in whatever they pursue. They've learned that they can adapt to the unknown, that they can take something vague and amorphous and make it into a concrete reality. The *Herald* forged stronger connections with readers who too often receive only crisis coverage.

What About the weeklies?

When we started this project, we wondered what its ramifications would be for weekly papers, many of which now have some sort of online presence. We've reached a few conclusions. People in the community love to have their voices heard and recognized. More coverage equals a more ardent following. Weekly paper owners don't want to scoop themselves or lose their print product/advertising base. But the online presence can feed into this.

You can boost your staff by making connections with journalism students: these can be at college or high school level. Don't wait for the students or teachers to come to you: make some overtures, sell them on the idea.

Many of you probably have digital video cameras and audio recorders. Additional hardware and software is reasonable: some of the software is available as freeware. For less than a few thousand dollars,

you can get the tools to add exciting new dimensions to your paper, pulling people to your Web site and, in turn, your paper. (If you pull enough traffic to your Web site, you may even beef up your online advertising, but that's a topic for another paper.)

You may not have that few thousand dollars. You might also not have the time to edit video and audio. But you can still use your Web presence to enhance and feed your print product. You cover stories and take photos all week long. Your print presence is limited by deadline and space. Online is a great place for excess photos. It's also a great place to turn your notes into blogs and briefs. You covered that terrific basketball game Friday night. Your paper doesn't come out until Wednesday. By then the score will be an anticlimax. Why not post a brief with the score and a few highlights? Then refer people to the print story for all the detail, color and drama. You won't be scooping yourself, but you could scoop the regional daily.

This doesn't have to be a lot of extra work. You've already got your notes. Just give people a headline and a hook. Update your content frequently throughout the week as you work your way through your stories. You'll reach people you don't normally touch and pull some of them to your longer, paid versions.

There was nothing unique to North Dakota that made this model function so well there. You, too, can do this. You'll find the content and method that work best for you and your readers. Don't worry if there are a few bumps in the road along that information superhighway. Success is just rising one more time than you fall. Threat embraced is opportunity.

Footnote

1. In order to respect students' privacy and rights, I refer to them throughout using pseudonyms.

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Score one for the home team: The return of independent journalism to Madera, Calif.

By Gary Rice

With his bow tie and suspenders, Chuck Doud could be the typical small town editor and publisher — from 50 years ago.

But Doud's formula of community involvement, cramming his papers with local news and taking care of business has proven far from outdated. Bucking the gloom and doom that surrounds much of the newspaper industry today, Doud still believes in printing newspapers. And he makes money doing it.

When Doud and a small group of journalism-oriented investors bought the struggling *Madera* (Calif.) *Tribune* from a chain that was selling itself off five years ago, some thought he was a bit crazy, or squandering his retirement nest egg. And at least he was bucking a trend: the California Newspaper Publishers Association knows of only one other time in California since 2000 that a daily paper had gone from being chain-owned to independent. The *Tribune* was such a cold property that no other buyer — chain or otherwise — was interested in making a bid. Only Doud was willing to take a chance on the paper published in the agricultural community of 50,000 people in the San Joaquin Valley, just about 20 minutes away from Fresno and in the shadow of the *Fresno Bee*.

His gamble has paid off. Doud has turned the paper around, bolstering circulation, adding employees, increasing advertising and producing a newspaper that is more vital to the community than it had been in years. He's done so well that he was inspired to start up a paper in another small town that a chain had given up. He's done it all while having a good time. "As the old saying goes," Doud says, "it is difficult to have this much fun and get paid for it without having to take our clothes off."¹

This paper examines the Doud experience and the question of whether it is an anomaly or a possible model for the future of newspapers.

A career newspaperman

Doud, 66, has spent his life in newspapers, big and small. The Preston, Idaho, native traces his newspaper career to his teen years. Shortly after turning 14, he began operating a Model 5 Linotype at the *Shelley Pioneer*, a weekly in Shelley, Idaho. He was introduced to the world of community journalism early, noting that submissions from correspondents arrived "on butcher paper, on the backs of envelopes and even occasionally on tablet paper, all hand-written, of course, mostly in pencil."²

He attended the University of Missouri, then bought his first weekly — the *Magnolia News* in Seattle — while going to the University of Washington and working as advertising manager for an outdoor magazine. He owned the weekly seven years, sold it and became a copy editor and later slot man at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Next stop was the *Tacoma News-Tribune*, where he climbed the management ladder in 11 and a half years from assistant city editor to city editor to associate editor. In the last job, he ran the editorial page and handled community relations.

The entrepreneurial spirit struck again in 1985 when he left big-city journalism and started the *Skagit River Post*, a weekly in Burlington, Wash. He bought out the competition, another weekly, and had high hopes of setting the world of community journalism on fire. Instead, he sold out four years later, scrambling for money, a bit humbled and a lot smarter. "I had been sort of a big shot at Tacoma," Doud recalled. "I thought I could show the world how to put out a weekly newspaper. Instead, I did almost everything wrong."³

Doud then worked for the Gannett-owned *Bellingham* (Wash.) *Herald*, before striking out on his own once again. This time he reinvented himself as the "Newspaper Doctor," farming himself out as a Mr. Fix-it to newspapers experiencing difficulties in the early 1990s. He promoted himself by sending out packages with an envelope containing a \$2 bill, an attention-getting way of paying people for taking the time to consider what he had to offer. His marketing plan worked. He became a managing editor of Western Newspapers in Prescott, Ariz.; did an 18-month stint as general manager for Capital Press in Salem, Ore; and was an editor at Lincoln City, Ore., and Ridgecrest, Calif. As it turned out, his last job working for someone else was in Madera, where Pacific Sierra Publishing hired him on Memorial Day 2002 to edit the struggling paper.⁴

Taking the plunge

Doud was content to finish out his career and retire in Madera when Pacific Sierra in late 2003 put up for sale the pod of newspapers it owned including those at Madera, Merced, Oakhurst and Chowchilla. McClatchy Newspapers bought the papers in nearby Merced, Oakhurst and Chowchilla, but passed on Madera and another Pacific Sierra paper in Turlock. Pacific Sierra approached Doud about buying the *Tribune* in October 2003. Doud recalled his wife, Annette, was worried about the prospects of jumping

into newspaper ownership and Doud went through some sleepless nights himself before the deal became final in March 2004. When it was all said and done, Doud had put together a new company, Madera Printing & Publishing Co., and the *Tribune* had become an independent — only the second time since 2000 that a daily paper in California had gone from chain-owned to independent, according to the California Newspaper Publishers Association.⁵

Doud, who added publisher and president to his titles, is the largest of the seven investors — all but one with ties to the newspaper business. Among the partners are longtime newspaper columnist Tom Elias, who writes the syndicated California Focus column; former California State University-Fullerton professor Jay Berman, who was a former city editor of the *Santa Monica Outlook*; and Terry Earls, who had been business manager in Madera under Pacific Sierra. Another is Swift Newspapers, the source of the used presses that Doud purchased after taking over the paper. The non-newspaper partner is Madera ambulance company operator Monte Pistoressi, an acquaintance from the Kiwanis Club in Madera who approached Doud about investing.

Faith pays off

Doud dispels any notion that the deal he put together would give Donald Trump pause. "Our total investment capital is less than three weeks of our gross today," Doud said, calling that fact "either remarkable or a bit insane." He said the investors had a tremendous amount of faith in how the newspaper would perform under the new ownership, and so far there have been no major disappointments.⁶

Paid circulation has grown from 5,200 to 6,100. Two new niche publications also are going well: a twice-a-month Spanish language paper and a monthly farm paper. Annual revenue had been budgeted at \$1.3 million when the paper was purchased, but Doud projects \$2.5 million to \$3 million by the end of 2008. He said the *Tribune* has turned a yearly profit of 10 to 12 percent, most of which he and the other owners have plowed back into the paper.

He and his partners are content with the financial return, although he said dividends paid so far have "not been enough to buy any of us much more than a few pizzas." Nevertheless, Doud has no complaints. "Don't get me wrong, we're not a big business," he said. "The paper pays me a nice living, we provide a living to our employees and we pay a lot of taxes."⁷

Changes of ownership in the newspaper business usually have meant layoffs and a shrunken staff, but

not at the *Tribune*. “When we bought it, no one was fired, and we’ve been hiring ever since,” Doud said. There were 19 full-time employees when his group took over. Now there are “32 or 33” with about another 20 part-time employees.⁸ The *Tribune* is full of Madera residents, from the newsroom to business office to the loading dock. “Whenever possible, we hire locally, then train for the job,” Doud said. “It makes for a stable workforce, and also for an institutional knowledge of the community, which I believe is important.”⁹

Among those local hires is Elsa Mejia, who was 17 and a local high school student when she became the editor of *El Sol de Madera*, the *Tribune*’s Spanish language edition. Doud has been impressed with the work of the bilingual teenager. “Elsa has been able to do this because she is so talented, she knows the market well and she is a hard worker,” Doud said.¹⁰

“It’s their newspaper”

As Doud reflects on the success he has realized at Madera, he returns to lessons learned from his early newspaper career, particularly his less-than-successful days in Burlington, Wash.

“Lesson No. 1: In a small community people see the newspaper as a very personal thing. It’s their newspaper. It’s not the editor’s newspaper. It’s not the publisher’s newspaper. What they expect you to do is use your skills to put out their newspaper. And they’ll tell you what they want. And if you don’t agree with what they want, God help you, because you’re either going to be very unhappy or very poor or both.

“Lesson No. 2: Community journalism is like any small-town enterprise. You really have to have connections with the community and the connections can’t be phony. They have to be real.” Doud himself is immersed in the community: a past president of the Madera Kiwanis Club, a board member of the county arts council, an active member of the local Lutheran church. Perhaps, Doud notes, some of the problems large chains have had operating in smaller towns come because the community realizes the owners and managers have no real community ties. “The people who call the shots aren’t sitting next to the readers at the Rotary Club or the Kiwanis Club or the Elks Club after work,” he said.¹¹

Doud’s partner Berman also cited the need for a genuine local connection. “The independent is of and from that community, whether in Kansas, Alaska or even another country. Someone in Minneapolis is going to be hard-pressed to know what’s going on in a town of 50,000 in New Mexico. They don’t live there. They don’t work there. Their kids don’t go to school there. They don’t know the place at all.”¹²

Doud said “the publisher must see himself or herself as a servant of the community. If that feeling is absent, the community will notice and will react accordingly.”¹³ Doud, who writes a popular local column and sometimes covers news events himself, instills the notion in his staff that they are there to serve their readers. Local news, columns and contributed photos and stories fill the *Tribune* almost

every day. “We are quick to respond to requests for newspaper service; almost no story is too small to cover, or at least to provide space if someone else provides coverage for us,” Doud said.¹⁴

And covering the community also means covering local businesses. “The wall that separates newsrooms from advertisers ought to have some doors in it, because the advertising community knows a hell of a lot more about the community, on the whole, than the reporters do,” he said. “The reporters go out and talk to the newsmakers. They don’t talk to the hoi polloi. They don’t talk to the people who have to make payrolls. My philosophy is that newsrooms shouldn’t necessarily have that wall up. Rather than a wall, you just need a good ethical sense. But you should be willing, able and in fact eager to do stories about businesses and business activities. When you get money, where do you spend it? In a store. And if you see a story about a store where you do business, that’s going to interest you.”¹⁵

Forget free Web sites

When he took over as owner, Doud wrestled with what to do about the Internet. The *Tribune*’s Web site was free, a situation that perplexed Doud. “Why are we giving away our news content,” he asked. Now the site is by subscription, and while it generates only about 1 to 2 percent of the *Tribune*’s revenue, Doud said at least it’s bringing in some money. He thinks newspapers have been too quick to shrink or abandon their print editions, still the major money-making end of the business. Readers will notice and react if the print content is cut appreciably, he said. “Don’t give up on newspapers,” he said. “Don’t lose faith. Remember, newspapers survived radio and television.”¹⁶ He points out new technology alone does not guarantee success. He recalled that a number of large newspapers 20 years ago invested heavily in a system which offered readers a chance to call in and hear — for a fee — the sounds of news being made, such as the crack of a game-winning home run. The novelty drew the curious initially, but it never caught on.

Doud’s partner Elias sees the newspaper background of the owners as key to the *Tribune*’s success. “We are running this paper the way news people think a paper should be operated, steadily improving it journalistically and technically,” Elias said. “Our town seems to appreciate what we are doing, too. Not only are we selling far more papers now, but new advertisers are coming to us steadily. And our reporters tell us they get positive feedback wherever they go.” Noting that he and his colleagues have invested most of the profits in added equipment and personnel, Elias says: “The more we spend, the more we seem to profit. It’s a model some other owners ought to try.”¹⁷

On to Coalinga

When Lee Enterprises in mid-April 2008 shut down the *Coalinga* (Calif.) *Record*, it looked like the end of local journalism in the fast-growing Fresno County community of 17,000 people. The paper had

served the community for more than 100 years.

Published and printed 45 miles away by the *Hanford Sentinel*, the paper had not made money in a while, *Sentinel* publisher Randy Rickman said. He added that Coalinga had been on the fringes of Lee’s market. It was the third area weekly that Lee had shut down since 2007.¹⁸

Loss of the paper hit the town hard. “Everywhere I went, people would come up to me and ask me what Coalinga was going to do without a paper,” wrote longtime *Record* columnist Dolores Crabtree. “How would the churches, the schools, the Chamber of Commerce and City Hall, and various businesses and organizations inform the townspeople about what was going on in our town. We all looked forward to getting our local paper on Wednesdays.”¹⁹

Coalinga residents barely had time to lament their loss of the paper when Doud rode into town. His wife, he recalled, once again thought he might be a bit crazy when he brought up the idea of starting another newspaper. But he got a different reception in visits to Coalinga. He found advertisers, civic leaders and readers eager to keep a newspaper in their town — and willing to support it.

“I went over there and saw this nice little town without a newspaper,” Doud said. “And I’m in the business of selling newspapers. So it made sense.”

After talking to Lee officials and being assured the chain had no intention of resuming publication — “I didn’t want to start a war with Lee,” Doud said — he jumped in. Three key members of the *Tribune* staff — general manager Leonard Soliz, editor June Woods and ad representative Katrina Soliz — turned their attentions to getting the new publication off the ground. Less than a month after the *Record* went out of business, Coalinga had a new newspaper: the *Coalinga Recorder*. The paper prints at the *Tribune* in Madera and is trucked 65 miles to Coalinga for Wednesday distribution.

The new newspaper took over the old *Record* office and has rehired some of the *Record*’s office staff, columnists and freelancers. Doud said, half-joking, that if he ever obtained legal ownership of the name “Coalinga Record,” all he would have to do is drop the “er” off his masthead and go back to the old name.

“We made a profit on Vol. 1, No. 1,” Doud said, overwhelmed by the support of advertisers and readers. He and his partners are pleased to be banking profits from the get-go, and happy to have been embraced by the community.

Even happier are Coalinga residents. As Dolores Crabtree wrote in her first column for her new boss: “When one door closes, another opens. Some great people have stepped in to give us back our local paper.”²⁰

Here’s how Doud did it: “We drew a line around a section of town where we felt people would read the paper and spend money on advertising. We deliver papers free to 3,000 houses in that area. In addition, we have placed 26 racks in town in which the paper is sold for 50 cents. Plans are to place some

more racks. And we will sell mail subscriptions outside our free zone if someone wants to subscribe. So far, no complaints. The paper is doing well so far. Nothing original here. We borrowed the model from other places.

"If something doesn't work out, we'll call corporate and get approval to do something else," Doud adds with a chuckle, not needing to say he is corporate.²¹

This was one time in which the newspaper management was not fretting over the impact of the Internet. "It never came up," Doud said. "No one has mentioned it. That's not to say we won't have a Web site someday."

In the meantime, Doud will stick with the formula that has worked in Madera: A print edition loaded with lots of local news, sports, features and columns.

Trend or oddity?

With large newspaper chains cutting staffs, shrinking their print editions and closing papers both large and small, the Doud model offers cause for optimism, if nothing else. Fans of free enterprise, good 'ol days journalism and the spirit of independent editors can't help but be buoyed both by Doud's success and upbeat attitude. How many newspaper publishers lately have been making jokes about getting naked while counting profits and launching new publications?

Newspaper broker Dave Gauger notes that as large dailies struggle with how to cope with declining circulation and how to fit the Internet into their product, small papers, especially weeklies, have done quite well by providing community news that is not available elsewhere. He said today's readers are faced with an unprecedented amount of available information. "People are almost overloaded with information. People are more selective in what they read, and people will read the local community newspaper," he said.

He is not sure the Doud model of chains selling to independents will be repeated often. "He's had the benefit of (buying from) a failed group, a poorly managed group, a debacle from beginning to end. I don't know if that's the beginning of a trend," Gauger said.

But Gauger does think that chains have left themselves wide-open for new competitors in suburban areas they had dominated. Too often, the big chains have shrunken their product or diminished their coverage in hopes of boosting profits. "I do think there will be more and more room for start-ups, particularly in areas where the chains made the decision to cut the product at the expense of covering the

news," he said.²²

Broker Gregg K. Knowles believes that while more independent owners will be buying papers from larger chains in the future, there will still be more chains buying others' spin-offs. "This is purely a function of availability of cash to invest," Knowles said. He believes overall interest in acquiring spin-offs will continue to be strong.

In the future, all newspaper owners may have to accept lower profit margins, Knowles said. "Independents' expected margins will always be lower than chains, and they can be as robust if not more robust because the chains have overhead factors to figure in," he said. "The incentive to create and succeed is stronger with independents than chains' managerial bureaucracy."

Independents like Doud are well suited to handle the lower profit margins. "While a chain earning 30 percent now may find it can only eke out 25 percent and cuts back product to handle that, an independent previously earning 20 percent can continue (and probably will continue) to provide an excellent product with 15 percent return," Knowles said.²³

Doud's partner Elias says anyone considering a similar purchase should watch their spending. "The main advice would be don't overpay for the paper," he said. Avoid problems with big loans and debt service. Elias thinks their experience could foreshadow a trend — if the buyers know what they are getting into. "The people who do it will have to be lovers of print journalism, like we are," he said.²⁴

Berman, another partner, does not see their experience being often repeated. "My fear would be that, rather than go from chain-owned to independent, a lot of papers would simply fail. I'm thinking that once the chain has let it go, there may be a reluctance on someone else's part to come in and try to save it." Anyone thinking of buying a newspaper should analyze their motivation. "If they're looking to get rich, they should buy oil stocks. If they realize the newspaper could mean long hours (I suspect Chuck probably works 60-70 hours a week) and questionable financial returns, then why not give it a shot. I wouldn't put everything I had into it."²⁵

One guesses that Doud doesn't regret giving the *Trib* his all. As he puts it, "This business is far more fun than having to go to work every day."²⁶

Endnotes

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2. "Chuck Doud, *Madera Tribune*," Publisher's Profile, *California Publisher*, Summer 2008, p. 3.
3. Doud, interview with the author, May 20, 2008.

4. Doud, interview with the author, May 20, 2008.
5. Joe Wirt, CNPA, email to author. *The Santa Barbara News-Press* was sold by *The New York Times* to local owners in 2000.
6. Doud, interview with the author, May 20, 2008.
7. Doud, interview with the author, May 20, 2008.
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10. "Youth no obstacle for bilingual paper editor," Alex Wolinsky, *On the Real*, a publication of the Central California High School Journalism Workshop at Fresno State University, June 27, 2008.
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13. "Chuck Doud, *Madera Tribune*," Publisher's Profile, *California Publisher*, Summer 2008, p. 3.
14. "Chuck Doud, *Madera Tribune*," Publisher's Profile, *California Publisher*, Summer 2008, p. 3.
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21. Doud, Telephone interview with the author, June 20., 2008.
22. Dave Gauger, telephone interview with the author, June 16, 2008.
23. Gregg K. Knowles, email to the author, June 12, 2008.
24. Elias, email to the author, June 15, 2008.
25. Berman, email to the author, June 17, 2008.
26. "Chuck Doud, *Madera Tribune*," Publisher's Profile, *California Publisher*, Summer 2008, p. 3.

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Building community online:

A twice-weekly's experience extending its reach with the Hartsville Today citizen-based news site

By Douglas J. Fisher

The author would like to thank the staff of the Hartsville Messenger and Osteen Publishing for their cooperation in launching HartsvilleToday.com. Funding for the project was provided by J-lab through a New Voices grant.

Introduction

The past decade has been one of upheaval in journalism, especially in newspapers. Even as Wall Street firms are dropping analyst coverage of the industry (MacMillan, 2008), members of the “former audience” increasingly have become producers of information, shifting news from a lecture to a conversation (Gillmor, 2004).

The number of news-oriented sites run by those outside the traditional mainstream media has grown quickly. One list has more than 80 (Dube, 2005). By 2008, another database listed nearly 850 such sites in the U.S. and North America (Knight Citizen News Network).

This study examines the challenges, successes and shortcomings of one venture, HartsvilleToday.com, during its first two years operating in a small South Carolina town.

The process of creating the site as part of a J-Lab/New Voices grant and its first five months of operation have been examined in detail (Fisher & Osteen, 2006). This paper concentrates on assessing whether such sites can be used by and be useful for small daily and nondaily newspapers. It uses in-depth interviews with staff members at the partner newspaper, the *Hartsville Messenger*, augmented by a content analysis of postings and some data from a community survey that sought to determine people's desire for such a site and awareness of Hartsville Today. This study is one of the first longitudinal studies of such a site.

A decision not to edit the site and to rely primarily on users to point out problems, with the newspaper staff and university researchers checking occasionally, was as much the product of the twice-weekly's limited staffing as anything else (Fisher & Osteen, 2006). Such a decision is well up Outing's (2005a) citizen-journalism hierarchy of giving users control.

HVTD, as it commonly called, went live on Oct. 27, 2005. In June 2008, it surpassed its 1,000th registered user in a town of 7,500 people and a market area of about 20,000 (Fisher & Osteen, 2006). We estimate that about 10% of registered users are out of town (we are preparing a more comprehensive analysis of this). Raw usage logs show 25,000 to 40,000 visits a month, but those include search bots, hacker probes, etc. Without sophisticated audience tools, we are left with flawed estimates by Compete and Quantcast (Niles, 2007) of 3,000 to 5,000 people a month.¹

Hartsville, S.C., has a small college (Coker), a statewide science and math high school, a Fortune 1000 corporate headquarters² (Sonoco) and an arts community. But it is not so different from surrounding towns as to make it unrepresentative.

The newspaper was recently sold to Media General, which has expressed interest in HVTD as a model for similar sites at other small papers. One question is whether HVTD will be incorporated into Media General's proprietary system. HVTD was set up to take advantage of several features of the Drupal open-source content management system that help shape the site's organization and maintenance. Maintaining a similar, logical organizational structure is important to not only keep HVTD from turning into just a chat room, but also because clear organization has been shown to encourage people to participate (Tedjamulia, Olsen,

Dean, & Albrecht, 2005).

Some HVTD users, fearing for its future, had suggested petitioning for its continuation (Puffer, 2008). One measure of success certainly has to be when community members find the site valuable enough to fear for its existence and propose action to ensure it continues.

This study seeks to answer questions about how the newspaper staff relates to HVTD, how receptive the community may be to such a venture and whether HVTD, as reflected in its postings, is a vibrant site.

Literature review

Defining new journalism relationships

A decade or so into the rise of the “citizen journalist,” we still have not settled on a term that adequately describes the concept and gains wide approval. “Participatory journalism” was favored by some early observers (Bowman & Willis, 2003) and still is widely used (Kolodzy, 2006). Others include grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2004), stand-alone journalism, open-source journalism, networked journalism, collaborative journalism and “we-dia” (Gant, 2007, p. 34). This paper generally uses citizen journalism, although HVTD prefers “community storytelling,” “community news,” and “community conversation” because some people recruited as contributors were concerned about being “journalists” (Fisher & Osteen, 2006, p. 11).

While we debate this increased public participation, we also are debating the role of journalists. Some have suggested that journalists, especially editors, become “pathfinders” (Newhagen & Levy, 1995), “gatewatchers” (Bruns, 2003) or “content shepherds, whipping the chaos of reader-generated content into a manageable morass” (Glaser, 2004). Others also see the role changing from one of story generalist and media specialist to story specialist and media generalist, with less emphasis on functional skills and more on “connective abilities” (Fisher, 2002). Even absent the growing pressure of public participation, Bruns (2003) notes there are simply too many news sources and new criteria of newsworthiness for specific audiences for the gatekeeper model to remain viable. Bentley et al. (2006) say that “guides and enablers” will be an important part of forging stronger ties between journalism organizations and their communities.

If the emergence of participatory media is seen as one more step toward giving users what they want, where they want it, how they want it and when they want it — then: “News consumers are leading the way...News media have to catch up...Media organizations that can serve only part of a consumer's media mix are marginalizing themselves” (Ifra, 2004, p. 12).

Smaller newsrooms are already closer to the community than their big-city counterparts as reflected in their continuing strong circulation (Snedeker, 2007). The digital revolution, however, will not stop at the suburbs, and people are increasingly likely to get at least some news and information online, especially as mobile devices proliferate and become more powerful.

One recent study of weekly newspaper Web sites found that 56 percent of the initial sample had no online presence. Of those that did, basic features of online sites — hyperlinks, archives of information and classified ads, and interactivity — were largely missing. The study concluded: “The potential for local community weekly newspaper Web sites to dominate the local information marketplace is still just that — potential” (Mitchell, Collins, & Saunders, 2008).

The challenge for news organizations, especially small community-based

ones, will be how to integrate public participation into existing workflows or create new ones to accommodate the changes (Storm, 2007). Even if, as Storm found in practice at *BlufftonToday*, few citizen contributions make it directly into the main product, they still inform and broaden the reporting. A news organization might try ignoring an “open-source philosophy” in which “every piece of news is important to somebody and [that] lets the public readership decide what it wants to read” (Bentley et al., 2005). But easy-to-use tools that let the average person become a media participant make holding out for long unlikely (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Outing, 2005a).

The rise of citizen-journalism sites

Many citizen-journalism sites are independent (Dougherty 2008), but increasingly news organizations have been encouraging “citizen” contributions. Some, such as CNN, encourage contributions directly to the news organization, with the best incorporated into the main news report, such as at <http://www.cnn.com/ireport>. The iReport became so popular — an estimated 100,000 contributions — that CNN also recently began a separate site, <http://www.ireport.com>, solely to highlight them (Shields, 2008).

Newspapers and local TV stations have, to varying degrees, opened their portals, often with separate sites such as Scripps's YourHub.com and more recently Triblocal.com in Chicago (Duran, 2007). And there already have been some spectacular failures, such as the collapse of independent sites Bayosphere near San Francisco (Grubisich, 2006) and Backfence, which started in the Washington, D.C., suburbs and had been criticized for having little local identity and a templated feel (Potts, 2008; George, 2005).

One truism of successful sites is that they “focus on a specific locality...not an entire region” as Bayosphere did, and “they try to capture the unique flavor of those communities” (Grubisich, 2006). Glaser (2007) says, “One of the mistakes made by media companies and startups trying to cash in on hyper-local sites is the idea that there's a way to copy-and-paste the success of one operation and make it a franchise in other locales.” In 2008 remarks to an American Copy Editors Society meeting, Travis Henry, *Your Hub's* former editor, said some of its sites closed because of lack of nurturing by the local paper.

If properly nurtured, citizen-journalism sites can create a sense of community, which can be a component of credibility (Bentley et al., 2006). That same study found that those who read newspapers and watched TV heavily were more likely to become registered contributors.

Though many independent citizen-journalism sites consider other media to be competitors, partnerships with another media outlet are seen (Glaser, 2008). Glaser says, however, that nearly all sites say some kind of community outreach is needed to reach the contributors necessary to keep a site viable, encourage more contributions, and form the critical mass that may make it attractive for advertisers.

Typing citizen-journalism sites

One early expectation of lowering or eliminating the barriers to online publishing was that it would bolster democracy (Sunstein, 2004) and open the gates to “a renaissance of the notion, now threatened, of a truly informed citizenry” (Gillmor, 2004).

Numerous blogs and some specialized sites are devoted to the kinds of political and governing discussions envisioned, but far more blogs are created with the object of “keeping family and friends abreast of life events,” moving “between the personal and the profound” (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Blogs dealing with politics and civic life are just one among many specialized communities. Online users can easily filter them out, prompting warnings about “serious dangers to democracy” from some of those who initially hoped easy access to communications tools would boost civic life (Sunstein, 2004).

Early in this decade, the digital frontier often went from individual bloggers to coalesced “interest clusters” (Kumar, Novak, Raghavan & Tomkins, 2004). The sharing and online community engendered by such groups, and later through social media sites such as MySpace and Facebook, might help community-based, citizen-contributed news and information sites by making people more used to sharing — a form of public speaking.

While citizen-journalism sites are not blogs, the experience, though thinly documented so far, appears to parallel that in the blogspace — less emphasis on politics, public safety and similar civic news and more on lifestyles and community life (Littau, 2007; Fisher & Osteen, 2006).

Deuze (2003) has proposed four types of online journalism. Blogs, for instance, are most like his index and category sites that produce little or no original content, but that link heavily to others. Yet they also can straddle into meta and comment sites, where journalists themselves often explain how the news is produced, or share and discussion sites, where people come together to exchange ideas (the most freewheeling of these being the completely unmoderated bulletin boards that some sites still use). His last category is that of mainstream media sites that provide repurposed copy from the newspaper or broadcast or create new content for online.

The difficulty in categorizing any particular operation can be seen in the suggestion by Bentley et al. (2005) that citizen journalism/community news sites best fit into the share and discussion sites. HVTVD, however, also has served as a way for the twice-weekly newspaper to post stories of its own ahead of its publication cycle (which may change now that it has a more flexible main Web site under new ownership). And judging from comments received occasionally from users and potential users, they sometimes confound the HVTVD site with a blog, using the term as an all-encompassing definition for any system that lets a person post stories or snippets of information online.

Littau (2007) sees such sites as more of a hybrid between mainstream news sites and share and discussion sites. Both he and earlier work by that research group (Bentley et al., 2005) propose a critical difference in that citizen journalism sites, to have that moniker, should be moderated or edited. (MyMissourian is moderated/edited with the help of students at the University of Missouri journalism school.) According to Littau, “The notion that citizen journalism is moderated is what separates citizen journalism from a typical community blog, and in fact is what elevates the posting format into a news format.”

As we shall see, however, this definition can pose difficulties for the typical small community newsroom that does not have access to a pool of such free or low-cost help.

Method

As a case study, the objective is not only to describe what is being observed, but also to begin to explain why (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). As such, a case study benefits from using multiple sources of information to provide a more complete picture of and explanation for what is being observed (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

This case study relies primarily on semi-structured interviews done in June 2007 with members of the staff of the *Messenger*, supplemented by a content analysis of postings and a telephone survey that asked people about their awareness and desire for a site such as HVTVD (a survey of HVTVD's registered users is being developed to seek a better understanding of their views of the site and motivations for joining).

Specifically, the semi-structured interviews begin with a formal list of questions, but the interviewer is free to follow up, probe, and explore other interesting topics that might arise (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). To help elicit candid responses on organizational questions, the newspaper's four rank-and-file staff members were promised confidentiality. (Two have since left the paper.) The city editor at the time — now the editorial editor — submitted a written statement with permission to be quoted by name. The woman specializing in online ad sales also agreed to be quoted by name. As she was alone in that position, a meaningful conversation about the challenges of selling the site would have been impossible without identifying her.

The content analysis involved a systematic coding and analysis of one month of postings to the site in March 2008. The 246 items from March 2008 were coded by the author and an assistant for source, type, section in which they were posted, timeliness, whether the poster's identity was clear, and whether a picture was included with the story or reply. Intercoder reliability was checked by randomly (using an online random number generator) selecting 10% of the items. Agreement was perfect on items except type, timeliness, and whether a picture

was associated with the posting. In those cases, Scott's pi was calculated at 0.85 for "type" and 0.84 each for "timeliness" and "picture," within the bounds generally considered acceptable for reliability (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998).

The coding was the same scheme used to analyze the first five months' postings from HVTVD in 2006 (Fisher & Osteen, 2006), thus there is the ability to do some longitudinal analysis of the site's development and growth. One additional category (a catch-all called "Hartsvegas") has been added since 2006, and minor changes were made to parts of the codebook just to clarify how to code pictures, for instance.³

The telephone survey was conducted in December 2006 using a probability sample. RDD was used in drawing the sample with 341 usable numbers. A total of 150 people were interviewed, resulting in a 44 percent response rate. Registered HVTVD users were excluded because they will be surveyed separately later, leaving the final sample size of 142.

The newsroom and HVTVD

In the interviews⁴ with the four rank-and-file *Messenger* staff members, and in the statement submitted by then-City Editor Jim Faile, four themes emerged: A wish for more public participation in Hartsville Today, its growing use to develop story ideas and check the community pulse, and a feeling it might be helping the paper as opposed to earlier fears of hurting circulation. In contrast, the fourth theme was that the newspaper could have promoted the site more and that the staff had yet to use its full potential.

More public participation

All of the four rank-and-file staff members wished more people would become involved with HVTVD. "From the very beginning until now you definitely can see growth in it," said one, while still wishing for even more participation. "All I see is the same people on it," complained another. From the third, "I would prefer we had more people involved to give us a little broader perspective of what the community thinks." But the fourth person said it was "really just a matter of getting people on there and letting them realize how easy it is, the true power of it, that it will be around for a long time, and there will be more people who use it."

There also is some uneasiness, however, that HVTVD does not always meet their ideal for a "community storytelling" site. "One of the things that I see is somewhat of a lack of understanding about what 'community storytelling' really is," Faile wrote. "Certain aspects of the site seem to me to have taken on the nature of a chat room."

One staff member pointed to a heated topic — the alleged rudeness of some local librarians. "The library changed because they got feedback on what was going on, and it was public feedback that they had to respond to. Now, that can be done very poorly and can be very bad. But I think ultimately the community benefited from that exchange."

Growing use of the site, and its stories, by news staff

The library story, which largely played out on HVTVD, also prompted some rethinking of what the newspaper covers, the staff member said. "The only way that story would have gotten into the paper was, perhaps, through letters to the editor because 'Did you have courteous exchanges with the librarians?' isn't that much of a story," the staff member said. But, "It's important to people."

Every staff member now checks HVTVD regularly. "I try to check the site several times most days, including weekends," Faile wrote. Others said they average three to five times daily. "It's like I open up my e-mail and then I open up Hartsville Today," one reporter said. From another: "I usually try to go to it every day and look to see what's on there just to see, like I said, for story ideas, what's going on that we might not initially hear about."

One reporter said HVTVD rarely had anything not heard from other sources. But another got story ideas, and "a couple of times they beat me out, too...I didn't like that."

Note that the staff members go to the site rather than use more efficient RSS feeds. It may be hard to teach some journalists new tricks, but it also highlights

how they can be hobbled by outdated technology. The *Messenger's* computers were a generation or more behind, hindering use of an updated browser so that an online RSS reader like bloglines.com could display properly.

The *Messenger* has used HVTVD items in the paper and its Monday total market coverage circular. Faile singled out commentary by Richard Puffer, a college professor and former spokesman for Sonoco Products (the Fortune 1000 company headquartered in Hartsville), and a story on soup kitchen volunteers by Jana E. Longfellow. Both were paid stringers and promoters for HVTVD at times during the first two years.

"More frequently, the site has pointed staff toward stories that otherwise may have otherwise been overlooked," Faile wrote, for instance a sinkhole under a street. "We were not immediately aware of the problem. But a resident of the neighborhood took pictures and posted them on HVTVD, and we were able to get a reporter on the story."

HVTVD also pointed the *Messenger* toward a downtown vandalism spree. "We were able to publish a front page story that alerted business owners to the problem," he wrote.

Staff members said complaints on HVTVD had also highlighted unhappiness with some of the paper's sports coverage.

HVTVD has not hurt, as first feared

In staff interviews⁵ before HVTVD went online, one clear concern was that the site could hurt the newspaper's circulation. The newspaper had its own Web site, but it was difficult to update and had only some of the stories from the paper, with no original content. There was a chat room, but it was largely filled with spam. Three years later, there was total agreement that HVTVD had not hurt the paper at all but may have enhanced it.

"I don't think it's hurt the *Messenger*. It's only helped the *Messenger*," one said. The paper's circulation actually was up slightly, said another. Reflecting on the initial concerns, one staff member said: "I guess we didn't know exactly how it would play out, what it would be. But I don't think it has hurt; I think maybe it has even helped because people actually on the site have commented about stories that we've done and said, 'You ought to read the paper.'"

Faile agrees. "I do not think HVTVD has hurt the paper in any way that I can see," he wrote. "In fact, I think some of the content may have prompted people to pick up a copy of the paper."

The *Messenger* could have done more

Still, a clear feeling existed that the *Messenger* could have done more to recruit contributors and use the site. "I don't think we've done enough to publicize it in our paper that it's there. We never have any little banners," said one reporter. Another said the newsroom should do more to post items off the publication cycle: "I think people here need to take it more seriously, know that this is a great tool, and there could be more done with it if they would put a little effort into it."

Two said they tried to mention HVTVD in columns from time to time. "I think certainly because it was an experimental thing and no one knew what to expect that there are some things we could have done better if we look back at it, but I think we got off to a good start," one said.

None found any problem in being "ambassadors" for HVTVD, and several said that while interviewing people they often distributed yellow business cards created to make people more aware of HVTVD and encourage registrations. One said HVTVD was often a topic of conversations at the civic club to which the person belonged. Another suggested the paper should have brought in local government and public safety leaders for online chats. Several said the paper's management, which became occupied with problems at the company's nearby daily, failed to get into the community enough to promote it.

"We have a pattern, and you get into that pattern, and then something has to jolt you out of it. You have to rise above it and say, 'Oh man, I'm just doing the same thing over and over again.' You have to make a conscious effort to change it," one staff member said. "Either you see it yourself or someone slaps you in the back of the head and makes you see it."

The person said a slightly younger and larger newsroom might have been different.

"I think a lot of people thought it was going to be a fad and it would just go away after a year, whatever," the person said. "But I think it's here to stay, and I think that if we pulled the site down today, we would hear about it within an hour — from a lot of people."

Selling ads on HVTD

Hartsville Today has had about a dozen advertisers, the first starting about five months after it went live. The *Messenger's* former owner, Osteen Publishing, did not break out specifics, but it is doubtful revenue has come close to the \$10,000 publisher Graham Osteen estimated it would normally take to set up a site like HVTD (Fisher & Osteen, 2006).

Glaser (2004) hoped that if such sites "bring more people into the editorial process and help the media cover smaller communities better, the so-called bush league content might just bring in major league revenues, at least in aggregate. The idea is to tap into smaller advertisers who hadn't considered newspaper ads before." The counterpoint was one *Messenger* salesperson who said it was difficult to figure out how to sell online without cannibalizing the paper in a small town where most businesses had a fixed advertising budget.

Into the mix came Susan Alexander, an experienced media saleswoman who had sold print and online for several years with a large chain. "It really was not a hard sell," she said. Relatively few ads were sold, however, as she was gradually pulled into more print selling and then brought to Osteen's nearby daily.

The challenge that many small papers are likely to share is getting the necessary traffic reports and technical support, Alexander said, along with the nagging question "How hyperlocal do you want to go?" and still remain viable.

The newspaper's marketing area includes some neighboring small towns, but when she tried to sell HVTD as a combo package, "I always got the objection, 'But it's Hartsville...And it's very tough to get them past that because of the branding.'" Yet, those towns of a few hundred people are too small to support a stand-alone site, and were HVTD broadened specifically to include them, would the focus and motivation of its users become too diluted?

All HVTD's ads have been front-page banners or sidebar rectangles. Because of other priorities, the Osteen staff did not create positions on other pages, and Alexander said that's critical for effective selling. But inside placements also pose a new challenge of getting "click through" reports, she said. While Alexander said she could tell a client how many times its ad had been seen on the home page, it would not have been possible to do the breakdowns by other parts of the site. "Once you open it to inside pages, the banner could have been seen 40,000 times, but 20,000 on 'Faith' (one of HVTD's subject areas) and 20,000 somewhere else. I can't tell you where they were on the site."

Such tracking software can be expensive, which makes it a challenge for smaller news operations, she said. As an alternative, ad salespeople also must learn to ask for a client's Web reports, she said, specifically where online traffic is coming from. She recalled one HVTD advertiser that she said was not thrilled that "impressions" was the only metric she had. "Then I started saying let's look at Web trends" for two months before and after the online ads had run. "And all of a sudden you started seeing more hartsvilletoday.com and themessenger.com falling into their top referring URLs."

HVTD opens a new market, she said, "pretty much that high-middle to high-income demographic." But to ensure such a site is successful, "You have to make sure you're committed, bottom line. Do not treat this as a stepchild. It needs to be just as important a part of your paper as your paper and your paper's Web site. And it needs to be promoted. Everything needs to be promoted."

Quantitative findings

Community survey

Results gleaned from a December 2006 telephone survey of the community illustrate the challenge, but promise, of a site like HVTD.

Respondents were read this statement: *Hartsville Today is an Internet site where people can share information and photos on happenings around town. The*

Messenger also files stories to it on days it does not publish. They then were asked to agree or disagree with this: *Hartsville needs a site like Hartsville Today.* Of the 142 people interviewed, 89 (63%) agreed and 22 (16%) strongly agreed. Twelve disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 19 did not answer.

However, 95 (67%) said they had never heard of Hartsville Today despite a year of speeches to civic groups, mentions in the newspaper, banners at events and distribution of bright-yellow business cards encouraging people to visit and join. Thirty-three (23%) had heard of the site but never visited, and 13 (9%) said they had visited. (One person did not answer.) Those 13 were asked five questions to help assess their feelings toward HVTD. A small number of respondents in the sample may be limited in further statistical analysis, but they reveal some patterns, hence helping to define an issue. For instance:

- 10 of the 13 agreed and two strongly agreed with: *I find the information on Hartsville Today credible.* None disagreed. (Totals do not equal 13 because of one refusal.)

- 10 agreed and 1 strongly agreed with: *I find the information on Hartsville Today useful.* One disagreed.

- All 13 agreed or strongly agreed with: *Hartsville Today helps broaden the Messenger's coverage of the community.*

- Eight agreed and three strongly agreed that *people should have to use their real names when posting on Hartsville Today*, but two did not agree, one strongly.

- Six agreed and two strongly agreed that *things should be edited before they are allowed on Hartsville Today*, but four disagreed.

An additional four questions sought to determine "community storytelling orientation" (agree and strongly agree are summed into "positive," and disagree and strongly disagree are summed into "negative"; nonanswers are not listed. N=142):

- Newspapers should listen more to people like me in the community when deciding what local stories to cover (79% positive, 18% negative).

- A newspaper could improve coverage of the community if people like me could easily contribute local stories and photos to it or its Web site (83% positive, 13% negative).

- Local stories written by members of the community are at least as believable as those written by journalists (71% positive, 26% negative).

- I am more likely to read a local story written by someone in the community (75% positive, 22% negative).

The results for the four were combined to produce a CSO score. No significant correlation was found with support for Hartsville Today, but the results argue for more community participation in news work.

The survey also reminds us the "digital revolution" does not spread evenly. While 66 (46%) had access to high-speed Internet, 47 (33%) had no access and did not use the Internet. The remainder used dial-up connections. Of the 95 who connect, 65 (68%) do it primarily from home, 24 (17%) from work and six from a public location like the library.

HVTD postings

The first key point of the content analysis is that the number of postings from one month (246) equals almost the entire number from the earlier five months (274). The number of contributors also increased, to 51 during the one month versus 34 for the earlier period.

There remains a Zipf, or power, curve — a phenomenon found in many online situations (Nielsen, 1997) — but it is flatter and has a longer tail, which indicates participation in HVTD has broadened. That is the hoped-for outcome as registrations increase. And while Richard Puffer and Jana Longfellow, two former stringers for HVTD, remain among the top contributors, many of the other names have changed. The postings continue to come overwhelmingly from the community, 97% this time compared with 72% in 2006. One *Messenger* staffer posted one time during the 2008 month. The remaining six non-community posts came from the author, who creates polls and occasionally moderates disputes.

The ability to easily identify who is posting also increased. A "clear ID," defined as a last name and enough of the first to be recognizable, or a recognizable ID picture, was present 59% of the time, compared with 39% earlier, and an

ID picture itself (as opposed to a nonspecific picture like a flower, or no picture at all) was available 54% of the time (compared with 7% two years earlier).

The mix of items also has shown a noticeable shift (Table 1). News and sports have become a much smaller proportion, as has “community conversation,” which we have defined as *the author, not acting in the traditional journalistic role of neutral reporter, seeks to inform the community — which includes expressing an opinion — on an issue, call the community to action (including solicitation of contributions to HVTD) or thank the community for participation*. But replies have skyrocketed to more than half of the total.

As Littau (2007) noted, sites like HVTD are not the great cauldrons of politics and democratic thought to which the early visions subscribed. Our coding scheme is not the same as Littau’s, but looking at how people categorize their posts, we get a similar idea. Posts dealing with politics and civic life would most likely go into “governing/safety,” “business,” or “education.” Comparing the top categories from 2006 and 2008 (Table 2), governing/safety was the only one that appeared in the top five (in 2006) and dropped out of the top in 2008, replaced by “hobbies.”

Considering only “story” posts and replies, not photos, about 17% went into governing and safety, education or business. The combined proportion is still less than arts/entertainment (19% - stories only) and not much more than calendar items and polls (15%).

Some contributors categorize their posts differently than a journalist might so that a political story occasionally might creep into “neighbors,” for instance, or might start as a stand-alone photo in an image gallery. When photos are included in the overall mix, governing and safety, education, and business combined account for just 14% of the posts, and even correcting a few miscategorized ones are not likely to push the proportion much higher. For instance, the most popular photo category, “Happenin’ Hartsville,” (which is filled with things like block parties, museum exhibits, etc.) had 11% of the overall postings (and more than half of the 45 photo-only entries), and even photos that marginally might have something to do with governing or politics are a minuscule proportion. The “news” pictures gallery had just three photos.

One other indicator of the vibrancy of a site is the timeliness of the postings — are stories posted close to when events happened and do replies quickly follow? Timely has been defined for HVTD as within 48 hours before or after an event (the former designed to take in “advance” stories) for an original post and within 48 hours of the post in the case of replies. This is much more time than journalism’s deadlines, but these are not journalists. Three quarters of the sports items and replies met this standard, while 42 percent of news postings did. Just 18 percent of community conversation items did, but by their nature that is to be expected, since someone can strike up the conversation at any time. A quarter of the photos were timely, but almost half could not be determined — a product of Drupal’s system that encourages assigning photos to galleries before they are attached to stories. As a result, many photos are put in by users without caption information.

Conclusion

In two-and-a-half years, Hartsville Today has become a vibrant online community with many of the same growing pains and characteristics of others (Bentley et al., 2005), including at least one plagiarism case and more than a few rough-and-tumble discussions in its comments. It provides a source of news and information the twice-weekly newspaper cannot reach with its staff or that it might not even deem worthy of putting in the paper, but yet is important to people. And there is a favorable attitude in the community toward such citizen journalism.

The newspaper’s staff, however, still struggles with its relationship to the site, a situation likely in many small newsrooms where just getting out the paper is enough of a job. The paper’s owner also is struggling with the idea that, unlike a printing press, the Internet is a constantly morphing medium that does not lend itself well to “set up and forget” operation and may require realignment of and additions to technical staff. In addition, little has been done to integrate HVTD into the newspaper’s marketing and ad sales efforts. In the newsroom, HVTD

seems to be viewed as just another source, albeit one that gives a broader view of the community and one that has the ability to scoop the newspaper, but not necessarily as a full partner.

The drop in staff posts to the site between 2006 and 2008 is troubling because viable citizen journalism sites require input and nurturing (Outing, 2008). Now, as part of a larger chain, the staff has access to a more easily updated main Web site and it seems possible the newsroom will cast HVTD further adrift, even though staff members acknowledge it has broadened their reporting and the newspaper’s reach. HVTD was purposely set up as a site separate from the newspaper, partly for technical reasons. But it also was hoped a new nameplate would also add a different dimension to the newsroom and to the *Messenger’s* relationship with the community, broadening the newspaper’s offerings with a separate title while also allowing it to provide news to the community between its regular publishing cycles. However, that also means it risks being relegated to a “citizen-journalism ghetto” (Outing, 2005b).

The content dominance of replies in 2008, compared with 2006, could indicate such a shift is under way. However, it also can signal the vibrancy of dynamic conversations — a site where almost every post gets some feedback and discussion. HVTD’s archive calendar rarely shows a day without at least one post and some comments.

We are analyzing registrations, as we did in 2006, to provide more longitudinal information. One thing that does seem apparent is that HVTD still has not connected far into the area’s minority community, and more research needs to be done on that. We also are working on a survey of HVTD members that will cover some of the same areas as the community survey so we can test for significant differences, but also will follow up on earlier work (Fedak, 2007; Bentley et al., 2006) on the formation of online community on such sites.

Similar research needs to be done with other citizen-journalism sites. For those with a mainstream media partner, additional work should be done on the challenges of integrating digital thinking into newsrooms through sites such as this. The challenges are many, including finding the technical resources so that an online site does not become a build-it-and-leave-it affair. Because of each site’s uniqueness, the specific information may not be generalizable, but we can build an empirical framework to help future journalists become guides for those formerly known as the audience.

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See Tables 1 and 2 on page 18

HVTD Staff Questions 2007 exit interviews

- 1) What do you think has worked with Hartsville Today? Kind of rank it for me with the best thing first.
- 2) What do you think has worked the least? Again, rank it for me with the worst thing first.
 - 3) How often in a week or a day do you look at Hartsville Today?
 - 3a) Any particular categories you look at — or do you go to most recent posts or use an RSS feed?
 - 3b) Have you ever gotten any story ideas from it, or been tipped off to something?

4) When we started this, I sat with most everyone on staff and got their sense of things. One thing that came through several times was a concern that “we will shoot ourselves in the foot” and hurt circulation. Do you think that happened?

4a) Do you think the site has hurt the *Messenger* in any way?

5) At the beginning, there was a feeling that the *News* and *Press* was the *Messenger*'s greatest competition, followed by the daily papers? Do you think that's still true. If so, has Hartsville Today helped at all?

6) Another thing expressed in several ways at the beginning was the hope that Hartsville Today could help broaden the *Messenger*'s reach in the community. Do you think that has happened?

7) Should reporters be “ambassadors” for a site like Hartsville Today? (If so — can they be “effective” and how. If not — what might be the best way, then, to recruit people?)

8) If we were starting Hartsville Today anew today, what would you suggest we do differently? Or would you just say don't do it?

Hvtd.com. Quantcast: <http://www.quantcast.com/hvtd.com>. The Quantcast plug-in is not installed on the site, and Compete relies on users to install a browser plug-in.

2. Detail at <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2008/snapshots/544.html>

3. A copy of the codebook is available from the author.

4. The questionnaire is at the end of this paper.

5. These included not only the newsroom staff, but circulation and advertising.

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Footnotes

1 <http://www.hvtd.com/usage>. Compete: <http://siteanalytics.compete.com/>

Table 1 Proportion of Hartsville Today posts by type, 2008 vs. 2006

	News	Sports	Community Conversation	Review	Event Calendar	Misc. Or Poll	Reply	Photo only
2008 (N=246)	7.7%	3.3%	11.4%	0	4.9%	3.3%	51.6%	17.5%
2006 (N=274)	13.1%	7.7%	14.6%	2.9%	10.2%	7.3%	14.2%	29.6%

(In both years, one item was of undetermined type.)

Table 2 Proportion of Hartsville Today posts by section (top five sections)

2008	Arts, Entertain.	Polls, Calendar	Sports, HS/College	Image Gall. Happenin'	Hobbies	Proportion of all posts (N=246)
	15.5%	12.6%	11.4%	10.9%	7.3%	
2006	Arts, Entertain.	Polls, Calendar	Image Gall. Happenin'	Governing, Safety	Sports, HS/Coll	Proportion of all posts (N=274)
	17.9%	13.9%	13.1%	9.9%	9.1%	

The sections are (IG=image gallery):

Stories: Polls/calendar items, arts/entertainment, business, education, faith, governing/safety, health, hobbies, home/gardening, neighbors, pets, sports-high school/college, sports-recreation, Hartsvegas (2008 only), IG-places, IG-bloomin', IG-people, IG-happenin', IG-news, IG-historic, IG-birthdays, IG-holidays, IG-sports/adult, IG-sports/school, IG-sports/youth.

The seven questions and *The Daily Record*

By Michael Ray Smith and Melissa Lilley

Background of *The Daily Record*

Among the leaders in high circulation venues with a mania for local news is *The Daily Record* in Dunn, N.C., once the nation's general circulation newspaper with the highest circulation penetration of 112 percent in 2001. The newspaper is published Monday through Friday as a broadsheet, often with two sections that usually run 30 pages. *The Daily Record* is the primary source for Harnett County news; it is also the primary source for display advertising, legal advertisements and classified advertisements. Despite criticism that community newspapers often offer lightweight fare as an answer to local news (Morton, 2007, p. 68), *The Daily Record* tends to show only a modest drop in circulation penetration since its zenith in 2001. The family-owned *Daily Record* serves Harnett County, a county of 106,283 people, according to the U.S. Census for 2006. About 40 miles south of Raleigh, Dunn is located in a state of 8.8 million residents.

The newspaper circulates in most of the eastern half of Harnett, northern Sampson, southern Johnston, and portions of northern Cumberland counties. The towns included in the circulation area are Angier, Benson, Buies Creek, Bunnlevel, Coats, Dunn, Erwin, Falcon, Godwin, Lillington, Linden, and Newton Grove. However, for circulation purposes the newspaper's home circulation zone includes the population for the cities of Dunn and Erwin, a total possible readership of 6,181 of homes in the Audit Bureau of Circulation-designated circulation area of Dunn and Erwin in southern Harnett County. In September 2006, the paid subscriptions for that area were 5,094, or 82.4 percent of the possible 6,181 homes. By March of 2007, circulation increased to 6,172, or 106.41 percent of the possible 5,800 homes in the zone. Despite the fluctuations in circulation, the newspaper still ranks among the highest in the nation, surpassing the average circulation of 30 percent penetration by most American daily newspapers, which number less than 1,600 (Morton, 2007, p. 68).

Purpose of the project

The Daily Record began publishing Dec. 6, 1950, when founder Hoover Adams took on *The Dunn Dispatch*, the only other city newspaper and then purchased it 28 years later. Hoover Adams spent those early years personally recruiting readers to submit news and instilling in his staff the need to publish as many names of county residents as possible in every issue. Today the newspaper's paid circulation is 8,556, according to publisher Bart Adams. In its 57-year history, the newspaper has maintained strong circulation and continues to attract readers as a community newspaper obsessed with local news. This newspaper can serve as a prime case study on strategies that work, strategies that anticipated the hyper-localism phenomenon sweeping the newspaper industry today. *The Daily Record*, Dunn, N.C., suggested that journalism students at Campbell University work with this daily newspaper to adopt the popular 10 questions column of *Time* magazine to become a standing column in the newspaper. The students from several classes learned valuable newsgathering and interviewing techniques and produced a series for the newspaper called "Seven Questions" that eventually became "Spotlight," a question-and-answer column that is tailored to the sources. "Seven Questions" is a profile on a member of community with questions tailored to the person's identity. For instance, students interviewed a bakery owner, probation

officer, a waitress at the Waffle House, a librarian at an elementary school, a sign maker and many others.

The seven questions

To assist *The Daily Record* with its community coverage, Campbell University's journalism students worked to produce news stories based on suggestions from Bart Adams. The students were required to formulate questions based on research. They are taught to use a number of sources to prepare for an interview. For instance, students are required to do what is called a Lexis/Nexis search on Campbell's database page to learn about the topic and to see if anyone has written about the source. In addition, students use the database Associations Unlimited to find an organization related to the topic. These non-profit organizations often can suggest experts that can provide vital information or statistics that help with the background of an article. Students routinely check more ordinary Internet sites including Google. Armed with prepared questions, the student was required to interview the subject and, if necessary, others to make the column successfully. Students worked on their own to set up the interviews and take the photograph that could accompany the piece. Many times students had to return to take a better photograph because of problems with light, poses and technical details. In the following pages are examples of the students' work.

An example of the seven-question interview

Here's an example of the question-and-answer format used by writing students in Campbell University's journalism program. The students contacted sources from a list provided by publisher Bart Adams. They planned the interview questions, met with the source and talked. In addition, the students took the photograph and submitted the package for use in print and online. The interview below features the police chief in Dunn, N.C.

Editor's Note: B.P. Jones is the Chief of Police in Dunn. Jones is from New Bern and spent 10 years in the United States Army before starting work in law enforcement in 1964. He served as Chief of Police for 25 years in four different cities. Jones was appointed to Chief of Police of the Dunn Police Department for the second time August 1, 2006.

1. How did you get started in police work?

By accident. After 10 years in the U.S. Army, I ran into an army acquaintance of mine on the street who told me about openings in the New Bern police department. There were three openings and 44 applicants and I was one of the three. I served three years in New Bern but have since served in Smithfield, Roxboro, Dunn for the first time in 1976, then Roxboro again in 1982 until 1991 when I retired to move to Dunn where my daughter was enrolling at Campbell University. I began more police work in 1993 and became Chief of Police in Dunn again in August, 2006.

2. You recently came back from retirement. What do you want to do when you retire again?

The first time I retired in 1991 my wife and I spent some time at our beach house, where I spent a lot of time on my boat and going fishing. But, I think if I

retire again, my wife and I will probably do some traveling. We've wanted to travel for a while.

3. What is your favorite part of being the Chief of Police?

My favorite part is managing the police department, making sure that we provide the best service we can to the public. I like looking out for everyone and making sure that officers on the force as well as the citizens are treated fairly.

4. What are some of the worst instances you've had to deal with?

I have had to shoot two people but I'd have to say that the race riots, demonstrations, and protests in 1968 were some of the most stressful times I've had to deal with, especially when we had to uphold a curfew for a two-week period. Child abuse cases are extremely hard to deal with on an emotional level as well.

5. Is there anything you would change about the legal system?

The problem is the court system. Sadly, there is no quick fix. There is too much time from when a criminal is arrested to the time he is sentenced. That leaves too much time for things to go wrong, for justice to be impeded. But, prisons are too overcrowded and it would take more money and time to build more prisons and keep criminals there. Only about 2% of the population deals with the legal system, and it is commonly that same 2% that keeps going in and out of jail. It's frustrating putting your life on the line to go after someone that has been put away before, and in the end, is very likely to be back on the street again before long.

6. What is your fondest memory of being on the force?

I am most proud of the fact that I don't know of any one else that has been chief of police twice in two different cities. It was a privilege to be hired back in Roxboro and Dunn for the second time. The most gratifying feeling of being on the force is when we find people and children who were lost. That makes it really worthwhile.

7. What is the most important thing that people might not know about officers?

That we are not superhuman. Police officers are just like every one else in the sense that we have emotions that fluctuate. It's hard to come off of a high emotion situation and not let it affect you the rest of the day. It takes emotional strength to do this job; we are like a close knit family. We trust our lives to the person next to us, and look out for each other to survive. We must care for our fellow officers.

We are a tight knit cohesive family that shares the same pain, joys and dangers.

Benefits

The project proved beneficial on several levels. The students gained valuable experience, including solving the problem of working with a reticent source and time-scheduling issues. I posted these articles on my web site at www.featurewriting.net and the readers profited and continue to profit from an *at-a-glance profile* that allows an audience to peek into another's person life. Finally, the newspaper profited by getting high-quality content and giving university writers a chance to showcase their work with a byline. The writers also had to take publishable photographs, an additional hurdle that helped these wordsmiths prepare to successfully transition into entry-level journalism positions at community newspapers. The class used the idea that the community newspaper often is the nexus of information to disseminate arresting and interesting information to readers, both in print and online. For most of the students, the featurewriting.net web site is their only source to be indexed, a benefit when the students seek their first entry-level job.

This project proved to be a service-learning exercise that benefits the writers and the newspaper. Bart Adams said he thinks about the project every day and ways to incorporate it as a regular feature in his newspaper. The Department of Mass Communication hopes to continue providing local content as a way to help students earn a byline and as a way to help the community press expand its coverage.

Works cited

Morton, J. (2007, April/May). "Facing the Future," *American Journalism Review*. 68.

Footnote

1. The Adams family's Record Publishing Co. owns *Harnett County News* and *Angier Independent*, both weeklies. π 4-5,8-9,12-13 Hoover Adams said he has had offers from the New York Times Co. and other group-owned media to purchase *The Daily Record* but he insists the newspaper is not for sale.

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