

NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Five Dollars

Is Local News *the* Answer?



Words & Reflections

Network News, Digital Photos, and Books

“... to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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Winter 2007 THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Examining Journalistic Change in the Digital Era

A new Nieman Web site will 'aggregate important information about best practices in preserving and advancing journalism that adheres to its fundamental principles.'

By Bob Giles

The Nieman Foundation was founded nearly 70 years ago on the idea that education could enable reporters to work at higher levels of excellence, which over time would help elevate the standards of journalism. In that spirit, Nieman Reports was established in 1947 in response to the Hutchins Commission's call for a forum that would offer regular and serious criticism of the press. During his decade as curator, Bill Kovach raised the Nieman Foundation's profile as a voice for the standards of journalism. He and coauthor Tom Rosenstiel organized a conversation among news people and citizens as they identified the principles that underlie journalism in their book, "The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect." We are also utilizing a gift of Murrey Marder, a 1950 Nieman Fellow, to advance the critical role of journalists as watchdogs with Niemanwatchdog.org. Through our Narrative Journalism program we are educating the fellows and those who attend our annual narrative conference.

Serving the foundation's mission is foremost as the staff and Nieman Advisory Board work to respond to a major question in journalism today: how to sustain high-quality journalism as the news media move their reporting online and confront differing standards practiced by various news and information enterprises in the digital media.

Following several months of discussion, the foundation plans to launch an interactive online resource to aggregate important information about best practices in preserving and advancing journalism that adheres to its fundamental principles. Included on the site will be information about developments in newsgathering and presentation, the management of digital news enterprises, the creation of new economic models, and the emergence of new technologies. The Nieman Foundation envisions this as being a vital online resource for journalists, business people, public officials, scholars and citizens worldwide.

Michele McLellan, a 2002 Nieman Fellow and a former editor for The Oregonian, is serving as editor for building and launching the Web site. Since 2003, Michele has been founding director of Tomorrow's Workforce, a Knight Foundation project located at Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

The content outline addresses these four topic areas:

New practices in journalism: Involving hyperlocal journalism, community journalism, citizen or open-source jour-

nalism, blogs, multimedia and new print products. Good examples of new practices that perpetuate such traditional concepts as beat reporting, investigative journalism, and explanatory journalism will be featured.

Ethics and values: Exploring these aspects of new challenges, such as relinquishing control of content, monitoring content, and interacting with audiences.

The business of journalism: Passing along information about emerging business models, strategies, nonprofit or grant-supported journalism.

Leadership in news organizations: Examining leadership challenges, including managing change, organizational development, and operating a 24/7 newsroom.

Within each of these topics, the site would offer the following kinds of information:

- A digest of timely articles on key editorial, business and technological developments affecting journalism.
- Examples of developing best practices that help ensure journalistic quality and/or financial viability.
- Links to workable ideas, along with essays explaining how the ideas came to life, what problems and setbacks were encountered, and how they are being executed.
- Transcripts, Webcasts and Podcasts of important speeches, workshops and conferences dealing with relevant topics.
- Q&A interviews with key leaders and innovators in journalism, business, research and related areas.
- Guest columns from experts, including Nieman Fellows, past and present.
- Links to critical research findings and polling results from outside sources.
- Interactive discussions among practitioners, scholars, entrepreneurs and citizens.
- A calendar with links to upcoming events related to the site's mission.

In addition to building the Web site, the Nieman Foundation and the Harvard Business School are exploring a partnership in initiating research on the intersection of quality journalism and new business models in the digital era. Such an ambitious undertaking invites ideas, suggestions, comments and offers of help. Nieman alumni and other readers of Nieman Reports are encouraged to weigh in. ■

Is Local News *the* Answer?

“Unique local content” is by now a familiar phrase as print competes with digital media for readers’ attention. With constantly updated international and national news reporting and commentary just a click away, hometown readers need different reasons to go to their local newspaper, in print or online. In this issue of Nieman Reports, we will explore what local news reporting can look like and what a hometown focus can mean for journalists, newspapers, Web sites, and those who consume this news and information.

Brett J. Blackledge, a reporter at The Birmingham News, won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting for a story he began telling about a small, local college that trained firefighters. For two years, he followed the trail of corruption and cronyism he found within the state’s two-year college system. “Newspapers have one place among the increasingly crowding media as the ever-vigilant watchdog, and it’s what we do best for local audiences” he writes. In Seattle, **Ken Armstrong**, a reporter at The Seattle Times, won ASNE’s 2007 Local Accountability Reporting award for a series of stories about improperly sealed lawsuits in the county’s superior court. “We could have gone broad—writing about sealed records on a national level . . . Or we could have gone local . . .” he writes. “National offered scale. Local offered depth. We decided to go local.”

Two bureau reporters at The Times Herald-Record in Middletown, New York, **John Doherty** and **Tim Logan**, set out to portray in-depth the demise of a nearby “small, poor, violent, old factory town.” The result was a controversial collection of stories that, as they write, “dispensed with the usual back-and-forth balancing between sides.”

At The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina, going local meant sending a reporter, **Tony Bartelme**, and a photographer, **Alan Hawes**, to China to send back word about a Charleston resident’s stem cell transplant. While there, they found other “local” stories about business connections. In words and images, they describe their trip. As environmental reporter at The Des Moines Register, **Perry Beeman** creates searchable databases using local information so readers can see for themselves how climate change, pollution and industry are affecting them. “. . . for every national and global story, a local angle is waiting to be told,” he says. At WISH-TV in Indianapolis, Indiana, a Peabody Award-winning investigation into inadequate helmet protection for the military in Iraq had many local dimensions. As news director **Kevin Finch** writes, “Local means local, even when the story originates half a world away.”

At The Dallas Morning News, assistant editorial page editor **Michael Landauer** recruits volunteer columnists to be “Community Voices,” and their words are published on zoned local pages in the paper’s Metro section. “The person needs to think locally, write well, tell us something we don’t know, and be persuasive,” he says. In Albany, New York, Times Union Editor **Rex Smith** pushes breaking local news to the newspaper’s Web site and expects his newsroom to do more analysis of news and aggressive in-depth local reporting, which in his city includes state government and politics. “Throughout our newspaper,” he writes, “content is relentlessly local.”

Will Bunch, who blogs and writes for the Philadelphia Daily News, knows why this push for local coverage is happening but realizes that “not one of us wanted to be covering local news at our age (or, for that matter, at any age).” As editor of The Roanoke Times,

Carole Tarrant echoes Bunch's concern: "How do we resolve the tensions we all know exist between what the news organization needs and the ambitions of those who will be sent out on the frontlines?" **Thomas E. Patterson**, acting director of the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, reports on the findings from three studies about local newspapers "and how the Internet is changing the distribution of local news." **Rick Edmonds**, media business analyst at the Poynter Institute, examines various news organizations' "local-local" strategies, including local zoning efforts taking place at metro papers. **Bill Ostendorf**, president of Creative Circle Media Consulting, says the Web should have taught newspapers that "readers want the news to be about them; to speak to them; to address their questions and concerns directly."

Dean Miller, executive editor of The Post Register in Idaho Falls, Idaho, speaks with **Mary Nesbitt**, managing director of Northwestern University's Readership Institute, about studies she's done about newspaper readers and the future of local news coverage. **Lane DeGregory**, a feature writer with the St. Petersburg Times, shared tips—ignore important people, read the walls, make freaky friends—for finding intriguing local stories with community journalists at a Nieman Foundation conference, and we provide excerpts from her talk.

Shawn McIntosh, director of culture and change at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and **Rene Sanchez**, deputy managing editor for news content at the Star Tribune, each write about organizational changes in the newsroom to accommodate a shift to local emphasis. At The Washington Post and the Chicago Tribune, hyperlocal coverage is now part of the newspaper's online offerings to readers. At the Post's LoudounExtra.com, according to one of its creators, **Rob Curley**, "relevance and relationship are at its core." As managing editor of TribLocal.com, **Kyle Leonard** relies on "people who live in these communities to report a significant amount of the news."

Jan Schaffer, executive director of J-Lab at the University of Maryland, provides key findings from a recent study about "the rise of local news sites based on user-generated content" and tips about launching a hyperlocal Web site. **Geoff Dougherty**, who had been an investigative reporter with the Chicago Tribune, is now editor of the online Chi-Town Daily News, which uses beat-reporting interns and neighborhood correspondents to be "relentlessly local." **Liz George**, a New York Daily News editor and managing editor and co-owner of Baristanet.com, a hyperlocal online news site in New Jersey, writes that "zeroing in on readership by creating unique local content in a variety of forms is what we do at Baristanet." **Mark Potts**, a cofounder of Backfence.com, a hyperlocal site that closed earlier this year for business reasons, describes how citizen journalism "augments and extends" professional journalism by covering news "that journalists can't get to and by giving 'audience' members a voice." At VillageSoup.com, a hyperlocal site serving two counties in MidCoast Maine, cofounder **Richard M. Anderson** finds his community host model combining exclusively local "professional, amateur and business content is proving to be successful." **Lisa Williams**, founder of Placeblogger, the largest site of local Weblogs, and of h2otown, a hyperlocal site in Watertown, Massachusetts, compares what happened to high-tech workers during that industry's downturn with what journalists are facing today as newsrooms shrink and jobs change. "What we discovered, of course, was that innovation survived the death of its institutions," she writes. ■

Newspapers' Niche: 'Dig Deeply Into Local Matters'

'... the purpose of local reporting is to cover what others can't, won't or haven't.'

By Brett J. Blackledge

I remember the whispers in our newsroom wondering why I, a state reporter, had become "The Alabama Fire College" reporter in early 2006. Why were we writing these stories, uncovering these small-town deals and contracts at the little firefighter training school in Tuscaloosa? The question really was, put less politely, "Who cares?"

The answer now seems obvious. We began the reporting at a small, local college campus and followed the path into a broader, statewide web of corruption and cronyism in Alabama's two-year college system. Two years after the reporting began, the community college system cast from former Governor George Wallace's populism and politics continues to undergo a massive overhaul—a new chancellor, new college presidents, new policies prohibiting jobs for politicians. A resulting federal criminal investigation has reached by now into nearly all of the system's 26 colleges and training schools, with prosecutors pocketing several guilty pleas already and three convictions in early trials.

The stories—passing more than 175 since those fire college articles¹—are the stuff of basic, daily journalism practiced by hundreds of newspapers every day. They represent the ability of a newspaper to dig deeply into local matters, following the threads beyond those boundaries close to home and pursuing the story

into every corner, even as others question why.

Local Reporting's Purpose

American journalism has a long history of this type of reporting. Movies are

the political partisans raising the most opposition to that effort. At times, the very White House press corps who missed the Watergate story seemed determined to dismiss it.

Local reporting by newspapers, more than any other journalistic offering, has survived it all—the advent of radio, television, cable and even the Internet. It's what we do best. And it's what readers love most. But it is becoming increasingly more difficult to hear the soft, steady voices of daily newspapers among what has become a shouting crowd growing in today's digital media. Think about it: In an age when just about anyone can write a "news story" or produce a "news clip" online, it becomes more difficult to separate propaganda from proof. And isn't that just what those who would hope to neutralize true, independent journalism would want, the ability to present their own agenda disguised as "the real truth?"

This is exactly why strong, local reporting—and devoting the resources necessary to do it—is so important to daily newspapers. No other news organization can spend the time collecting thousands of pages of contract, payroll and financial records from Alabama's community colleges, spread across hundreds of miles at dozens of campuses. In this case, local reporting was defined by The Birmingham News's interest in a statewide system of colleges. National newspapers wouldn't spend the

**Fire official gets
\$190,000 buyout**

Foundation built \$350,000 house for college director

**College chief's
family makes
\$560,000 in
2-year system**

TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

**Legislator's
budget post
earned him
a school job**

made about it. History is changed by it. It was, after all, local reporting that uncovered the burglary of the Watergate hotel more than three decades ago, and the success of that work was the product of committed, sustained reporting over time despite powerful political opposition. It wasn't always

¹ These articles are archived on The Birmingham News Web site at <http://blog.al.com/twoyear/>.

often have to do, because we believe the next bright, shiny light is where we should head.

This year's work on this story might be more significant, frankly. I have focused on legislators working in the system and the connection the two-year colleges have to the state's politically powerful. As a dear friend and former boss of mine who died a few years back used to say, "Now you're meddlin'." The result has been not so much praising us for our work, as was the case last year from elected officials and their friends who patted us on the head with that "attaboy" compliment. Now, as a result of more scrutiny into the system's political infrastructure, we're part of a conspiracy, they like to say, to undermine the electoral process, to help unseat those who couldn't be

beaten at the ballot box.

The partisans are on attack, and their bloggers are taking aim. But all of that is to be expected. Just like the small-town paper that dares to write about the mayor's wife receiving an interior design contract from the town council, the News is under fire for raising questions about politics and patronage and for writing about it. Unlike the small paper, though, the News can afford to take the hit and has maintained its commitment to cover this subject regardless of the politics that erupts around it.

How can we afford not to? This is, after all, our community. We cannot allow political campaigns to intimidate us. And we cannot allow those campaigns to discourage us. We just need to continue doing the job we set out

to do, with the same motivations to do good journalism that inspired us to do the work in the first place. That sense of community, of purpose, of relevance, of readers is the deciding factor that distinguishes newspapers from other media. The commitment to local reporting is how we prove it. ■

Brett J. Blackledge is a general assignment and special projects reporter at The Birmingham News. His reporting won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting, with the judges citing "his exposure of cronyism and corruption in the state's two-year college system, resulting in the dismissal of the chancellor and other correction action."

Investigative Reporting Stays Local

'The local stories are the toughest. They matter more to readers . . .'

By Ken Armstrong

Reporters at The Seattle Times kept saying the same thing: I'm writing about this person, or that company, or this public agency, and some judge won't let me see court records that I need. Some lawsuit goes right to the heart of my story, but I can't read the file—or at least not the parts that matter.

Hear that enough, and it's time to ask, "What's going on here?"

That's what Justin Mayo and I did. But getting the answer took lots of time and money.

We could have gone broad—writing about sealed records on a national level, pulling anecdotes from hither and yon. Or we

could have gone local—trying to find every sealed lawsuit in King County Superior Court; recording every plaintiff, defendant and judge, and pulling

every sealing order to see the reasons provided for secrecy and whether the law was followed.

National offered scale. Local offered depth. We decided to go local.

The clerk's office in King County didn't keep a list of sealed cases. So Justin, a specialist in computer-assisted reporting, figured out a way to search the court system's massive database of electronic dockets, looking for codes or key words that suggested a lawsuit might be sealed. I took the thousands of civil suits that Justin's searches kicked up and entered each case number into



Files sealed by the King County Superior Court are stored out of public view in a locked room at the courthouse. *Photo by Mark Harrison.*

the computer at the clerk's office. If a case was sealed, a box popped up, denying access.

We found other ways to supplement that search and, in the end, found 420 civil cases that had been sealed in their entirety. In these cases members of the public couldn't even read the complaint to see what the dispute involved. But we had learned the defendants in these cases included public agencies; lawyers and judges; prominent business figures; doctors and hospitals, and the manufacturers of widely used products. We discovered also that almost all of these cases had been sealed illegally, with litigants and judges ignoring Washington's strict laws restricting such secrecy.

This is when our newspaper's commitment really came through. We could have gone to press with a story saying hundreds of lawsuits had been improperly sealed—and leaving readers to speculate what was in those files. Or we could have gone to court to fight and have them opened.

We decided to go to court. We filed motions in 40 cases—and got 37 lawsuits unsealed. The newspaper's legal costs exceeded \$200,000. That was the price of public access—a price The Seattle Times was willing to pay.

Revealing What Had Been Secret

With the help of Steve Miletich and other reporters, we wrote more than a dozen stories, which appeared under the headline, "Your Courts, Their Secrets,"¹ about the contents of previously sealed files. One lawsuit accused a judge of committing legal malpractice in one of the last cases he tried before joining the bench. In another lawsuit, a respiratory therapist was charged with using a wrong adapter so that oxygen was forced into a newborn, with no way out. That one was settled for \$7.8 million, a record for birth-injury cases in Washington.

Among the other sealed cases we found were these:

- One lawsuit disclosed how a 13-year-old girl came to be raped while in the state's care. That case had been sealed upon a motion arguing that the file's contents could embarrass the state and the caregiver it had hired to protect troubled kids.²
- In another case, four principals were accused of allowing an elementary-school teacher to fondle girls. Three families sued. The school district settled—but secretly. The agreement ordered documents destroyed, computer records purged, and court records sealed. The secrecy agreement silenced the victims and even restricted what they could tell any therapist. After we wrote about this lawsuit, one of the principals named in the case was investigated by his new school and wound up resigning.
- The family of a diabetic woman who suffered permanent brain damage accused Medtronic Inc., a manufacturer, of selling an unsafe insulin pump and the University of Washington Medical Center of medical malpractice. The file was sealed in 2003, concealing concerns about the pump and how Medtronic had not reported the case to federal regulators. The medical center, a public entity, settled its part of the lawsuit for \$3.2 million—but on condition the plaintiffs not tell anyone, including the media, how much the university paid or why.

When we began writing about these cases, the judges in King County took note. Counting civil, divorce and guardianship cases, the judges had sealed at least 1,378 files between 1990 and 2005. Since our stories began being published, not one file has been secreted away.

Readers also responded. We received more than 700 e-mails from

readers, with most expressing outrage that the files had ever been hidden from the public in the first place.

Local Investigative Reporting

With investigative reporting, the temptation is always there to go big, to go broad. But too often, we elevate the national and international at the expense of the local. Wanting novelty and sweep, we strive to distinguish ourselves from some newspaper 2,000 miles away rather than concentrating on what our hometown readers most need to know. Project ideas tend to get rejected on the flimsiest of grounds. "The Washington Post (or the St. Pete Times, or the Raleigh News & Observer, or The Wall Street Journal) has already written about incompetent teachers (or abusive cops, or polluted waters, or breakdowns in the foster care system)," an editor or reporter will say.

Well, so what? If the problem exists in your town—and it's the kind of problem that exposure can help solve—then, chances are, your readers want to know about it. They don't care if the same thing has been written about somewhere else.

The Washington Post did a terrific series on sealed court records in the late 1980's. But all that says to me is that courthouse secrecy is an ingrained problem. The more deep-rooted some problem is, the greater the need for lots of papers to dig it out.

After we published our stories on sealed court records in King County, Washington, the Las Vegas Review-Journal wrote a series of stories on sealed records in Clark County, Nevada. The Review-Journal did its local take on what is a national problem—and the stories were outstanding.

I've worked at papers big, small and in-between, and worked on projects that could be categorized as national, regional or local. The local stories are the toughest. They matter more to readers—including, perhaps, your neigh-

¹ <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/yourcourts-their-secrets>

² This story in the series, "Failures by state, caregiver kept secret in child-rape case," won a 2007 Casey Medal for Meritorious Journalism.

bors, or other parents at your kids' school, or even your loving spouse. They get picked over more. Objections can mount. Feelings get hurt.

The conventional wisdom seems to say that the more expansive the story, the greater its degree of difficulty. But to me, the challenges—and the potential

benefits—become even greater as the issue strikes closer to home. ■

Ken Armstrong, a 2001 Nieman Fellow, is a reporter at The Seattle Times. His series of stories, "Your Courts, Their Secrets," won the Distinguished Writing Award for Local

Accountability Reporting from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 2007, a Sunshine Award from the Society of Professional Journalists, and the National Headliner Award for Public Service.

Blending Voice and Reporting

'... stories conveyed a definite point of view, and the voice we used shared our perspective throughout their telling.'

By John Doherty and Tim Logan

In the summer of 2005, the editor and the publisher of our paper, The Times Herald-Record of Middletown, New York, came to our suburban bureau and said what every reporter longs to hear: "We want you to do something big. And we're going to cut you loose to do it." The editor was Mike Levine; the publisher was Jim Moss. Fresh from a trip for newspaper leaders at the Poynter Institute, they were eager to try out some new possibilities, especially Moss, who'd just won a fight with cancer and had said he would retire at year's end.

They gave us only two rules to follow: what we came up with could not be a traditional newspaper series, and they wanted it to be about Newburgh, a small, poor, violent, old factory town hard by the Hudson River, an hour north of New York City. The rest was ours to decide. The result, published six months later, was a 12-page pullout of five articles called "The Promised Land."¹ In story selection and in the use of our voices



During urban renewal in Newburgh, New York, an old firehouse on the corner of Second and Montgomery Streets was demolished. *Courtesy of Historical Society of Newburgh.*

in the story's telling, it was a natural fit for—and, as things turned out, our tribute to—Mike Levine's perspective on how best to report local news.

As our paper's executive editor, Levine had staved off circulation declines of our tabloid paper (80,000 daily) by employing risky and innova-

¹ http://archive.recordonline.com/news/special_reports/newburgh/

tive strategies toward newsgathering and telling. He'd sent a reporter and photographer to Indonesia after the tsunami and to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina so our readers would be well served in coverage of these global news events. Staff writers appeared on the paper's local TV ads; he believed their personalities and hyperlocal expertise would engage readers and, in turn, keep the newspaper alive.

When Levine was editor, the journalism we did was about the connections that could be made with readers. Coverage of a men's adult soccer league popular with local Hispanic immigrants received as much space and vigor as did the Yankees. Ignore the all-too-typical local government "process stories" playing out in our sprawling region's dozens of town halls, he urged, and instead focus on the view from 50,000 feet up, or from flat on the ground or, ideally, from both. Even casual readers should know the name of the leader of our booming Hasidic community, he believed, and something about the power struggle within his family. Connect, too, he said, with the experiences of migrants from the Bronx who left the city for peace but found the places we covered—"the country"—had their troubles, too. When one of our reporters wrote a personal story about her weight loss, he ran a photo of her in a bikini. And once he even urged a reporter covering a sexual assault trial at West Point to write the story in the first person.

He once described his approach as trying to build "a tabloid New Yorker." No approach was out of bounds. "The Promised Land" was, more than anything, Levine's local news philosophy writ large. And it was, in a word, strange.

None of our articles was longer than 30 inches. They were published together, as a five-part whole. The first piece took readers back to the day in 1970 when bulldozers leveled Newburgh's black neighborhood and marked the arrival of an urban renewal that didn't renew anything. (This event happened before either of us who wrote the story were even born in Massachusetts.) Told through memories of many who'd

THE PROMISED LAND
Thirty-five years later, can Newburgh find its way back home?
A Special Times Herald-Record Report
Newburgh: The Promised Land

Why Newburgh?
MESSAGES
Share memories of Newburgh and how you think the city can improve

Historic Newburgh: Images from the past

When the clothes were folded away and the curtains taken down and all the photographs placed in their boxes, it started. When the stores were closed for good and all the black children led to other homes on other streets, when the flag at Levy's grocery store was rolled up and the bell above the door of Ma Houto's pie and ice cream shop was silenced, when all the things that made this neighborhood a home had disappeared, the bulldozers moved forward.

They rolled into the Golden Platter, first bending, then snapping the beams of the big sun window. They tore up the floor of the billiards hall at 59 Smith St., and the upstairs rooms, where Runston Lewis and his seven siblings lived, came crashing down. They plowed through Al Atkin's Shoe Shine Parlor and Max's Grocery, through the Silver Grille where the second-shifters at Mastic Tile took their meals. They pushed their blades into homes and storefront churches, and they pulled back under showers of wood and glass and plaster. Then they edged deeper into the block, pushing and pulling, over and over, like the steel waves of some violent tide. [Read more.](#)

January 29, 2006

Doherty and Logan's reporting is amplified on the newspaper's Web site with historic images and interactive commentary.

lived then in Newburgh's East End, it grabbed readers by the throat and didn't let go.

Another article detailed the emergence of Newburgh's "poverty economy," the \$40-million-a-year industry that grew up to serve and sooth the poor. Another explored the theory, long regarded as fact on the brick streets of Newburgh, that this city was a dumping ground for the troubles of an increasingly affluent region. In a separate piece, which began with a scene of a barefoot man stomping a rat to death, evidence was given that decades of concentrated poverty had produced a condition not unlike posttraumatic stress disorder in Newburgh's ghettos. In the fifth piece, we returned readers to the still-vacant urban renewal land and challenged the city to see the land as a chance to combat poverty, not just build luxury condominiums.

The Voice

For us, the strange part of writing these stories was the voice we were

encouraged to use in doing so. Clearly we couldn't tell the story using a first-person voice, since it wasn't our story to tell. Still, these stories conveyed a definite point of view, and the voice we used shared our perspective throughout their telling. Newburgh had become a dumping ground, our stories argued, a corral for the region's woes and, until that was addressed, the city could never be renewed. With Levine spurring us on, we dispensed with the usual back-and-forth balancing between sides. Instead, we portrayed the issues as they are seen by people who live in Newburgh, and we conveyed our core finding as a fact backed up by decades of experience.

To reach this conclusion, we relied on the wisdom of regular Newburghers, the ones who had been there through factory closings and crack cocaine and heard so many promises of a new start that had left only bitterness in their wake. We talked with the mayor, but more importantly we talked with Valencia Forbes, who carries a picture of that rat her husband squashed, and one



With its abandoned factories and appalling poverty, Newburgh is like many other faded industrial towns. Two reporters talked with residents in this upstate New York city, then shared what they'd learned by offering readers their point of view. *Photo by Jeff Goulding.*

of a son who she lost to Newburgh's endemic violence. In the end, we gave more weight to her words than to those we heard inside of city hall.

We also relied on our expertise. One of us, a seasoned street reporter, came to understand the history and contemporary dynamics of Newburgh as well as anyone who has lived there and concluded the city's core problem was entrenched poverty among its black residents. The other, who holds a master's degree in urban planning, was encouraged to analyze the city's economy and assess the effects of urban renewal. In a city as remote and small as Newburgh, no outside experts, professors or think tanks had studied its poverty economy or mental health issues. Living as close as they do to these problems, we weren't surprised that no inside experts emerged, either. So we had to study the city ourselves.

"The Promised Land," a magazine-style essay about the self-perpetuating cycle of urban poverty, conveyed voices of those hard streets, alongside our big picture analysis of how things got to be the way they are today. At the end, it included a series of next-step recommendations, written mostly by our publisher, Moss.

Reaction by readers—including resi-

dents of Newburgh—was mixed. A few praised our work as "brilliant." More wrote it off as "The Record picking on Newburgh" again—a common theme in the paper's relationship with the city. It served to galvanize opinion around our chief recommendation—that the vacant urban renewal land be used to build a community college then under discussion—but moved it in the opposite direction. The city's leaders launched a campaign to put the college someplace else. Most of our recommendations were casually ignored, though some have been taken up by other groups. Under the grind of deadlines and the rush of new priorities, any push by us to keep the pressure on got lost in the haze.

Our colleagues' reaction was mixed as well. A reporter at another paper wrote to ask one of us if he was aiming to become a columnist. When one of us interviewed for a job at bigger, more traditional papers, editors' comments about the series went from "genius" to wondering how this buttoned-down business reporter had strayed so far off the reservation.

Back in our own newsroom, Levine liked what we'd done. He used our series as a prime example of the direction he thought newsrooms should move

in if they were going to stay relevant to readers. At the Record he believed in freeing up reporters to call it like they see it by trusting in their experience and analysis. He wanted them to write stories that stood for something and to say things no one else would. He articulated these values in an interview with the Columbia Journalism Review a few months after "The Promised Land" appeared in our paper.

At our newspaper, "The Promised Land" was really a last hurrah for Levine's local news approach. Shortly after the series ran, Moss, the publisher who had given Levine so much leash, retired. Within a year, Levine was dead, killed by a heart attack at the age of 54. Soon after, Rupert Murdoch launched his bid to buy Dow Jones and, when his bid succeeded, he indicated plans to sell off its Ottaway community newspaper group, of which the Record is one. Uncertainty pervaded our newsroom, followed by a predictable exodus of reporters, many of whom were believers in Levine's ideas. One of us embarked for a new newspaper job in St. Louis.

If there's a lasting legacy, it might be that our words—the voice we became accustomed to using—have been absorbed into Newburgh's struggle. Two years later, in the offices of several nonprofit agencies, pages from "The Promised Land" are taped to walls and desks. This fall, the city was engaged in a hard-fought, three-way race for mayor, and poverty was a central issue. At least one candidate included excerpts from our series in campaign literature. What's certain is that the issues and ideas this very different and challenging newspaper series raised are now part of Newburgh's conversation. As our editor would have reminded us, "That's the point." ■

John Doherty is a bureau reporter at The Times Herald-Record in Middletown, New York. Tim Logan covers the telecommunications and airline industries for the business desk at the St. Louis Post Dispatch.

Going to China to Report Local Stories

‘... I returned to Charleston convinced that we do a disservice to our readers when we think local reporting only happens when we stay close to home.’

By Tony Bartelme

“I’ve got a great local story, but I need to go to China. How about it?” In so many words, that’s how I asked my editors for permission to write about a man named Hal Burrows, who lives in Charleston, South Carolina. Soon he would be going to China for the second time to have stem cells injected into his badly damaged spine, and I wanted to travel with him.

Twenty years ago Burrows was paralyzed in a bicycle accident. He’d fought hard and had regained some movement, only to see it slip away when he reached his forties. In 2006, he traveled to China for stem cell injections, one of the first Americans to do so, suddenly regaining movement in his left arm. He hoped for even greater improvement on this second trip.

Aside from exploring Burrows’ personal struggle to overcome his disability, this story held the promise of delving deep into a contemporary political controversy and societal debate. Stem cell treatments like those offered in China aren’t available in the United States because of governmental roadblocks and concerns in American medical circles that the treatments don’t work or aren’t safe. Now our newspaper had an opportunity to use a local man’s experience to educate our readers about stem cells, which some believe have the potential to be one of the more important advances in medical care since the discovery of penicillin.

I made my pitch, which combined aspects of all these arguments, but I doubted it would work. Though editors at large daily newspapers are often willing to dispatch reporters to faraway places, many small and medium papers across the country like *The Post and Courier* (circ. 100,000) now march to

the drumbeat of local, local, local. During the past decade, the paper closed its bureau in Washington, D.C., and reduced or eliminated other in-state bureaus. Once dominated by national wire stories, *The Post and Courier*’s front page looks more and more like the local section. Though some readers grumble about this change, daily circulation is up, as is our readership on the newspaper’s Web site.

William Hawkins, the paper’s executive editor, is a vocal cheerleader for this heavier emphasis on local news. “Local is our future, but we’re not so local that we’re parochial,” he told me. To make room in the newsroom’s travel budget, he canceled a trip to an industry conference and told me and staff photographer Alan Hawes, who worked with me on suggesting this story, to get our visas.

Reporting in China

Soon we were 12 time zones from Charleston, in Dr. Sean Hu’s gleaming black Buick Riviera, weaving through the crowded boulevards of Shenzhen, China. Hu is chairman of Beike Biotechnology, one of a growing number of Chinese companies that charge foreign patients as much as \$20,000 for stem cell treatments. Just 40 years old and trained in Sweden and Canada, Hu moved back to China several years ago and sold two medical supply companies to focus on stem cells. “China is where the money is,” he told us.

As we drove through Shenzhen, Hu talked about clinical trials his researchers had done and shared his thoughts about the Bush administration’s prohibition on embryonic stem cell research and medical use. He told us how he’d watched paraplegics walk after stem

cell treatments. At times, he’d interrupt our conversation to point out skyscrapers, including one of the world’s tallest, or an exhibition center with the floor space of 30 Wal-Marts. Three decades ago Shenzhen was a mere fishing town of about 70,000 people; it now has more than 12 million residents and 120,000 factories, a stunning example of China’s economic transformation. Hu mentioned potential deals with venture capital firms in Great Britain and Silicon Valley. His cell phone rang every few minutes, with a female voice saying “You got message” in English. Hu epitomized how China’s boom has created a new generation of international high-tech entrepreneurs.

Hu’s story was compelling in itself, but our assignment was to bring to our newspaper’s readers a local story. To do this, we spent most of our time in the hospital with Burrows, and there we met other American patients, too. Some of these patients had experienced remarkable improvements after their stem cell injections. One partially blind patient from Florida regained his vision. Another told us he could relieve himself without mechanical help for the first time in years.

Others weren’t so satisfied. A few doors down from Burrows, a patient from Louisiana with a spinal injury told us how he had developed spinal meningitis after doctors at another company injected his back with stem cells. He also had no improvement after Beike’s expensive treatments. A Canadian father began to question whether the subtle improvements he had seen in his two paralyzed daughters were from physical therapy or the placebo effect. In the end, Burrows saw no changes after his second round of stem cells. He left China skeptical about the treat-

ments, though hopeful that stem cells still might cure him one day.

In 2007, more than a dozen American newspapers wrote about people from their towns and cities traveling to China for stem cell treatments. Each was an emotional story about hope and determination. Few reported in any depth about the risks and controversy of these treatments. The time we spent in China resulted in a story entitled “Miracle or Mirage,” which was a three-part narrative that took readers inside the complex debate about stem cells, but it also wove into the story the universal theme of how hope can have the power to transform and to blind.

Finding Other Local Stories

Knowing the expense of our reporting trip to China—and certain The Post and Courier would not be sending us back to China anytime soon—during our time there we tried to find other “local” stories. This turned out to be a surprisingly easy task. On our way back from the hospital one afternoon, we traveled to a neighborhood in Shen-

zhen where 3,000 artists churn out fake van Goghs and Rembrandts in an assembly-line fashion, much the way McDonald’s cranks out burgers and fries. This scene framed a story about how cheap knockoffs affect Charleston’s art scene.

We also visited a factory owned by a Charleston-based lighting manufacturer and, by luck, met the company’s top executives, suitcases in hand, just after their 25-hour flight from the United States. Our tour of their factory helped to shape an in-depth story about how China’s boom directly affects businesses, employment and consumers in South Carolina. A few days later, we toured the port of Hong Kong. There we learned about some creative approaches used to squeeze containerized cargo into a place where land is scarce. This issue is of great importance to Charleston, which also has a large container port and is struggling to find new space to expand.

When I pitched the China trip, I felt I was pushing the envelope in describing it as an attempt to chase “local” stories. But I returned to Charleston convinced that we do a disservice to our readers

when we think local reporting only happens when we stay close to home. In an increasingly interconnected world, the definition of what constitutes local news naturally must expand.

The question editors—and publishers—at daily newspapers confront is how to balance the costs and benefits of such reporting with their local obligation to cover city hall and lots of other local stories.

Our trip wasn’t cheap, costing about \$7,000 for the two of us. But it wasn’t expensive, either, when one considers that it equals roughly the cost of sending sports reporters and photographers to two college bowl games. “If you think about it, everybody is going to have the same story about that bowl game,” Hawkins observed. “But nobody else had the stories we did.” ■

Tony Bartelme is senior projects reporter with The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina. His work about China won the 2007 Associated Press Managing Editors award for international perspective for newspapers under 150,000 circulation.

AN ESSAY IN WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Showing China—With a Local Thread

By Alan Hawes

I met Hal Burrows like I meet a lot of people, when he called me over and wanted to talk about my cameras. Ours was a usual back-and-forth conversation, with him asking me some questions about technical aspects of my cameras, until he mentioned that he’d been to China for stem cell treatments. When I heard him mention this recent medical trip, my ears perked up. Suddenly, I was thinking about how his story would be a terrific one for us to tell in The Post and Courier, our local newspaper in Charleston, South Carolina.

Against the odds—given our mid-sized paper’s newsroom budget and our emphasis on local news coverage—reporter Tony Bartelme and I received a go-ahead from Executive Editor William Hawkins. [See Tony Bartelme’s story on page 13 for more about how and why this happened.] When Hal headed back to China for his second round of stem cell treatments, we went with him.

Once there, my job was to tell the visual story of Hal’s trip. My plan for doing this was to bring back compelling photographs from this Charleston

man’s medical journey in this distant, and in many ways exotic, place as he tried what some regard as a risky treatment in a hospital that does not adhere to American standards of medical practice.

Hal had only one stem cell injection while we were in China. Even though this moment was the one I felt we’d traveled around the world to document, the hospital officials did not want me to photograph the procedure. We knew this before we’d left on the trip, but figured we could find a way to make it happen once we were there.

In fact, just before the procedure was going to take place, I found out that the doctor who would be injecting the stem cells into Hal's spine was very interested in photography; he was very familiar with my camera but had never seen one, so we talked a bit about it. He did not seem at all bothered that we were there, and after we talked he agreed to let a nurse take photos of the procedure with my camera. I was not allowed in the room.

Other days when I'd been at the hospital, I'd tried to be very inconspicuous, keeping my camera in my backpack. But

on this day I shot some photos of Hal in the hallway outside the room where the procedure would take place. After the procedure, the nurse who took the photos gave me the camera back. All seemed to be going well until I saw the panic-stricken eyes of another nurse as I was photographing Hal being rolled into his room. She confronted me, and I told her we were leaving. We rushed out of Hal's room and were met at the elevator by several hospital and stem cell company employees. They asked if I took pictures, and I told them I did. A long pause followed. As the elevator

door opened, packed with passengers staring at us, I thought about escaping into the elevator and was about to when one of the stem cell company managers said, "Just go." I held my breath as we passed the guards on the way out of the hospital and chased down the first cab we saw and headed back to the hotel. I promptly sent my photos back to the newspaper. ■

Alan Hawes is a photographer at The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina.



A photo of President George Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao shaking hands in Beijing on November 20, 2005 was copied to make this painting in the Dafen oil painting village in Shenzhen, China. This image appeared in *The Post and Courier* as part of Bartelme's reporting to demonstrate China's pride in its business ties to the United States. *Photo by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.*



Hal Burrows rests in his room at Nanshan Hospital in Shenzhen, China after receiving a stem cell injection. A floor of the government-owned hospital is occupied by the Beike Biotech Company, which specializes in stem cell treatments for foreigners.

His hospital room was stark, with nothing to suggest to a viewer that he was in China. There was no medical equipment in the room—only a bed, sink, window and bathroom. It looked like my college dorm, and Hal used it like a hotel room. He was an inpatient despite getting stem cell treatments only once a week. By communicating the room's starkness, I thought I might be able to show a contrast between Chinese and U.S. hospitals. —A.H.



Burrows, right, waits outside the room where the stem cell injections are done.

Photos by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.



Burrows explores a market near the hospital where he was waiting for stem cell injections. He traveled halfway around the world from his home in Charleston, South Carolina to Shenzhen, China to have the stem cells injected into his back. *Photo by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.*

When Hal decided to venture out of the hospital, I had an easier time making the visual story come alive. Hal loved to get out into the city, where he would bravely navigate the streets in his wheelchair and interact with the local residents. This was a most unusual sight in China, since the only time people are seen in wheelchairs is inside of a hospital. Tony and I followed Hal around the streets on two different days. My goal was simple: to place Hal in China and let the pictures illuminate who he is, something that happened when he hitched a ride on the back of the motorized bicycle. —A.H.



An employee works on parts at the Quoizel plant in Shenzhen, China. Quoizel is headquartered in Goose Creek, South Carolina, but moved most of its manufacturing to China so it can remain competitive because of the cheap labor. Most of the manufacturing in the plant is done by hand.



A Quoizel employee moves boxes of lighting fixtures around a storeroom at its manufacturing plant in China. The label on the box shows a direct link back to the Charleston area.

After we finished working on Hal's story, Tony and I looked for other "local" angles to stories we could do in China—and found several to pursue. With a story we did about a South Carolina-based manufacturing plant located in Shenzhen, for example, I took pictures of the process we observed at the factory and then took photographs of the goods made there that are stored in the warehouse in South Carolina. In China I was surprised at how much of the factory work is done by hand. Large machines were not in use in the production process we observed. Instead, workers used hand tools, and I focused on the labor-intensive atmosphere. I also took pictures of some of the executives from South Carolina at their office in China, but the most interesting photos came from what was going on with the workers. —A.H.

Photos by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.

Global Issues Viewed Through Local Eyes

New media—and new ‘newsroom’ arrangements—combine to make local coverage of environmental issues compelling and personal.

By Perry Beeman

Many journalism leaders are banking on the lure of local news and information to save the mainstream media from oblivion. There is no doubt that local sells, and news about environmental issues fits this new model well. Even a story as global in its reach and significance as climate change has lots of strong, attention-grabbing local angles. Of course, so do stories that can explain to people how their local kayak run or swimming hole became polluted, delving into why and who is responsible and whether any local government official is doing anything about it.

The latest incarnation of local news coverage—digital style—combines conventional reporting with video, interactive polls, quizzes and steady updates of major stories. At Gannett, where I report on environmental topics for The Des Moines Register, we no longer have newsrooms. At Gannett-owned newspapers, we now have “information centers.” It’s a phrase my more traditional colleagues have mocked, but one that rings true in many ways. No longer are we about delivering only inverted pyramid news stories. We are about telling the story using a lot of different media *and* delivering the documents that support what we’re reporting.

People can search online databases to learn which state government employee gets paid the most, which dog’s name is most popular in the home county, what ethanol plant has violated pollution laws the most, or how the hometown hero wrestler is doing at the state meet. What’s happening with endangered species can be tracked online, and reporters—just like folks at home on their computers—use Google Earth and other tools to see changes in our landscape as cornfields vanish

and suburban homes, roadside malls, and parking lots blossom.

My beat presents all kinds of opportunities for compelling local coverage using the latest in multimedia techniques. Even the crustiest of my newsroom—oops, information center—colleagues must know now that the newspaper’s Web site is our friend, with its amazing power to convert the printed word into a combination TV station, newspaper, bulletin board, and town hall meeting. I remember years ago, before many of us woke up to the power of clickable maps linked to databases, when The [Raleigh] News & Observer did a fabulous, huge map that showed every pipe dropping sewage into the Neuse River. The print map was beautiful and informative. The Web map allowed residents to click right on their local neighborhood and find out who was responsible for polluting that stretch of water.

Virtually every community has water quality issues, and in many places there are air contamination issues, too. Urban and suburban sprawl, fights about endangered species vs. industry, construction-site runoff, crop fertilizer pollution, the debate about how to satisfy our increasing need for power, and local effects of climate change are frequent topics of daily coverage. Never has it been so easy to make these stories compelling—in part due to the audio and visual digital connections our readers now have. When we have news about pollution in local kayak runs, viewers can read and watch and hear our coverage. When Iowa’s state government dragged its feet for years on starting bacterial checks at state park beaches, I teamed up with a laboratory to do sampling. The results were surprisingly bad and led to the state’s first comprehensive weekly samplings and

a steady string of beach advisories.

Interactivity extends beyond the computer screen when reporters combine forces with local volunteers. Dina Cappiello crafted an award-winning project in the Houston Chronicle in which homeowners helped to test air quality; their findings were found online—placed within the broader context of her overall reporting—and they offered a stark look at local pollution issues. Because of homeowners’ engagement in the “reporting,” the story was one of particular local interest.

These examples show how the environment beat fits in well with the changing direction of journalism. Our readers and viewers should be able to find out who the biggest local polluters are. And now they can do this by using public databases we put on our Web site and through stories we publish in the paper, some of which reveal surprising facts about local industries.

Recently the Register reported that the biofuels industry, which is supposed to be a “clean” and “green” alternative to fossil fuels, is creating large amounts of pollution in manufacturing and in growing the feedstock—corn—in the first place. We constructed our own database using enforcement records we obtained and analyzed, and we put up what we had learned on our Web site. In time, we produced a map on which residents click to check out who owns the local biofuels plant, how much pollution it produces, and how many environmental violations it has. We didn’t make our readers take *our* word for the violations. All of the original documents are available on the paper’s Web site.

There’s something incredibly democratic about all this. As journalists, we still act as a news filter, but we

also offer raw data and raw footage. People comment on what we report, often immediately and anonymously and without the fuss it takes to meet the rules of a standard editorial page. There are merits and drawbacks in this arrangement, but there is no doubt that these features let us connect with local residents in ways we never had before, at least to this degree. And often in these exchanges we pick up new leads for advancing the story.

Recent examples of solid reporting on the environment, which can serve as examples of the kind of work that can be done in nearly every locality, include these:

- James Bruggers of The [Louisville] Courier-Journal reported about serious air pollution in his city.
- Dan Fagin, when he was at Newsday, delved into questions about possible environmental causes of Long Island breast cancer cases.
- The Los Angeles Times's landmark series, "Altered Oceans," reported on details of ocean pollution problems, meshing local concerns with global circumstances.
- Both The Times-Picayune in New Orleans and The [Baton Rouge] Advocate examined oxygen-starved waters where animal and plant life struggle to survive.
- Several years before Katrina hit, The Times-Picayune warned its readers

in New Orleans about the devastation that would befall their city when a powerful hurricane like Katrina hit—and the levees didn't hold.

It's certainly the case that since 9/11 public documents can be tougher to get. But using our skills as reporters to get those records onto our Web sites helps our readers and viewers detail threats in our communities. The records can help residents find out what businesses store chemicals that might, under certain circumstances, pose a great risk to them. People can use our Web sites to find out which cities, factories or farms routinely violate permits issued by the state or by EPA under the Clean Water Act that are meant to ensure that streams are fit for fishing and swimming. Our Web sites enable people to also find out what officials in state government are doing, if anything, about these offenses. (Answer: Many do little.)

Reporters who cover the environment have a great resource in searching for local stories. The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) has an incredible Web page that includes a database of top breaking stories about a variety of environmental issues and a library of top stories from the past. Much of the Web site is available for public use, but SEJ members also have a private listserv that allows them to ask their colleagues at other media

outlets for advice about sources, story angles, and recently released reports. Within minutes a query will bring in multiple responses.

Information about local issues is already being delivered via cell phone and RSS. And though these technologies enable news to travel around the globe faster than we can deliver a newspaper, the real value of the Web for us seems to be its ease in getting local readers the kind of information they want and need. When they have data in front of them, all sorts of new directions in our reporting can develop. Local angles are inspired by readers' desire for information relating to their daily lives, and coverage is often informed by comments readers make via blog-like entries under the story displayed online.

News about environmental issues can be local, national and global, all at the same time. Wire service stories and big national papers tend to provide the broader view on these global topics, but for every national and global story, a local angle is waiting to be told. These stories are among those news organizations like mine need to be telling. ■

Perry Beeman is environmental reporter at The Des Moines Register. He served on the board of the Society of Environmental Journalists for eight years and as president for two.

Going Far to Explore a Local Story

'The currency common to these assignments was the thread of local connections stretching from Indiana to overseas and back in news stories we broadcast.'

By Kevin Finch

A giant military cargo plane rumbles to a stop on a dry, windswept runway in Iraq's embattled capital city. A U.S. cabinet member, a congressman, and their entourage ease their way off the noisy aircraft. A television news crew who tagged along

also jumps into the sun, dry air, and 120-degree heat—not to mention the expected gunfire and explosions—in this foreign land. The reporter and photographer had traveled 12,000 miles on five planes, including this military transport, to get here.

This could be a crew from CNN, Fox News, ABC, NBC or CBS, but it isn't. They are from WISH-TV in Indianapolis—a local TV station that has sent this team far from home to report on a story that has strong local roots. In fact, this was WISH's second trip to Iraq, and this

time our story turned out to be a rare glimpse at a significant issue. The reports by anchor/reporter Karen Hensel and photographer Eric Miller, edited by Doug Moon, were broadcast in the fall of 2006 and exposed a soft underbelly in the U.S. Marine Corps' armor: the helmets that were supposed to protect their heads. Our series of stories, called "Command Mistake," was recognized with a Peabody Award.

This reporting experience reminded us of just what constitutes "local" news these days. Many local TV news departments went "hyperlocal" a few years ago, with a just-around-the-block focus—after newspapers began their zoned editions phase more than a decade ago. So an international assignment like this one would seem at odds with our mission. But a closer look reveals how these various approaches to news reporting can coexist.

Following Local Leads

Hensel's father is a former Marine, and his experiences as a veteran have connected her through the years with situations faced by veterans. At the outset of the Iraq War, she helped to lead our station's drive to send air cooling "mist" to Americans fighting there. She's also reported on delays in veterans receiving benefits owed to them and about a Veterans Administration (VA) security breach. Viewers know that she is interested in such stories, so soldiers and Marines, as well as veterans, often contact her to give her leads on possible stories.

That's how "Command Mistake" began. In January 2006, "This guy writes and says, 'I understand there's padding. How do I get it?'" Hensel recalled. This e-mail message, sent to her from a soldier in Iraq, led Hensel to ask a lot of questions about this added padding that fits inside of helmets. She wanted to find out why soldiers and Marines need this extra cushioning pad for their helmets and why, if it's needed, the helmets don't already have it. And why, Hensel wondered, are the soldiers themselves having to pay for this padding?

In a short time, Hensel learned a

lot about American military helmets, head injuries, and the Iraq War. Much of it required little more than some old-fashioned digging—and that she did by talking with military people in Central Indiana. "What really hit me was when the VA set up four polytrauma units stateside to deal with all the head injuries and other serious injuries," said Hensel. "That told me the numbers were bigger than we knew."

But she learned that the Pentagon wasn't providing such numbers. Therefore, it took a lot more digging for her to establish connections among these helmet pads, head injuries, and what turns out to be the nature of warfare in Iraq.

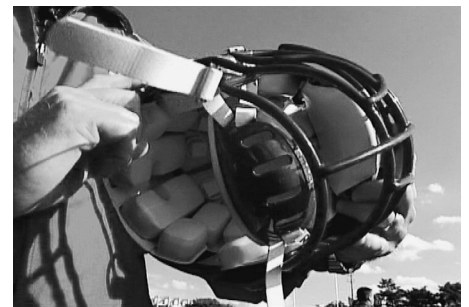
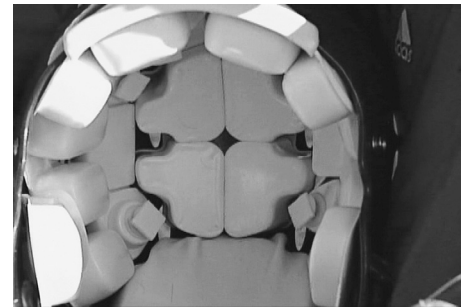
Surprisingly, that's when the story became very local.

By this time, Hensel had collected plenty of helmets to compare to the standard issue military helmet, including helmets used by players on the Indianapolis Colts and Indiana University team. Each of these helmets, she discovered, had much more padding than a soldier's helmet, which, in 2005-2006, was still known as a "sling" helmet. When the Iraq War began, American troops wore a modern helmet with a Kevlar shell, but the interior still featured a sling design similar to the helmets dating back to World War II. This sling-style webbing suspended the helmet above the soldier's head, but there were no cushioning pads to create a snug fit.

What's the difference between webbing and padding? Hensel found that it's the difference between severe brain injury and no injury at all. That's because in this war, she reported, "for the first time, more soldiers are dying from bomb blasts than from bullets."

The outer Kevlar might protect a soldier's head from a piercing wound, but the webbing inside the helmet actually contributes to a concussion injury when the energy from a roadside bomb blast travels from the ground up to the helmet and slams the Kevlar helmet against a soldier's head. That force leads to intracranial bleeding of the brain.

The results for the soldier or Marine range from obviously catastrophic—



Various visuals were used to show the relationship between helmet design, helmet padding, and brain injury. Top photo by Eric Miller/WISH-TV, other photos by David Hodge/WISH-TV.

loss of motor skills, speech and memory—to more subtle delays that can last for months or years.

Hensel uncovered government research that had revealed recently the danger of roadside blasts from IED's (Improvised Explosive Devices). This research explained how the energy from those explosions contributed to brain injuries. But she also dug up a huge disconnect: Despite the research and despite the U.S. Army's decision to add cushioning padding to its helmets, the Marine Corps adamantly refused to follow the Army's lead. That meant that Marines were left to improvise their own field installation of padding, in the same fashion that American troops have been "up-armor-ing" Humvees for years.

Even though Hensel's findings certainly had international significance, still much of her reporting continued to be done near home. She documented what researchers were doing at Indiana University as they placed sensors in football helmets to measure force impact and alert trainers to players taking too much punishment. Hensel's reporting showed how the nation's leading football helmet designer, Riddell, was improving its helmets during the first three years of the Iraq War, while at the same time helmet design remained at a practical standstill at the Pentagon.

Hensel also discovered that two of seven companies manufacturing helmet padding also were located in Indiana. For years, they'd sold pads directly to worried parents of soldiers and Marines. When the Army authorized helmet padding, they won contracts and became direct suppliers.

Going Far, Remaining Local

After a couple of months of research, Hensel began sharing the helmet padding story with her audience in Indianapolis. The first story aired in



A wounded soldier arrives at a U.S. trauma treatment facility in Landstuhl, Germany after being flown there from Iraq. *Photo by Eric Miller/WISH-TV.*

March 2006. Others followed. In June, she reported on the congressional hearings that looked into brain injury from roadside bomb blasts.

Even before this, she'd begun trying to convince her bosses that to tell her story fully required a reporting trip to Iraq. At that time I was the assistant news director, and Tom Cochrun was news director at the station. While we supported the concept of Hensel making such a trip, our support wasn't without reservations.

A trip to a war zone is fraught with more dangers than bombs and bullets. What if our contacts could not deliver on access they'd promised to soldiers and Marines? What if we ran into difficulty in securing visas in Kuwait? What if the commercial flights we take are delayed and Hensel and Miller miss their ride into Iraq on a military transport? With all of these uncertainties, we were concerned about whether they could get the story and do so safely. But we also understood that Hensel had exhausted the newsgathering she could do here. If she wanted to tell the whole story, she had to go to Iraq.

WISH-TV President and General Manager Jeff White is energetic and passionate about his station being a local leader. Ultimately, this decision was his to make, and though it was an expensive proposition, money wasn't his top concern. Besides his crew's safety, what concerned him most was

whether Hensel would return with a story that our viewers would care about.

In two meetings, Hensel convinced all of her bosses that the Iraq trip was the right way to go. Perhaps one of the strongest selling points—aside from the evident passion she had to tell this story—was her reminder of the many local angles she'd already pursued. She had never forgotten that first e-mail—the one from a local soldier asking if she knew how to acquire a little after-market improvement to a standard-issue helmet. Hensel convinced all of us

that if her curiosity was piqued by this query from an Indiana soldier, then her viewers would be interested, too.

"Command Mistake" was one of several recent WISH-TV news series involving overseas reporting trips. Our crews logged tens of thousands of miles from 2004 through 2006, with much of the reporting focused on local soldiers serving in distant lands. Anchor Debby Knox and photographer Bill Fisher profiled Indiana Guard troops on peace-keeping duty in Bosnia. Reporter Pam Elliot and photographer David Hodge made the station's first trip to Kuwait and Iraq, documenting the "up-armor-ing" of Humvees. Elliott also traveled to Afghanistan with photographer Jerry Peck to report on Indiana soldiers training Afghanistan's new army in modern battlefield tactics.

All of these were dangerous assignments, but one that turned out to be almost deadly was not in a typical war zone. Anchor Eric Halvorson and photographer Kevin Conners traveled with Jim Morris, who headed the UN's World Food Programme and is from Indiana, as he surveyed the destruction of the tsunami in Sri Lanka. Even though Morris had negotiated a truce to allow relief workers to distribute food, rebel troops fired on their helicopter.

The currency common to these assignments was the thread of local connections stretching from Indiana to overseas and back in news stories

we broadcast. But not all of our “international” reporting—with a local angle—required travel. In early 2005, reporter Mary McDermott and photographer Ron Nakasone began documenting the physical, emotional and personal costs of the war in Iraq. Her series, “Wounds of War,” focused on an Indiana veteran named Nick Bennett, who was later profiled by members of the national news media. Bennett has endured surgery after surgery for severe physical wounds. McDermott’s stories also showed how tough it is on families financially when the chief breadwinner has to leave his or her job and answer the call to active duty.

What Local Audiences Want

It remains true, however, that most of any local station’s news coverage is dedicated to purely local issues; there are proposed tax increases and political races, houses on fire and crime on the rise. And weather and daily events are consistent ingredients. Yet research shows that many viewers want their

local TV station to cover it all. Be local, they say, but don’t forget to tell us about what else is going on in the world, too.

That sentiment is reflected in surveys conducted by Frank N. Magid Associates, the TV consulting firm. Magid has tracked local viewers’ interest in national/international news and noted a significant change in attitudes after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Using a 1-10 scale, with 10 being interested in national news and one reflecting interest in only local news, before 9/11, 53 percent of viewers (surveyed in 10 television markets) preferred local news only. After 9/11, just 23 percent of viewers wanted to know only about life in their hometown. Magid found the biggest change in the middle of the scale, with 39 percent favoring a blend of local and national news before 9/11 and 64 percent preferring the blend after 9/11.

“It simply means that there is a dependency viewers have on their local news to inform them about the important national and international

news that is happening and if it can be brought down to the local level, so much the better,” says Richard Haynes, senior vice president, research, Frank N. Magid Associates.

To satisfy such viewer demands, Haynes recommends localizing an international story—a time-honored tradition among local stations. But it can also mean traveling to the source of the story overseas. Yet Haynes argues that national and international news must still be presented under a local umbrella. This guidance drives a lot of what we do at WISH-TV. Travel is never authorized simply for the sake of a trip. Our general manager’s thinking is correct: If the viewers don’t find some connection to their own lives with the news being reported to them, it doesn’t matter where the story originates or what its intrinsic value might be. Local means local, even when the story originates half a world away. ■

Kevin Finch is the news director at WISH-TV in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Local Voices—Once Quiet—Are Heard

On the zoned local editorial pages of The Dallas Morning News, people from the community ‘think locally . . . tell us something we don’t know’ and are ‘persuasive.’

By Michael Landauer

There he was among a mountain of photocopies, Applicant W38, a smart, plugged-in, articulate, longtime community leader. Who could write more knowledgeably about the city council than a former council member? Who could bring greater insight to crime issues than the former head of the state prison system?

But we rejected him. And here’s why: Charles Terrell has a voice. He’s a newsmaker. We’ll gladly run guest columns from him on timely issues, but he’s not “Voices” material.

So who is? To be a Community Voice,

a volunteer columnist for The Dallas Morning News’s editorial page, the person needs to think locally, write well, tell us something we don’t know, and be persuasive.

I couldn’t quite articulate those criteria when I got our first group of Voices together over cheese and crackers in a cramped conference room in 2003. All I knew back then, and all I told those six volunteers who read the paper often enough to see our humble little plea for applicants, was that I wanted real people writing about real issues in their very real lives. I guess I

had in mind a print version of reality TV, minus the eating of bugs.

Since getting things started with that thoughtful bunch in one of our suburban zoned editions, we have expanded to include our full readership, and we have published regular columns from hundreds of different Voices. We’ve added Student Voices and Teacher Voices to the mix, and we currently have 98 Voices writing columns every four to six weeks on our zoned local pages inside our Metro section.

In addition to writing full-length columns, these volunteers also answer

our question of the week. We send them an e-mail on Monday and print the best mix of responses on Saturday. Non-Voices wanted in on this action, too, so we run their responses alongside responses from our Voices but, as the stars of the show, the Voices have photos included with their answers. This second-class status doesn't bother the non-Voices, though. The list of people who send us their personal contact information to be part of Sounding Off continues to grow, having just passed the 1,000 mark. On any given question, we get about a 20 percent response rate.

We're still figuring out what works and what needs work in our Voices and Sounding Off programs. Every time we put together a new introductory workshop, the agenda changes a little. For example, I used to spend time teaching free writing, but I've dropped that to focus more on preparing them to answer their fan mail, which is plentiful since all the adult Voices have their e-mail addresses published with their columns.

Other lessons I've learned along the way include:

Avoid partisan politics. I tried to even out the conservatives and the liberals, and then I realized I should be getting these people to write on issues that transcend such labels. Why don't people talk to their neighbors? Why do kids fall behind in school? Are PTAs hostile to dads? These aren't red/blue issues. When we've chosen party precinct chairs and tried to even them out, no one believed there was any balance anyway. They just saw red—or blue.

Create status. We don't pay these folks, so we have to give them something

COLLIN COUNTY OPINIONS

They're raising their voices

Today we introduce our 2007-2008 Teacher Voices, who will be regular contributors to this forum

Melissa Peden
Chief teacher, Bryant School, McKinney

For 13 years, Ms. Peden taught in Collier Hill, and she says that after a year in her school, she's seen differences between old and new, north and south. She says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same. She says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same. She says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same.

Debra Madrigal
Sixth-grade mathematics teacher, Mountain Elementary School, Allen

She never expected to be a teacher. But Ms. Madrigal says she can't imagine anything else. Growing up in a rural, low-income area, she says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same. She says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same.

Mary Higgins
Campus executive director, Mountain Elementary School, Allen

Ms. Higgins loves the challenge of teaching. She says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same. She says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same.

Diane Berry-Dye
Seventh-grade language arts teacher, Prairie Middle School, McKinney

Ms. Berry-Dye says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same. She says she's seen a lot of change, but she's seen things remain the same.

Buzz Priestley
Communication systems and staff skills teacher, Communication Systems, Dallas

What do you do when you turn 60 years old with a communication systems job? He says he's seen a lot of change, but he's seen things remain the same.

Heath Henry
History teacher, Mountain Elementary School, Allen

Heath Henry says he's seen a lot of change, but he's seen things remain the same. He says he's seen a lot of change, but he's seen things remain the same.

RAISE YOUR VOICE

The Dallas Morning News is accepting applications for Community Voices, a panel of volunteer columnists who will be regular contributors to the "Opinions" page inside the Metrosection. Voices volunteer write opinion columns four to six weeks and are the face of the weekly Sounding Off feature that appears on Saturdays, in which readers and other readers respond to a question of the week.

The other 30 percent

Personal responsibility can make all the difference, says LYNNE SIPIORA of McKinney

As the San Antonio Star, Collin County's only homeless newspaper, and promote our 20 percent "Zero to One" goal, I'm grateful to a former homeless person who knows our program with full employment and a 30 percent increase in income. I believe that every person deserves the right support and appropriate assistance, even if it's not a job. I'm not a social scientist, but during my years I have seen an awful lot of people come and go. Some I can't remember, but I don't. Others I can't remember, but I don't. Others I can't remember, but I don't.

LETTERS

Shameful greed

It has now been two years since we all witnessed the picture of thousands of fellow citizens on their rooftops in New Orleans—pleading to state-owned government authorities to rescue them in their hour of greatest need after Katrina struck. From this unthinkable tragedy came a humbling sense of national shame.

They can do it

"Next is a family of children. Ms. Henry tried to do a few other things before answering his call to the classroom. He was the best teacher, a self-starter, a student-led teacher and a counselor for emotionally distressed youth. But the call was too strong.

Crimes at tennis center

I understand that the city of Dallas has some plans to add several tennis courts at Summit Grand Tennis Center. That is terrific news for me and the people who play tennis there and see the park and some quality crime prevention.

We walk the walk

Truth is I still sometimes do, but the difference now is I don't do it personally. They have to do it for me. I have a severely autistic son who is 16 years old. My husband and I have a daily routine with him. All of the things you mentioned. No breakfast, no good night's sleep, etc. are rare garbage. When you heard an entire group of people as follows, are you truly the perfect parent you profess to be?

HOW TO REACH US
E-MAIL: opinions@collinnews.com
MAIL: Letters from Readers, P.O. Box 52247, Dallas, TX 75255
FAX: 972-252-0456
Letters Policy: We encourage letters from readers. Letters should include the writer's name, address and phone number for verification purposes. Only the name and address of the writer will be published. Letters may be edited for length, clarity and style.

Michael Landauer, assistant editorial page editor for community opinions, can be reached at 214-977-8228 or mlandauer@dallasnews.com. Bridger Jones, lead editorial writer for Collin County, can be reached at 214-977-8207 or mjones@dallasnews.com.

the one by a mom explaining to her son why he shouldn't give money to beggars who then realized that she needed to do more to help the homeless (and was recently named the homeless shelter executive director of the year by a statewide homeless advocacy group). I think about the high school student who wrote about her painful realization that she's an alcoholic and argued that youthful indiscretions should not be taken lightly by parents. One of the powerful and persuasive columns was written by an unemployed nobody, one of the original six Voices, on the issue of health care for the poor in the richest county in Texas. He had no voice when his contributions to our pages

began, but he went on to become his party's nominee for a seat in county government, and I know we haven't heard the last of him.

But his Voices time has passed, and 247 people applied this fall to follow in his footsteps. When we sought applications from teachers and students in the spring, hundreds answered that call, too. And I think I know why. I think it's because no matter how much information we can get out there—on TV, online or even in print—people still look for news and information they can connect with personally. These columnists provide that in a way the typical journalist cannot. They see their world differently, and they write because they

have something to say. Perhaps that is why readers don't accuse them of writing just to sell newspapers.

One Voices' applicant may have explained it best: "Your call to contribute is one of the most authentic opportunities for Dallas citizens to be engaged in meaningful dialog. What a wonderful challenge and responsibility to deliver diverse views that may resonate in a large and increasingly faceless metropolitan community of Blackberries and traffic." ■

Michael Landauer is assistant editorial page editor of The Dallas Morning News.

A Front Page Dominated By Local News

Changes in how the Times Union's newsroom functions drive the paper's push of breaking local news to the Web, with more analysis on its printed pages.

By Rex Smith

Oh, how I sometimes envy Harry. Harry Rosenfeld was an honored predecessor of mine. When he became editor of the Times Union in the late 1970's, he was about the same age I was when I got the job in 2002. He proved to be a smart, tough editor. What I envy is this: Harry's major task during his 16 years in the editor's chair was to work each day to create a better newspaper for our community.

It sounds almost quaint. Noble, in fact.

That's my job, too, but I also have another one: to grapple with just what a newspaper is supposed to be these days, not to mention what it's going to be a decade or so ahead. A newsroom deserves a leader with smart strategic objectives and a clear path to achieve them. But that seems harder now than it was when we all knew what constituted a good newspaper. Is it a mark of weakness, or simply recognition of



In a story about an Albany neighborhood, Rebecca and Richard Lawson stand with great-grandson Larnelle Rochford, where the front steps to their home once were. *Photo by Paul Buckowski/Times Union.*

reality, that the longer I work at this job, the less sure I am about what I ought to be doing?

Those of us in the newspaper industry today are struggling to redefine ourselves, even as we remake ourselves. We're constantly told that we're too late already and that we haven't been innovative enough—too slow to adopt new technology or to stretch across media platforms—and that we're on the road to irrelevance.

I don't think so. Optimism is a fundamental of leadership, but the hopeful conclusions about what a midsized newspaper like ours ought to be are genuine. Other newspapers have undeniably moved faster than the (Albany, N.Y.) Times Union to adopt some of these tactics, but perhaps we'll execute better if we're not first around the block. I'm lucky to have had a bit more breathing room than some editors, because I work for a privately held media company, Hearst Corp. While financial objectives are just as important to the folks in the Hearst Tower in Manhattan as they are to the people who run Gannett and Tribune, we don't need to impress shareholders by cutting spending and announcing new profitable initiatives each quarter. And if our best efforts prove misdirected, we have the resiliency to adapt.

We have long held the view that our powerful local brand will sustain us in print and online if we make the right content and delivery choices. That notion was reinforced by a study released this summer by Harvard's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy that discussed how the Internet is redistributing the news audience. While the study warned that the Web is a threat to daily newspapers, it also pointed to the power of newspapers' brand names as providers of local news in their communities. [See Thomas E. Patterson's story on page 33.]

WEATHER

 56° - 38°
 Sunday's 10-11 a.m. will be mostly clear.
 Details: 92

SUNDAY

INSIDE Was mysterious Israeli target a Syrian nuclear site?/A4

SPORTS Pats-Cowboys tops slate of matchups/C11-13

ON TV CBS rolls the dice with a Vegas musical drama/Inside

REGION
 82 For raising funds, it's good to be the mayor.
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PAUL BUCHANAN/THE TIMES UNION

Decades of decay

Boarded-up buildings dot Albany's Arbor Hill, West Hill and South End neighborhoods, where residents say their complaints often go unanswered. These structures are along Sheridan Avenue.

Vacant and crumbling structures in Albany pose dilemmas for neighbors and city officials alike

By KATE GURNEY and TIM O'BRIEN
Staff Writers

Albany's 870 vacant and abandoned buildings are concentrated in Arbor Hill, West Hill and the South End. Neighbors there say tight finances in their respective neighborhoods are often blame.

Albany's 870 vacant and abandoned buildings are concentrated in Arbor Hill, West Hill and the South End. Neighbors there say tight finances in their respective neighborhoods are often blame.

Albany's 870 vacant and abandoned buildings are concentrated in Arbor Hill, West Hill and the South End. Neighbors there say tight finances in their respective neighborhoods are often blame.

INSIDE Signs of housing economics, 8/3

ON THE WEB Watch a video on abandoned housing, 7/10/7

UPCOMING Possible solutions to a growing problem, 7/10/7

ALBANY 870 vacant and abandoned buildings are concentrated in Arbor Hill, West Hill and the South End. Neighbors there say tight finances in their respective neighborhoods are often blame.

Families find relief in kids health plan

Spitzer answers critics of driver's license plan

End of Ramadan

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TODAY'S UPDATES ONLINE

Cycle rally
 Motorists gather in Seneca Springs to raise money to buy Christmas gifts for needy children.
 For details about this and other updates visit: <http://timesunion.com>

The Times Union took an in-depth look at a crumbling neighborhood within blocks of the state capitol.

The power of our brand, built in print during the past 151 years, can be sustained in the newspaper and enhanced online if we focus on certain types of content—a focus that is necessary, in any case, because resources are shifting away from newspapers' profitable core product. Market research in our community confirms some of the decisions we have made about this.

New Strategies

1. Expanded commitment to high-impact watchdog journalism: In most commu-

nities, nobody but the daily newspaper can do this kind of work. It is worth sacrificing other areas of coverage to make an investment in journalism of verification and serious investigative reporting. This is expensive journalism, but these are dollars well spent, from both a public service and brand-building perspective. Readers want somebody to stick up for them, and they value courage. Our recent report, "Decades of decay," on residential blight within blocks of the state capitol,¹ is the kind of reporting we believe builds our brand and fulfills the unique mission of the daily local newspaper.

2. Aggressive efforts to improve reporting of particular interest to our community—state government and politics: Every community surely has a similar topic demanding a primary focus. As the dominant medium in New York's Capitol Region, we see this as part of our fundamental mission. During the last election cycle, nobody who hoped to be on top of what was going on in New York campaigns could ignore our most popular blog, Capitol Confidential, which was written primarily by one reporter and backed up in print. In 2006, we had to get a court ruling to pry information about pork-barrel spending out of the state legislature (and recouped \$33,000 in legal fees from officials who had illegally blocked release of key documents), and in the process we firmed up our reputation for take-no-prisoners state government coverage.²

3. Increased shift of breaking news to the Web: As we do this, we are also establishing our print product as the

¹ See "Decades of decay" at www.timesunion.com/specialreports/.

² See "Political Piggy Bank" at <http://timesunion.com/capitol/>.

home of good interpretive and analytical work. By the time most people pick up the Times Union in the morning, they know what happened yesterday from the Web or from TV; our job in print is to tell them what they need to know to be smart today and ready for tomorrow. This will be even more true in a few years (though some readers still will get all their news primarily from the printed newspaper), so our course is clear.

On our front page now, most of yesterday's top national and world stories appear in an abbreviated form along a rail; the only wire stories that bump local off the front page on most days are those that give readers unusual insight into an ongoing issue or trend.

It has been hard for us to get accustomed to breaking news on the Web when we know that content will be routinely swiped by competitors. Yet, during the past year, we have quintupled the number of stories we break online daily. Nor are we bashful in inserting an italic box in print noting the time our story broke on our Web site as a way to remind readers to check timesunion.com regularly if they want to keep up with news as it happens.

Local Imperative

Throughout our newspaper, content is relentlessly local. While our sports section still carries coverage of plenty of pro and college games, our beefed-up coverage of high school sports is one of the more popular destinations on our Web sites. Our Features section, no less than Metro, is filled with local names. Of course, even in our newsroom of 135 people, we don't have enough reporters to cover every community effectively. So we must develop partnerships with weekly papers and relationships with capable stringers to sustain adequate hyperlocal coverage in many places. Is this as good as having a highly qualified daily reporter in every town hall? Rarely. Is this one of the tough choices an editor must make? Absolutely.



In "Decades of decay," Catherine Niles, with grandson Donte Beck, said the home she bought on Delaware Street seven years ago was damaged during the demolition of an adjacent abandoned building. *Photo by Paul Buckowski/Times Union.*

Some of these steps have required shifting resources.

- When an editorial artist left, we used the vacancy to hire a director of news research who had been both a librarian and a Microsoft project manager; part of her job is to lead acquisition and management of databases of great interest to people who live in our region. We're pursuing the complete database of state criminal cases, for example, as well as overlaying satellite maps with databases on local land use decisions, so we—and our Web site users—can track the cause of pollution in Adirondack lakes.
- Editorial assistants have been shifted to an expanded calendar desk. And we have fewer people available for general assignment and lifestyle reporting so that we can use those resources to pay our investigation's editor.
- A photo editor now spends a lot of time giving everyone in the newsroom basic training in videography (some receive extensive training in visual storytelling, as well) so such stories can find a home on the Web.

Our content choices reflect both print and Web demands, yet with each medium, our focus remains intensely local. Our newspaper's Web site must be broad and bold, rather like the notion prominent a decade ago of a community portal. It cannot be a newspaper transplanted onto the Web; it's a different medium with different uses and thus requires different content. In the coming months, key channels of content on our Web site will feature not only what our staff produces, but also a wide range of material from elsewhere, including appropriately labeled commercial content. Some of our hyperlocal news channels, for example, will include content from local weekly newspapers. Our entertainment channel will feature local bands and provide links to clubs where they are playing. Throughout the site, user-generated content sits alongside staff-written work, with each clearly differentiated.

A goal for news reporting on our Web site is to offer a lot of photography and video produced by staff and by users; some will be of the quality of a public TV documentary, but most of it will likely be no more sophisticated than YouTube. When we look at page views

as a standard of value, we discover that most of our effort to produce sophisticated video for Web sites is wasted work. Web users tend to choose quick shots that depict reality over artfully executed longer-form video. Better not to force-feed high-quality video, but that should be an arrow in our quiver when topics demand it. And this is likely to be a consumer demand as Web use and technology evolve.

Newsroom Adjustments

To accommodate the new realities of news consumption, we're also changing how our newsroom works so we can seamlessly create content for both print and the Web. A new content management system soon will replace our 15-year-old front-end and pagination system. But there's a difference between our course and that in other newsrooms: Instead of changing our operations to match new technology—the typical approach when new computers arrive in a newsroom—we're adapting the technology to match the workflow we have designed.

All of our news reporting and information gathering—from story budget

to finished product—will contain audio and video, which will be sent through a digital repository we call the Interactive Database of Events, Assignments and Stories (IDEAS). Finished work emerges from this repository after being handled by people assigned to assemble both the print product and Web version. Readers will also be able to contribute to IDEAS. When necessary, their contributions, including photos, video and audio, along with that of staff reporters, will be handled by these editors with a sense of immediacy in posting them on the Web. We call our project inaugurating these changes “Prometheus,” named for the figure renowned in Greek literature as the great innovator.

This innovation marks nothing less than a revolutionary period in the history of our industry. Revolutions are usually pretty messy, and there's little doubt that more blood will be spilled in newsrooms during the next decade or so. But this doesn't mean either our fundamental principles or our core products will disappear. While the Times Union envisions its growth in years to come will primarily arise from online and niche products, we're con-

vinced there's also a great future in the newspaper. During the next few years, we expect Hearst Corp., which owns the Times Union, to make an investment of tens of millions of dollars in a new press and mailroom in Albany. At the same time, Hearst is linked to developers of electronic paper technology, which are creating devices we can barely imagine now that might deliver our content in years to come. We're not surrendering to an uncertain future on any platform.

That's the approach an editor of any generation would take, I think. Maybe the job isn't really harder than when my pal Harry sat in this chair. This much is the same: What we're doing is vital for our community, and so we must do it well enough to survive and thrive. ■

Rex Smith is editor of the Times Union in Albany, New York.

Forgetting Why Reporters Choose the Work They Do

Will journalists ‘cover local news for life, with no chance of parole?’

By Will Bunch

When I was a teenager, I decided what I wanted to do if and when I grew up. To say that I wanted simply to become a journalist—the job I now hold at the Philadelphia Daily News more than three decades later—wouldn't be 100 percent accurate. Specifically, I wanted to be one of the Boys on the Bus.

Though heavily influenced by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, to the point where I ignored my raging

hormones to read “All the President's Men” in the summer of 1974 when I'd just turned 15, the tale that really pushed me in this direction was actually a tome that came out around the same time, “The Boys on the Bus,” by Timothy Crouse.

It's a bit ironic since this book about the life led by political reporters following George McGovern and Richard Nixon in the 1972 campaign wasn't all that flattering. And buried in the book's

colorful prose is a withering critique of how U.S. elections are covered. But it was the life I wanted—with its journalistic camaraderie and a chance to be a front row witness to history. Even the brutal travel seemed romantic at the time.

Through my college days—from what I wrote on my applications to when I walked through the front door of the Brown Daily Herald, then with summer internships and early jobs—it

still would not have been accurate to say I wanted to become just a newspaper reporter. I planned on being R.W. Apple or David Broder, a shaper of big national stories. I suspect tens of thousands of my peers who went into journalism during that time shared this ambition. We weren't going to be satisfied by covering a town meeting when 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue loomed so large.

I've been thinking about my early life career ambitions a lot lately, because I've been attending a lot of journalism conferences and doing research for a book I've been writing on media reform called "The News Fix." At each conference the participants fixate on the same point: With the Internet in play, a small group of players—The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, the BBC—will dominate the big stories on the world stage and in our nation's capital.

For the rest of us, journalism will die if it does not become more local, or even something called "hyperlocal." The theory goes like this: readers seeking out world or national news on the Web won't bother with local sites or their city's daily newspaper when they can go directly to global sites on the Internet. What is missing—and what nytimes.com can't offer—is intensive reporting of local news about what's happening, for example, in Philadelphia's schools or with Spokane's city council or with the eight-car pileup that just took place on a heavily traveled commuter highway.

In more sprawling, faceless exurban communities, especially in the Sunbelt, the move is for hyperlocal reporting, akin to what a leading pioneer in the field—Kate Marymont, executive editor of The News-Press in Fort Myers, Florida—acknowledged can be "cat stuck in a tree" journalism at times. This kind of reporting—short bursts of neighborhood-type stories, frequently updated—is being carried out by a new breed known as "mojos," young, not exorbitantly paid reporters who file words and pictures and sound more often than not from their car using a laptop and mobile phone. With its

promised quickness and reduced cost, it resembles more a pizza delivery strategy than the shoe-leather model of reporting we grew up with.

The Missing Pit Stop

To say that I have mixed feelings about this movement to save the newspaper industry would be an understatement, even though the goal here is to save my ever-endangered job. Intellectually, I agree fully that the only thing that makes sense in the Internet age for a newspaper like The Philadelphia Daily News is to cover the living daylights out of new streetlights for the Platt Bridge or applications to open neighborhood charter schools.

**To be brutally honest:
For an ambitious
journalist, the only way
to get through a four-
hour suburban school
board meeting—even
at age 22—is to keep
repeating the mantra
'this, too, shall pass.'**

On an emotional level, I'm going on 49 years old, and I have a lot of friends around my age who have survived the surge in newsroom layoffs and are still working in an ink-stained newsroom somewhere. Not one of us wanted to be covering local news at our age (or, for that matter, at any age.) But we've been there, done that. To be brutally honest: For an ambitious journalist, the only way to get through a four-hour suburban school board meeting—even at age 22—is to keep repeating the mantra "this, too, shall pass." In other words, treat this day's assignment as just a boring but necessary pit stop on the road to Moscow or Beirut.

During a brief stint in the legend-

ary Room 9 of New York City Hall in the early 1990's, there was a metro reporter for The New York Times who was actually nicknamed "Pit Stop," because he'd told all his friends that covering New York City was just a kind of a speed bump before the Middle East beat, which for him it was. Now our bosses, and all the journalism-reform gurus, tell us that "the pit stop" has morphed into the finish line.

There's a very real problem here, a serious disconnect. For the past couple of years, a number of change-minded journalists, academics and engaged citizens have been discussing a lot of great ideas for saving the news business: Teaching reporters how to wield video cameras on assignment, to file breaking news for the Web, to use a blog to cover a local beat like mass transit, or work as moderators with engaged citizen journalists.

What's almost never mentioned in these discussions is the human factor. After all, one of the underlying tenets of saving newspapers is supposed to be rescuing the livelihood of working journalists. But do the rank-and-file of most metro newspapers in 2007, people in their 30's, 40's, and 50's, actually want to do these things—cover local news for life, with no chance of parole?

Some, perhaps. Most, no. Definitely not me. The irony for me is that I became involved in the media reform movement—and now I am writing a book on the topic—because of my early interest in blogging. (I write a blog, Attytood.com, at the Daily News.) And the main reason I wanted to write my blog was because in my mid-40's I found myself at an urban tabloid newspaper that was already too local in its reach for my ambitions. What I wanted was a broader platform to express my dismay about the war in Iraq and some of the abuses I felt were happening at the national level after 9/11; I didn't want to write about the troubles with SEPTA buses.

Knowing my peers in journalism as I do, I'd say that for the local journalism movement to succeed within the existing newsroom, there's going to

need to be a very different system of rewards to replace the dreams of Beltway punditry or a glamorous foreign beat. In fact, the rewards of the more pointed kind of journalism that blogging allows—the ability to develop a voice and a personality and to connect daily with readers—are considerable. Another route: convince the Pulitzer

Prize committee to double the categories for local journalism.

Even this might not be enough for the generation reared with the likes of Woodward and Bernstein and Crouse. As another great writer from that era, Ken Kesey, said, “Either you’re on the bus—or you’re off the bus.” ■

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Matching Ambition With Assignment

A newspaper editor reassesses how to tell stories and who will tell them as pressures to go local intensify.

By Carole Tarrant

Story assignment No. 1: A handful of residents are upset that a company wants to build a concrete-mixing plant near their homes. They fear the plant will be noisy and lower their property values.

Then there is story assignment No. 2: As a government crackdown in Myanmar makes international headlines, refugees from that country—formerly known as Burma—arrive at a Virginia immigration services office. The refugees have compelling stories to tell about torture and their flight from a brutal, authoritarian regime.

Both of these stories are valuable to the 94,000 subscribing readers of The Roanoke (Va.) Times, the daily newspaper I serve as editor. But which one would the typical print reporter lunge for, and which would she avoid by diving under her desk as her editor approaches?

In the answer, you’ll also find the root of the problem in the Times newsroom and many others of a certain size.

Our ambitions as journalists some-

times don’t align with our readers’ appetite for local, local, local. Its most harsh expression can be heard when a reporter complains, “I didn’t go to j-school for this.”

But a young journalist I know sees the issue more subtly. Her first job out

Our ambitions as journalists sometimes don’t align with our readers’ appetite for local, local, local. Its most harsh expression can be heard when a reporter complains, ‘I didn’t go to j-school for this.’

of college was writing for a weekly suburban paper outside Washington, D.C.. She found herself covering the comings and goings of this community—church news, student achievements, and club fundraisers—without a whole lot of gusto. She didn’t look down on such news. Single, renting, with no kids and new to the area, she just didn’t feel connected to it. “I felt like a fraud,” she told me.

The ‘Zoned’ Reporter

Fifteen years ago, I was in the same boat. Newly married, renting, with no kids or longtime ties to the area, I was stationed in a suburban bureau of a Florida metro paper, The Tampa Tribune. I say “stationed” because the bureau was very much the frontlines in an old-fashioned newspaper war, The Tampa Tribune vs. the St. Petersburg Times.

In the late 1980’s, the Tribune fended off an assault from St. Pete by zoning the heck out of its home base, the city of Tampa and Hillsborough County. That meant we—the frontline soldiers—churned out five (later growing to eight) daily zoned broadsheet editions, publications that supplemented a separate state/metro section. In theory, the zones blanketed the market with neighborhood-level coverage, leaving readers wanting for nothing in local news. In truth, the coverage had its highs and lows. One reason was geography: If you were reporting from the suburban bureaus closest to Tampa, news—the kind that

appealed to the ambitious j-schoolers—was easy to come by. Crime reporting alone kept those bureaus humming.

Reporting from rural bureaus farther out—30 and 40 miles from downtown—was more problematic. Flat scrublands dotted with cattle, palms and palmettos dominated the landscape. We, the foot soldiers, attended countless county commission hearings discussing the development plans for this land. We dutifully covered the meetings, filling the zoned editions with an abundance of 15-inch stories. We documented every bureaucratic step and related Sierra Club snit over subdivisions and strip malls planned for five and 10 years hence.

Doing this kind of coverage especially pained one young reporter, who expressed his distaste by creating an award for what he considered especially insignificant copy. He named it the MEGO (My Eyes Glazed Over) award and took the time to tack the offending clips to a bureau corkboard.

This reporter worked in a city bureau, the one closest to the Tribune's downtown office overlooking the Hillsborough River. Working "downtown" was his goal, as it was for nearly every bureau reporter of that era. Getting promoted to downtown meant you'd hit the big time. Downtown meant you'd escaped the world of PTA cookie sales, puppet shows at the library and, most painful of all, Rotary Club meetings.

The Disconnected Reporter

This was the other reason for the lackluster coverage, the essential truth that

dogs such coverage at today's metro newspapers. We either didn't care about the communities we covered, or we tried to care and couldn't because this was not our world. It did not quench our professional ambitions. We felt like frauds.

The young journalist who confessed her fraudulent feelings to me recently did so at a meeting called to reassess our own zoned coverage in Roanoke. We're beginning this process with some optimism, a condition rarely exhibited in this time of shrinking newspapers. We have vowed to learn from the past and to view competition far more broadly than a competing daily (which this market hasn't seen since the mid-1970's).

The competition is online, of course—but not solely. That's why Dwayne Yancey, the person steering this reexamination, carries a new title, senior editor for new channels.

What exactly is a new channel? It's an Internet database we develop on high school football. It's a text-message weather alert, an entertainment Webcast, or a niched print—yes, even print—publication. This time, the battle for community readership has many frontlines. That's why some of

us in the newsroom trade half-joking messages of "Incoming!" when another new local Web site or niched publication pops up.

We're plenty aware of the need to change. The next phase is acting on what we know, which brings me full circle to:

- Story No. 1: The concrete plant controversy and potential MEGO award winner.
- Story No. 2: The Myanmar refugees story and potential journalism award winner.

How do we resolve the tensions we all know exist between what the news organization needs and the ambitions of those who will be sent out on the frontlines?

Here's an example of how we are trying to do this. We begin by recognizing the Myanmar story is a gift to an enterprising reporter—the kind that, if done well, would get one noticed by downtown editors. But we also emphasize that it's intensely local.

Beth Macy, the reporter who covered this story for us, approached the assignment as both a local and global story. She explained the political history

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Neighbors




Sam Dean | The Roanoke Times


Giving adoption a face

Eight-year-old Aimee Rothschild is featured on the cover of a calendar that will raise funds to help orphanages in Yiyang, China.

Other Stories



More time for recreation
Ken Myers, regarded as the county's "father of parks and recreation," will retire Nov. 30.



Camping days grow into extended excursions
Mary Lou Agee takes to the road with her tent to watch birds.

[Neighbors Video](#) | [Most-read stories](#) | [RSS](#)

Featured Sections


Community

- Have you heard?
- Troop donations group seeks home
- A Turning Point for women's shelter
- Program helps families with children with spina bifida
- Continuing to care

Living with autism

When Nicholas was slow to walk, his mother became concerned.

Then one afternoon in her eye doctor's office Crouch-Hullender picked up a Good Housekeeping magazine. There was an article on autism. It listed everything she had noted in Nicholas.



"I went, 'Oh no,'" Crouch-Hullender recalled. "My heart just

Featured Jobs

Bookkeeper/Secretary

••

CNAS
Floyd Skyline Nursing and Rehab. Center

Helpdesk Support
Roanoke Medical Facilities of America

Lab Assistant
Salem Novozymes

Bookkeeper
Blacksburg Rapid Cool Trading



Bea Sellinger did translations for a recently arrived Burmese refugee family. Sellinger was a child in 1962 when military rule was first imposed in Burma. It took the family nine years to get permission to immigrate to Pennsylvania. Sellinger worked as a cell geneticist in Philadelphia before her husband was transferred to Roanoke in 1999. *Photo by Stephanie Klein-Davis/The Roanoke Times.*

of Myanmar/Burma but also worked in only-in-Roanoke details that were especially relevant to our community. She focused on a suburban Roanoke homemaker who'd fled Burma in the 1960's and recently found her translation skills in high demand.¹

Macy took the same global-local approach with a 2006 series, "Land of Opportunity," in which she told several tales of immigrant journeys that all ended in a familiar destination, Roanoke.²

What's News? Who Reports It?

Seeing the promise in such stories is relatively easy compared to the other task, the one that involves a reassessment of what we consider "news." Put another way, how do we make a concrete plant controversy compelling journalism? Will homeowning editors remain in the position of preaching

to renting reporters why this story is so important—reminding them that it's all about a threat to hearth and home equity?

Or do we turn to our readers to "report" such things? And do we fill our Web and print pages with what they appreciate but what we are sometimes loathe to gather—the "user-generated" pet photos, Little League scores, and dispatches from neighborhood block meetings?

I warily watch such experiments at other newspapers, warily because of this one fact: Readers live busy lives, especially those with family obligations. Between their jobs and kids' soccer practices, most can scarcely eat a dinnertime meal together, let alone accurately report the fundraising shortfall for a neighborhood playground. I can all but hear them asking, "Isn't this what we pay you to do?"

Every reader survey I've seen ranks investigative reporting as a high pri-

ority. From inside the newsroom, we feel pulled in two ways—how do we maintain our highest level of public service journalism and keep our eyes focused on the many details of our community's life?

In his role as the seeker of "new channels," Yancey has been consulting the small-newspaper division of our parent company as we look anew at our zoned editions. By and large, these small weeklies and biweeklies are healthy and lovingly appreciated by readers. What is their secret for remaining vibrant in an age when readers are peeling off from the Pulitzer-winning papers covering many sprawling metro areas?

So far, these conversations have produced one valuable nugget of advice, something we can act on and see promise in: Hire local. Look for part-timers or flex-timers who want to do a little writing on the side or in between things. Above all, seek out those who are well connected in the community through their family, friends and activities.

Yet already we, the professional journalists, can't help ourselves. Already we are talking about the ambitions we have for them. We'll train them. We'll invite them to an in-house journalism boot camp where they'll learn how to write and report and abide by our ethical standards. A wise editor friend has done this before, with success. "Invest in them and they'll invest in you," he says.

That's where we stand in the fall of 2007—exploring new channels and recalibrating our budgets and outlook on journalism. The young journalist who fled D.C. is back home, working as a journalist in Roanoke. The young reporter who invented that MEGO award eventually went to work in downtown Tampa. From there he landed his dream job—at a big city, but now very ailing, West Coast newspaper. ■

Carole Tarrant is editor of The Roanoke Times in Roanoke, Virginia.

¹ Macy's story can be found at www.roanoke.com/news/roanoke/wb/133868.

² Macy's immigration series can be found at <http://blogs.roanoke.com/immigration/>.

The Decline of Newspapers: The Local Story

‘Judging from our three studies, the future of America’s local newspapers is dim.’

By Thomas E. Patterson

In 1963, the television networks plunged into the news business in a serious way, expanding their nightly newscasts from 15 to 30 minutes and hiring the correspondents and film crews necessary to produce picture-based daily news. The change transformed the newspaper business. When the networks launched their new format, there were 1,400 afternoon dailies and fewer than 400 morning papers. Within two decades, the circulation of the afternoon dailies had plunged below that of morning papers, and scores of afternoon papers had switched to morning delivery or shut down. Population growth—the coming of age of millions of baby boomers—was the only thing that kept overall newspaper circulation from falling.

By the 1980’s, the boomer boost had run its course and a new threat to newspapers had emerged: 24-hour cable news. Newspaper circulation edged slowly downward, falling by 10 percent overall in the 1980’s and 1990’s. In the past few years the drop has accelerated, fueled in part by the growing audience for Internet-based news.

The newspaper industry faces an uncertain future, one more challenging than might be assumed. During the past year, as part of an initiative funded by the Carnegie Corporation and Knight Foundation, we conducted three studies aimed at assessing the future of newspapers (in a word, discouraging)—and in each of these studies we learned also about local papers and how the Internet is changing the distribution of local news.¹

Classroom Use of News: We surveyed a national sample of 1,250 middle- and high-school civics, government and social studies teachers to determine the news media they employ. Fifty-seven percent of teachers said they frequently use Internet-based news in the classroom—twice the proportion (28 percent) who frequently rely on the daily newspaper. Moreover, teachers were nearly three times more likely to say they plan to make greater use of the Internet in the future than to say they intend to use the newspaper more fully. And teachers were four times more likely to say they plan to cut back on newspaper use than to say they intend to reduce Internet use.

Given the decades-long history of Newspaper-in-Education programs, it might be thought that teachers would turn to the local paper’s Web site when transitioning to Internet-based news. However, two in three Internet-using teachers said they depend mostly on the Web sites of nationally known news organizations, such as CNN.com and nytimes.com. Only one in seven said they depend mostly on their local newspaper’s Web site.

The Comparative Advantage of Brand-Name Web Sites: This study examined the traffic to 160 news-based Web sites during the period April 2006 to April 2007. Newspapers, as a whole, had virtually no increase in site visitors during this period. However, the flat trajectory masked important differences among newspaper sites. Those of the national brand-name papers—The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and The Wall Street

Journal—gained audience. Their already high traffic level rose more than 10 percent on average during the year-long period, while the average traffic level for other newspaper sites declined. The Web sites of some local papers experienced positive growth, but most of them had either no growth or negative growth.

The Internet has weakened the influence of geography in the selection of a news source. When people go to the Internet for news, they can just as easily navigate to a source outside their community as one within it, bypassing a local site in favor of a known site elsewhere. The Internet inherently favors “brand names”—those relatively few sites that are readily brought to mind by users everywhere when they seek news on the Internet. The New York Times’s Web site, for example, draws three fourths of its visitors from outside its primary readership in the states of New York, Connecticut and New Jersey.

Local newspaper Web sites also face heightened competition from those of local broadcasters. Technological advances have increased the Web’s capacity to carry audio and visual content, and broadcast news organizations are now more actively pursuing an online audience. Our study found that although the site traffic of local broadcasters still lags behind that of local papers, the gap is closing. Local papers might face even greater competition from the sites of search engines, aggregators and bloggers. Our study found that these sites had the greatest increase in traffic during the past year. Their overall growth rate

¹ The three studies cited, as well as information on the Carnegie-Knight initiative of which they are a part, are at www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/carnegie_home.htm.

easily outpaced that of Web sites run by traditional news outlets.

The News Consumption and Habits of Americans: Using a sample of 1,800 Americans and a variety of survey methods, we obtained answers from equal numbers of groups based on age, including teenagers (ages 12-17), young adults (ages 18-30), and older adults (31 years of age and older). Noteworthy is the inclusion of teenagers, who are rarely included in national polls.

Our survey makes it clear that America's newspapers have lost two generations of young Americans. Only one in 12 young adults and only one

in 20 teens rely heavily on the newspaper—meaning they read it almost daily and do more than just skim a few stories while doing so. Although most young Americans do not attend closely to any daily news medium, the newspaper is their least-used medium.

Judging from our three studies, the future of America's local newspapers is dim. Perhaps they can effectively manage the transition to the Web and somehow find a way to attract the attention of young people. However, there is nothing in our studies to suggest such efforts will be highly successful. The decline of the hard-copy newspaper

appears irreversible.

The decline will diminish America's public life. Since the nation's founding, the community's story, as told through the local paper, has been an everyday part of American life. Weakened newspapers will shrink local communities as places where self-government is practiced. ■

Thomas E. Patterson is Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. This year, he is also acting director of the Kennedy School's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

The 'Local-Local' Strategy: Sense and Nonsense

'There is broad logic behind it, but also a host of devilish details that could drag the effort down and once-vital newspapers along with it.'

By Rick Edmonds

When newspaper company executives talk to investors and analysts, the air is typically thick with buzzwords. Lately, local focus and its variants "local-local" and "hyperlocal" have been nudging out "multiplatform" for the top spot on that list. At June's Mid-Year Media Review in New York, Sue Clark Johnson, president of Gannett's newspaper division, told the Wall Street crowd that metros can thrive and relate to their local communities "if they also think and act like smaller papers."¹

Gannett is backing the rhetoric with action. Its 85 papers have launched more than 1,000 local specialty publications this decade. A year ago, the company ordered its newsrooms to transition from focus on the daily print product to becoming "information cen-

ters" with such new tasks as building searchable local databases. Gannett has also jumped on the trend of launching Web sites for moms. These contain lots of local listings and chats among participating moms and thus generate a targeted audience for a ready-made advertising base.

So Gannett has a strategy for adapting to the economic upheavals afflicting the industry. And that is more than might be said for some of its competitors. Tribune, for instance, while starting its own hyperlocal Web site, TribLocal, in Chicago has had little to offer its many excellent papers—The (Baltimore) Sun, Los Angeles Times, and Newsday—in recent years but directives to eliminate bureaus, cut staff, and trim newsroom expenses. [See Kyle Leonard's article on page 57.]

Still, investors have hardly been bowled over by Gannett's proactive stance. They are in a show-me-the-money mode, waiting for advertising revenues and earnings to at least stabilize and preferably show prospects of improving. In four months following Clark-Johnson's talk, Gannett stock was down nearly 20 percent, off 50 percent from its high in early 2004.

In fairness, changes of the scope Gannett is promising will, best-case, take years to produce significant new income. But my assessment of local-local as a business strategy for the industry is skeptical. There is broad logic behind it, but also a host of devilish details that could drag the effort down and once-vital newspapers along with it.

Some years ago it became clear that

¹ More detail on what companies such as Gannett are telling investors is available from an article Rick Edmonds wrote at http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=115082.

most newspapers, even big metros, had little distinctive to add as they edited a version of the day's national and international report. In the Internet age, such news is widely available, updated 24/7, and free. Someone interested in a news event can pick among The New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Post, CNN or any combination and come away with a pretty good sense of what's going on. Also, as was the case for a number of readers early in the Iraq War, if a reader believes that U.S. newspapers are missing parts of the story, the BBC and a host of other international sources are just a click away.

Going Local

So it stands to reason that nearly any newspaper's franchise—now and in the foreseeable future—will be local news, probably with distinctive variations in print and online. Smaller circulation dailies, which only this year are beginning to feel the advertising pinch, made that call years ago and have, relatively speaking, prospered as most metros became distressed.

Following this basic logic, as newsroom expense cuts became necessary, even metros as big and ambitious as The Boston Globe have eliminated their national and international bureaus. Among nearly all metros, the front page mix is now heavy with local stories, something that was rarely the case not that long ago. When I joined the St. Petersburg Times organization 25 years ago, it pretty much took a hurricane for a local or state story to make the front; now the all-local front, especially on Sundays, is common.

Even the big, broad version of this local strategy requires a few qualifiers. Not everyone will seek out news online, national or otherwise. Some might be perfectly nimble online, but after a busy day and evening they might appreciate the "daily miracle" of sorting and condensation of yesterday's events—the kind of thing newspapers have done well. No metros are so bold as to settle for a tiny national/international summary tucked back with the truss ads (and what ever happened to the truss

ads?). Print readers expect more. Yet there is some movement at newspapers to run more summaries and fewer mid-length stories of the kind that filled "A" sections some years back.

More serious pitfalls await if metros go too far in emulating Clark-Johnson's formulation of thinking and acting like small-town newspapers. Judging the New England Newspaper Association contest in early 2007, I saw plenty of excellent smaller-circulation papers—local, local to the core, often with substantial staff-written reports on adjoining townships. However, in discussions I've had more recently with 15 editors of bigger metros, I was surprised to find a number cutting back on local coverage of exurbs and even nearby suburbs. As Phil Bronstein, executive editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, put it pithily, "We can't afford to cover the Richmond City Council anymore."

Like the Chronicle, The Dallas Morning News and The Philadelphia Inquirer have endured newsroom staff cuts in the hundreds in recent years, and a lot of these cuts have been absorbed in bureau coverage (both foreign and local). This can leave residents who used to be served by a bureau of six to 10 journalists from the big-city daily with one reporter—and push them towards relying on a small suburban daily or weekly for their coverage of what's happening nearby.

I'm very much aware that many newspapers are trying to do the "hyperlocal" part with online sites, usually lightly staffed with a content "wrangler" or two soliciting stories, photo and comment but relying on unpaid user contributions for most content. Gannett's Cincinnati Enquirer claims to have more than 200 such micro-sites. Notable examples include The Bakersfield Californian's The Northwest Voice (for one corner of its circulation pie), multiple "Your Hub" sites around Denver offered by the Rocky Mountain News, and Bluffton Today, launched by Morris Communications in a growing new community near Hilton Head Island in South Carolina and created to be online first with a "reverse published" free print version.

I'm leaving it to others—in this collection of articles and elsewhere—to discuss the editorial merits of such efforts being undertaken by newspapers and as unaffiliated citizen-journalism ventures. However, what I've observed on such sites are lots more pet pictures and Little League results than news reporting about or discussion of important local issues. And when looked at through the lens of business entities, nearly all are characterized by sparse advertising.

When John Temple, editor and publisher of the Rocky Mountain News, said at an editor's conference that 90 percent of Your Hub revenues (and he thought this was typical) come from the reverse published print version, I was astonished. This indicates that the typical small local business, unable to afford metro advertising rates, might be wooed by a geographically targeted print product but, for now, seems not to be ready for Internet advertising.

Zoned Editions

Where this circumstance leaves us is pointing in the direction of some of the successful and well-established print local zoning efforts taking place among metro papers. Here are three examples:

- My colleagues at the St. Petersburg Times have marched their way to nearby Clearwater and two counties to the north with strong zoned daily sections for each that supplemented the run of the paper. That is how a paper based in a city of 250,000 residents and a county of 900,000 has achieved daily paid circulation of about 320,000 and, on Sunday, 430,000.
- A few years ago, the Fort Worth Star Telegram had the highest newsroom staff to circulation ratio among metros. Behind these numbers lay a curious success story. During the mid-1990's, when The Dallas Morning News pushed into its home country, the Star Telegram added more than 100 reporters and editors in less than a year to strengthen two zoned editions in the area near the airport

and in suburban Arlington. Before long a 40 percent advertising revenue increase followed. Wes Turner, the Star Telegram's publisher, told me the key was providing a seven-day-a-week, current news report in zoned sections of the paper that was professionally produced.²

- Another variant in making zoned local news work editorially and financially is provided by the independently owned Daily Herald of suburban Chicago and Gannett's Journal News in New York City's Westchester suburbs. Neither has a real metro "center," so multiple editions put different communities in the lead position. As might be expected, both papers have relatively large reporting and editing staffs given their circulation, but there is a payoff in household penetration and broadening the advertising base.

These examples demonstrate that a well-targeted, professionally produced local focus can be an editorial and business success, though it probably takes skill *and* some luck to get the geography right.

Keeping Business In Mind

There is one more business challenge, little discussed externally but well known inside metro papers, in trying to reconcile a local-local focus with advertiser preferences. Increasingly, advertisers clamor for, and insist on, being placed in the paper's A-section. The theory is that sports, features, and local are only read by part of the audience while nearly everyone at least leafs through the front section. (Take a look at a midweek sports section of your favorite metro and you will see just how little advertising is there.)

Putting more local stories on the front, with their jumps inside this section, addresses this challenge to some degree. Still, that is not enough copy, as hardened business types would put it, "to run around the ads." A block of national and international news needs to stay.

While no business model has yet emerged to fully replace the one that drove newspaper profits so high in years past, experimentation with new strategies must happen given the clear and irreversible erosion of the old

business model. In this regard, "going local" is not all that different, in a business sense, from newspapers trying to improve their online capacity on a branded site while the business model to support it is being constructed.

As of the end of 2007, here is my scorecard on hyperlocal. Does its content, for the most part, merit being called "news" in the way journalists have understood the word? Maybe, but often not. Will it work as a business? Maybe, but there is little encouraging evidence yet. Meanwhile, thinning the traditional print report, even if financially necessary, runs risks of its own—like losing the attention of loyal print readers even as advertising on the printed page is likely to provide most of the advertising revenues well into the next decade. ■

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² A lengthier story about the Fort Worth situation by Rick Edmonds can be found at http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=12287.

Stories About Me

'Being local these days is not just being a one-way flow of information.'

By Bill Ostendorf

Newspapers are missing the point about local news. It isn't about geography. It isn't about breadth of coverage. It isn't even about news. It's about me.

That's what has changed. Readers want the news to be about them; to speak to them; to address their questions and concerns directly.

That's what the Web has taught readers. Broadcast news (which shamelessly promotes itself with campaigns like

"your news source" or "we care about you") has also shaped what people want from their media. Polls such as the annual survey on media credibility by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press indicate that local and national TV news have more credibility than their counterparts in print. TV has become the trusted source. I would argue that one reason is that they know how to be about me.

Unfortunately, newspaper news-

rooms don't get it. And here is something else they don't get: The biggest changes have to take place in the print edition, not just on the Web. Most newspaper editors try to fix print problems with a redesign, and right now they are more likely to do something radical or unusual. Unfortunately, most redesigns are purely cosmetic and don't address the underlying issues.

Fixing their relationship with readers will require new approaches to writ-

ing, headlines, graphics, photos, refers and layout. And editors need to rethink their whole approach to the Web site, too. This means newsroom workers at all levels have to get in the habit of translating news into stories and visuals that connect with people—and beyond that, create stories and online tools that connect people.

A Different Approach

All of this requires thinking about news in very different ways. A good example is a simple story from one of our client's papers about a hoof and mouth outbreak at a local school. The reporter found out about this at a school board meeting when the superintendent reported that 40 percent of students were out sick, disrupting classes and lesson plans. This was a big issue in this suburban community.

The original plan: Write a story, quoting the superintendent about the extent of the outbreak and a teacher about how disruptive this was to teaching. A good start, but just a basic story. Readers will give you a grade of "C" if you deliver this version and a breakout box explaining the symptoms of hoof and mouth disease. Now the headline reads, "Epidemic hits local schools." Not great, but it's the level most newsrooms would achieve.

If I have a child in the local schools, that story is about me. But if my child is in the schools, then I probably already know what the headline tells me. And this is the core problem with most newspapers today—tired approaches to telling old news.

Many editors today would want to take the story further. But how? Where?

Think like readers do, and you can begin to understand that this isn't a story warning parents who have kids in the schools. Too late for that. It's really for those people who don't know about this outbreak yet—those who don't have kids in the local schools. How can this story be made interesting to them, while at the same time giving parents some new information? In short, how can we make this more about me for a broader audience?

Cutting Staff Results in Less Local Coverage

At a time when we're trying to invent a new medium on the Web and with niche publications, getting rid of content creators—a.k.a. reporters, photographers and editors—is just plain stupid. During an opening panel at the Canadian Newspaper Association in Halifax, I asked an expert on disruptive competition if there was ever an instance of an industry surviving a disruptive influence by cost cutting. "No," he said. "That would be the worst thing you could do." Right.

Publishers are comforted that readers haven't seemed to respond to substantial content reductions. But our consulting firm is seeing evidence that they have noticed. We're increasingly hearing in focus groups and other encounters with readers that there is just less content, less local news, less town coverage in their newspapers, especially larger metros. The price for this mistake may soon be paid in substantial circulation losses in the years ahead.

And many of the good initiatives on the Web or in niche publications publishers have launched have been crippled by a lack of staff and talent. Newspapers owned the local Web franchise, but that dominance is slipping away. The missed opportunity cost of staffing shortages will turn out to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. We are gutting the golden goose. ■ —B.O.

Reporters could talk to parents about how they are dealing with the problem or go to the school and interview the kids who are there about how strange it is to be in a half-empty school. Better. Now we could have headlines such as "Parents battle epidemic by sick-pooling" or "Epidemic has some kids feeling lonely in class." Parents and kids could all relate to that, even if they aren't involved with the local schools. And kids feeling lonely at school casts an even wider net, potentially attracting more readers to the story.

Readers would likely give this approach a "B"—adding a plus to the grade if the text block on the specifics of the disease has a headline such as "Are you in danger?" And this hooks others into the package, too, just as having a strong photo of kids in a half empty cafeteria does. Bonus points if links were added online about treatments, the history of the disease, and how it got its name.

How can the story be made even broader? Perhaps by focusing on kids who are home and sick. What is this like? Since parents were helping each other out by sharing kid-sitting duties, and since staying home these days is about video games and watching movies, this gives us potential headlines

like "Epidemic shows how much sick days have changed." A photo might show three kids playing video games or watching a movie together. Now this is a story anyone can relate to. It sure wasn't like that when I was home sick from school!

Broadening stories until they address more universal themes is one way of getting more stories in the paper about me. We can still report the scope of the epidemic and how seriously it is disrupting the schools, but with this approach people are reading and thinking and talking about what it is like to stay home sick these days.

Readers might grade this effort an "A+" if the Web site, e-mail list, and daily newsletter blast was used to gather information and find students and parents to nail this angle. And extra credit, too, if readers contributed to the story by passing along what they remember about staying home sick from school and their opinions about today's sick-at-home methods and realities. Want more bonus points? Set up a site for parents and kids to share stories or connect, to exchange movies or find other families willing to split kid-sitting duties.

There are so many places to go with this: Have a contest for photos

of the best comfort clothes to be sick in or the best comfort foods that mom makes. Add a doctor or nurse online to answer questions about the disease that evening. Offer to host some videos or lesson plans for teachers.

The next day we could put together a follow-up story about what it is like when adults have to stay home sick from work. What are your comfort foods? What do you do—watch TV, read, go to bed? How do you know when you feel better? What do you think about coworkers who come to work sick? And the following day, the story can be about whether the number of kids and adults calling in sick is going up or down and why. What does that mean to the school budget, or what is it costing businesses? What does it cost, for example, when someone calls in sick?

Now you're talking about my life. It's about me.

This is nothing radical, really. Just better and different kinds of storytelling. But most newsrooms would never explore these options or make any of these potentially rich reader connections.

The print edition's job—our mass medium—is to broaden the story to the widest possible base. The Web site—our niche and interactive medium—does what it does best, which is getting details to those closer to the subject and allowing users to interact with us and each other.

Getting involved and being helpful is a big part of our future as information institutions. Being local these days is not just being a one-way flow of information. It's about getting information from readers and helping them connect with each other. It's about fostering communication and community and being a trusted source of information.

While this might sound easy, this transition is very difficult to execute in any real way. That's partially because there's a newspaper to put out and that means deadlines to meet. Can't shut the paper down, go for retraining, and reopen under new ownership a month later. And it's hard to change your ways

when the way you've done it gets the paper out on time, which is, after all, the prime directive.

Those who work at newspaper can sometimes be too close to see how off the mark they really are. And that's why newsrooms can do really dumb things, despite being staffed with really smart, hard-working people. It's not only about what gets done, but also how it happens and when. Improving newspapers means changing just about everything. It's depressing. Overwhelming. Where to start?

When we work with newspapers that come to us for guidance, we emphasize that this isn't about some big change. It's about hundreds of little changes. And some of them are easy. That's how we get the ball rolling.

Starting With Small, Significant Changes

Take the breakout box, for example. Readers like them, but newsrooms often produce breakouts that are redundant, dull or otherwise off the mark. And editors always complain that getting them done is like pulling teeth. Most papers don't feature enough breakouts or the right ones.

In this case, the villain is simply our conventional workflow. Too often reporters don't even get the message that a breakout is needed until after the story is written. Or, worse, the work is done even later by the copydesk. Even if reporters know they need to create a breakout, they almost always do it last, after writing their story.

An easy fix: Write the breakout boxes first—then write the story. Now, instead of pulling fragments from the story that are redundant or poorly chosen, put the best stuff in the box—numbers, specifics, the essentials. Do this every time. The difference is immediate and dramatic. The story is typically shorter, smoother and easier to write. And the desk or the graphics department get the box first and can do whatever polishing or illustrating they need to do.

This is an important change because we're now writing in the same order the reader is reading. We know readers

read the boxes first, so we're spending more time on the things that have the highest readership. But doing this can be hard, because newsroom cultures are built around stories and writing. There is nothing wrong with this except that it tends to diminish the use of other storytelling tools.

It's critical that newsrooms begin devoting a lot more attention to the most highly read items in the paper—photos, captions, breakouts, graphics and headlines. This starts with top management—like having story editors spend time understanding the photo department and figuring out how to make pictures more reader focused. (Photos get the highest readership on almost every page.) Yet photo departments are the most understaffed, misunderstood and undermanaged department in any newsroom.

To serve readers better and to tell stories readers want to read, we've got to accept and embrace what readers want and what they read. It's that simple. And it starts by respecting the readers' needs more than our own. Monica Moses, former deputy managing editor for the Minneapolis Star Tribune, who led much of that paper's interesting work with the Readership Institute at Northwestern, put it very clearly: "Interesting is no longer optional."

Interesting to me, that is. ■

Bill Ostendorf is president of Creative Circle Media Consulting, www.creativecirclemedia.com, a newspaper design and consulting firm. He has served as a trainer or consultant to more than 250 media firms on three continents and has led more than 400 seminars for industry associations and institutes in 34 countries. He also is founder and CEO of Creative Circle Advertising Solutions, www.adqic.com, which has created Web-based classified, citizen journalism, social networking, and CMS solutions for media companies that include the Chicago Tribune and NBC. He also spent 20 years working in newsrooms in a wide range of management positions.

What Readers Mean When They Say They Want Local News

‘Some journalists run toward these challenges; others react with resistance, fear and anger.’

Dean Miller, executive editor of The Post Register, Idaho Falls, Idaho and a 2008 Nieman Fellow, spoke with Mary Nesbitt, managing director of the Readership Institute at Northwestern University's Media Management Center. They talked about what has been learned from the institute's numerous studies about how people connect with newspapers, with a particular focus on local news coverage. Miller provides an overview of how the work of the Readership Institute began and its relationship to the newspaper industry.

At the American Press Institute in the 1980's, editors who had been seeing scary numbers from Scarborough Research and other quarters came up with “Fix local news or die” as a catch phrase for what American newspapers needed to focus on. But the front pages of U.S. dailies continued to privilege The Associated Press and The New York Times daily budgets: heavy on world and national stories, which left little room for local coverage. Jolted by stalled and falling circulation numbers, news executives pooled their resources to hire Mary Nesbitt and her peers at Northwestern University's Readership Institute to undertake a truly massive reader survey to quantify the public's interest in local news and impatience with the inverted paragraph.

Despite a vigorous cross-country campaign of evangelism about the findings—which pointed to an abiding interest in local news coverage—many newsrooms continued to fight the findings and do so to this day. That's no small irony, since the most ignored sections of the study delved into questions of newspaper corporate culture and determined that newspapers score right up there with the military on measures of defensiveness and resistance to change. —Dean Miller

Dean Miller: Why is it that local news gets so little respect in major U.S. metropolitan newspapers?

Mary Nesbitt: It is probably getting more respect today in those markets than it has in a long time. The problem has been, of course, that in a major metro market it has been a huge challenge to serve, in any way that had meaning to real people, the hundreds of communities within it. But that was when we were thinking print only. Now online affords a lower cost opportunity to reach communities with micro-news, and this is being taken advantage of by many entities in addition to established media organizations. I also think—I know—that local news, while immensely relevant to consumers/citizens, isn't particularly sexy for journalists.

Miller: Based on the Impact Study in 2000 and the follow-on studies, how do you define local news?

Nesbitt: Local has to be defined from the consumer's perspective (I'm going to use the term “consumer” though it is not perfect) rather than how a news organization would like to define it. It does, of course, have a geographical connotation—where I live, where I work (although those may be two quite different places), where I socialize, where I obtain services (education, health, shopping) where I worship, etc. It's more than geographical, however. It comprises a personal element—people I know, people like me, important events in my life. And I think there is a “collective” element embedded in there—a concern not just for one's self but for the health of the community.

Miller: Two big problems your studies have identified are the “too much” factor and the

Now online affords a lower cost opportunity to reach communities with micro-news, and this is being taken advantage of by many entities in addition to established media organizations.

— Mary Nesbitt

“wrong story selection” factor. Which one is the bigger drag on circulation?

Nesbitt: In a way, they are both expressing the same thing—you’re not relevant to me and my life. In the former instance, you’re overwhelming me with too much stuff that I can’t be bothered wading through; in the latter, I just don’t care about the content you select. I don’t think we can say which has a worse effect on readership.

Miller: Last summer, New York Times Editor Bill Keller’s memo about story lengths in the paper leaked into the trade press. What was your reaction to what he was saying?

Nesbitt: If I could remember exactly what he said, I’d probably say—what took him so long? I think Len Downie at The Washington Post sent a memo to his staff about writing tighter, too. I’m sure both newspapers have lots of proprietary research showing that most readers have less tolerance for lengthy stories than they used to, unless they are hugely compelling. This has been well known for a long time in other markets.

Miller: What has been the most surprising Readership Institute finding about local news? And what is it that readers respond to so warmly about local news?

Nesbitt: I’m going to take those two questions together and address a slightly different one. I’m not sure that anything in our research has been too surprising on the subject of local news. My biggest “aha” moment has been in putting together those parts of the research that speak to the kinds of news topics people are interested in, with the kinds of experiences that cause them to engage with the news. Engagement is important because there are so many messages—news, information, commercial and otherwise—vying for people’s attention in so many places. The products and discrete pieces of content that can best engage people are the ones that win [their attention]. It’s possible to have highly local news that doesn’t engage people at all, although it might hit all the right topics and provide all kinds of utilitarian information.

Miller: Can the presentation and story-style lessons of the local news movement be applied to world and national news, making

them more appealing to readers?

Nesbitt: Yes, but I think newspapers have to ask themselves whether it is worth devoting resources to do this. This kind of news is readily available from other sources. That said, it all depends on your company’s readership strategies, the audiences it is trying to reach, and expectations of those audiences in your specific market.

Miller: Which metros do the best job of selection and presentation of local news?

Nesbitt: I wish I could answer this. It would take an in-depth study of consumer responses in those markets, an analysis of the content, and some understanding of each newspaper’s audience strategies and targets. I think too often we judge what is good performance based on journalistic norms that bear little relation to what actually matters to readers or their tastes, interests and preferences. That is a kind of success, judged professionally, but there are surely other kinds—success, as related to the newspaper’s business goals and success, as related to its readership goals.

Miller: Do you believe that it is realistic to believe that a powerful executive could remake a major daily, the Los Angeles Times, for instance, to emphasize local news?

Nesbitt: Yes, but to get to the truly micro-level the innovation may come first online with perhaps some reverse publishing, if economically feasible.

Miller: I’ve heard senior executives at midsize and metro papers say their aging-Boomer newsrooms fight against and even sabotage efforts to implement the findings of the Impact or New Readers studies. Do you think this is true? If so, why?

Nesbitt: I think journalists feel under assault from all directions—their work not as valued as it once was; fewer traditional job opportunities; being pushed to learn new skills; more and more successful attempts by public officials to keep more information hidden; more criticism from more places; more competition. Some journalists run toward these challenges; others react with resistance, fear and anger. Our work could also be considered threatening, because it

Can the presentation and story-style lessons of the local news movement be applied to world and national news, making them more appealing to readers?

— Dean Miller

Readership Institute's Newspaper Studies

Mary Nesbitt is managing director of the Readership Institute at the Media Management Center and associate dean for curriculum and professional excellence at Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. The Readership Institute,¹ which was created with funds provided by newspaper CEOs in 1999, field-tests readership-building ideas and educates newspaper leaders seeking to adopt best practices. Recently the institute has expanded its work into magazines, TV and online media, for example studying teens and their relation to online news and looking at user-generated content and social networking to find out the kind of news people are most likely to notice and share.

Significant newspaper studies done by the institute include:

Impact Study: The Power to Grow Readership:² Released in 2000, this study identified practices in a representative sample of newspapers and highlighted best practices at papers with the best overall readership results. The institute continues to track the original 100 newspapers in this study since they represent a good sample of the industry as a whole.

The Newspaper Experience:³ Released in 2003, this study identified feelings, emotions and reactions that contribute to why people read their daily newspaper more. It also points out those feelings, emotions and reactions that drive readers away.

New Readers:⁴ Released in 2004, this study looked at experiences that cause different age groups—with a special focus on younger people and more diverse groups of adults—to engage with the newspaper or discount it. It also identified approaches that resonate with these potential readers. ■ —D.M.

¹ www.readership.org

² www.readership.org/impact/impact.asp

³ www.readership.org/consumers/data/newspaper_exp.pdf

⁴ www.readership.org/new_readers/newreaders.asp

unapologetically puts the people for whom the news businesses commit journalism at the center, rather than the journalism itself.

Miller: Why have so few newspaper executives read the first Impact study and the ones that followed it?

Nesbitt: I think the Impact study had fairly broad readership, perhaps because the findings were presented as eight imperatives. Our subsequent work, which I think is more penetrating because it gets to consumers' motivations—which you really have to understand if you want to respond appropriately—is much less prescriptive and therefore tougher to take on board. If you

really take the experience [of consumers] research to heart, it should challenge your news definitions to the core.

Miller: Impact data are clear about readers' interest in what they consider local news. But readers scored some wire stories as local if they were about a person and not a policy or a bureaucracy. What do you make of that?

Nesbitt: Readers don't pay a lot of attention to origin of story. They are more interested in topic, the relevance to their lives and whether it touches certain "hot buttons" (what we call "experiences"). If a story is told through the perspective of a person to whom a reader relates, the story can feel local. In

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the Impact study, the category that had the greatest potential to grow readership was an amalgam of three topics: community announcements, obituaries and stories about ordinary people. The word “local” is never mentioned, but it is clear that in consumers’ minds this is “close to home.”

Miller: What do you think would happen to local coverage in this country if the American Journalism Review, Columbia Journalism Review, and Editor & Publisher devoted as much ink to local news reporters as they do to foreign correspondents and the aging lions of the legacy newsrooms?

Nesbitt: Well, the publications that you cite take what is to me a narrow definition of the term “journalism.” Big-J journalism is, of course, important, but journalism is a large tent that houses many species. Now, in this digital age, it’s being practiced by an increasing number of people not trained in the “classical” way. Journalism is being disrupted, just like journalism businesses are being disrupted. Perhaps publications that cover journalism need to change as well.

Miller: Do you feel the corporate culture findings of the Impact study are the most important and least used?

Nesbitt: I think that as newspapers have been forced to make changes in the last few years, largely because of the weakening business model, they’ve come face to face with the cultural realities that the Impact study quantified seven years ago. Culture is a complex thing that can’t be changed quickly. It has a lot to do with enlightened management practices and leadership, breaking old habits and expectations and instilling new ones. You have to work hard and consistently at changing culture; news organizations aren’t renowned for their long-term focus.

Miller: “This newspaper looks out for my personal and civic interests” was identified as the experience most likely to bring readers back to a newspaper. Why haven’t news executives embraced that finding and thrown more resources into accountability journalism?

Nesbitt: I’m not sure that it’s a case of throwing more resources at it. It could

New Readers Study

After looking at how different demographic groups “experienced” their local daily newspapers, the Readership Institute offered several recommendations. What follows is their first.

“Focus on the experiences you want to create in readers and let decisions cascade from this focus. ... This demands a significant change in mindset across the newspaper, in both long-term and day-to-day decisions. It’s easier to move straight to specific, familiar actions—such as doing more in-paper content promotion, or providing more intensely local, people-oriented news—than it is to re-examine and probably overhaul your decision-making criteria. But the returns are greater.” ■

just as easily be a case of refocusing some existing resources on the idea of finding and spending time telling stories that meet this consumer need. Or using this experience as a screen for deciding what stories to report and how to approach them. Or requiring every beat reporter—regardless of the beat—to make it a prominent part of what she or he does.

Miller: When I review the Readership Institute’s clips, it’s almost comical how hard newsrooms fight the findings. “Aha! You can’t guarantee circulation will rise, so we reject your ideas.” What keeps you going in the face of that kind of hostility to change?

Nesbitt: Well, as researchers we can only tell what we know and suggest how to apply the findings. We’re not reformers. We try to spend as much time as possible with people who are receptive to our message or who will offer constructive criticism and help us sharpen our thinking. I think it’s tougher for researchers and marketers within newspapers, who have been saying the same kind of things for years but haven’t been listened to by their peers and bosses. ■

Local Characters: How to Tell the Stories You Have to Tell

Lane DeGregory offers tips and describes some of the stories she's written to reporters who work at community newspapers.

In mid-October The Nieman Foundation and The Alliance for Community Journalism, a Boston-based organization that supports locally owned and owner-operated community newspapers, sponsored a community journalism conference for Boston's neighborhood and community reporters. Lane DeGregory, a feature writer with the St. Petersburg Times, offered tips for these community reporters on how to find people whose stories a local audience would want to read. What follows are edited excerpts from her presentation.

Tip 1: Talk to strangers. Everybody in our community has a story—whether it's the old lady sitting on a bench or the guy who's out there feeding the pigeons. Anybody that you see, if you take the time to walk up to them and ask, "What's your story?" 99 percent of the time people are flattered you want to know. If you take the time to sit with people and ask them their story, it does make a difference.

I got this story right when I moved to St. Petersburg. We were on this big pier on Tampa Bay and this old man was out there and he was playing the guitar and he was singing and he was really, really bad. And everybody was kind of walking by like, "Oh, my God. Poor man." So my son goes up and he's sitting there listening real attentively, and the guy gives him a little red cassette tape. We got back in the car and this tape said, "Elmer Wright, been playing on the pier since 1939." And I thought, "Gee, that's longer than I've been alive, so I go back to the newsroom and I'm like does anybody know this guy with the Jesus hat and the suspenders who's out there on the pier?" And they're like, "Oh, yeah. He's been out there for years." No one's ever written about him. He's one of those people you just kind of walk by because he's part of the landscape, and in 47 years no one had

written about this guy that they saw up there every weekend.

So I went back the next weekend and I took a photographer with me and we just hung out for a day with Elmer Wright, and we asked him if we could come back to his house.

When I'm reporting a story, I don't always know what it's going to be, but I try to think about what could the theme be as I'm talking to this person. What is this a story about? This man's wife had died when he was a young man. His kids had grown



Tip 1: Elmer Wright. Photo by James Borchuck.

up and moved away. He lived in this little efficiency apartment, and he took his Social Security money and paid to have these little cassettes made of his original songs.

I asked him, "Why do you do this?" This is what he said: "Oh, I know hundreds of people, thousands of people know me. I'm

All photos in this series appeared in the St. Petersburg Times and are provided courtesy of the newspaper.

a celebrity, but I'm almost always alone. I had a homeless guy come home with me from the pier one night, but he ate my last can of beans. He drank my Scope. No, I don't get much company. So when it's nice out, I play on the pier. You can't never be lonely on the pier."

So this was a story about loneliness.

I asked him, "Where do you record these cassettes?" He said, "Come with me and I'll show you," and he went in this bathroom and he shut the toilet and he had a boom box on the medicine shelf in his bathroom, and that's where he made the cassettes. I'm sure there's an Elmer Wright in every single one of your communities that people have seen that they don't really know what their story is, and that's an easy, quick way to do a profile.

Tip 2: Play hooky. As a feature writer, I'm always feeling like I'm on call. The best stories have come not from my beat or my colleagues or even press releases or PR people; they've come out of things in my life. If we take the time when we're on a

reflect our community, not just what editors assign us to do.

Ride the bus. You have a captive audience—a whole group of people who aren't necessarily in the same demographic as you are, and they've got time. Sit right by them on the aisle, and they're going to talk to you. Great stories come from walking around docks, public spaces, and by letting somebody else drive. I find stories on my way to work if someone else drives me because if you can check out a different route or take a different way there, there are other things you pass, and then you start to wonder about them.

I left work one day early to go take my son to a car show. He loves the drag racers, and we get there and there's all these old bubba-looking Florida guys in their drag racers and then there's this little girl who's 16 years old and she's sitting there looking completely miserable and her dad is at this little table saying, "Would you like an autographed picture of my daughter? Come see my daughter, the youngest drag racer in St. Petersburg." And the girl is like, "Oh, dad." It was like this typical teenage-dad thing. So I just started talking to him and her and the story was that her mother was dying of AIDS. She'd had a blood transfusion and got AIDS and the parents had been divorced forever and the dad was trying to find a way to connect with his teenage daughter. So as soon as she got her driver's license, he built her a dragster. She did not want a dragster. Okay? This was like *his* dream. He worked at an auto body shop, and he was making her drive this dragster on this strip with all these old guys in Florida.

I framed the story around the race: Is she going to win the race? That was sort of the story line, but it was really a story about a father and daughter and a father trying to reconnect with a teenage daughter and the daughter trying to figure out what is it dad wants from me vs. what do I want to do.

Tip 3: Read the walls. This is the most profitable tip I'm going to give you. Small papers, shoppers, classified ads, bulletin boards at laundromats or deli counters and places where people can put up, "Free tuba lessons," and "We'll mow your yard." Those people are easy profiles. Their contact information is there.

This was a story that I got off of a flyer at the laundromat. There was a missing



Tip 2: A drag racing daughter. Photo by Bill Serne.

field trip with our kids or we're out to dinner with our husband and we are absorbing what people around us are caring about or talking about, that's where good ideas for feature stories come from. That's how we

person flyer, and it looked like a lost cat flyer. It was homemade. It was handwritten, and there was a phone number on the bottom. It's a 14-year-old girl named Tara Exposito, and I called the phone number on the bottom thinking it was the sheriff's office or the police department, and it was this girl's mother. She said, "Oh, my gosh. I can't believe you're interested in this." She said her daughter was not a very good kid, she'd been kicked out of school for fighting and smoking pot and drinking and stuff, and she'd run away before, but she had always called her mom and said, "Oh, I'm at Leslie's house. Mom, I'm okay." Well, she had been missing for about four weeks and the police were like, "She's run away. She's not a victim of anything. She's just a bad kid who ran away." They wouldn't help her look for her daughter. So I spent the weekend before Christmas with the mom as she went to the Publix and the bowling alley and the car wash and just asked people if they'd seen her and hung up flyers all over the place, and there was a profile of the mom.

When I went back and pitched this story to my editor, he's like, "Lane, there's 12,000 kids that go missing every year, why should we do a story on this kid?" And I'm like, "Because 12,000 kids go missing every year." You read about them when they're dead or when they get brought back home. I'd never read a story about the mom who was out there actively looking for her daughter like that. So I Googled stats and wrote two paragraphs about missing kids and what percentage of them are returned and what percentage of them are dead and what percentage of them the police look for vs. are considered runaways. That was all I had of factoids in my story, but that was enough to float it with my editor that we could do a profile of this mom and the little girl. Sadly enough, she never came home, and they found her body. I had to do a story about nine months later. They still have not solved the murder.

Tip 4: Make freaky friends. Take a photographer out to lunch, buy a photographer a beer. They have fabulous ideas. At least once a month I'll find a different photographer and go, "Hey, what are you working on?"

This is a story from a photographer. He was tracing the Tamiami Trail, one of the oldest north-south roads through the state

of Florida, and he called me one night on my cell phone about 8:30. He was like, "I'm at the Showtime Bar and Grille in this little tiny town. I'm sitting here having a beer with the fat man and the midget and they're crying. Do you want to do a story about the fat man and the midget?" I said, "Well, why are they crying?" He said, "Because they're taking the sideshow on the road for the last time."

He took some pictures and brought them back and convinced the editor that they should let us go for a whole week to the Allentown County Fair and follow this



Tip 3: Mother of missing daughter. Photo by Michael Rondou.



Tip 4: Man in the freak show. Photo by Scott Keeler.

Florida sideshow on their last trip on the road. It was awesome. This guy had been on the road for 57 years. He had run away to join the circus when he was 12 years old, and he had played Carnegie Hall. I'd seen him when I was a kid at the Smithsonian in D.C.. He played every state, and now the sideshow was dying out, so this story was a profile on him, but it was also about the death of the sideshow.

I was asking him why is it the last time that you guys are going on the road, and he said, "You know what, Lane, you can find fatter people than my fat man at the Ponderosa. You can find tattooed women at St. Pete beach. They're separating Siamese twins, they're cutting off the third arm of the three-armed guy, the lizard skin lady has a dermatologist. They're fixing all this stuff, and so they're not making freaks anymore."



Tip 5: The dresser for beauty queens. *Photo by Kathleen Flynn.*

I did this great story, hanging out with the people who used to be freaks. They'd been marginalized; they used to be at the beginning of the fair, now they were behind the funnel kicks.

Tip 5: Ignore important people. When I get assigned to do stories about important people, I try to find a way to cover that assignment without going to that person

as my source.

This was an assignment about Miss St. Petersburg, who was going to the Miss Florida pageant. She'd been a runner-up for two years in a row, and this was her last year to do this. I was assigned to do a profile on Miss St. Petersburg. She was very pretty and she was very nice, but we'd written about her twice, and she was kind of not that exciting, and I really didn't want to write a story about Miss St. Petersburg. So I did this thing where I put Miss St. Petersburg in the middle of my circle, and I started thinking about other people who would be connected to Miss St. Petersburg who could be a window into her story or would have some kind of stake in her story that I could tell the story through their eyes instead and satisfy my assignment.

So I started thinking it out. After a few people I thought of didn't work out—like her mom, who lived too far away, and her personal trainer, who turned out to be secretly dating her, and the pageant caterer, who said no, I started thinking about evening gowns. I hadn't bought an evening gown since my prom. Where do you go to buy an evening gown? So I called the pageant director and I said, "Where does Miss St. Petersburg go to buy an evening gown?" And she was like, "Oh! Oh, my—we do not let the contestants shop for their own evening gowns. We have a Svengali for that." And I go, "What?" This 39-year-old gay guy who works at the waffle house, that's his job. He's the Svengali. He's the dresser for the beauty queen pageants, okay? He was so funny and so cool. I called him up, and he started rattling stats at me. He was like a baseball junkie with his stats. He can tell you off the top of his head only one Miss America in the past 14 years has been blond. Texas hasn't had a Miss America in 28 years. Florida has only had one Miss America, back in 1993.

Not only would he take them shopping, but he would groom them. He would take them back to his house and they'd watch game tapes. "Oh, watch when Miss Delaware dropped her baton, you don't want to do that. Watch this crazy answer that Miss Texas gave, you don't want to answer it like that."

I spent the day shopping with them, and I wrote the story about finding the perfect evening gown for Miss St. Petersburg. The story was about him, and it was so much fun,

people totally reacted to him much more than her, and I got out of Miss St. Petersburg, so you can write around them.

Tip 6: Celebrate losers. We often get sent out to write the story about the person who won the lottery or the guy who made the football team. What about people who don't make it? I mean what happens when your dream doesn't come true? Those people are much more rich for profile writing, because they have to regroup and figure out, where do I go from here?

I did a story about the oldest cheerleader for Tampa Bay Buccaneers. She was 38 years old and she had been a cheerleader since she was 18. And she was trying out again, and I just followed her through cheerleading tryouts as she looked at all these girls who were young enough to be her daughter. She didn't make it, but it was a great ending because she had to go—"Cheerleading is my whole identity. What am I now?"

Tip 7: Wonder who would ever? Do you remember those Bud Lite commercials where they'd be like, "Here's to you, Mr. Golf Ball Picker Upper." "Here's to you, Mr. Wrestling Costume Designer"? They're out there in your community, so find out why they do what they do.

I got a story in this bar where little paper coasters say, "For a free vasectomy, call 1-800 blah, blah, blah." I'm like, who in here is having a Budweiser and they're going, "Oh, yeah, I think I'd like a free vasectomy." So I started thinking, who put them there? It's like Joe's Bar is now hawking vasectomies. What is the deal with this? So I called the number on the coaster, and this woman who is as old as my mother answers the phone and her name is Flo Conklin and she says, "But they call me Mama V, the mother of vasectomies." When you get a nickname with somebody, that's just money. I wanted to know who this person is with a nickname like Mama V. So I talked to Mama V for a little while, and it turns out that she's a public health nurse for Pinellas County, Florida who had gotten this huge grant to award free vasectomies. They had been trying to give birth control to women and passing out condoms that nobody used, and finally she was like, "I'm going to target a little bit older population and get these men who have had enough kids and try to help them with free vasectomies."

What sold this story to my editor was my superlative: Pinellas County has more free vasectomies than any county in the whole country. Who knew? She'd wait until 10 or 12 guys had called, then schedule an informational session. She said she'd call me before they did the next informational session. So I went into this room and I'm the only woman with Mama V and then there's a dozen men in there. I did a narrative of her selling this idea of free vasectomies and these guys trying to go through this process



Tip 6: Tampa Bay Buccaneers cheerleader. *Photo by Dirk Shadd.*



Tip 7: Mama V. *Photo by Douglas R. Clifford.*

of whether or not they wanted to do it. I found one guy who actually let me follow him through as he had the procedure done, but it was mostly a profile on her—how do you sell free vasectomies?

Tip 8: Work holidays. I used to dread that, but now I relish it because when you work



Tip 8: Kappa Sig frat mom. *Photo by Michael C. Weimar.*

holidays usually your story is going to go on the front page the next day. And usually people are going to read it the day after the holiday and then go, “I wish I had written that story.” So I take it as a challenge: What am I going to do that’s different for Valentine’s Day? What am I going to do that’s different for Mother’s Day? I try to start thinking far in advance so that I can be the one with that idea.

I did a really fun story for Mother’s Day last year. I found a frat mom who was the Kappa Sig frat mom at the University of Florida, who had like 89 18- and 19-year-old drunk debaucherous guys, and this woman was 80 something years old and she lived in this little room off the foosball table. I spent two days with her because I had to stay for a party one night. She hunkered down in her little room behind all the frat boys.

Holidays and rituals, too, baptisms, funerals, weddings, bar mitzvahs, all of those are built-in narratives because people under-

stand what’s going to happen at a wedding, what’s going to happen at a funeral. You’ve got your narrative structure already built in. When something weird happens, it makes that much more of a surprise.

I did a story that came from a lady who was a PR person from hospice. She kept calling me and wanting me to write stories about their fabulous hospice volunteers, and I was like, “Alright, but you got to find me somebody. I don’t want to just write about the one person that put in the most hours as a hospice volunteer. I need somebody doing something extraordinary, or find me an ordinary person who’s dying who has something that they want to do before they die.” You can kind of train PR people sometimes and tell them what kind of stories you’re looking for or what you like. It took this lady about two years. She finally called me back, she goes, “I think I found somebody for you. This woman is dying of AIDS and she really wants to be baptized before she dies, but she’s Southern Baptist and she wants to be baptized in the full immersion pool.” And none of the churches would do it because of the fear of contamination. So they found this one minister who agreed, and he partnered with the local hospital to come and drain the baptismal pool and baptize her there with all of her family around and then have the hospital sort of disinfect it and take care of it. It was a simple baptism frame, but it was a profile about this woman who, before she died, really wanted to be baptized.

Tip 9: Be late. I don’t get to cover the news on the day it happens, but I think that a lot of our stories can be more rich, especially profile writing, if you wait a little bit. It’s easier to talk about how it felt to have your kid die two months later than it is the day of the accident.

So I keep a little file on my desk that I pull out of our newspaper and other publications of a news story that happened that I might want to go back on and write about the story behind the story or the effect of that story on that person months or weeks later.

One story I did was off of a police brief, which said “Officer so and so was very happy because after three years of chasing this fugitive, the fugitive turned himself in at 11:30 p.m. last night to the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s office.” This detective had been

looking for this guy and I started thinking about that and I was just thinking about this guy who was a fugitive for three and a half years. Why would he turn himself in? There was nothing else about it in the police brief, so I waited maybe about two weeks and I wrote a letter to the fugitive who was in jail and I just told him I was interested in his story and why would he turn himself in, and he called me collect the very next day and said, “I’d love for you to come and talk to me.”

I did this big profile on him. My first question was, “How do you be a fugitive? How do you do that?” He says he was a 38-year-old stockbroker. He went out for his birthday, got drunk with his friends, driving home he plowed through these three Army officers on the way home and killed them, a DWI manslaughter. He was facing life in jail, so he bailed himself out, waited for his trial, and the night before his trial he throws this huge party for himself and he just drives away into the sunset. He didn’t even drive, he got on the bus. Left his car, left his dog, left his girlfriend, didn’t tell his parents or any of his friends where he was going, just hit the highway on the Greyhound bus and landed in Pennsylvania, was working as a telemarketer, changed his name, spent three and a half years, never contacted anybody from his old life. And one night he’s chain-smoking Marlboros on the bed in this little Econo Lodge where he’s staying, watching TV, and he sees himself on “America’s Most Wanted” and he’s like, “I got to go back. I don’t want to live like this for the rest of my life.”

So I profiled this fugitive, and this probably ran maybe a month or so after that cop brief saying they had caught the guy, but it was totally the other side and it was because I waited until after the news part had happened. Then he was able to tell me his story.

Tip 10: Hang out at bars. Even if you don’t drink, bars are the greatest place in the world to get stories, because everybody in bars is telling stories and nobody ever minds at a bar when you go, “Hey, I heard you—what was that story you were telling?” It’s great to have a place like Cheers where you can come back and everybody knows who you are. I leave a stack of my business cards with my favorite bartender, and she finds stories for me. I’ll come back in, and she’ll

go, “Lane, I met this guy. I told him all about you and here’s his information.” She’s out there brokering stories for me.

I get lost sometimes in the quirkiness and have to come back to reality and say, “Okay. Now how am I going to pitch this to my editor?” The most extraordinary looking people, like the Elmer Wrights of the world, I’ll try to find out the most normal thing about them. What makes them human like all the rest of us? We look at this guy and we go, “Oh, that is a weirdo.” But we’ve all experienced loneliness or a need to belong somewhere. So I try to think about my stories in a two-or three-word theme. What is this story about? With the woman who was looking for her daughter, it was about loss and regret. With the woman who wanted to be baptized before she died, it was about salvation. Try putting a one-word or two-word label of what your story is about, and this will kind of help you focus and figure out what is universal in this story. ■



Tip 9: The fugitive. Photo by Toni L. Sandys.

Strategically Reorganizing the Newsroom

‘Two new content departments—News & Information and Enterprise—focus on producing unique local content for print and online.’

By Shawn McIntosh

Think about inventing a contemporary newsroom. How would it be organized? Around the sections of a print newspaper—with departments such as metro, business, sports and features? Not likely. With people finding information and news through search engines rather than section headers, this approach is horribly outdated. And it’s arcane, when business pressures are forcing newspapers to kill sections. It’s inefficient, too, when breaking news is usually published first online, not in print.

Yet this remains the organizing structure of most U.S. newsrooms. Until recently, it was true of ours, too, at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC).

Until earlier this year, our online department was one of more than a dozen in the newsroom, and it competed for the same dollars and resources as the newspaper’s features or sports department. Our Web site, ajc.com, thrived only because newsroom leaders sold the message that online mattered in everything we did. Our success at integrating the Web with print, and vice versa, was spotty and depended entirely on the strength of the editors’ sales jobs.

In 2006, we decided this way of doing things was no longer good enough. For the long haul, we had to address our newsroom’s core structure. The AJC and ajc.com had to become faster and more nimble. Having more than a dozen desks and departments devoted to specific sections of the newspaper had worked when print was king, but the new reality required significant change. Foremost in our minds was finding ways to reduce management layers, promote quicker decision-making, and enable faster movement of resources. We also had to more tightly

focus our mission on our competitive edge—our knowledge of metro Atlanta, our deep local reporting resources, and our expertise on topics of local interest.

In reinventing our news organization to position us to grow digitally, we were not willing to abandon our newspaper and its devoted readers. But we did decide to quit chasing marginal readers in print. Instead we would tailor the newspaper for people who we know still want a newspaper, while working to grow our Web site to be metro Atlanta’s leading source for breaking news and information. In developing this strategy, it became clear that ajc.com would be our new “mass medium,” while our newspaper would become a specialty product for those who want deep, local enterprise reporting that they can’t get from any other source.

Understanding this new dynamic was different than living it. Our newsroom, as it was functioning at the time, was not organized to provide these two distinct products. Nor would it work to tinker around the edges, so our paper’s editor, Julia Wallace, along with a small leadership group, decided to abolish all existing departments and invent a new newsroom.

Beginning in the second week of July, the AJC began operating with an entirely new structure—flatter and more nimble—that allows us to move wherever our readers and users take us. Two new content departments, News & Information and Enterprise, focus on producing unique local content for print and online. Our two production departments, Print and Digital, take the content and decide how best to offer it in distinct ways for those who will consume it. These various departments

function in tandem, which means that our newsroom system demands collaborative decision-making. Expertise about reporting news and gathering information is thus aligned with knowledge about what content our audience is seeking in print and on the Web.

Each of these four interrelated parts has certain tasks and is designed to perform those and to work collaboratively with the others.

News & Information (N&I): Our largest department—staffed from dawn until midnight, seven days a week—has beat reporters, columnists, general assignment reporters, photographers and others who gather news. N&I’s first client is Digital; reporters in N&I strive to break news, develop scoops, file quickly for the Web while learning what constitutes the “Web experience” and keeping in mind the desire to grow our online audience. But news and scoops gathered for ajc.com also serve our print readers. There is also a new group of information specialists charged with gathering and editing informational content such as city guides, calendars and consumer tips. These items are designed to help Web site visitors quickly find information to assist them in their daily lives and return them to our site often as a valued resource.

Digital: This department consists of producers who prepare content for publishing on the Web; channel managers who oversee content areas, such as business or sports, and multimedia specialists. They get news onto our Web site while it is breaking and constantly update the site to draw readers back. Some newly created positions include interactivity editors, designed to keep

the conversation going with our audience, and digital managers, who think strategically about how to grow audience in such key areas as high school sports and entertainment.

Enterprise: Here the talents of reporters and editors are concentrated in several specialty areas—watchdog and investigative reporting, explanatory reporting, narrative writing, profiles, obits and criticism—and these make the newspaper a unique source of news, analysis and information. Enterprise's first client is print, and the reporters and editors in this department are charged with providing unique local section front stories every day—stories readers will not find anywhere else. A few examples: A story on a university that continued to water its athletic fields in the midst of a complete ban on all outdoor watering and an in-depth look at the life of a local man recently charged by federal authorities with training guards at two Nazi concentration camps to use attack dogs.

Print: There are designers and copyeditors, but also newly created positions of section editors. These are "presentation specialists" who do not oversee what reporters do but instead focus on producing the best sections they can with the content they receive from N&I and Enterprise. Here the concern is with pacing, presentation and mix; these were not always top priorities before content and presentation were separated. New positions include "big type writers," who work on key headlines and captions to draw readers into pages and sections.

One key change in the reorganization was to more clearly define our content-gathering mission as local. That doesn't mean the newspaper or

ajc.com have abandoned national and international news. We aggregate that news from wires, rather than using our own staff. It was a tough choice to make, but we decided every time a reporter

people have been displaced; many are in new roles and doing work that is not altogether familiar to them at a time when nearly every workflow system in the newsroom has changed. Some

priorities of our news organization are different, and some of what reporters and editors loved doing is no longer practical. For example, we don't have a national movie critic, and we eliminated a roving regional beat. With fewer newsroom resources (a voluntary buyout accompanied the reorganization), many are working harder.

Still, our advantages are many. We have committed owners—a private, diversified company with a long history in journalism—and great love of what we do. We have a strong, talented staff with

deep local knowledge. I am humbled by how they are working to adapt to these huge changes and learning new ways of doing their jobs while remaining committed to what is best about journalism's possibilities.

Will our reorganization ultimately work? I'm confident it will, and I'm also certain that our newsroom won't continue to look the way we redesigned it earlier this year. That is precisely the point of what we set out to do—to create a newsroom capable of change as it sees the need to do so. Instead of standing still—fearful of the future—we've taken some control of our fate. As our publisher, John Mellott, puts it: "We are not in the business of preservation. We are in the business of creation." There's no business I'd rather be in. ■

Shawn McIntosh is director of culture and change at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and ajc.com. Portions of this article were prepared for the newspaper's entry in The Associated Press Managing Editors' Innovator of the Year award.

The screenshot shows the ajc.com website interface. At the top, it displays the date "Thurs, Nov. 08, 2007" and a personalized welcome message: "Welcome, Shawn | Member Center | Logout | Customer Care". Below this is a navigation bar with tabs for "Home", "Nation/World", "Metro", "Sports", "Entertainment", "Business", "Living", and "Travel". Underneath the navigation bar are links for "Personalize with myajc.com", "Get Mobile Access", "Get E-mail News", and "Add RSS feeds". The main content area is divided into several sections. On the left, there is a "TRAFFIC NIGHTMARE" section with a photo of a highway accident and a caption: "Georgia Department of Transportation I-75 south at Cumberland Boulevard was looking grim at 6:25 p.m. as police closed all lanes to search for bank robbery suspects. The freeway reopened at 7 p.m. when police called off the search, having made no arrests. • Story". In the center, there is a headline "Cumming man admits eBay scam" with a sub-headline "\$1 million in counterfeit computer products sold over 5 years." and a brief article snippet: "Georgia State president to retire Over 16 years, Patton expanded school's presence. | Photos". Below this is another headline "Bluffton bus crash inspires bill" with a sub-headline "Father of athlete killed in wreck pushes for improved safety." and a list of "MORE HEADLINES" including "Women rule in Auburn | Photos", "Oral Roberts' son fights claims", "HomeBanc seeks court relief", and "Kick smoking habit with shot?". On the right, there is a "news buzz" section with a photo of a man wearing sunglasses and a list of short news items: "Big Boi getting \$50K diamond sneakers", "Dealer testifies against O.J. | Photos", "Lots to do this weekend — trust us", "Interactive planner", "Strike threatens return of '24' | Blog: Share your plot ideas", and "Ga. woman says she married Brown in '53". At the bottom of the main content area, there are three buttons: "News", "College hoops tipoff", and "Get out tonight". On the far right, there is a "CMA AWARDS" section with a link "Pix: Show 1 'Couples'".

traveled out of town to cover a regional or national news story, a local story was probably being overlooked. Our readers can find regional, national and international news from other sources. They depend on us to bring them local news. We still take a sophisticated and global approach to telling local stories. For example, an Enterprise reporter was in Hawaii in October to follow the story of a local soldier accused of murdering a detainee in Iraq.

Four months into the reorganization, the new newsroom is developing according to plan. We're doing a better job of growing our digital audience and in finding stories that keep loyal print readers buying the paper. Of course, our work is not nearly done, and we have many unresolved questions: How locally focused should a local newspaper be? What is required to reinvent the newspaper to serve loyal readers, rather than chasing occasional ones? How do we continue to build our digital reach to become more of the mass medium that our long-term strategy calls for?

The new structure is still daunting for many in the newsroom. Jobs and

Changing Reporters' Beats—With a Focus on Local

‘... we need to demonstrate in our pages and on our Web site that local journalism does not mean insular, shallow content.’

By Rene Sanchez

Twice a day, editors from across the newsroom of Minneapolis's Star Tribune gather around a conference table to debate what stories ought to make the front page. We call the meeting the “huddle,” and almost every time it convenes we have to confront a question that seems to get tougher every day: How do we give our newspaper readers stories that are distinct?

The answer, more often than ever, is that we seize on local stories—not national and international news.

That decision does not mean we are retreating from news out of Washington or from coverage of those international events. Every day our pages are still filled with national and foreign stories, usually conveyed to our readers through wire service copy. But the hard truth redefining our priorities is that much of that news is instantly available to readers from a myriad of other sources with whom we aren't able to compete—from CNN to the Web pages of The New York Times to the aggregated news reports found on Yahoo! News. The newspaper that lands on the doorstep of our readers cannot look like a rethread of the stories that those news media have already broadcast or published a few digital news cycles ago.

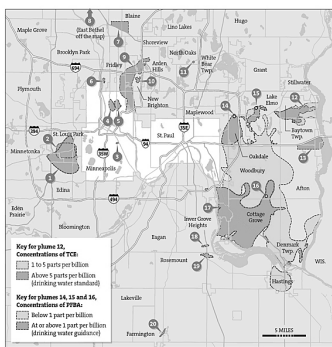
There are certainly some exceptions to our emerging local habit, such as when a new Supreme Court justice is chosen or a powerful hurricane hits the Gulf Coast or mass carnage happens in Pakistan or Iraq. But in this time of declining circulation

*** STAR TRIBUNE • SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2007 ***
the longest cleanup a star tribune special report

THE POLLUTION THAT LIES BENEATH

Pockets of chemical-laden water percolate beneath the metro area. These 20 plumes of pollution are the legacy of decades of industrial waste disposed by private companies and government. Some communities now use special filtration for every drop of drinking water.

- HOW THE PLUMES WERE IDENTIFIED**
- The maps reproduced in this report were compiled from regulatory or public health purposes by engineers who did not intend to detect potential pollution using well-test data. But every year before the sampled wells is necessarily contaminated. Therefore, it is assumed that every property within a mapped plume has pollution beneath it. When state agencies test private well monitoring wells, owners are notified of the results. The Star Tribune contacted maps and other public records, interviewed regulators, engineers, public health officials and water supply managers to identify 20 plumes across the metro area.
- 1. SINKA PLUME**
Location: Edina, Hopkins, St. Louis Park
Pollutant: Vinyl chloride
Description: Edina district city well in 2003 after the chemical was detected. Plume covers 2.8 square-mile area, part of it is under a former wood treatment site. Source of vinyl chloride is unknown.
- 2. HULLY VAL**
Location: St. Louis Park, Hopkins
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Chemicals from a wood preservative plant (1921-1972) have required carbon filtration since 1986 at two affected city wells. Private stable site is now a park.
- 3. SODDY HINTEAPOLIS**
Location: Minneapolis
Pollutant: Formaldehyde
Description: Formaldehyde operation (1918-1971) left residue in a 25-acre area of groundwater. Soil was contaminated over a broader area.
- 4. SIOBERHAN YARD - WEST END PLUME**
Location: Minneapolis
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Wood treatment (1915-1972) site on West End contaminated groundwater over a 100-ft radius.
- 5. SIOBERHAN YARD - EAST END PLUME**
Location: Minneapolis
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Degreasers and solvents from metal shop and former chemical distribution center created this pollution plume.
- 6. FRIDLEY ORNANCE PLANT PLUMES**
Location: Fridley
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Two stable chemical plumes at a heavy machinery plant on the Mississippi River near Longfellow through the Mississippi water supply.
- 7. SLAVE GROUNDWATER PLUME**
Location: Blaine
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Industrial chemical from an unknown source affects ground water beneath 10 square miles. City treats water from affected wells.
- 8. EAST BETHEL LAKEFILL PLUME**
Location: East Bethel
Pollutant: VOCs, other chemicals
Description: Groundwater near closed landfill is currently contained in the small pollution plume west of ground.
- 9. ALBERT ANHEUSER PLANT PLUMES**
Location: Ancker Hills, New Brighton, Columbia Heights, Fridley, Minnetonka, View St., Ancker, Minneapolis
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Two stable chemical plumes containing solvents from a former munitions plant in Ancker Hills (1941-1975).
- 10. WOOD TREATMENT PLUME**
Location: New Brighton
Pollutant: PCBs, other chemicals
Description: Two stable chemical plumes near the closed McGill's & Cable plant is extended and treated by a new wood preservative chemical.
- 11. NORTH OAKS PLUME**
Location: North Oaks, White Bear Township
Pollutant: Vinyl chloride
Description: Benzene chemicals found in coal-bio, crude oil, concrete (PC), PCBs, Chloroform and in dry cleaning. Also known as perchloroethylene. PCBs: Diphenyl ether used in a wood preservative (PC). PCBs: Polychlorinated chemicals, including PCE, PCE and PPA, formerly used in 1950s construction in stone-rental products. VOCs: Chloroform is a solvent used in paper cleaners, other products. Benzene: Clear, colorless liquid with a



- 12. DUNBAR DUMP**
Location: St. Paul
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Waste dump used by W.M. W. (1915-1975) is one of three sources of PCB in vicinity. Chemicals have spread to the north.
- 13. COUNTY LANDFILL PLUME**
Location: Lake Elmo and nearby areas
Pollutant: PCBs, VOCs
Description: Closed public landfill (1969-1972) accepted waste from many sources, including 1945 effects groundwater to south and east.
- 14. IN WOODSBURY DUMP PLUME**
Location: Woodbury and nearby areas
Pollutant: PCBs, VOCs
Description: Large area of PCB-contaminated groundwater for south and west of the 100-acre (1960-1964) site. The site is now a park.
- 15. FARMINGTON PLUME**
Location: Farmington
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Heavy plume of groundwater tainted with degreasers, chemicals migrating toward Vermilion River, a trout stream.
- 16. REFINERY/PEP PLUME**
Location: St. Paul
Pollutant: PCBs, petroleum
Description: Small plume near Mississippi River from a former wood treating business and refinery now owned by Marathon Oil Co.
- 17. PINK BEER LANDFILL**
Location: West Coon Rapids
Pollutant: VOCs
Description: Closed public landfill (1969-1972) accepted waste from many sources, including 1945 effects groundwater to south and east.
- 18. FLINT HILLS REFINERY PLUME**
Location: Rosemont
Pollutant: BTEX
Description: Plume of pollution from refinery extends 1.5 miles to Mississippi River; 4.5 million gallons of water are treated at the site.
- 19. IN WOODSBURY DUMP PLUME**
Location: Woodbury and nearby areas
Pollutant: PCBs, VOCs
Description: Large area of PCB-contaminated groundwater for south and west of the 100-acre (1960-1964) site. The site is now a park.
- 20. FARMINGTON PLUME**
Location: Farmington
Pollutant: PCBs
Description: Heavy plume of groundwater tainted with degreasers, chemicals migrating toward Vermilion River, a trout stream.

CHEMICALS IN THE WATER KEY: (C) CARCINOGEN; (PC) POSSIBLE CARCINOGEN

Average Semi-volatile element from natural deposits, agricultural practices, industrial uses (PC)
Benzene: Colorless liquid widely used in treating other compounds (C)
BTEX: Stands for benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene. Used in petroleum.
LA: PCBs: Dry liquid used to make such things as flash removers (PC)
LA: PCBs: Dry liquid used in plastics, rubber, resin, fire retardant (PC)
MMA: Methyl methacrylate liquid used in

plastic, the color used in floors, adhesives (PC)
PC: Polychlorinated biphenyls, a liquid grease remover or solvent.
VOC: Volatile: Colorless gas often formed when certain chemicals break down (C)
VOCs: Volatile organic compounds, include solvents and other chemicals.
Xylenes: Solvents and thinners.
Source: EPA, DCE

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A newspaper graphic gives local residents information about industrial waste plumes in their neighborhoods and leads them to an interactive map and blog about these issues on startribune.com.

numbers for our print product, it's become more clear to us that a constant emphasis on substantive local news is most likely to persuade our audience of busy, casual readers that the journal-

ism we exclusively produce truly matters in their lives.

Tilting Local

Our tilt toward local news is not merely manifest in the stories we now put on the front page. The entire newsroom is being reorganized this year around that idea, from reporting beats to our most ambitious journalistic projects. The same focus is also evident on our Web site, startribune.com, where during the past year we've created two distinctly local destinations. One new section of the site is called “Politically Connected,” where political reporting covers the national landscape mostly through a local and regional lens. The other, called “Buzz,” launches a daily conversation on a range of local interests and issues. Simultaneously, our newspaper's editorial pages are working hard to provide unique local commentary.

Like many other newspapers dealing with declining revenues, the Star Tribune reduced its newsroom staff in the first half of 2007 as several dozen reporters and editors departed through buyouts. This exodus required us to overhaul our reporting ranks. This has been a painful process but moving through it nonetheless has given us fresh opportunities. Despite the cutbacks, we still have a veteran reporter in Washington, D.C. covering Minnesota's congressional delegation, but reporters who were in the features and sports departments have been reassigned to

local news. And we've created a new health team with the mission of exploring medical and health news in-depth and locally. We also put together four reporting teams whose beats are in the Minneapolis and St. Paul suburbs, where most of our readers live.

Some of these changes are provoking scorn or skepticism from some readers (and some staff members) who are worried that we're about to start covering pothole problems and school lunch-menu debates at the expense of deep, meaningful stories on local and national issues. There's no doubt that is a risk. But we are determined to prove otherwise. To do that we need to demonstrate in our pages and on our Web site that local journalism does not mean insular, shallow content. Nor does it mean abusing the notion of "breaking news" by flashing on our Web pages insignificant items that might have 15 minutes of news value.

Instead, we are digging deep, and doing so locally. This fall, four reporters were put on a full-time investigative assignment to look into the collapse of the I-35 bridge near downtown Minneapolis, a mysterious disaster that killed 13 commuters and left many more seriously injured. We also recently published a three-part investigative series on how groundwater tainted with potentially hazardous chemicals still lurks beneath many nearby suburban

communities despite the millions of dollars that have been spent struggling to clean it up. And we just took an in-depth look at how the fertility industry has become a freewheeling big business both locally and nationally.

Meanwhile, our enterprise team—a dozen or so reporters—is working to show our readers how issues as diverse as college costs and the Iraq War are rippling out across the region. When we publish these stories, we invite reader comment about them and publish what readers tell us in the newspaper. And what they have to say sometimes leads to more stories.

Our series about groundwater pollution is a model for what we are trying to accomplish. One of our investigative reporters, Dave Shaffer, spent a few months going through piles of arcane records to map out where—and to understand why—local sources of tap water still carry toxic risks. An interactive map on our Web site gave residents in the affected areas the ability to see precisely where the risks exist. We aren't able to publish this kind of project every week, but we know we can report all kinds of local stories with the same tenacious spirit.

Considering the Odds

With our new game plan, we realize we're charging down a field lined with

obstacles. No newspaper in America appears to have found just the right formula in the digital age—one that attracts new readers and retains the old ones and brings in the revenue needed to pay for journalists to do their work. There are days when I wonder where all of this is headed. But there's also no point mourning the so-called glory days of newspapers, when profits rolled in and Google sounded like the name of a candy bar. When I look at some of the long-faded front pages hanging on a few walls along our corridors, I see plenty of examples of good journalism. But I also see too many predictable stories and a lack of meaningful attention to issues that deeply affect the day-to-day lives of our readers and their families.

We know what's not working well: our old habits. And it's hard to speak with certainty yet that these new steps will reverse our fortunes. But when I sit in one of our afternoon huddles watching the next day's front page fill up with compelling or important local stories that no one else is reporting, I'm convinced we're giving ourselves a fresh, fighting chance to keep readers coming back. ■

Rene Sanchez is deputy managing editor for news content at the Star Tribune.

Childhood Memories Kindle Hyperlocal Strategies

'Trust me, this ain't new. If anything, it's old school local journalism.'

By Rob Curley

I grew up in a three-newspaper household. In the morning, my family got the regional daily out of Topeka, Kansas; in the evening, we got the even more regional afternoon paper from either Ottawa or Emporia (depending on who had the best deal) and, once a week, we got the hometown Osage City Journal-Free Press. To this day, my newspaper sensibilities are

directly related to the papers I read as I was growing up.

Overkill sports coverage for my beloved Kansas Jayhawks came from the Topeka newspaper. Coverage of our local high schools and obits for our town were in the Ottawa newspaper. And the Osage paper had great local letters to the editor, as well as the reports from local nursing homes about

who had visitors that week, as well as pictures from the Osage County Fair and parades.

When the team I was a part of was asked to build Web sites for the newspapers I worked at in Kansas (the Lawrence Journal-World and The Topeka Capital-Journal), we basically pulled from the news menus of our childhoods. It's what we knew, and

even though most of the journalism we've created during the past decade has been delivered via the latest technology instead of with ink on paper, the content has not been far removed from the newspapers I grew up reading in Osage City.

In today's world of labels for everything, people call this "hyperlocal" journalism and tend to act like it's something very new. Trust me, this ain't new. If anything, it's old school local journalism.

Hyperlocal Goals

In the fall of 2006, when our online team¹ walked through the newsroom of The Washington Post—the paper that hired us to create a venue for local news on its Web site—we knew we weren't in Kansas anymore. In front of us sat some of the world's most talented journalists who were watching government's every move, while overseas their colleagues were risking their lives to tell their readers about the Iraq War. Especially in this age of corporate journalism and big newsroom cutbacks, I have a deep admiration and respect for what it means for an organization like the Post to have bureaus all over the country and world to continue our essential role as a member of the Fourth Estate.

Each morning, it's amazing to me to see all of this journalism with a capital "J" coming from the newspaper where I work. But even at the Post there needs to be journalism with a lower-case "j" since it is still also the local newspaper for millions who live in the D.C. area. And it turns out that responding to this obligation doesn't look dramatically different than what we did at our local newspaper Web sites in Kansas.

What I've come to realize is that what is important to people is basi-

cally the same no matter how long their daily commute is. And that's where LoudounExtra.com comes in. It is washingtonpost.com's first step in creating hyperlocal sites that readers connect to in much the same way I related to the newspapers I grew up with in Kansas, which means that relevance and relationship are at its core.

... even at the Post there needs to be journalism with a lower-case 'j' since it is still also the local newspaper for millions who live in the D.C. area. And it turns out that responding to this obligation doesn't look dramatically different than what we did at our local newspaper Web sites in Kansas.

Our goal was never to build a traditional local newspaper site. We were determined to give readers an online experience very different from the typical one of simply finding stories that appeared in the newspaper. Since as far as we can tell no one seems to know what "hyperlocal" really means, we took a stab at what we thought it meant as we built the site.

We knew that news, lots of news, had to be at its center, regardless of whether that news came from Post reporters or online reporters or from bloggers. There are big-time local stories on LoudounExtra.com, the kind readers expect Post reporters to give them. But there also are truly local stories, like police reports about stolen iPods—just like the stuff I might have read in those small Kansas newspapers.

But our goals for the site weren't just journalistic. There was a fair amount of capitalism being discussed with every move we made. The site needed to be an affordable and very targeted adver-

tising vehicle. We wanted the ads on LoudounExtra.com to feel as relevant to our readers as they do in print. Let me explain: For years, I'd watched how my family looked at the ads in newspapers as content. Ads mattered to them. They looked forward to the ads as much, if not more, than they did the stories and photos in the newspaper.

And this sentiment hasn't changed. Recently I saw folks buy the "bulldog" Sunday edition of The Washington Post on a Saturday morning at a local grocery store and throw away the news sections right there at the newsstand and keep the ad inserts. We knew the local ads on LoudounExtra.com had to feel this way: lots of desired deals from lots of local stores.

Our basic strategies to accomplish these hyperlocal goals at LoudounExtra.com consisted of the following:

Constantly updated news: We knew LoudounExtra.com had to be updated all the time with local news. We thought this could be a chore with a five-person Washington Post bureau in Loudoun, Virginia, which had to serve a population of over 250,000. To our surprise, it's going much easier than we expected. The site has incredible buy-in from these reporters, who do a fantastic job of getting us a surprising amount of breaking news. Our online team also does some basic blocking and tackling for the site by doing all of the cop calls throughout the day and updating the site when press releases are sent from local agencies.

Our litmus test for a breaking news story on LoudounExtra.com is very different than both The Washington Post and washingtonpost.com. It's not unusual for one of the site's breaking stories to be about something as small

¹ Many key members of this team have worked together for nearly a decade since they began at newspapers in Kansas. They moved to the Naples (Fla.) Daily News in 2005, where others joined the team that went in the fall of 2006 to The Washington Post. Only one member of the current hyperlocal effort joined the team at the Post.

as local mailboxes destroyed by kids putting fireworks in them or for our lead story to be about how a local high school's cheerleading team did at a regional competition.

Most telling about the local audience's reaction to the site is that often the most-read story on our site will be something that doesn't even make it into the next morning's newspaper as a brief.

Databases galore: It took our team's two multimedia journalists, and one part-time intern, a little more than two months to gather the information, photos and panoramic images needed to build these five custom databases:

- **Restaurants:** Our team called every restaurant in Loudoun and created a database with their responses to about 15 questions ranging from things like are they vegetarian-friendly to their hours of operation to if they are locally owned.
- **Religious institutions:** We visited every church and place of worship in Loudoun we could find to create a searchable guide to more than 150 churches and places of worship in the county with information about congregation size, service schedules, and contact information.
- **Schools:** We talked with every principal at the 85 schools in the county to develop profile articles and links to state report cards. Parents can learn which schools have full-time nurses, if foreign languages are taught, or how many special-education teachers are on staff.
- **Calendar:** It is intensely local, huge and inclusive, ranging from Bible study groups to band appearances at bars.
- **High school sports:** Using information in the box scores from coverage of local high school football games by The Washington Post, we created a database with detailed stats pages for every team and every player. This means that any player whose game performance shows up in the Post's box score has a personal page on our site that contains game-by-game as well as cumulative stats. It is then

The screenshot shows the LoudounExtra.com website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with categories like News, Blogs, Sports, Education, Entertainment, Multimedia, Guides, and Deals. The main content area is dominated by a large article titled "Dulles Slows Down" with a sub-headline "Few places have optimized the recent boom in commercial real estate better than the busy arteries that connect Dulles International Airport with the rest of the Washington region." Below this, there's a "Latest News" section with a headline "Median Home Price Drops to 2004 Levels" and a "Local Calendar" for November 2007. On the right side, there are "Blogs" with articles like "Living in LoCo" and "A Moving Tribute to Veterans", and "Local Sports" with a "Game of the Week" section for "Broad Run Now 10-0".

easy to do side-by-side statistical comparisons for any two players or teams in the database.

An interesting attribute of these local guides is that the entire LoudounExtra.com site is built essentially as one huge relational database. This means that all of the site's parts can "talk" to each other. When a band is performing at a restaurant on Friday night, that information appears on the restaurant's detail page and in the calendar. Similarly, with more traditional content, if a news story or review is posted about a restaurant, those same words appear on the restaurant's page.

Location is also a shared piece of data on the site. Called "geo-coding" and used with places and calendar events and with news stories, we often tie a Google map and driving directions to items appearing on the site. Such geo-coding gives us the capacity to group all of these different types of information—news stories, events, stories, advertising deals, high school sports' results, and church information—and

display them geographically on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis.

Multimedia overkill: Using photo galleries, video, audio and other multimedia tools, we're focused on telling the stories of the Loudoun area in innovative ways. As with the breaking news, the buy-in we've received from the Post reporters in the bureau has been impressive. Along with our stories of the county fair, we had daily photo galleries and videos. And we shoot four videos for our high school game of the week: a highlights' video, an interview video, an analysis video with a Post reporter, and the halftime show.

My favorite multimedia packages are done by former Washington Post photo editor (and former Lawrence Journal-World managing editor) Bill Sned, who puts together weekly packages, which are a huge hit on the site. (His stories and images often end up running in the print edition of The Washington Post.) He's done a story about being a first-grader in Loudoun, being a woman police officer/member of the

SWAT team, being a life-long resident of rural Loudoun, as well as elaborate pieces featuring photos from nearly every high school prom in the county and even local weddings.

There are not many journalists who understand what Washington Post journalism *and* 20,000-circulation newspaper journalism tastes like. Snead does, and he shows this sensibility while using several multimedia tools from his storytelling tool belt. But not all of the multimedia on the site comes from journalists. In some cases, video arrives directly from one of the many Webcams we have positioned near Loudoun highways.

Evergreen content: Put together once and given some rare care and feeding, this content can basically last forever. Our site has big sections on the history of Loudoun, a moving-in guide for new residents, and a “Loudoun 101” overview. These sections also related to editorial topics. For example, there is a massive guide to AOL with a detailed financial snapshot of the company dating back to 1992, lots of multimedia (including 360-degree panoramic photos of the AOL campus in Loudoun), and stories about the company—and its predecessors—dating back to 1989. A similar section exists for Dulles Airport, including hundreds of Post stories gathered since 1957. (Four people spent a week copying, pasting and in many cases typing in stories dating back to when the idea for “Chantilly Airport” was first conceived.) There’s a virtual tour inside and outside the airport and a gallery of historic and current photos, links to flight information, coverage of the Metrorail extension to Dulles, and a traveler’s guide to the airport. This means that when these topics become headline news, these huge sections exist to give our readers more perspective and information.

Platform-independent delivery: We want our site’s content to work in any format—video, text, audio—and on every site and device our readers might use, whether it be on mobile phones, iPods, MP3 players, game consoles, iGoogle, MyYahoo, Facebook, or on a

desktop through customized widgets. Schedules can be downloaded to Microsoft Office calendar or iPhones. And we’ve spent lots of time building mobile versions of our site with the latest news, movie listings, calendar information, or info on where to get dinner. We also do a lot with text messaging to mobile phones. We send game updates for local high school football games or reminders to people that they wanted to attend an event listed in our calendar. We often joke that if we could figure out how to beam content directly to your brain, we would.

Audience dialogue/community publishing: On nearly every page of the site, readers can comment. Without going into a ton of detail on how the proprietary system was built, it recognizes a registered washingtonpost.com reader, then takes it from there. There are a lot of blogs, anchored by a staff-written blog called Living In LoCo, which is Tammi Marcoullier’s take—and she seems to know everyone and everything—on interesting things in Loudoun County. Our audience loves her, easily making her blog the most-read thing on our site nearly every day. Because she is a well-connected former AOL employee, she’s even broken some pretty big news on her blog. When AOL announced that it would lay off 2,000 employees, the e-mail sent to employees from CEO Randy Falco was first posted on her blog; the breaking news story on the home page of washingtonpost.com linked to Tammi’s blog.

The Linked Up in Loudoun blog is a continuously updated look at interesting items published on other sites by newspapers, news organizations, local homeowners associations, area volunteer fire departments, other bloggers in the region, and any other sites that discuss noteworthy happenings in Loudoun. The site also has a fairly lengthy local blog directory, and we do lots of live chats with community leaders, such as with the superintendent of schools or with local candidates. We’ve been blown away by the quantity and quality of the questions that come

through those chats.

One of the custom pieces of software that we’ve worked on the most is our community-publishing tool that integrates content from YouTube, Flickr and Facebook. Though lots of other newspaper sites have their own community-publishing tools, as we did when our team was at the Naples (Fla.) Daily News, on LoudounExtra.com we decided to go a much different route—this time building a site that works the way the Internet really works, instead of how many news organizations wished the Internet worked.

Turns out that when people have shot great photos or video, they are much more likely to share those through sites like YouTube, Flickr and Facebook. So we’ve built software that allows us to get local content from those sites and move it to ours. YouTube, Flickr and Facebook allow this; they even encourage it.

Using these strategies, we operate LoudounExtra.com, a constantly changing news site that was designed so its day-to-day workflow can be maintained by essentially one highly trained (and very motivated) editor. Even so, there will be times when we dip into our team’s intern pool for help, such as covering high school football games or on Election Night.

Will The Washington Post’s hyperlocal strategy work? We just don’t know, but that does not mean we are not going to try. The early results have been promising, as traffic and revenue numbers have exceeded our early projections and content initially created for the Web site continues to find itself more and more in the print product. Now we’ve started work on other regional hyperlocal sites to be released soon by The Washington Post and washingtonpost.com.

By any measure, we believe LoudounExtra.com—at least in these early stages—has been a success. And in a lot of ways, it seems a whole lot like how journalism felt to me when I was just a kid in Osage City. ■

Rob Curley leads the product development team at Washingtonpost.-Newsweek Interactive.

Going Hyperlocal at the Chicago Tribune

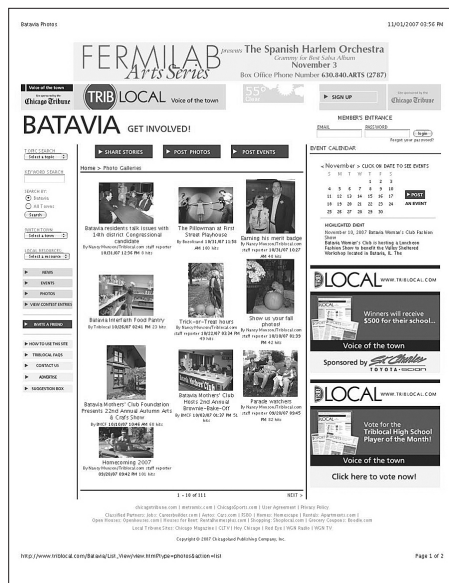
TribLocal.com is 'designed to give readers the depth and breadth of news and information that their local newspapers don't deliver.'

By Kyle Leonard

On a recent Thursday my weekly local newspaper arrived in the mail. Eager to see what was happening in town I flipped to page 5 (leaving the real estate ads on pages 2, 3 and 4 behind) and found a regional story about traffic in and around the county and a feature on a school district that serves a part of the town I live in, although not my neighborhood. My kids attend a different school, and there were no stories about their school in this edition.

On page 6 the columnist was solving a problem for someone who lives 45 miles from where I do, and page 7 had a slew of short tidbits, one or two pertaining to my life but none I read for very long. The last real news page offered a profile of a business leader from a neighboring town. Press releases, entertainment news from a wide swath of northern Illinois, a large (by today's standards) classified section, and a fluffy grip and grin section consumed the rest of the pages. For me, the "local" section of my local paper turned out to be the sports section, since school teams play each other.

I used to edit this newspaper, and when I did I oversaw the work of three local reporters each dedicated to a specific town and a county reporter responsible for regional coverage. There was also an education reporter and a reporter who did light features. A lot has changed in a few years. The county reporter is now responsible for two large counties, essentially most of northern Illinois and any breaking news. There are now two reporters responsible for the three towns and, since the education reporter and feature writer positions were cut, the two remaining reporters must contribute stories to fill those sections as well.



That Thursday my local newspaper didn't live up to its billing. I didn't get much news that meant much to me. But I wasn't surprised, since I know how the staff cuts there have decimated what was already a tiny newsroom with limited resources. This local newspaper is part of a huge newspaper conglomerate that owns a downtown daily, three suburban chains, and another suburban daily newspaper. All of what was really local had been sapped out of this paper a long time ago, and advertisers noticed.

This kind of spiraling decline is happening now at a lot of corporate-owned local papers. A key question large news organizations confront is whether they can reverse the course of decline in these community papers. After all, the corporate owners are not part of the local community, nor is their approach designed to do what it takes to really deliver the kind of news and information families like mine want to read.

Local Goes Online

In April 2007, the Chicago Tribune launched TribLocal.com, a hyperlocal Web site designed to give readers the depth and breadth of news and information that their local newspapers don't deliver. Instead of sending reporters to school board and city council meetings or having them monitor the crime beat or track politicians, new hyperlocal sites, like ours, rely on people who live in these communities to report a significant amount of the news.

Citizen journalism, as it's called, isn't really journalism. Instead it resembles what you'd hear in small town barber-shop conversations. It's stories about you, your neighbors, your friends, sometimes your town leaders, and what's happening in your life and in the place you call home.

News organizations can't afford to deploy a cadre of reporters to let residents know about fundraisers, school plays, church ice cream socials, or youth football games. Community calendars—a staple of every local paper—are fine, but they don't tell you about what will be happening or report back once the event is over. And even if resources existed for this kind of reporting, most journalists consider this coverage beneath them. So residents send words and photographs, even video clips, to our Web site, and soon a genuine flavor of the local scene emerges.

In the fall TribLocal served a total of nine communities, each with its own Web site. A cluster of four communities is in the south suburbs of Chicago; the other is in the far western suburbs. The southern towns—bonded by shared high school districts—are bedroom

communities built along a commuter rail system linking them to Chicago. The Fox River is the link for the five western towns, all of which have transitioned from mill towns into tourist destinations.

Technology enables what gets sent to TribLocal to flow directly into a publishing system built on templates. Seven staff members of TribLocal are able to do the work that in a less automated setting would require 15, maybe more. Our four “reporters” also work as editors, photographers, designers and ambassadors. As managing editor, I help to layout pages, edit stories, and direct Web site-to-publication workflow. There are two—one for each cluster—sales reps whose only job is to sell TribLocal to potential local advertisers.

Back to Newspapers

In August of this year, TribLocal.com, in a case of reverse publishing, launched two weekly newspapers, one for residents of each cluster. Content comes solely from what has already been published on the Web sites. Each week, reporters choose which stories will be considered for publication in the paper, and then the usual debate and decision-making, familiar to any newsroom, occurs. Once a story is selected, it must go through the same fact checking and editing process that any staff reporter’s work would receive.

While our online site is a free-flowing forum of ideas, with its graphic images and opinions governed, if at all, by liberal rules, the newspapers are a different animal. All the rules of publishing the Chicago Tribune apply. This means that opinions are labeled as such; language that is okay on the Web is edited for print, and situations that might lead to charges of libel, along with other legal concerns, need to be addressed.

When we first started to reverse publish this online content, the majority of stories to fill our 16 to 20 pages (with a 50-50 split between stories and advertisements) were selected from work done by our small staff of reporters.

Newspaper sales were surprisingly strong for our new product, and we found that publication of the paper drove up the page views on the Web sites significantly. This meant that more contributions from residents soon followed. When the school year got underway, local schools began to post stories. So did parents with children in youth sports, who sent photographs and game summaries. Village officials also started to use our site to get notices

to stories that come to us but need a more professional touch. There are stories to be told that only a reporter with great sources will know about, but now we often hear from someone in the community who is willing to become a reliable source—or write the story themselves. For example, residents fearful of overdevelopment and encroachment of surrounding communities incorporated into the small town of Homer Glen about five years ago. Recently, TribLocal has posted several items written by residents who are unhappy with decisions made by elected officials. We’ve also run information sent to us by residents about the sudden resignation of Homer Glen’s city manager.

We know, however, there is more to be told about this story. A community that fought so hard to come together is now splitting apart. Why is this happening? What are the issues? Can the community find a way to resolve their internal differences? These stories take time to report, and for this reason they are the type of story seldom being done by local news outlets today. A city manager’s departure will be on the front page one week and then, with little follow-up, the story will die away due to the lack of reporting resources needed to make the effort. In this case, this Homer Glen story is one we will pursue with the help of our local contributors.

What does the future hold? Early success with TribLocal.com has accelerated expansion plans for 2008 and 2009. Already more than 1,500 people have registered with us, a necessary step to post information and comments on the site. Page views have increased by double digits every month, and more local advertisers are signing up for multiple week ad runs. There are local newspapers serving the towns that TribLocal is now a part of. And they are suffering declining circulation and ad revenues, and the usual business decisions are being employed. Staffs are being cut, mastheads are being consolidated and, as a consequence, local coverage is suffering. Instead of being more relevant to their local audience, they are becoming less so.



to residents. And as we expected, public relations professionals and politicians also found the site useful and now post regularly. We treat their pieces as we would any other.

Reporting on Local Issues

As contributions to our site increase, the reporters’ need to “fill pages” is decreasing, and they can begin to report on issues that are crucial to the community. They also give voice

What TribLocal—and other hyperlocal sites, some attached to newspapers, others on their own—is attempting to do is to reconnect with an audience that traditional newsgathering organizations have lost touch with. Time will tell what works and what

doesn't. During the next few years we'll start to see how a renewed and intense focus on all things local will influence how journalism is practiced. Stay tuned. ■

Kyle Leonard is managing editor at

TribLocal.com, the Chicago Tribune's online hyperlocal Web site. Before assuming this position, he was managing editor, assistant bureau chief, and niche publishing manager at the Pioneer Press Newspapers in Chicago's suburbs.

When Community Residents Commit 'Random Acts of Journalism'

'In communities with little news coverage, people are using the Web to restore a sense of place.'

By Jan Schaffer

In rural Dutton, Montana, 80 people showed up last fall, wooed by a notion of starting a local news site for this newspaperless town of 375 people. Months later, the community celebrated the launch of the Dutton Country Courier.¹ In Chappaqua, New York, three long-time community volunteers decided their community needed a weekly online newspaper. So in early October, they launched NewCastleNOW.org: News & Opinion Weekly. Meanwhile, in Moscow, Idaho, low-power KRFP-FM radio, just two years after it began airing a citizen-produced nightly newscast on radiofreemoscow.org, is applying for a noncommercial radio license.

All three of these citizen media projects were fueled in small part by microgrants from the J-Lab/Knight Foundation New Voices program, but they are being sustained in much larger part by the passion, vision and hard work of their creators. From girls podcasting in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, to environmental journalists creating a wiki about the Great Lakes, to journalism students

scooping Chicago news outlets, in two years some 30 New Voices start-ups have joined scores of other hyperlocal ventures in committing what some refer to as "random acts of journalism" by "citizen journalists."

It is here—on these hyperlocal sites—that systemic conventions of inverted pyramids and "balanced" stories are out of sync with information conveyed amid a keen caring about community. "These are not multiple-source stories," said veteran journalist Suzanne McBride of the items on CreatingCommunityConnections.org, which she cofounded in Chicago. "It took me a while to say that's okay; it's not libeling anyone. I had to change my thinking about that," she told a Citizens Media Summit at the The Associated Press Managing Editors' conference in October.

Nonjournalists sharing photos and videos of breaking news events—from the London bombings to the South Asia tsunami, from the violence of Burma's protests to Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan—garners media attention, yet what's happening on emerging

hyperlocal news opens a window to observe what is happening in journalism today. In communities with little news coverage, people are using the Web to restore a sense of place. Behind these hyperlocal efforts is a desire to get local citizenry engaged in issues affecting their lives—in essence, to create a civic media that at the same time constructs a new architecture of participation in their towns.

Learning curves at many of these Web sites are still high, but those of us who closely observe and do research about these efforts already know a lot. Earlier this year, J-Lab released one of the first reports on the rise of local news sites based on user-generated content (UGC). The research, "Citizen Media: Fad or the Future of News?,"² reported on survey responses from 191 citizen media participants and about in-depth interviews with those involved with 31 Web sites.

Here are some of the key findings:

- Citizen media is emerging as a form of "bridge media," linking opportunities to share and create news and

¹ www.DuttonCC.org

² www.kcnn.org/research/citizen_media_report

Tips About Starting a Hyperlocal Web Site

For those seeking to venture into the hyperlocal sphere—whether affiliated with a news organization or not—we’ve developed tips through observation and study. —J.S.

1. Get ready for a high-touch experience: Citizen journalists won’t join the effort unless cajoled, recruited, trained, stroked, celebrated and sometimes paid. Content wranglers must be evangelists, cheerleaders, assignment editors, and writers. Travis Henry, top editor of YourHub.com in Denver, has taken local contributors to Broncos’ games and made house calls to teach someone how to load to the site. In Dutton, University of Montana journalism students coauthored early stories with local contributors to help build confidence. And when MyMissourian.com founder Clyde Bentley discovered that a local bluegrass band got a grant to go to China, he “gave them an old computer, set

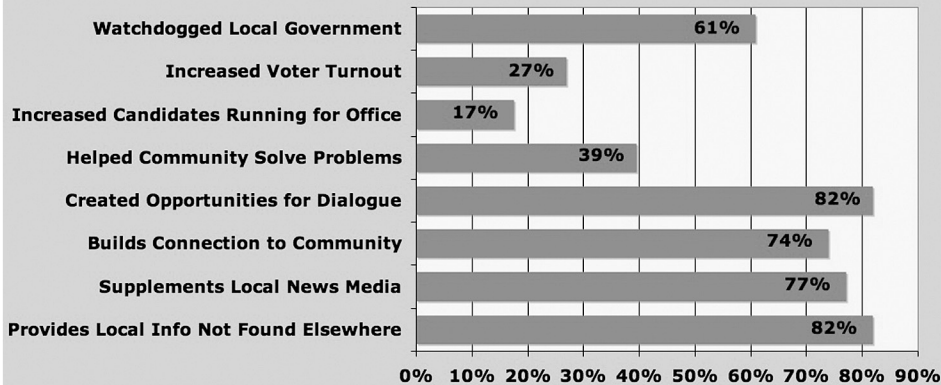
them up a blog and a Flickr account.” They sent e-mails, and he posted what they sent. “We got incredible readership on this thing, and we all saw more of China than we ever would,” he explained.

2. Understand contributors’ motivations. Robust user-generated content demands a measure of equilibrium between the giving and the getting. Volunteers will write or report if they are getting something in return. What motivates them? They might want to learn technical skills or get a job as a journalist, make a difference in their community or solve a problem. Said one citizen reporter for The Forum¹ in Deerfield, New Hampshire: “My experience working as a Forum reporter has been one of the best experiences of my life. At times, I feel used, overworked and run out of words in my head to place on the screen. But it is all worth it in the end.”

3. Model content: Seed the site with the kind of stories you hope others will contribute. Write a mission statement. BlufftonToday.com promises to provide a “friendly, safe, easy to use place” on the Web for people to post and share. “In return, we ask that you meet this character challenge: Be a good citizen and exhibit community leadership qualities. It’s a simple and golden rule. Act as you would like your neighbors to act.” “We’ve had almost no complaints about inaccurate information,” said iBrattleboro cofounder Lise LePage. “Citizen journalism is always going to be advocacy. They attend a meeting because they have a reason for being there, but that doesn’t mean their coverage is going to be inaccurate.”

4. See and be seen. Invest in face time in your community. Attend meetings, state fairs, and sports events. “Most of the community stories come from

Where Citizen Journalism Adds Value



From “Citizen Media: Fad or the Future of News?” by Jan Schaffer

information with opportunities to get involved in civic life.

- No one size fits all; there are many models. Sites have been started by former journalists, seeking to be the I.F. Stone of their towns, and by friends of the public library seeking

to construct a local news entity.

- Instead of being comprehensive sources of news, sites are formed as fusions of news and schmooze. Stories unravel over a series of postings and people, contrary to traditional journalistic conventions, “cover”

the topics they care most about and know something about.

- Half the respondents said their sites don’t need to make money to continue. Costs can be as low as \$13 a month for server space, and volunteers provide most of the labor. But site founders concede it would be nice to be able to pay a little to contributors.
- Most citizen sites don’t use traditional metrics—unique visitors, page views, or revenues—to measure success. Even so, 73 percent assessed their efforts to be “successful.”
- Success is often defined as impact on the community. Included as evidence of their effectiveness are such accomplishments as increasing voter turnout in elections and attendance at town meetings, helping communities to solve problems, and being a watchdog on local government. [See

my going out and relentlessly talking to people,” said Barb Iverson, co-founder of CreatingCommunityConnections.org. Mark Potts, a founder of the now-shuttered Backfence.com, said: “It’s the garden club. It’s the stoplight down their street that isn’t working or the principal who’s been fired. If you don’t live there, you don’t care.” [See Potts’ article on page 66.]

5. Tap existing assets. Pay attention to what the community tells you is important. When The Bakersfield Californian launched Bakotopia.com, local bands made it the place to share information about local musicians. Bicycling is so popular in Chicago that those who do it insisted it be a separate “beat” from “transportation” on CreatingCommunityConnections.org.

6. Open doors for participation. iBrattleboro.com has an assignment desk that seeks volunteers to cover town meetings and events. In Appalachia,

Appalshop radio² trains community correspondents to produce news stories for broadcast. NewWest.net—whose territory stretches across six Western states—offers those who write their own “MyPages.”

7. Rethink “news.” Citizens define “news” very differently than do traditional news outlets. Rarely do they engage in scorecard journalism: Who’s up or who’s down today? Nor do they “balance” stories by creating false equilibriums; if someone is in favor of something, they won’t run around to try to find someone who’s against it. Important, too, for the community, they don’t require conflict before telling a story; they use their words to validate consensus, as well. For some sites, it’s enough to run the minutes of a town meeting.

8. Find partnerships. When CreatingCommunityConnections.org found Chicago aldermen hiring their relatives, the editors offered to also break the story on The Beachwood

Reporter, a nearby hyperlocal Web site, to help juice traffic and impact. Most news organizations consider it unthinkable to share enterprise stories.

9. Don’t sweat the math. Appalshop trained 13 producers, but only five are regularly producing. MadisonCommons.org has trained more than 70 citizen journalists but only a handful contribute. It’s common to have fewer than 10 percent of those who agree to contribute actually do it.

10. Build the business as it comes. The editors of Baristanet.com will barter ads for hair care and dry cleaning. [See article about Baristanet.com on page 64.] NewWest.net supports activities with revenues from an indoor advertising company. TCDailyPlanet.net has attracted grants from several community foundations. ■

¹ www.forumhome.org

² www.appalshop.org/cc

accompanying graph.]

- There is a high degree of optimism that citizen news and information sites are here to stay. But founders note that attracting more contributors and some operating support continue to be major challenges.

With the rise of so many independent local news sites, traditional news outlets are now trying to enter this space with their own iterations of UGC sites, such as the Chicago Tribune’s TribLocal.com and The Washington Post’s LoudounExtra.³ [See stories on these two efforts on pages 57 and 53.] For the most part, news organizations are starting from scratch in developing their hyperlocal news sites rather than partnering with existing ones. It

remains to be seen whether the sites affiliated with news outlets will achieve the passion and caring for community exhibited by the independent start-ups.

Some citizen media site operators think such competition is senseless. “We are plankton,” says Christopher Grotke, who cofounded iBrattleboro.com in Vermont. He would like to see news organizations feeding off his site—and others like it—rather than trying to replicate what it already does.

It remains an unanswered question as to whether sustainable business models will emerge out of the numerous citizen media now on the Web. Perhaps activity such as this will be a venue for a new type of community volunteerism, something baby boomers

do after they finish coaching their kids’ soccer teams. But it’s increasingly clear that sites like these are transforming how local journalism is practiced and even what it is and what it can do. [For tips about how to create a hyperlocal news site, see box above.]

From his perch at MyMissourian.com, Clyde Bentley believes that “traditional journalism plus citizen journalism equals 21st century journalism.” I agree. ■

Jan Schaffer is executive director of J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism at the University of Maryland. E-mail news@j-lab.org to get a copy of “Citizen Media: Fad or the Future of News?”

³ <http://loudounextra.washingtonpost.com/>

Picking Up Where Newspapers Leave Off

A former investigative journalist launched an online local news Web site in Chicago.

By Geoff Dougherty

In November 2005, I placed an ad on craigslist that changed my life—and altered the media landscape in Chicago. This was my first public acknowledgment of plans I had to launch a Web site. My ad said I was looking for volunteers who wanted to write for a nonprofit local news organization.

I didn't have a lot of practical details about how this new operation would function. Who would fund it? Who would read it? Who would write for it? These were some of the key questions that I couldn't answer. Nevertheless, the basic framework turned out to be enough of a powerful force to propel me, my idea, and those who responded to my ad forward.

My vision was this: build an online news organization with a relentless, exclusive focus on Chicago. We'd cover the city's six-dozen neighborhoods by recruiting a volunteer citizen journalist in each one. We'd offer training and editing so that what our volunteers submitted—words or sound or visuals—would include the best reporting possible. We would assemble a small group of full-time reporters to cover citywide beats. And we'd investigate the people and institutions too often granted a pass by traditional local news outlets.

My Motivation

I decided to start ChiTownDailyNews.org after spending four years as an investigative reporter at the Chicago Tribune. My time there convinced me that our city's newspapers were doing a terrible job of covering Chicago. The Tribune didn't regularly cover the Chicago Housing Authority, an agency that spends millions in public funds every year. Chicago has the nation's largest civil justice system, but no reporter

was assigned to cover it full time. Each Chicago public school has a local school council, independently elected to set the annual budget and evaluate the principal, and they meet each month. Nobody at the paper covered those meetings. The Tribune had more reporters stationed in Europe than on the South Side of Chicago.

Of course, the Tribune and its traditional news siblings are staffed to serve a reader who doesn't exist anymore. When I spoke to a college journalism class recently, I asked those who counted the Tribune as their primary source of international news to raise their hands. None did. Readers are apt to follow international news through the BBC Web site and national news on CNN.com or nytimes.com. They read their local newspaper's Web site for local news.

The game has changed; newspapers can no longer assume that they're the only source for their readers. Reporting by a smattering of foreign correspondents no longer makes a news organization a go-to destination for world news. If the local paper's foreign report isn't as comprehensive as The New York Times, then why read it when nytimes.com is just a click away? And at many newspapers, some of the best reporters are being shown the door in an effort to cut payrolls and meet inflated earnings targets. The story is the same in city after city: fewer reporters, editors and photographers, a smaller news hole, and a higher newsstand price. It became difficult for me to see how that equation served readers.

I was also feeling for the first time in my 10 years as a newspaper reporter that journalism was boring. Good journalism involves risk—for reporters, risk can mean getting killed or being sued; for a newspaper, it can mean killing off print readers in pursuit of

a better Web site. Taking such risks is what makes journalism exciting. But newspapers seem to hate risk. Many newsrooms chase after stories others have done instead of demanding original reporting. Investigative projects can languish as editors worry about offending the powerful. Declining readership spreads, as newsroom managers try everything but what needs to be done: betting it all on the Web.

Our Experiment

I met the volunteers who responded to my ad at a popular North Side watering hole. About a dozen journalists and soon-to-be journalists showed up, most of them eager to get started. For the next few weeks, I struggled to raise money and build a board of directors. I imagined that ChiTownDailyNews.org would be launched several months into the hazy future. But as we kept talking, the volunteers' enthusiasm became contagious. They made me realize that there were very few obstacles to launching this Web site. We had no money, but we didn't need any; Web site hosting costs \$20 a month. We had no rich folks vying to join the board but, with \$20 a month in expenses, we didn't need them, either.

What we had was a Web site prototype, a working content-management system, and a handful of dedicated volunteers. The site, I figured, would either find its niche within a few months and attract funders, writers and readers. Or it wouldn't. Either way, I thought, it would be an interesting experiment.

It has certainly been that and, as I set out to build a new kind of news organization, it's been a huge departure from the world of big-budget newspapers. The big differences: We are relentlessly local. We pursue risky

stories and experiment with cutting-edge Web technology. We also invite reader participation and have broken away from the traditional ownership model and operate as a nonprofit institution.

So far, it's working. We've survived for two years. More than 15,000 people visit the site each month, though we spend no money on advertising. We have more than 300 people registered to submit content. We were finalists this year for a prestigious Online News Association investigative reporting award.¹ We regularly break news, and our stories often start vigorous comment threads on the site.

Earlier this year, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation awarded a \$340,000 grant to help us build and train our network of 75 volunteer neighborhood journalists. We're hitting our recruiting targets with volunteers, and people with little or no previous journalism experience have contributed some compelling content. Mark Draughn, who covers the community of Jefferson Park, has done an excellent job of keeping readers up-to-date on issues raised at neighborhood community policing meetings. And citizen journalist Alex Parker jumped off a city bus when he saw fire trucks surrounding a lakefront high-rise. His coverage of this fatal apartment fire was comprehensive and quick, making us the first Chicago news organization to post details.

Good reporting has come, too, from our crew of full-time, beat-reporting interns on whom we depend for coverage of beats like city hall, the public schools, and public transportation. These are ever-present, ongoing stories that demand more time and experience than most citizen journalists can give. In the future, we want to transition these internships into full-time, paid reporting positions. This would give us a core crew of journalists to produce

a regular flow of copy and share their knowledge with our volunteers.

We have some difficult challenges, as do similar start-up, online news organizations. Pushing our traffic numbers higher requires a steady flow of fresh content. But relying on citizen journalists and a small group of beat-reporting

some business challenges that are far more vexing. Sales of advertisements were a huge part of our initial business plan, accounting for nearly 50 percent of our revenue. Yet we've sold fewer than 10 ads so far, earning less than \$1,000. (This is a problem of scale: with 200,000 page views a month, our maximum ad revenue potential is about \$2,000.) And ads, as I've discovered to my great dismay, don't sell themselves. And we can't pay a salesman on \$2,000 a month.

We're also finding that foundations, with the exception of Knight, are not especially receptive to paying for the work of gathering news. Many fund journalism school programs; others support studies done on the relationship between the news media and the public. Very few write checks for the purpose of hiring reporters.

That is unfortunate, because the availability of such funding could well determine what kind of organizations will deliver news in future years. Will the next generation of news organizations be launched as nonprofits and become valued community institutions? Or will they need to become for-profit companies and inevitably confront the same profit vs. public service conflict that is decimating so many of our best newspapers?

ChiTownDailyNews.org has come close to folding once or twice during the past two years. Right now it's unclear whether we'll raise the \$500,000 or more that we need to hire beat and investigative reporters to supplement our crew of volunteers. What we do have more of each day are readers. That alone is worth celebrating, given what a rarity it is in the news business today. ■

Geoff Dougherty is editor of Chi-Town Daily News, a nonprofit online newspaper covering Chicago.



interns for this content makes it tough to predict when we'll have new stories and how many of them we'll have.

Ethical dilemmas abound. Those who are most interested in writing for our site are often very much invested in what happens in their neighborhoods and involved in a host of other organizations. Asking them to give up those activities for the sake of journalistic objectivity would discourage many and rob other community organizations of participants. Instead of barring such involvement, we make sure writers avoid covering issues with which they've had prior involvement. But this requirement creates friction. Though we strive to be as inclusive as possible, some folks have their fingers in so many pies that finding an interesting topic they can write about is almost impossible.

These obstacles are journalistic and can likely be resolved with careful consideration and hard work. We face

¹ The article "A Man of Two Lives," which was a finalist for an Online News Association investigative reporting award, can be found at www.chitowndailynews.org/Chicago+news/2007/1/10/A_man_of_two_lives.

Going Local: Knowing Readers Is Essential

‘... hyperlocal news sites like ours are bringing the personality of a community to the news by letting residents have a much more active role in dictating what is news.’

By Liz George

People are talking local. And what they are talking about isn't coming from their local newspaper but because they clicked on a story delivered to their e-mail or on a local Web site's homepage. What they find there, they talk about in real time. This Web to water cooler connection is happening throughout the country—because of what a lot of folks call “placeblogs,” Web sites with an intense, some say “hyperlocal,” focus on what's going on close to home.

As managing editor and co-owner of Baristanet.com, a hyperlocal online news site based in Essex County, New Jersey, I've watched the conversation and the medium grow during the past three and a half years. Perhaps because in my day job I work as an editor at the New York Daily News, I've been invited to talk about what we do at Baristanet with newspaper editors and entrepreneurs from around the country as they both look for ways to start similar successful ventures.

Big news stories are everywhere. Anyone with an Internet connection can get access to them from a variety of Web sites. So it's not surprising that there's a lot of attention being focused on getting the stories everyone else doesn't have. Zeroing in on readership by creating unique local content in a variety of forms is what we do at Baristanet.

The Local Formula

To do local, it is essential to know local. I've gotten to know our readership, a dedicated, growing and eclectic group of folks who visit our site to the tune of 7,000 hits a day. When I say “gotten to know” I'm talking about the

keen attention we pay to our readers. When bigger news operations attempt to create sites for local content, I've noticed that the level of attention paid to readers isn't as high. How can it be? What happens often is that the news outlet creates a template and hopes that citizen journalists or local “mayors” arrive and magically start to feed it content.

Nearby, the local newspaper, The Montclair Times, has a main Web site on which articles from the morning paper appear online the same day. It has no interactive component, and thus no options for commenting, nor any forums. Our Web site benefits from this limited Web presence of the Times. In the past year, the newspaper launched “My Montclair,” a separate online community page. With advertisements in their paper, they encouraged readers to contribute photos and stories. These ads promoted this by telling readers how easy this is to do. But when we look at “My Montclair” today, we can see that one contributor has essentially hijacked the page by using it as a platform for his own rants.

When no effort at personal engagement is extended by those building the site, the online experiment is destined for dullness. With local news, dullness means death. Traditional community newspapers conjure up images of council meetings, public notices, and the occasional feel-good picture of do-gooders. Published once a week, the news is stale by the time it reaches residents. With a major story—a natural disaster or a power outage—what lands on the doorstep is no longer news at all. People accepted this because until now the local paper was the only game in town, churning out the same

tired formula of news, enjoying a captive audience, and dominating local advertising.

Technology—and new media derived from it—has changed the game. Entrepreneurial sites like Baristanet, Hoboken 411, and others around the country are playing hardball. Baristanet routinely scoops the local papers and takes a healthy chunk of ad revenues away from both town and regional papers. More importantly, hyperlocal news sites like ours are bringing the personality of a community to the news by letting residents have a much more active role in dictating what is news. That they cover the news, too, gives it an even more personal touch.

Readers of local news now demand timeliness and immediacy of its delivery. In the age of Internet immediate gratification, who wants to look at 4th of July parade photos on July 11th? Immediacy of delivery translates into more people coming to our site: Traffic spikes to 12,000 on days we cover a breaking news story such as a bank robbery. No waiting until Thursday to find out what's happening on Monday.

Community Voices

Participatory journalism—with enhanced opportunities for dialogue—benefits those who live in the community it serves. More eyes on what local officials do, or fail to do, leads to improving the community's watchdog accountability as residents now demand greater transparency. They also use our site to spearhead efforts to solve community problems. Local election coverage has improved, tear-downs of historic homes have been prevented, and platforms for public

engagement are open to community members who might not have had a voice in the past. In real time news sharing, we inform residents about traffic, weather and crime. And to create buzz for an issue, a cause, or a policy change some might disagree with—just to get word out about what's important to them—residents in Montclair, Glen Ridge, and Bloomfield, which are the areas we serve, increasingly turn to Baristanet.

Providing a home for local content isn't just about relaying news. It's about capturing the unique voice and flavor of a community. Personalized local content is just as important as having the barista at the local coffee shop know just how you like your morning cup. By us getting to know the voices, buzz and language of these communities and inviting residents to use their voices, we've laid the foundation for a solid readership. For many, the site—with its polls and survey, book clubs and calendars, videos and podcasts—is now as necessary as the first cup of coffee each morning.

Making Baristanet a viable success happened without benefit of venture capital money or a sophisticated infrastructure. We started it as two journalists with a desire to make local news entertaining. And while the Web tools to do this are easy to find, the toughest thing to find is the unpaid time each day to devote to it. Fortunately, in the past year my founding partner and I have been able to draw a consistent salary from Baristanet, and we are also able to pay our staff—two writers, a designer, and a part-time tech consultant, as well as our accountant. Based on current revenue, each of us could quit our day jobs, but we enjoy the security of having both, the creativity of doing this, and the juggling of more than one pursuit.

Once we got the site going, we found a readership who embraced it

and made it their home. To initially get people to notice Baristanet, we created swag (Frisbees, beach balls, and other giveaways) to distribute at outdoor festivals and community events. We also compiled and added to a healthy e-mail address list of key people in the community. We did a lot

The screenshot shows the Baristanet website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, CLASSIFIEDS, FOOD, CALENDAR, FORUMS, REAL ESTATE, ABOUT US, and CONTACT US. The main content area features a featured article titled "Indie Coffee House Owner Stands Her Ground" dated Wednesday, November 14, 2007. The article includes a photo of a coffee shop and text about Rhonda Mallick's efforts to protect her business from Starbucks. To the right, there's a "FOLLOW THE DISCUSSION" section with a "MOUNTAINSIDE HOSPITAL" article and a "RECENT POSTS" section listing various local news items. At the bottom, there are search bars for Local Video, Local Maps, Book Club, and a "Get Baristanet VIA Email OR RSS" section.

of interaction with local police—sent over some lunches to them—as well as city council members. We went onto existing area user groups and tried to get noticed there. Our big discovery was that the most effective method was through word of mouth.

In many ways, keeping Baristanet, a 24/7 operation, going has been probably the most fun I've had as a journalist. In my day job as a special sections editor at the New York Daily News, I do news and features much in the way I was taught at New York University's School of Journalism. On Baristanet, we balance straight news pieces (crime and other news of a serious nature) with aggregated news, polls and opinion-style pieces. It's an approach to local content more in the mode of a columnist/provocateur serving up news with a generous helping of opinion and humor.

Local news lends itself to this less serious tone. It's finding out which city counselor blew his or her stack

last night at the meeting. It's having a live chat with an elected official or, more importantly for a lot of our readers, commenting on the idiocy of how local officials handled a certain problem. One town has had a proliferation of Canada geese at a park, causing complaints from residents who found the grounds covered with droppings. A firm was hired to scare the geese away with fake coyotes, fake dead geese, scary balloons, and other equally absurd decoys. When these methods failed, the town—declaring that it had exhausted every measure—hired someone to kill the geese. Readers came to our site and furiously debated this issue rather than writing letters to the editor and waiting for the local paper to comment.

Local content isn't static. It's about a community—its people and places, its sensibilities and shared experiences—being its own news. It might involve a plea to find a lost pet, or a review of a local restaurant, but it all involves community building. By sending a digital photo or getting a news tip to us via e-mail, a person becomes the force that launches a new story. By recognizing and validating the reader's role in breaking news, we create a loyal and active readership, which over time does more of the reporting work that likely began with those who conceived the site.

Local content won't thrive—or even survive—when those who receive it are set apart from the business of creating it. Put up fences to corral such enterprise on a separate, non-news site, and the endeavor is doomed to fail. Local readers shape and make their news. Ignore them at your peril, for if they are ignored, they'll quickly move on—with the click of their mouse. ■

Liz George is special sections editor at the New York Daily News and the managing editor and co-owner of Baristanet.

Journalism: Its Intersection With Hyperlocal Web Sites

These sites ‘provide a depth of coverage of microscopic issues and events that thinly stretched traditional newsrooms simply can’t get to.’

By Mark Potts

Residents of Reston, Virginia take pride in living in one of the nation’s first and oldest planned suburban communities. But it galls some of them that Reston, as part of Fairfax County, doesn’t have its own local government. So there’s been a long-running community debate about seceding from the county and setting up Reston as an independent town.

If you don’t live in Reston, this is a fairly esoteric and mundane topic. At Backfence, the network of hyperlocal citizen journalism Web sites we launched a couple of years ago, we’d roll our eyes a bit whenever one of our Reston members posted a story about the “town status” idea. “There they go again,” we’d think. But we also knew that we were in for a vigorous online discussion, with a great deal of audience participation and readership, as Reston residents passionately argued for and against secession on Backfence’s pages.

Participatory community news sites like Backfence and others started by entrepreneurs and traditional media companies are providing a forum for local residents to share their knowledge and opinions about local life. These “hyperlocal” community discussions represent a new sort of journalism and storytelling—what some have labeled “citizen journalism.” Don’t expect the traditional “who/what/where/when” or inverted pyramid formats. Instead, these discussions produce back-and-forth exchanges of hundreds of

words of passionate prose, written by residents, which provide far more detail and nuance on a topic than a traditional news story ever could. They also provide a depth of coverage

there are varying approaches on all of these sites, each provides local citizens a voice in their communities and a new source of local information at a microscopic level that traditional media simply can’t match.

At Backfence, we saw countless examples of community members sharing their knowledge of the local scene with each other. A local Little League team’s run to the national championship was covered in real time, through stories and photos posted by the league commissioner days before similar

news appeared in local papers. When Virginia officials proposed privatizing a toll road, a Backfence contributor posted a detailed analysis of the potential fiscal impact; this kind of in-depth “reporting” was unavailable anywhere else. A group of citizens united to try to save an architecturally significant building after learning on Backfence that it was going to be torn down. Backfence users lamented the closing of a popular store. Contributors reviewed restaurants, electricians and beauty salons. Local government officials used the sites to communicate directly with their constituents.

This isn’t Woodward and Bernstein stuff, of course, and the citizen journalism practiced on Backfence and other user-contributed sites bears only passing resemblance to traditional journalism. Participants generally don’t act as reporters; they write what they know. It’s the ensuing discussions with other contributors that can produce a

Are [hyperlocal Web sites] substitutes for traditional professional reporting? No, they aren’t. Do they hew to the spirit of impartiality that journalists strive for? No, they don’t. But they do provide an additional, complementary forum for the airing of local issues.

of microscopic issues and events that thinly stretched traditional newsrooms simply can’t get to.

As hyperlocal citizen journalism sites have sprung up around the country, some journalists have viewed them with consternation. Are these substitutes for traditional professional reporting? No, they aren’t. Do they hew to the spirit of impartiality that journalists strive for? No, they don’t. But they do provide an additional, complementary forum for the airing of local issues.

Community Voices

Backfence proved a fascinating laboratory for this new form of journalism in its two-plus years of operation, before closing earlier this year for business reasons. Similar hyperlocal sites such as iBrattleboro.com, WestportNow.com, and Baristanet.com are carrying on similar pioneering work. While

well-rounded report. The quality of the writing would make a journalism professor or copyeditor blanch, but what gets conveyed is nonetheless quite understandable in most cases—and often much better than many professionals would expect. And in spite of the seeming free-for-all nature of user-generated content (which always seems to scare journalists), we had very few problems with abuse of the sites.

The citizen journalism movement, which also includes hundreds of local blogs focusing on community issues and politics, still is in its nascent stages; none of these sites is more than three or four years old. But many of them have become important forces in their communities—and are beginning to find their footings as viable businesses, as local advertisers flock to them as a way to reach the customers closest to them at affordable prices. Over the next few years, I believe, as the digital hyperlocal format matures, local I.F. Stone-like journalists will emerge, doing more sophisticated local reporting and publishing themselves through blogs or community sites.

Citizen journalism also is presenting an opportunity for traditional media to extend its reach deeper into local communities. Many newspapers and broadcasters are beginning to experiment with their own locally oriented, user-contributed sites, discovering that they provide a low-cost way to provide detailed coverage of issues and stories too inconsequential to assign to a staff reporter or to gather firsthand accounts, photos and videos. Newspapers also are beginning to draw on this force of amateur contributors to help out with broader, staff-directed investigative stories, in a phenomenon known as crowdsourcing.

In perhaps the best example of this, The (Fort Myers) News-Press, a Gannett-owned paper in Florida, enlisted the help of dozens of community members—experts and regular citizens—to investigate the high cost of local sewer service. In all, some 110 stories about

this issue were generated, leading to a 30 percent reduction in fees and a local official's resignation. And the "microsite" that hosted discussion about this topic became the most visited part of the News-Press Web site.

Journalism and Hyperlocal

As professional journalists interact with their citizen counterparts, there are a few things worth keeping in mind:

- It's not journalism, it's a conversation. Don't expect participants to do reporting, at least not in the classic sense. The magic of user-generated sites is that they provide a forum

Over the next few years, I believe, as the digital hyperlocal format matures, local I.F. Stone-like journalists will emerge, doing more sophisticated local reporting and publishing themselves through blogs or community sites.

for community members to share and discuss what's going on around town. An active online conversation can be as rich, deep and interesting—or more so—than traditional journalism.

- Trust the audience. There seems to be fear among many journalists that opening up their Web sites to audience participation will lead to trash talking. That's a risk, but there are many safeguards that can be put in place—profanity filters, forum moderation, "report abuse" mechanisms—to minimize this. At Backfence, the audience took responsibility for what went on at each site and debated local issues in a civil manner because it was about their community.
- It's a window into a community. What people really care about and what editors and reporters think they care about can be very different things. Citizen journalism sites

can be rich sources for journalists of information about what's important to local residents. We lost count of how many stories originated from community members on Backfence and showed up a few days later in the local newspapers.

- People will write about their local community for free. This flummoxes many journalists, who assume that no one will create content without being paid. But citizen journalists get different kinds of rewards—the sense that they're "experts" in their community, a chance to have their voices heard—that make them happy to share what they know without expecting compensation.
 - An important role still exists for traditional journalism. I can't stress this enough: Citizen journalism doesn't replace old-fashioned shoe-leather professional journalism. It augments and extends it by providing new ways to cover news that journalists can't get to and by giving "audience" members a voice.

For a print or broadcast entity that wants to defend and enhance its local franchise, citizen journalism is an important tool. It broadens coverage and gives the community a highly personalized stake in local media. By providing an inexpensive means to cover the mundane to-and-fro of daily life, it frees up professional journalists to dig deeper into local stories. Most importantly, it provides a vehicle for the audience to find out what's happening up the street, not just around the world. Hyperlocal citizen journalism, literally, engages people where they live. ■

Mark Potts, a former journalist, is an entrepreneur and consultant who cofounded washingtonpost.com and Backfence Inc., a pioneer in the field of user-generated, hyperlocal citizens media. He blogs about the intersection of media and the online world at www.recoveringjournalist.com.

VillageSoup: A Community Host Model At Work

‘Finding a sustainable business model for interactive distribution of news and information is essential.’

By Richard M. Anderson

Ten years ago, we began an experiment with a local Web-based news and information site called VillageSoup.com. We premised the site on our view about how local communities would use the Internet to enhance community life, and it was grounded in the belief that the Internet was the place people go for answers. VillageSoup chose to target what is now described as “hyperlocal” markets. We define hyperlocal as the traditional weekly newspaper markets typically serving population and service centers of approximately 30,000 people. We began with two counties along MidCoast Maine, each with 40,000 population. Rockland, Camden and Belfast are the primary service centers.

Our initial efforts focused on creating ways for small businesses, professionals and people in the trades to use our Web site to enhance their competitiveness by better serving their communities. If we didn’t get their buy-in and support, we knew we wouldn’t have a sustainable way to share news and information for people who live in these places. So we created browser-based tools to help the business people answer simple, frequently asked questions, such as: What are your specials today? What waterfront property is on the market? What are your business hours? Are you available?

Just as business owners do not rely solely on catchy phrases and signs in real space, we sought to take advantage of the Internet’s answer-providing characteristics to allow them to serve customers in ways similar to the way they serve them in their place of business. Using our software and Web site to post her restaurant’s specials, one of our business members tripled her luncheon servings after three weeks of



There was a day when an elderly gentleman failed to return from his regular Sunday drive around the countryside, accompanied by his small dog. Police asked VillageSoup to post a notice about the search. VillageSoup responded with two prominently placed stories, and a citizen of a rural town responded with her sighting of the gentleman’s car turning down a logging road. Police immediately found the gentleman [in truck above], dehydrated and lying in a ditch with his dog by his side. Another story was posted that he was alive, and people in the community breathed a sigh of relief. The weekly paper was still two days away from publication. —RMA. *Photo by David Munson/VillageSoup.*

postings. A nonprofit quickly sold out two performances that were less than half-sold five days out.

In our online village, we’ve created a virtual main street and town square, where every business can afford to locate and where community members can shop. Shopping on VillageSoup isn’t likely to be an online transaction; it is building awareness and offering in-depth and comparative information. Transactions happen in face-to-face encounters down the street or across town.

With interaction an essential Web ingredient—and because we have a distinct advantage not being saddled with the beliefs and practices that drive traditional news organizations—our second focus was to encourage unfettered, unfiltered posting of events and ideas. We understand the power of many-to-many communication, and our offer to provide space in which people can communicate with one another was quickly embraced by those nearby as well as by those logging in from around the globe.

Gathering and immediately sharing news where there was otherwise only weekly news was our third focal point. Whether the news is a local tragedy or achievement, election returns or just the opportunity to share images of a beautiful view, our professional journalists make information and news available to others when it happens. No more waiting until next week's paper.

To launch our news efforts, we hired as our first reporter a former bureau chief who worked for one of the state's dailies. From there, we built a team of reporters and editors; now, we have 13. Having begun as Web-only, stories are entered into the database ready and available for online publication. A copy manager schedules when a story is to go live online and assigns a story a page of the paper, if it is to appear in the paper. (Aside from our online news, we now publish two weekly paid subscription newspapers for residents in the communities associated with the Web site.) Our Web-based publishing system codes stories with XML tags for exporting to a page make-up system. These tags identify a story as breaking news, feature, or current news as well as labeling it according to traditional news sections and location. The system automatically codes stories including placing images uploaded by the reporter. Reporters take their own photos and are now beginning to shoot video and occasionally record audio. A regional network television reporter and cameraman work out of our office, and his daily feeds to two stations appear on our site as well.

We actively solicit bloggers from these communities while we also allow those who express an interest in blogging to log on and become bloggers. Member stories and comments appear without solicitation or active encouragement on the part of the Soup staff. Content is exclusively local.

This combination of professional, amateur and business content is proving to be successful, and VillageSoup

has become an integral part of daily life in these Maine Coast communities.

Lessons Learned

The VillageSoup experiment has traveled along its 10-year road, and now our model is beginning to be shared across the industry. But as futurist Paul Saffo said, "Never mistake a clear view for a short distance." A graph on Saffo's Web site uses television to illustrate that full market adoption of a new media can take three to four decades.

Finding a sustainable business model for interactive distribution of news and information is essential. Consumers, no longer content to be mere spectators, want more control over content, while businesses want more than static display ads.

Finding a sustainable business model for interactive distribution of news and information is essential. Consumers, no longer content to be mere spectators, want more control over content, while businesses want more than static display ads. Emerging technology is lowering financial barriers to entry, and this circumstance is challenging conventional entities that are slow to budge from their entrenched, highly vulnerable monopolies.

We believe the approach being followed by many traditional newspapers, in which they incrementally add new revenue generators to their news sites through alliances using products such as Yahoo!'s HotJobs, Google's AdSense, and HomeTownStores will not create sufficient revenue to replace lost newspaper display ad revenue. The success of Google and Yahoo! are based on two factors local newspaper enterprises cannot enjoy. Their content is user generated, and their audience is worldwide. Thus their costs are low, and they can amass sizable revenue through pennies per click.

The VillageSoup experience con-

vinces us that our community host model is taking full advantage of a new medium. The conventional community newspaper approach to going online is analogous to an event production; just as a star performs on stage, reporters "perform" by providing compelling narrative and factual reporting for an audience of readers. Similarly, just as advertisers are eager to display their names around the concert venue, newspaper Web site advertisers use banners and buttons to compete for the attention of the gathered readers.

In contrast, our community host model is more akin to a trade show. Attendees learn from keynote addresses and sessions, then share ideas, knowledge and views during breaks, luncheons and receptions, and shop with exhibitors, who answer their questions about latest offerings and features. The community host model assumes active seekers who are looking

to learn from our reporters, to share with their neighbors, and to shop with their community business operators, professionals and trades people.

After seven years of online presence—during which time VillageSoup built a highly regarded brand and online revenue five to 10 times that of most weekly newspaper Web sites—we introduced two weekly newspapers to compete directly with the legacy 100-plus year-old weeklies in our market. We did this to build relationships with traditional newspaper advertisers who were not ready to move to online activity and to fill a void being created by cost-cutting activities of the now distant-investor-owned four legacy newspapers. One of our new publications has already won general excellence awards in both the Maine Press Association and New England Press Association annual contests, and the other placed second in the Maine Press Association General Excellence category. Both papers within the short four-year time period rank number two and three in circulation among the area's six paid-circulation weeklies.

VillageSoup visitor loyalty—the emerging metric of choice, replacing page views—is remarkably high. According to Google Analytics, 75 percent of the VillageSoup’s readers consistently visit more than 10 times per month; 32 percent visit more than 200 times per month. That means visitors are coming more than seven times per day. This speaks to the importance of user-generated content, since local breaking news is not happening seven

times a day in these small markets. In VillageSoup’s local area, a bit more than half of those surveyed visit our Web site at least once each day, while only five percent said they visit competing news sites daily. When weather threatens, sirens blare, a heated municipal debate ensues, or a community celebration takes place, those numbers spike.

There is great dynamism in a community host Web site where everyone can participate and the flow of infor-

mation is a two-way Main Street. As multimedia consultant and teacher Jane Ellen Stevens has observed, the Internet is a “solution-oriented medium: ask a question, get an answer.” VillageSoup is constructed with this in mind. ■

Richard M. Anderson is CEO and co-founder of VillageSoup and two community newspapers, the Knox County Times and Waldo County Citizen.

Journalists Navigate New Waters

‘When high-tech’s central institutions blew up, people asked many of the same questions I hear asked by journalists today.’

By Lisa Williams

Massive layoffs with no end in sight. Wave after wave of acquisitions and mergers fueled by the excesses of artificially cheap capital. Widespread fear that an entire industry will stall or simply cease production.

These phrases describe the news industry today, but they also echo what was heard about the high-tech industry during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) laid off people by the tens of thousands; Wang Computers, Data General, and Apollo Computer sank beneath the waves. Prime Computer fought off a hostile takeover attempt by corporate raiders only to die of its wounds. IBM and Hewlett-Packard survived, but never regained their roles as central innovators in their industry.

My life has been spent in high-tech, not journalism. My parents met over a mini-computer; my marriage comes with free lifetime technical support; our kids will know their Emacs from their Vi. Now I run two hyperlocal Web sites—h2otown.info, about the place where I live, Watertown, Massachusetts,

and placeblogger.com, where blogs with an insider’s point of view about places they know best are compiled. Others call what I do “citizen journalism,” and this is why my path now converges so much with yours.

I’ve been communicating and connecting via computer since I was a kid. Over time, I haven’t strayed far from what I’ve always done, but in many ways journalism has been drifting steadily in my direction. What’s going on now with journalists—as layoffs hit and thinking about the future turns to teaching or wondering if your kids will follow in your footsteps—happened to me and mine during high-tech’s tailspin, and it made for a few miserable Thanksgiving dinners paid for with unemployment checks and spent with laid-off aunts, uncles and cousins.

When high-tech’s central institutions blew up, people asked many of the same questions I hear asked by journalists today. Without these institutions, who will fund the mission? How will we attract the talent we need to make the transition? Just as journalism without newspapers seems inconceivable, it

seemed to many of us back then that innovation could not continue without the force, resources and sheer heft of the companies that formed the core of the high-tech industry. Who would write the next operating system? Who would create the next generation of microprocessors?

Today, journalists ask how democracy will fare in our country without the robust free press they’ve been a part of. Back then, technology folks were asking how the United States could retain its leadership position without big, powerful computing companies.

There can be no underestimating the pain of the tech implosion: People who got laid off expected to be out of work for a year or more; people lost their houses, got divorced, or left the industry entirely. The lucky ones took early retirement packages. To make matters worse, many people had deep loyalties to the companies they worked for and spoke with pride of the “HP way” or the “IBM way.”

This breakdown wasn’t sudden: From beginning to end the dismantling took nearly a decade. We decamped

from the Titanic and dispersed in every direction in a fleet of kayaks: small, self-propelled, and iceberg-proof. We learned through all of this to be loyal to our friends and to the ideas and ideals for which we had genuine passion. It was our friends who were going to pull us out of the cold water. And it was our ideas that would relaunch us after this setback.

What we discovered, of course, was that innovation survived the death of its institutions. Only 10 years after DEC founder and CEO Ken Olsen stepped down amid the massive layoffs, Google was launched. And if you are reading these words on the Nieman Web site, both of us are beneficiaries of LAMP, the “web stack” that serves the vast majority of sites and browsers across the world. The acronym LAMP stands for its components—Linux, Apache (a Web server), MySQL (database), and PHP (scripting language)—each of which began as the contribution of an individual and is maintained by a distributed cast of thousands. The central innovations of the Web today don’t emerge from the labs of giants but from the dorm rooms of kids. And on them is constructed a big and varied industry with, yes, actual paychecks.

Do not mistake this message as a prediction that the news industry’s misery is mere stage setting for a glorious resurgence. It isn’t. As the Web, emerging software, and news coverage merge gradually—but certainly—into a single industry, the stability and security of those times when our foundational institutions were big and strong are gone and will never return. Gone with them are bloated bureaucracies and that feeling of giving up trying to change anything because it’s impossible to figure out how many people to ask for permission. All of these and more are as dead as IBM’s dress code of blue blazer, red tie, white shirt.

Good Riddance!

On the decks of a career Titanic, passengers sat back and let others ensure their safety and set their course. Traveling now by kayak, setting your direc-

tion, and learning to keep yourself safe have become essential skills. From a fellow kayaker, let me pass along this navigational advice as you enter the high-tech waters:

- **High tech is a boom and bust industry.** We get laid off when the economy is good, and we get laid off when the economy is bad. Investors get fed up and pull the plug on small companies; at big companies, the CEO must, on ceremonial occasions, throw a few sacrificial victims to the volcano gods on Wall Street. We don’t even take it personally anymore. If it weren’t for layoffs, we’d never take a vacation. If you value your sanity, have some savings, and don’t take out big mortgages.
- **Jobs are temporary.** Friends are forever. High tech offers reincarnation without having to die. The person who’s your boss now is someone you’ll hire as an employee later; then they’ll be your boss again. Everyone gets recycled. Act accordingly; you will see them again.
- **Nobody has the right qualifications.** If you think you aren’t qualified to work at Google or Yahoo!, you haven’t worked there. People with all sorts of backgrounds have jobs at high tech companies. Perhaps the best way to get a job at The New York Times is to start by getting one at Facebook. Bring your values to online companies; bring your skills back to news companies. Then repeat the cycle.
- **Projects, not companies.** Look for interesting projects, not prestigious companies. A set of ideas will last a decade or more, even if they get housed in half a dozen companies during that time. Companies can’t and won’t provide stability, and even prestigious, exciting companies have a ton of boring, dead end jobs.
- **Time is on my side.** Why pick up that “Learn to Build Google Maps” book if you don’t know how long it will take for you to be able to do something useful—or even if you’ll be able to do something useful when

you’re done? Set your goal-orientation aside for an hour or two a week for study and experiment with something that excites you without any practical expectation of results. On-the-job training just makes you an expert in something you don’t love.

- **Breaking things is a privilege.** Progress is about alternating breaking and fixing. Anything 100 percent functional is 100 percent dead.
- **Read the manual.** It’s all they really teach at MIT. Yes, read the, uh ... fine ... manual. The whole thing. Really.
- **Write the manual.** No manual? Write one. Your newspaper Web site lets users blog—and has no manual? No video tutorials? Why not? Create the documentation and you don’t just know it—you wrote the book on it.
- **Narrow comprehensiveness.** The Web rewards narrow comprehensiveness: “Everything about something.”
- **Collapsing vs. building.** Traditionally, the news industry has taken stuff that’s free—public information, for example—and made it worth money by adding editorial value. On the Web, the more successful companies don’t build, they collapse, by taking something that used to cost money and making it free. Craigslist isn’t the only one that can play this game.

It’s tough to hear about what’s happening to your industry, as I do frequently these days since I am asked to attend a lot of conferences and workshops with journalists—and there the talk is about little else. I do believe that the values and work you care about have a chance of survival. On behalf of my global tribe of bloggers and citizen journalists from Mumbai to Minneapolis, I bid you welcome. ■

Lisa Williams is the founder of Place-blogger, the largest live site of local Weblogs, and of h2otown. In May she received a Knight News Challenge grant to support her work on these Web sites.

In his essay about network news, **Marc Kusnetz**, a former NBC News producer, leads us through a half century of enormous changes and then discusses the challenges TV news confronts in the digital age. In one passage, he writes, "... television conflates simplification with clarification, and in doing so it refuses to acknowledge a self-evident truth, that complexity and confusion are often intrinsic to the story being told." Photographer **Frank Van Riper** speaks to his concern about digital manipulation of images—and provides examples of when news images were tampered with. He writes: "... when the public sees one news photographer manipulating images ... the assumption inevitably will be that this dishonest shooter is simply one of many." And he proposes a way to certify a photograph's authenticity.

Edward A. Gargan, who reported for Newsday from Iraq, quotes Josh Rushing from his book, "Mission Al Jazerra," as he repeats the words that ended his career as a Marine (and the Iraq War's Central Command spokesperson) and led him to become a reporter with Al Jazerra. "In America, war isn't hell, we don't see blood, we don't see suffering ... Al Jazerra shows it all." In books by two photojournalists, Thomas Dworzak and Ashley Gilbertson, **Molly Bingham**, whose documentary film "Meeting Resistance" is about the Iraqi insurgency, finds that "The images of the Iraq War build on one another and consequently take on explanatory powers that words alone are ill equipped to handle."

As she looks back at news coverage of the Duke lacrosse players' rape case and absorbs the perspective of the authors of "Until Proven Innocent," Charlotte Observer columnist **Mary C. Curtis** says that "I searched the articles [written about the case] for balance, for facts—for solid reporting. What I found was prejudgment and stereotypes." After reading the collection of 15 essays in "-30-: The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper," **Robert J. Rosenthal**, a former newspaper editor, felt energized by his recognition that in the future—unlike the past—opportunities will be "limitless for the work that journalists do." He goes on to write, "into the future, with the help of the Web, emerging technologies and new partnerships, the impact, global reach and community engagement with what journalists do will be enormous."

After reading "What Good Is Journalism?," columnist and author **David Randall** finds fault with the book's organizing concept of extolling the work of good journalists. He raises several questions he believes should be probed, including "What limitations are there on the roles that journalism performs? Does the way journalism is performed impose its own limitations? And what best promotes good journalism?" **Brent Walth**, a senior reporter at The Oregonian who teaches journalism, discovers in the book of letters William Woo wrote to his journalism students, entitled "Letters from the Editor," a clear message "that a journalism education must not include simply instructions as to the techniques, mechanics and traditions of the craft." From "Breaking News," a recent history compiled by reporters with The Associated Press, **Robert H. Phelps**, a former editor at several newspapers and Nieman Reports and cub wire service reporter, pulls out some examples of news coverage from which lessons apply today. Among these lessons are the following: "Keep after sources, don't give up." "Scream if the editor screws up." And "[get] the news first without sacrifice of accuracy." ■

Network News's Perfect Storm

'Productivity, a central and venerable tenet of corporate culture, began to occupy the world of news in a way it previously had not.'

By Marc Kusnetz

Throughout the evening and early morning hours of November 9th and 10th, 1989, I stood near the Brandenburg Gate and watched, transfixed, as the Berlin Wall came down. What put me there was a decision by several colleagues at NBC News with whom I had been closely tracking developments in eastern Europe during the preceding months. Mixed in with a sense of awe at what I was witnessing, there was also, I confess, a wave of professional and competitive gratification.

All through that night, I stood at the base of the wall, interviewing Germans in various stages of delirium. As I called up to the revelers, and they shouted down to me, there never was a pause in the chip, chip, chip of their hammers and chisels, nor any escape from the concrete dust that billowed off the wall.

At dawn, I made a brief visit to my hotel room to freshen up. As I bent over the bathroom sink and splashed cold water on my face and head, the images of the preceding hours played through my mind. Distracted by these thoughts, I was at first perplexed by the gray, granular liquid circling in the basin. Then, of course, it struck me: I was watching the Berlin Wall go down the drain.

Eighteen years have passed since that November morning. The news divisions of NBC, ABC and CBS have not disappeared, despite much talk about the threats posed by cable television, the Internet, and alternative media. For about 12 of those years, I continued doing what I had been doing for so long. Then, for reasons I could no longer ignore, I decided it was time to stop.

Throughout the 1990's and con-

tinuing into the new century, I had nursed a growing conviction that something important—perhaps basic—had changed in the world of television news since that night when the world changed. Although I had no way to realize it at the time, I have since come to believe that the broadcast news divisions' commitment to the news—covering, reporting and explaining it in at least some of its complexity—went down the drain that November morning, along with the bipolar world.

It is inescapable that there never was a truly golden age of television news. For every "NBC White Paper" or "CBS Reports," there was also a "Person to Person." It could not have been otherwise; a commercial enterprise makes commercial decisions. Those of us who grew up in the early days of television had no quarrel with the equation.

Later, as some of us decided to try our own hand at broadcast news, this equation held. Except for the most naive and deluded among us, we knew there would be trade-offs and bargains that, if not precisely Faustian, were sure to trouble us. It seemed a fair enough trade-off: win one, lose one; win one, lose two; even, win one and lose three. For me, the halcyon days



Berliners celebrate on top of the wall as East Germans (backs to camera) flood through the dismantled Berlin Wall into West Berlin at Potsdamer Platz. November 1989. Photo by Lionel Cironneau/Courtesy of The Associated Press.

were the 1970's and 80's, diminished and mitigated by stories not covered, surely, but halcyon days nonetheless.

Thereafter, the calculus changed. I want to reflect on three of the various reasons: One is based on world events, a second on American corporate culture, and a third on technological advances.

There was, of course, the end of the cold war, as we had known it. Whether the collapse of Communism seemed sudden or glacial, the new reality was breathtaking. Events and phrases that

had felt contemporary only yesterday took on the coloration of history: MAD, U-2, Bay of Pigs, Iran-Contra, and many more. These buzz phrases faded into the white noise of 1990's America and, at the same time, the long-standing urgency of mainstream media, in general, and broadcast news, in particular, went into steep decline.

It was understandable, as a half-century of menace—the nuclear specter—seemed to have evaporated. The most piquant coinage of this at the time was Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History." For him, the phrase was metaphorical but, for broadcast news, whether consciously or not, it was literal: Contemporary history—with its intimations of world-shaking events—had ended. The world would survive; we were free to turn our attention elsewhere.

The Rise of 'Talkability'

About this time I started to hear a new buzzword, which I came to consider the most obscene word in the short history of broadcast news. It was "talkability"—invoked repeatedly, almost daily, to refer to a story, person or situation, regardless of its significance, that would elicit intense interest and comment among viewers. This idea ushered us into the age of the water-cooler metaphor: stories that would find someone at the office water cooler saying to colleagues, "Hey, did you happen to see ...?"

Inevitably, this trend began to have a significant effect on the balance between domestic and international news coverage. Talkability, it was assumed, emanated from viewer's natural interests, and those interests were strongest when the story was closer to home. Interest, thus, flagged as distance increased.

A fundamentally misguided argument emerged between those pushing "domestic" news and those advocating "foreign" coverage. What once had been a free-for-all involving competing priorities—commercial vs. editorial imperatives—was replaced by another model altogether. The archetypal American viewer became the sole con-



Douglas Edwards was the first news anchor on network television, CBS, 1950. *Photo courtesy of Library of American Broadcasting, University of Maryland.*

sideration—a viewer whose interests were known, whose imagination had been mapped, whose wishes had been ascertained, and whose gratification was now the North Star of television news.

There was an irony here. As this process unfolded, another larger process had been put into play. The commercial networks were consumed by huge and vastly successful corporations: General Electric (GE), Viacom, Disney, the News Corporation, Time Warner. More than any other sector of American society, these entities had grasped the global realities upon which their success depended: the interconnection between "domestic" and "foreign." Simultaneously, the news divisions of these corporations, whose job was to examine the impact of the wider world on the nation, were instead moving in the opposite direction. Parochialism replaced globalism. And with that, network news began its slide toward irrelevance.

Just a few years earlier, in November 1985, scores of NBC colleagues and I were ensconced at the Noga Hilton hotel in Geneva to cover the first Gorbachev-Reagan summit. Huge contingents—battalions of four, five, even six editing systems, along with editors and engineers—were necessitated, in part, by the technical and logistical realities of the time. It made economic sense to bring editing equipment into the field so that then-expensive satellites would be used only to transmit edited stories. Carpenters and technicians would build sets on location. Unit managers would hire local personnel—drivers, gofers, guides, translators, facilitators. Anchormen had assistants. Programs had bookers. News coverage required researchers, and everyone had a hotel room, and everybody had to be fed.

Food—mountains of food—was always available. One morning I arrived at the makeshift newsroom to find a table piled high with cheeses, assorted meats, fresh fruit, eggs, sausages, hot



Beginning in 1949, John Cameron Swayze anchored NBC's "Camel News Caravan." 1957. Photo courtesy of Library of American Broadcasting, University of Maryland.

and cold cereals, crepes, assorted breads and rolls, jams, several different juices, cocoa, tea and coffee stretching half the length of the room. A colleague entered the room, slowly walked the length of the table, examined the fare, then picked up a house phone and ordered room service.

This moment proved to be an instructive incident when the corporate culture of GE began to take hold at NBC News. In isolation, it was only an anecdote, but similar instances of extravagance were commonplace and legendary. Everybody had a favorite boondoggle, when no expense was spared. I began to muse on how such scenes must have struck the fresh eyes of not only GE managers, but those of the McKinsey management consultants brought in by GE to scrutinize the way things were done at NBC News. The era of hard-nosed corporate management was upon us—its momentum enhanced by an inescapable reality: The cost of covering the news, already ample, was multiplied by the lavishness of our lifestyle. Despite our resentment at being reined in, we knew that to some extent we had brought it on ourselves.

As time passed, the logic of the bottom line pervaded all aspects of the news business as news divisions, for the first time, had to demonstrate their commitment to efficiency and their opposition to waste. Productivity, a central and venerable tenet of corporate culture, began to occupy the world of news in a way it previously had not. It is at this juncture, I believe, that the new culture of the broadcast news business—so justified and potentially beneficial in its inception—began to drive the process in an unfortunate direction.

Covering News 'Efficiently'

The difficulty arose because the product is the news. What is a quality product? More practically, what is the formula for determining whether too much time and manpower have been invested in producing a news story? Ultimately, of course, such questions are unanswerable because of the capricious nature of what happens in the world. A light bulb is produced in a highly organized environment; a news story is often produced in difficult, even chaotic, time-consuming condi-

tions. Each light bulb is, or should be, identical; all news stories are different, even when they have similarities.

The parent companies of the network news divisions addressed this problem in an oblique way. News programs are the delivery systems for the product—the news story. It's a simple task to monitor those programs and measure who contributes most and who least. The process is clearest when one examines the news bureaus, both domestic and foreign, which provide the stories that wind up on television. If in a given week, or month, or year, the bureau in Moscow produces X stories, and the bureau in Chicago produces 2X stories, it follows that the Chicago bureau is twice as productive.

In reality, it does not follow at all. In the new paradigm of the post-cold war world, stories from Russia rarely have the urgency that stories from the menacing, nuclear-armed Soviet Union used to have. With some exceptions, they are not as appealing as stories from the home front. Put another way, they lack talkability.

And so the conundrum is total: efficiency demands productivity, productivity depends on the interest of the programs, the programs are driven by what they perceive will be interesting to viewers, viewers make do with what they are offered, and the result—great interest in some things and little interest in others—is driven by decisions that often are based on factors having nothing to do with the newsworthiness of the stories or the skills of the storytellers. The irony is total, too: A process set in motion by the most successful global corporations in the world, whose lifeblood is the international arena, results in a contraction of the very entities meant to examine and report on that arena and the forces that drive it—the news divisions.

The Digital Factor

Early in the 1990's, the dawning digital era transformed the way TV news was presented. The visual possibilities seemed, and turned out to be, virtually limitless. As the "look" of a program,

as well as the stories within it, became a central consideration, the graphics department became a de facto coequal of the newsroom.

Cosmetic considerations didn't spring into existence. Since the 1950's, the look of television news had always been important since it was a visual medium. But the digital age was different. Whereas, in the old days, color schemes might be blue or green, and lighting might be softer or brighter, the new technology offered tools that fundamentally altered the way in which a viewer received information.

The opening sequence of the various evening news programs provides a striking illustration. In ancient black-and-white days, John Cameron Swayze or Douglas Edwards would talk into the camera with few supporting visuals. Later came the static photo over the anchor's shoulder, followed by moving video that served the same informational purpose in a more compelling and visually pleasing way. Then, suddenly, digitally, the change became exponential. If the lead story was the war in Bosnia, what the viewer might see behind the anchorman was a column of tanks crossing left to right, combined with another shot of somber refugees trudging right to left. Often a third, even a fourth shot, would be introduced—an irate politician or statesman shaking a fist, a skyline of blasted buildings. Typically, a few words—"Bloody Day," for example—would be superimposed over these overlapping images.

While these editorially propelled images were flashed, other effects, aesthetic in nature, were also inserted. A digitally induced pulse might impart a sense of urgency or ominousness. The video might be given a sepia tone or a black-and-white treatment or some other effect, depending on the nature of the story, which in turn invited an emotive response, whether it was rage, satisfaction, nostalgia or patriotism.

As the anchorman spoke for 20 or 25 seconds about the evening's lead story, I would often monitor my reaction to the combined audio-visual display. Invariably, I noticed that the more I watched the many visual elements on the screen, the less able I was to fol-

low what the anchorman was saying. Despite my television experience, it struck me that my response probably was broadly representative of how a typical viewer might react. If anything, I thought, my insider knowledge would shield me from distraction and confusion. But the opposite proved to be the case, and I wondered then—as I do today—about the impact of such presentations on viewers trying to concentrate on the details of a complex story.

The Iraq War Coverage

These trends coalesced in the television coverage of the Iraq War. Every network and cable news outlet deployed platoons of military, diplomatic and Middle East specialists even before the war began. Advances in video and satellite technology made instantaneous, live transmission from the battlefield not only plausible, but also easy. And the coverage was catalyzed by the hot-house urgency spawned by 9/11.

I offer two examples of coverage whose defining characteristics were that the storytelling trumped the story and that insufficient attention was paid to facts that served to complicate the story.

The first became apparent in May and June of 2004, as the Coalition Provisional Authority prepared to transfer sovereignty to an Iraqi interim government. Daily briefings at the Pentagon were often covered in their entirety, after which reporters on scene would be debriefed by the anchors in the studios. Frequently the Pentagon briefer would talk about casualties, noting that a spike in violence was to be expected at such a pivotal moment, referred to as "a turning point." Frequently, reporters would return to the theme, reminding viewers of a supposed connection between the approaching turning point and an increase in casualties.

The problem was that the linkage was demonstrably false. U.S. military deaths illustrate the point. In April 2004, there were 135 American fatalities, a very high number. In May, there were 80; in June, 42; in July, 54; in August, 66. Thereafter, in a pattern that

has held for the duration of the war, the U.S. military's fatality statistics rose and fell, rose and fell, then rose and fell again. Why wasn't this reported? There was the strain of filling so much airtime and the challenge of citing pertinent data in a timely fashion, to name a few. But there was also the seductive quality of a neat story line: If a momentous event is at hand, one that the insurgency would surely oppose, it seemed inevitable that there would be an increase in violence. But it wasn't so.

At another dramatic moment—the Iraqi elections of January 2005—this dynamic appeared again. Video images were inspiring as Iraqis risked their lives to go to their polling places, then proudly displayed their thumbs bathed in purple ink to prove their participation. Naturally and fittingly, the airwaves were filled with stories about the triumph of the democratic process. Very quickly, however, an editorial pecking order was established. The process itself became the central, overriding story, while the results of the process—the outcome of the voting—became a secondary theme. It had been universally assumed that people would vote for their own ethnic group, which they did. It was predicted that some Sunnis would refuse to vote, either out of fear or a sense of disenfranchisement that the ballot box could not redress, and this also proved to be the case. As a result, Sunni candidates who represented about 20 percent of the population emerged with even less than that minority share.

These facts were reported, but the irony of the situation was largely ignored. The democratic process had institutionalized, even deepened, the ethnic divisions that by that time were becoming more obvious and lethal by the day. If both sides of this electoral coin had been analyzed in tandem, the story line would have been ambiguous and perplexing, certainly, but closer to the significance of the event. As it happened, the great preponderance of television news coverage focused on just one side of the equation: the irrefutable appeal of people voting freely for the first time in their lives.

Competing With the Internet

In war and in peace, television news has developed a highly structured approach to the way stories are told and, for that matter, in deciding which stories are told. The emergence of the Internet has created a new culture, and television news, fearful of becoming an anachronism, has rushed to be part of the process. At first blush, this makes sense, since the computer user and the television watcher have similar experiences: both look at electronic screens and both are exposed to two potent phenomena—instantaneity and limitlessness.

But the differences between the computer and the television are rarely examined. Using a computer is an “active” experience, since the user controls what is flashed on the screen, what length of time it remains there, and what comes next. Watching television is fundamentally a “passive” experience, assuming that the average viewer would prefer not to constantly

switch among three or more news programs. The viewer cannot shape or control the experience without resorting to the “change channel” or on/off button.

Paradoxically, television is trying to remain relevant by appropriating the techniques of the computer, while ignoring its unique qualities. In so doing, television news is delegitimizing itself. It deepens the problem by insisting that all stories must have an arc—a beginning, a middle, and an end that is clear and, if possible, have a touch of inevitability, as great stories often do.

The problem here lies in the difference between literature and journalism. Describing the requirements of drama, Chekhov famously observed that a gun seen on the mantle piece in Act I had better be fired in Act III. No such requirement applies in the real world; the gun sometimes goes off, sometimes not. In its natural and commendable desire to present the news in a dramatic form, television conflates

simplification with clarification, and in doing so it refuses to acknowledge a self-evident truth, that complexity and confusion are often intrinsic to the story being told.

Driven by ever-tougher economic imperatives, seduced by the digital marvels at its disposal, motivated by an enshrined notion of what an audience wants to see, and fearful that nuance and ambiguity will drive that audience away, television news is at war with itself. What it tells is too simple; what it shows is too complicated. Television journalists have debated and agonized about these questions for a long time. I recall one newsroom discussion many years ago in which a colleague concluded, to universal agreement, “Look, you can’t look down on the American people.” But that is exactly what has come to pass. ■

Marc Kusnetz, a former NBC News producer, is a freelance journalist and a consultant to Human Rights First.

‘Photo Vero’—A Modest Proposal

A photographer, worried about digital manipulation of images, suggests a way to protect the veracity of what the camera captures.

By Frank Van Riper

It says something that for at least six years Gianni Berengo Gardin, one of Italy’s—and the world’s—finest photojournalists and documentary photographers, has found it necessary to stamp these words on the back of his images, along with his copyright notice: “Vera Fotografia—non corretta, modificata o inventata al computer.” (The English translation is “True photography—not corrected, modified or created by computer.”)

Ah, for the days when we believed the camera could never lie. Credit digital with calling into question almost everything we hold dear about the camera’s ability to document the



Gianni Berengo Gardin inoculates himself against any hint of digitally manipulating his photographs. *From the book “Gianni Berengo Gardin,” published by Contrasto.*

world around us accurately and dispassionately.

I first saw Berengo Gardin’s notice about computer manipulation (or lack thereof) in the front of his small, brick-thick paperback book, “Gli Italiani,” and recall thinking at that moment that surely such a statement was unnecessary for a photographer of his stature. By then, he’d been making brilliant images for more than a half century and was widely regarded on a par with the legendary Henri Cartier-Bresson. Like the late Cartier-Bresson (who stopped photographing seriously decades before his death in 2004), Berengo Gardin, who is still shoot-

This remarkable photograph by Berengo Gardin defines “the decisive moment” as well as, or better than, any by Cartier-Bresson. Taken on a Venetian waterbus decades ago, this photo juxtaposes myriad figures beautifully—even creating a bit of surrealism in the figure reflected in the glass. Created in a fraction of a second, the image is brilliant; if made in Photoshop, it would merely be a parlor trick. —FVR. *Photo courtesy of © Gianni Berengo Gardin.*



Artist John Bailey’s iconic mural of Marilyn Monroe graces the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Calvert Street in Washington, D.C. I wanted to interpret the scene at dusk and at night and show the activity of the bustling intersection (The photo to the right is the one I took at night.) Each exposure was more than a minute—evidenced by the fact that all the traffic signals are aglow at once. —FVR. *Photo courtesy of © Frank Van Riper.*



ing, is known for his gritty black and white images. Similarities continue in that each photographer used available light and shot with tiny Leicas, with the resulting images published in absolute full-frame. Berengo Gardin's work routinely captures what Cartier-Bresson famously called "the decisive moment" when all elements of composition, gesture and light combine to make a perfect, or near-perfect, photograph.

But then it hit me: If a photographic giant like Berengo Gardin feels it necessary to distance himself and his work from the morass that can be digital manipulation, surely those of us of lesser reputation and renown run an even greater risk of having our work downgraded, denigrated—even doubted—in the brave new world of digital.

This danger extends far beyond the work of individual photographers. I fear that all of photojournalism is at risk of having its work cast aside as mere illustration—a passable representation of an event, like the engraved drawings of battlefield artists in the years before half-tone printing made possible the mass publication of actual photographs—and not necessarily a "true" depiction of what is real or what actually happened.

Digital Transformation

Far-fetched? I wish it were so. But think back just to the recent past and recall when news publications and news agencies were burned by fabricated images. Wire service photos of bombings in Baghdad in which smoke from one explosion was put through Photoshop and transformed into two or three explosions to enhance its dramatic impact. In another situation, two good war shots were combined into one great one before the photographer's digital "handiwork" was discovered—which cost Brian Walski, a photographer with the Los Angeles Times, his job.

On a more mundane, but no less egregious, level for its dishonesty, Allan Detrich, former photographer for the Toledo Blade, routinely added or subtracted elements from his news

photos during the course of at least one year; this included a dramatic shot of a female basketball player jumping for a ball that Detrich conveniently had inserted into the frame from God knows where. (Happily, this photo was not printed. It was discovered this year, however—complete with bogus basketball—among those he had submitted to his editors for publication.)

Surely, these are isolated incidents, and the vast majority of news photographers would never resort to such visual dishonesty. Or at least I hope not. But in light of the Walski case, I also must pay reluctant attention to what some have called "the cockroach theory of journalism." It goes like this: Turn on the kitchen light at night and, if you see one cockroach, you can bet there are dozens—maybe even hundreds—more nearby, but unseen. In journalism, it means that when the public sees one news photographer manipulating images as Walski did, the assumption inevitably will be that this dishonest shooter is simply one of many. And that, in turn, blackens the reputation of everyone in the news business.

In discussing the Walski episode, Pete Souza of the White House News Photographer's Association, of which I am a member, made no attempt to defend Walski's action; he merely expanded its context, and in so doing made an important point about another situation that subtly, though significantly, impacts photojournalism today.

Souza noted that in the case of newspapers especially—but also among news magazines and news agencies—economic pressures are forcing news outlets to rely ever more heavily on unvetted freelancers, or stringers, for images, especially in war zones or other places where it would be too dangerous or, more likely, too expensive to station a regular photo correspondent. Taking nothing away from most stringer's honesty or courage, there is nothing like the bond that exists between a staffer and his or her picture desk (stormy though that relationship may be at times) and the unstated though universally accepted belief that news photos must never be manipulated to

alter their essential truth.

This is one reason that my wife and I, following the lead of Berengo Gardin, plan to add this notice at the front of our forthcoming book about Venice in winter: "None of the photographs in this book was manipulated digitally to add or remove compositional elements or to alter the truth of the image."

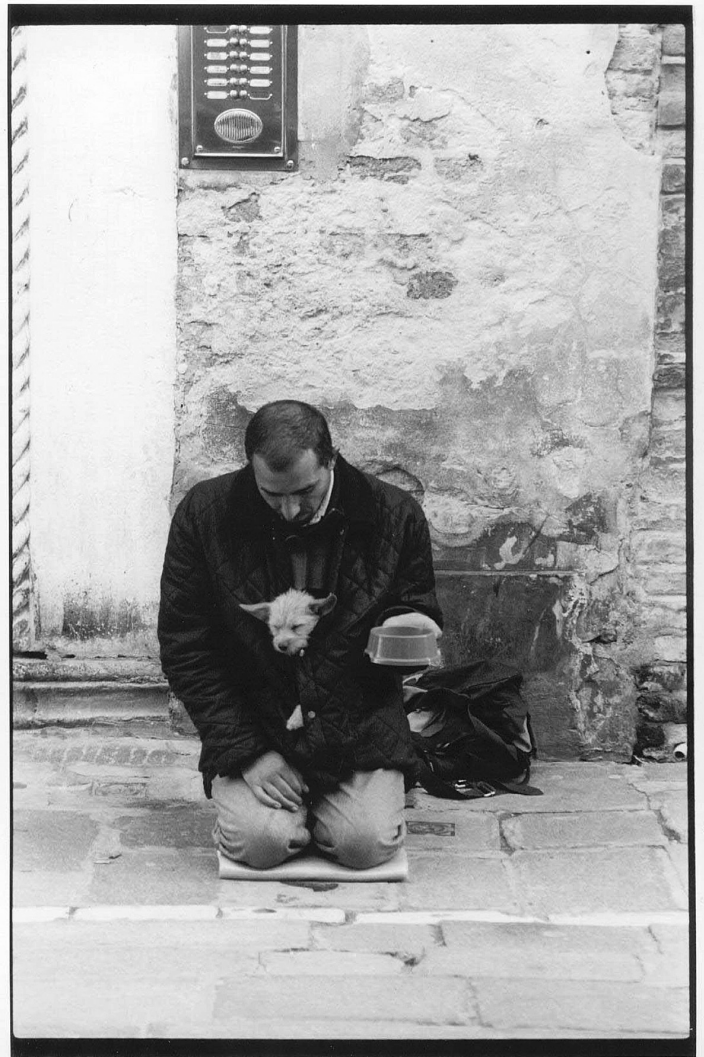
To be sure, virtually all major news organizations today expressly forbid computer enhancement or manipulation of news photos, beyond the kind of tweaking and cropping that previously had been done in the darkroom. This latter kind of alteration most often was done to remove extraneous elements from the edges of a news shot or to improve the brightness and/or contrast of an image for reproduction. But given the sad state of photojournalism today—and the ease with which images can be put through Photoshop and transformed into things they never were—it now might be necessary for news outlets to specifically label their news photos as real.

Labeling Images

Suppose, for example, the term "Photo Vero," (or even "PV" once the term was widely known) was used in each news photo's caption or credit line to certify that the attendant image has not been digitally manipulated beyond darkroom-like changes to enhance reproduction. In other words, what viewers see is a "true photograph," not a photographic illustration in which an errant telephone wire has been air-brushed out, or an extraneous person or thing has been put in the background through Photoshop, or something has been added (for your benefit, of course) to better tell the story. (Such stiff-necked rules would not apply to deliberately done photo-illustrations that accompany news or feature stories. Yet it is common practice for news organizations to so label such composite images, lest they be confused with the real thing. My suggestion merely takes this one step further.)

Granted, incorporating "Photo Vero" into every caption is like asking every journalist to affirm that he or she

In Venice, my wife and professional partner, Judith Goodman, made this poignant image of a beggar and his dog, capturing them just as their expressions were identical. Could the dog's head have been added later in Photoshop? Sure, but the fact that it wasn't adds to the inherent value of this photo—as journalism and as a work of art. —FVR. *Photo courtesy of © Judith Goodman.*



is honest and true. (Who, after all, is going to say otherwise—at least in print?) But my hope is that the practice might crank up the pressure on those who think that just a little photo manipulation can't really hurt. Who's gonna miss that telephone pole, anyway?

Finally, there is the simple fact that those of us who love being photographers by definition love the act of “writing with light,” which is what the word “photography” literally means. We do not necessarily love “writing with pixels” or “writing with Photoshop” or writing with whatever new electronic toy comes down the pike.

There will certainly be those who will satisfy their artistic and creative selves by manufacturing wonderful images on the computer. These folks might be extraordinary photo-illustra-

tors or photo-manipulators, but they definitely are not photojournalists, nor are they documentarians, and they should not be confused with them.

I know how much I loved being able to create two of my favorite color images of a famous mural in Washington, D.C.—John Bailey's giant iconic image of Marilyn Monroe—totally in my camera, requiring no post-production work at all. It took a lot of planning—thinking how to make the light trails of cars and buses work in both images—and at least one site visit and a lot of sitting on a ladder with my tripod-mounted Hasselblad as I waited for my version of two decisive moments to occur as day turned into night.

The result was worth the work I put into doing it, and I didn't have to go blind in front of a computer screen

amid layers, cutouts and tools for sharpening images. When what I saw through my lens was captured within my camera, my job was done. ■

Frank Van Riper, a 1979 Nieman Fellow, is a documentary and fine art photographer, journalist and author. This article is adapted from a column published on his Web site, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/photo/essays/vanRiper/. Since 1992, Van Riper has been a Washington Post columnist with “Talking Photography.” His book of the same name, a 10-year collection of his columns and other writing, was published in 2001. “Serenissima: Venice in Winter,” co-authored with his wife, photographer Judith Goodman, will be published next year.

News From Iraq: From Spinning to Reporting

After working as Central Command's spokesman for the war in Iraq, Josh Rushing became a reporter for Al Jazeera and writes about his transformative journey.

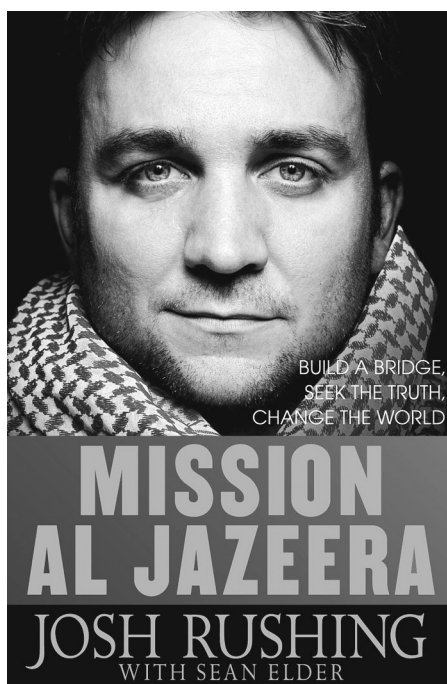
Mission Al Jazeera

Josh Rushing, in collaboration with Sean Elder
Palgrave Macmillan. 233 Pages. \$24.95.

By Edward A. Gargan

The catalogue of mistakes—whether from ignorance, deliberation, malfeasance, arrogance or circumstance—that has characterized the Bush administration's war in Iraq has been detailed in the growing number of books on what is now a full-blown sectarian civil war. There are careful examinations of the planning (such as it was) for the war by the administration, its execution, the occupation of Iraq and its manifold failures, the impact of the war on Iraqis and, recently, Iraqi assessments of the war's consequences for this country of about 25 million people, most notably Ali A. Allawi's magisterial new book on the catastrophic failure of the occupation and its devastating consequences for Iraqis.

By now the tales of an administration consumed by ideological certainty in its march to war are well known, as are accounts of the willful disregard of experts and scholars both in and outside government who offered advice, warnings and post-occupation scenarios on civil conflict. Arab speakers in the occupation administration were comically, and tragically, few. Bush administration acolytes, young Republicans who knew how to answer a question on their position on *Roe v. Wade* but could not distinguish a Shiite from a Sunni much less a member of the al-Ddury tribe from the neighboring Dulaim tribe, were the staffers of Paul Bremer's occupation team. Bathed in the administration's delusional verities, these staffers sought to implant American ways of doing things on a country that had been brutalized for decades, that was riven by tribal, eth-



nic and sectarian tensions, that was economically devastated, and was witnessing an exodus of much of its educated elite. But Bremer and his horde of young Republicans did not worry much about this; they remained cocooned in the Green Zone, a little America walled off from the country around them.

Rushing's Perspective

This cultural ignorance and dissonance is at the heart of Josh Rushing's account of his transformation from a U.S. Marine officer to a correspondent for the English-language division of the Qatar-based Al Jazeera television news network. There may be more improbable intellectual and vocational reori-

entations (Augustine of Hippo springs to mind), but Rushing's awakening, if that is what it is, provides a small insight into the political stubbornness and cultural intransigence that infected both the administration and the military and that far from implanting the seed of democracy and appreciation of the American effort in the Middle East, has arguably fostered greater regional instability and even greater wariness of Washington's intentions.

Rushing, a Texan born and bred, was so consumed by a desire to serve his country that he eschewed a chance to attend college and joined the Marines as a lowly enlistee. Fate and his intelligence propelled him toward college, however, and he emerged an officer who was then assigned to one of the corps' public affairs units. As preparations for the Iraq invasion quickened, Rushing was dispatched to Qatar, where the military's Central Command had established its headquarters for the war. His job was to provide the official military version of events to the horde of news organizations gathering there including, as it turned out, Al Jazeera, the network known to most Americans for being the recipient of video tapes from al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

As the buildup to war accelerated, Rushing says, he was a faithful mouthpiece for the military and, he writes, to the highly politicized version of events dictated by a White House official sent to Qatar to keep the correct spin on events. "I didn't realize at the time that the messages I believed to be true were often more tried than true," Rushing

writes. “They were a paradigm the government had used over and over to sell the war.” But Rushing also says that he eagerly promoted his sense of American values to the Arab journalists, particularly Al Jazeera; so impressed were the Al Jazeera journalists with the young Marine’s reasonableness that they interviewed him at length on tape, tape that ended his military career, as things turned out.

In May 2004 a film called “Control Room,” a documentary on Al Jazeera, hit the art theater circuit, and in it Rushing was portrayed through the magic of editing as a central character, a Marine officer who, he writes, “while never giving up what he believed in, really did want to understand the other side and do the right thing.” But it was one comment in particular that marked the end of Rushing’s career as a Marine: “In America, war isn’t hell, we don’t see blood, we don’t see suffering. All we see is patriotism, and we support the

troops. It’s almost like war has some brand marketing here. Al Jazeera shows it all. It turns your stomach, and you remember there’s something wrong with war.”

Soon after, Rushing left the Marine Corps and shortly afterwards was approached by Al Jazeera to join its fledgling English-language service, a network, he writes, that “lays all the facts and opinions on the table.” For Rushing, the refusal to see and listen to “all the facts” pervades American policymaking toward the Middle East and is often apparent in American television news coverage as well.

While Rushing’s fervor and arguments provide much grist for discussion, his relative unfamiliarity with some of print journalism’s best work remains a significant lacuna in his account, whether it was the work by Knight Ridder journalists systematically debunking the administration’s case for war or Seymour Hersh’s exposés of

prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Indeed, much of “Mission Al Jazeera” reads as an extended blurb for the unique integrity of Al Jazeera, a claim that demands significant leavening, despite the network’s remarkable growth and considerable aura of authority it has acquired in the Arab world. A somewhat plodding writer, Rushing never manages to capture what clearly were enormous emotional highs and lows, preferring a steady, monotonal narrative that barely escapes a Marine’s habit of clipped speech. Still, Rushing has posed questions that do and should trouble journalism’s coverage of this war. ■

Edward Gargan, a 2005 Nieman Fellow, covered the Iraq War for Newsday and now lives in Beijing where he is working on a book on the nature of borders, borderlands and identity.

Collective Power—Photographs From the War in Iraq

In two books by photojournalists, words and images explore various dimensions of the experience of being a witness to war.

M*A*S*H I*R*A*Q

Thomas Dworzak

Trolley Books. 143 Pages. \$35.

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot: A Photographer’s Chronicle of the Iraq War

Ashley Gilbertson

University of Chicago Press. 260 Pages. \$35.

By Molly Bingham

These two books—“M*A*S*H I*R*A*Q” and “Whiskey Tango Foxtrot: A Photographer’s Chronicle of the Iraq War”—testify to the collective power of images. Generally, the public only nibbles piecemeal on images sent from Iraq that are published in the daily or weekly press. Within the pages of these books we are presented a full banquet of imagery to dine on. The images of

the Iraq War build on one another and consequently take on explanatory powers that words alone are ill equipped to handle.

Even as we take in all of what these photographs tell us about war—the Iraq War, in particular—it is worth noting that the iconic images of this conflict were not taken by professionals. They were taken by amateurs documenting

the torture that they were involved with at Abu Ghraib. Their photographs are likely to be what most Americans link in their minds with this war, despite the astonishing record of work by the many professional photographers who have risked their lives, including Thomas Dworzak and Ashley Gilbertson.

Many of the images have not been seen, and they wouldn’t have been if

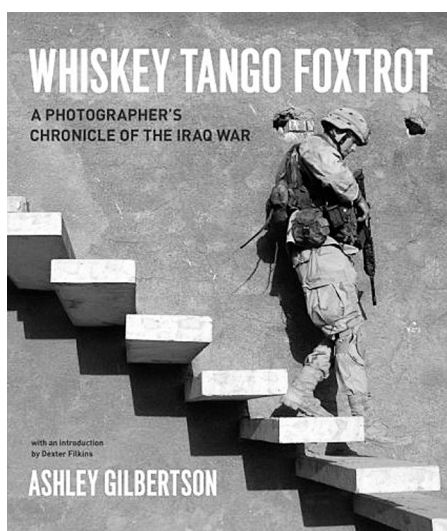
these photographers hadn't sought to publish these books. As viewers, we glean much from their presentation of these images in groups, as their power reaches us intellectually and emotionally. We learn about the Iraqis and Americans in the images, but we also learn about ourselves as we emotionally connect and react to them. Having this human connection between the viewer and the individuals in a photograph provokes a response rarely achieved by words alone. Images carry dimensions of humanity that are often impossible to verbally describe.

Too often in print media, images are relegated to the second-tier role of mere illustration alongside text or some "color" added to the story. These collections prove again that images can do so much more.

Weaving Words and Images

Both books are about Iraq, yet each provides an entirely different experience for the reader to absorb. Dworzak's reverie of impressionistic images powerfully evokes the confusion, pain, loss and madness of war experienced on all sides of a conflict; in doing so, it connects the observer with those emotions in real time. The text is reduced to excerpts from the 1970's CBS television series "M*A*S*H" that are juxtaposed with strong, precisely selected images. The viewer walks step by step, page by page, down the route of disillusionment that Dworzak sets out for us.

His photographs reveal the inner quiet of deep pain felt not only by the patients at the Combat Support Hospital in Iraq, but by the staff who treat them, the buddies who visit them, and ultimately by the Iraqis they've encountered in the war. Each image is concise in its message; there are no extraneous images on Dworzak's pages. Each one carries its weight and contributes profoundly to the group. Through such precision, Dworzak masterfully paints the experience of an occupying force, a force apart from and resented by the people it occupies, and often confused by and resentful of



their sentiments.

The concept of interweaving the quotes from the "M*A*S*H" television show and Dworzak's images from the Iraq War initially struck me as absurd. But its impact turns out to be emotionally powerful to the point of being overwhelming. Using the TV show's stills and quotes—funny and familiar—and employing that familiarity to connect a Western audience to the contemporary experiences of soldiers on the ground in Iraq makes Dworzak's experience of the conflict crystal clear. He uses no captions, titles, dates, introduction or postscript, allowing his images to speak with hardly any textual framing. It is a bold move and one that clearly conveys his message regarding the madness, pain and senselessness of war.

Dworzak's book is rich with detail, and it is an excellent guide for those who have not been there. There is the Iraqi man in gray flannel trousers and a striped short-sleeve shirt over a white undershirt, pen in his pocket, hair well graying and long lines on his unsmil-

ing face, who stands with his heels together, his shoes polished, clutching a newspaper and a half smoked cigarette on an empty street that he shares only with bits of trash, painted over graffiti, and the barrel of a gun pointed at his head by a camouflaged, body armored and helmeted Iraqi army soldier. The man's powerlessness is clear in the stealing glance he takes at the camera. The moment is laden with the possibility of death. This image is set against two images on the facing page of a Humvee's bulletproof windshield, cracked where bullets have hit and spattered with blood, as two Iraqis look on, seemingly smiling, and an impressionistic image of the Iraqi army in face masks training through a screen window. The opaque gauze of comprehension—literal in this picture—figuratively describes the shady nature of Iraq's forces.

There are also the seemingly obligatory images of Americans trying to let off steam as they escape the hour-after-hour pressure of serving in Iraq. Stogies come out on a night and elicit smug smiles from men in Army T-shirts. A young man takes an awkward backward plunge into a pool by a destroyed Saddam palace while flashing victory (or is it peace?) signs with both of his hands.

Dworzak offers a concluding meditation on how different individuals in the military respond to war. Some think it "stinks," in the words of Hawkeye Pierce (played by Alan Alda in "M*A*S*H"), while some thrive on it. But all must contemplate it and its impact on them and others.

The final image is a striking but unexplained one of an Iraqi youth whose head has been torn apart, likely by high caliber gunfire. An older Iraqi gentleman, well dressed but in a shirt stained with blood, stands to the side. Is this his son dead on the ground? An Iraqi policeman plaintively gestures for the man to tell them something about the dead youth. Another Iraqi stares into the nothingness before him. To the left are three uniformed members of the coalition, standing over the body as one American, his flag clearly visible on his uniform's sleeve, makes a video

An Iraqi man confronts an Iraqi soldier.



A soldier relaxes with a stogy.



*Photos by Thomas Dworzak/
Courtesy of Trolley Books.*

of the dead youth lying in the street. Are they this youth's killers?

Are we, as photojournalists, mere voyeurs in our recording of death? Dworzak asks himself this question and presents his work as the answer. When images are compiled as they are in "M*A*S*H I*R*A*Q," photojournalists not only document what they see, but provide an essential emotional level

of understanding about this war that viewers would otherwise be without.

Meshing Personal and Professional Perspectives

In "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot," Gilbertson provides a personal, illustrated narrative of his own professional coming of age in Iraq as a war photographer.

His accompanying text is articulate and revealing, and his images are edited to compliment and illustrate his story. As a consequence, images that would never have been put into a book of photographs meant solely as a visual record of Iraq appear in this one. Nevertheless, Gilbertson has created a memorable documentation of his experience in Iraq, showing us



In Samarra, a man and his son venture outside to see the damage to their neighborhood.



A boy plays on the slide at al-Zawraa park in Baghdad. Before entering the park, he was searched for weapons and a suicide vest, just as other children as young as five were.

Photos courtesy of Ashley Gilbertson/University of Chicago Press.

people he worked with and soldiers he came to know. As he does this, we come to appreciate how what he witnessed in Iraq gradually destroyed his innocence about war—and about this war, in particular.

Gilbertson's is an incredibly rich journal revealing the personal, professional and emotional challenges for a professional photographer in a war

zone. Words fill the first 20 pages of this book before a single image is reached. Gilbertson's words are well worth absorbing, not because they usher forth an Iraq that most Americans don't know but because they offer an impressive psychological portrait of what it's like to cover war. After witnessing the fighting in Fallujah in November 2004, Gilbertson discovers his underlying

hope for the American project in Iraq that he had unconsciously held during his work there. He also discovers how his innocence, illustrated by that hope, is torn to shreds by his experiences working there.

It's somewhat baffling that Gilbertson tells his incredible story about working in Iraq without seeming to contemplate—or at least not that he

reveals on these pages—the hell that Iraqis endured, too. It is most certainly a horrific hell to spend hours in a windowless Marine outhouse to file pictures, but Gilbertson's is a temporary hell. What of the Iraqis and the permanent and painful changes to their lives that they endure as their homes and neighborhoods are destroyed, their lives and livelihoods shattered, loved ones killed or maimed, and their

families broken?

"Whiskey Tango Foxtrot" is about Gilbertson and his stories from a war-torn place. It is not a deliberate exploration of the emotions of war, which is what photography books from such conflict areas often are. Perhaps that is a loss, but in spite of that it is still a remarkable record of Gilbertson's journey and well worth the read for that alone. ■

Molly Bingham, a 2005 Nieman Fellow, is director, with Steve Connors, of "Meeting Resistance," a documentary film about the emergence and development of the Iraqi insurgency, as told through the voices of seven men and one woman actively involved in the fight. More information about the film can be found at www.meetingresistance.com.

Disgraced By a Story That Consumed Them

'I began to understand why some mistrust the news media...'

Until Proven Innocent: Political Correctness and the Shameful Injustices of the Duke Lacrosse Rape Case

Stuart Taylor, Jr. and KC Johnson

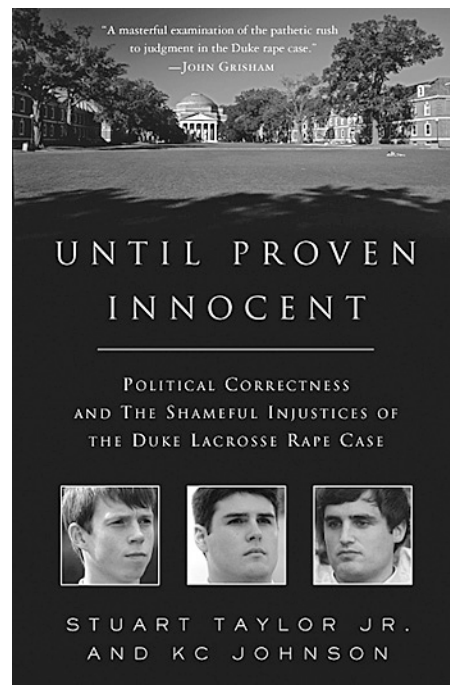
Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press. 420 Pages. \$26.95.

By Mary C. Curtis

At an April 11, 2007 press conference, North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper announced that the three young men accused in what had come to be known as the Duke lacrosse rape case were "innocent of these charges."

Reade Seligmann, Collin Finnerty, and David Evans might have been innocent, but there was plenty of guilt to go around. Stuart Taylor, Jr. and KC Johnson make that clear in their book, "Until Proven Innocent: Political Correctness and the Shameful Injustices of the Duke Lacrosse Rape Case." Their list of what went wrong is a long one and, while the actions of Durham District attorney Michael Nifong would have to be at the head of it, the news media's coverage of this story is not far behind.

It's true that Nifong—called a "rogue prosecutor" by Cooper—branded members of the lacrosse team "hooligans" before any charges were brought against three team members. He withheld exculpatory DNA evidence from the defense. As a result, he won support and votes from black Durham citizens with his manipulation of the case.



After the first accusations that white members of the lacrosse team raped a black woman hired to strip for them—a woman who was also a mother and a student at North Carolina Central, an historically black university in Durham—Nifong recognized what it

could mean for his career. But it would have been difficult for him to pursue his cynical agenda without assistance from compliant media. Nifong was eager to make his case—one short on evidence—in the newspapers and on television.

Members of the media obliged. Journalists—and cable TV pundits—lapped up sound bites and quotes. In March 2006, when the story broke, I was far from North Carolina and my job as a columnist and editor at The Charlotte Observer. My body was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and my brain was coming to terms with the rapidly approaching end of my Nieman year. I couldn't ignore the news coming out of Durham and Duke. No one could. This was the lead story on every cable TV show and front-page news, from the tabloids to The New York Times.

The story had everything: race, sex, class and privileged athletes at an elite institution. What disturbed me from the beginning was what it didn't have—the ring of truth. Something was off. I knew it. I felt it.

My son graduated from Duke University in 2005, long before most people

had heard of the school's lacrosse team. I had spent some time in the city and at the school, as a parent and a journalist. The public profile on display was a caricature of what our family had experienced. I spelled out the contradictions in a column I wrote upon my return to North Carolina.¹

The script soon became set in stone: poor, black townies vs. white, wealthy preppies. The story was less sexy if a reporter decided to write about a city diverse in color and income. There were tensions, to be sure, between the area's largest employer and the citizens of the town. But Duke students were also involved in Durham life, volunteering to tutor in the schools and register voters. There were more black students—slightly more than 10 percent—at Duke than at many private universities. It costs more than \$40,000 for a year at Duke, a fact stated often in news coverage. Not many stories mentioned that more than 40 percent of the students receive financial aid. My son, like others, attended the school on scholarship.

While I didn't excuse boorishness, underage drinking, and hiring strippers, behavior members of the lacrosse team admitted, I didn't see it as evidence of rape. I searched the articles for balance, for facts—for solid reporting. What I found was prejudice and stereotypes. It's not as though I am unaware of this country's shameful history of exploitation and abuse of black women, through slavery and beyond. And as a black woman, I also knew there might be more to the story of the woman at the center of the case, dismissed as an "escort."

Yet I was uncomfortable that journalists were using that history as a ready-made frame. In "Until Proven Innocent," Taylor and Johnson carefully recount the sorry episode. Taylor is a columnist for the *National Journal* and a contributing editor for *Newsweek*,

writing about legal, policy and political issues. Johnson is a history professor at Brooklyn College and City University of New York, who has written more than 800 posts of analysis about the Duke case on his blog.²

Their view of this case tilts conservative, and their targets also include what they see as political correctness

That all the elements were too good to be true should have been a warning to journalists. But as they parachuted into Durham, looking for an angle and a scoop, it became clear that the opposite was true.

run amok on college campuses across the country. They lambaste some Duke professors, particularly the Group of 88 who signed a newspaper ad asking, "What does a social disaster look like?" that linked the case to racism and sexism at Duke.

That all the elements were too good to be true should have been a warning to journalists. But as they parachuted into Durham, looking for an angle and a scoop, it became clear that the opposite was true. The Duke student newspaper, the *Chronicle*, was closest to the students and the case. Ironically, it was student journalists and columnists who urged caution and attention to the facts. The *New York Times* set the tone of its coverage early. An April 1, 2006 headline read: "A Team's Troubles Shock Few at Duke."

In August 2006, as Nifong's case was crumbling, the *Times* ran a lengthy, front page reassessment, based substantially on notes presented by the lead detective months after his initial investigation. Not surprisingly, the detective's memo supported Nifong's case. But *Times* columnists David Brooks and Nicholas Kristof had started, by then, to raise questions. *Newsweek*, which early on put mug shots of

Seligmann and Finnerty on its cover, later published "Doubts About Duke," which dissected Nifong's unraveling case. Cable TV, usually preoccupied with crime when the woman in peril is white, blond and attractive, emphasized every sensational element of the Duke case, with former prosecutor Nancy Grace leading the charge. The faces, names and reputations of the suspects were fair game, while the identity of the alleged victim was protected.

It's not as though anyone could say "we didn't know better," as relevant facts—such as black Duke law professor James Coleman's largely favorable report on the culture of the lacrosse team and his damning criticisms of Nifong—were ignored or downplayed. They didn't fit the frame.

After April's verdict, there were few media corrections or apologies. It took someone labeled a wealthy, white entitled preppy, Reade Seligmann, to finally express concern for "people who do not have the resources to defend themselves," after the charges against him and his teammates were dropped.

I began to understand why some mistrust the news media, who were so off on a story I knew something about. What about the others? Michael Nifong's claim to fame might be contributing a new word to the language—to be "Nifonged" means to be "railroaded." Stripped of his law license, the disgraced district attorney eventually paid a price. In terms of their credibility, so did journalists. ■

Mary C. Curtis, a 2006 Nieman Fellow, is a columnist at The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer, a contributor to the Nieman Watchdog Project (www.niemanwatchdog.org), and an occasional commentator on NPR. Her Web page address is www.charlotte.com/333/index.html.

¹ www.charlotte.com/marycurtis/story/344081.html

² <http://durhamwonderland.blogspot.com/>

Optimism in a Time of Chaos and Change

'I have faith that new models of journalism are going to fly out of this whirlpool of change and be successful.'

-30-: The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper

Edited by Charles M. Madigan
Ivan R. Dee. 245 Pages. \$26.

By Robert J. Rosenthal

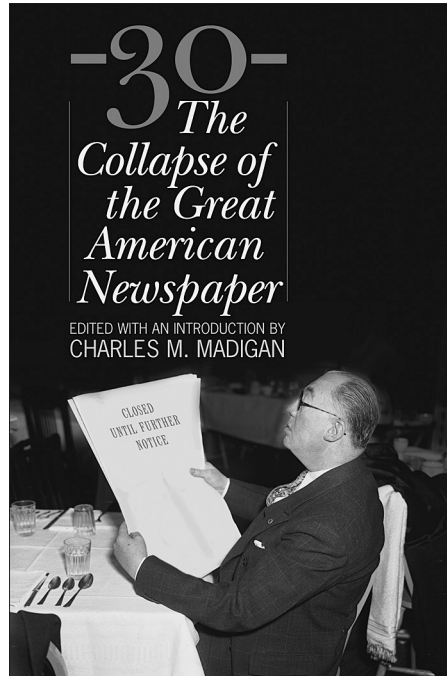
The first time I walked into the newsroom of The New York Times there were paste pots and spikes on the desks of copyeditors. Reporters wrote on 10-part books, and stories were whisked to the composing room through pneumatic tubes. The staccato of hundreds of typewriters pounded in the daily dance of deadline. The linoleum floor was pocked black with the burns of thousands of ground-out cigarettes.

It was the summer of 1969, and I was smitten by the excitement, the creativity, and the energy of the newsroom. That summer also saw banner headlines proclaim "Men Walk on Moon," announced a tragedy at Chappaquiddick, and a generation's greatest party, called Woodstock.

I worked that summer as a copyboy and clerk on the national desk. After graduating from college a year later I started at the Times as a copyboy. Less than a year after graduating, in the spring of 1971, I was assigned as editorial assistant on The Pentagon Papers Project. The Vietnam War raged, and the adversarial relationship between the press and the Nixon administration was real and dangerous. There was Nixon's enemies list and then the Watergate story broke and unraveled a presidency.

Was there ever a better time to be a young, idealistic journalist? There was romance and glamour and even valor in my chosen vocation. Every day I spent in the newsroom was an adventure, an opportunity. A boring day could become electric in a moment with a breaking story. And, best of all, it was fun.

That was all a long time ago. My career has been filled with adventures,



triumphs and setbacks. And for the past 12 years I've had a ringside seat to the dismantling of an industry, a calling, a culture that I loved and am truly passionate about. Call me one of the dinosaurs. But after reading "-30-: The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper," an anthology put together by Charles M. Madigan, a long-time journalist at the Chicago Tribune, I was not ready to be euthanized.

In his introduction Madigan lays out a premise I agree with:

"The business sits," he wrote, "after all, at the intersection where truth and trouble collide, and that is a risky place. It searches every day for the doom and the delight that define life. It tells sad, happy, pointless, profound stories. It is inconceivable that it would disappear, but not inconceivable that to save itself

it will change so much you may not recognize it."

The book tracks, in 15 essays, the myriad reasons we know so well about what has happened to newspapers. It is not a pleasurable read. But it is an important anthology, with lessons learned and possible solutions. It has the feel of a campaign book for a lost war. And like a war, there have been many casualties. John Nichols, the Washington correspondent for The Nation in a piece published last January by that magazine, wrote, "More than 44,000 news industry employees, at least 34,000 of them newspaper journalists, have lost their jobs over the past five years." This is a staggering number, and since that time at least hundreds, and probably thousands more, have left newsrooms across the country.

Energized for the Transition

Still, reading this book left me energized, as I think it will other journalists, as we try to figure out how best to utilize our skills, knowledge and leadership in developing a new journalistic model for the 21st century. The road ahead will be bumpy and challenging, but if we can adapt to the new dynamics and demands that technology presents to us—and find ways to weather some tough economic times during the transition—then the job of being a journalist will become even more valued in the years ahead.

Before I read Madigan's book I believed the core of the problem for newspapers (the medium I am most familiar with) was a business model that demands and expects ever-grow-

ing profits. After reading this book, I am certain this is true. This is not an epiphany for me or any other journalist. Editors and publishers have felt for quite some time that the business model for newspapers is broken. But the response from the business side has been to hit their profit targets by cutting staff, expenses and reducing the news hole. While these moves pleased Wall Street analysts and shareholders, they have failed to increase revenue or led to true innovation.

Playwright and author Lillian Hellman, in “Scoundrel Time,” observed that during the period of the House Committee on Un-American Activities hearings, “Truth made you a traitor as it often does in a time of scoundrels.”

What was one of the important truths about newspapers—a truth well understood but perhaps not voiced as vigorously as it should have been? What I came to understand was that the creative culture of the newsroom was in nearly total conflict with the culture and values of the business side. Journalists were characterized as being naive, foolish, change adverse, and prone to spending a lot of the company’s money. But the best journalists are innovators and risk takers, with a tremendous sense of urgency. They are also highly ambitious.

The skills that journalists possess seem a perfect fit during this time of immense chaos and change in our business. Yet during the time when newspapers have been collapsing, top editors who had a say seemed rarely to be heard. Drastic strategic changes that some editors proposed were dismissed or ignored, often due to the potential their idea had for a short-term downturn in revenue. In truth, their ideas weren’t likely to be listened to when the core value of the company that owned their newspaper was increasing its profit margin and receiving a thumbs-up from Wall Street analysts.

The conflict of quality vs. profit has long been argued. In the summer of

1998, Columbia Journalism Review published a piece, included in this book, titled “Money! Money! Money! The Profits-Versus-Quality War.” In that article Neil Hickey asked: “But should news organizations reasonably expect the same profit levels as software companies, pharmaceutical

Journalism, as practiced at newspapers, is not dead. But journalists will need to salvage what is essential, figure out how to transform it to the new media, and become leaders in this period of upheaval.

firms, and computer makers? Or should stockholders and owners understand, when they wed their fortunes to those of working journalists, that news is a venture like no other? It’s the only business protected by the Constitution of the United States, a status that brings obligations for both the shareholder and the journalist.”

Envisioning New Models

The future will be different but with opportunities that are limitless for the work that journalists do. The Internet is a voracious beast, never satisfied with the amount of “content” it can offer. Sadly, the loss at news organizations of thousands of journalists means that what they could have contributed to these new models emerging on the Web won’t be a part of this change.

Yet a pressing need remains for the crucial and critical role journalists have long played in their public service capacities as news and information gatherer, watchdog and investigator. What journalists do has shaped history, explained complex issues, irritated those who abuse their positions of power, and delighted those who consume it. Today and into the future, with the help of the Web, emerging technologies and new partnerships, the impact, global reach and community engagement with what journalists do will be enormous.

And the extent of journalism’s influence will be based—as it always has been—on its core values of credibility, quality and service.

What will new models look and be like? This book offers suggestions and vision, and I come away from reading it with the belief that the crucial element

determining success will be the strength of emerging relationships among those whose money will support the journalistic enterprise and those who create the product. They will need to arrive at a sense of shared values and passion about what their journalistic enterprise is and the value it holds—not expressed in monetary terms alone. To

use the term “news organization” does not begin to describe the potential opportunities I see ahead for these new ventures. “Publishing” partnerships will be formed and collaborations among news organizations—though these might look very different than we think of them today—will be crucial.

Creating these organizations—using a new DNA—will be easier than the slow transition we are witnessing today with the “old model” organizations. Energy increases when we become engaged in building something new instead of feeling demoralized as institutions we once valued so highly are being destroyed by our own cannibalization.

I have faith that new models of journalism are going to fly out of this whirlpool of change and be successful. Ten years ago Google wasn’t even in our vocabulary. Ditto Craigslist and Facebook and MySpace and YouTube.

Journalism, as practiced at newspapers, is not dead. But journalists will need to salvage what is essential, figure out how to transform it to the new media, and become leaders in this period of upheaval. It will take men and women of vision and deep pockets, whose primary catalyst is not profit.

“I believe a newspaper is a civic asset, a civic trust,” says Eli Broad in John Nichols’ contribution to this book. “I see a role for foundations that are not totally bottom-line oriented some-

how being involved in the newspaper industry and/or civic-minded families and others.”

This idea offers a possible solution—one we already see being tried in several online journalistic endeavors—if journalists do not let the agendas of their funders influence their work and undermine the credibility of these new enterprises. There are these inherent risks, and they must be dealt with, since there is no other

choice. I’d argue that we cannot, as a nation, continue to lose thousands of journalists or sit back and watch the daily erosion of journalistic work on which we, as citizens, rely.

As journalists, we live in a time of crisis—offering the possibility of historic change—as we witness a pillar of our democracy being wounded and withering away. Great urgency and risk taking is called for to stem the collapse of what newspapers have stood for in

our country’s past. We have no other choice. ■

Robert J. Rosenthal is the former editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer and former managing editor of the San Francisco Chronicle. He hopes to contribute to building a new media organization that takes advantage of all of the opportunities that lie ahead.

Why a Critical Eye Is Needed

In exploring why journalism matters, it is not enough to look at what works well; examine, too, why sometimes it fails.

What Good Is Journalism? How Reporters and Editors Are Saving America’s Way of Life

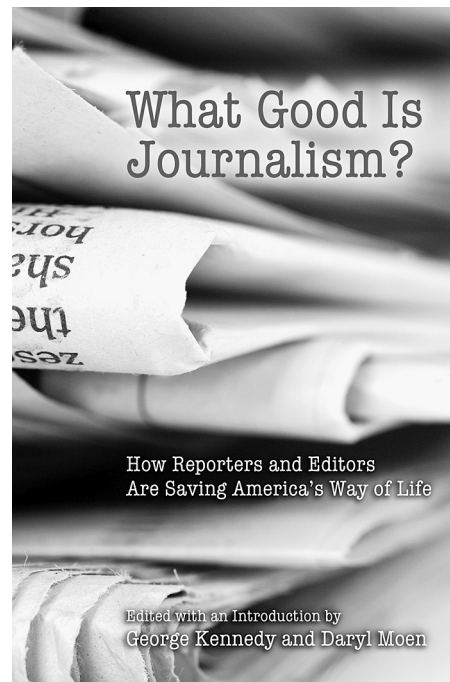
Edited by George Kennedy and Daryl Moen

University of Missouri Press. 171 Pages. \$37.50 hc, \$19.95 pb.

By David Randall

It’s not often I feel uneasy about a book by just seeing it. With this book that sinking feeling began before I opened it. It wasn’t the cover design—though from sad experience I know the futility of getting publishers to produce journalism books with anything other than close-ups of newsprint or keyboards on the front. It was its titles. “What Good Is Journalism?” has problems, but the subtitle is so off-putting it seemed like a stuntman from a rival publisher inserted it. “How Reporters and Editors Are Saving America’s Way of Life” looks like a corporate mission statement: “Saving America 24/7.” It reads like one: “Journalism—Protecting U.S. Way of Life Since 1744.” It is a bloody corporate mission statement.

In this case, the corporation is journalism and the 12-strong team who assumed the task of being its public relations department is mostly senior members of the Missouri School of Journalism. Bothered by what they see as the unhealthy quantities of criticism being heaped onto journalism, they



decided to produce an antidote—a book to show not only the contribution reporters and editors make to their country’s health, but how these unsung and unappreciated men and

women are apparently rescuing its very way of life.

They explore this heroic salvage work in all its contemporary forms: one member of the team headed to National Public Radio; another to The Anniston Star in Alabama; a third to Washington, D.C.; others to speak with investigative reporters and news councils throughout the nation, and one to talk with journalists working in Kosovo, Palestine, South Africa, and Albania. Each chapter is well enough written and informs us how select journalists and news organizations function. But their headings read like they, too, caught the mission statement virus: “NPR offers News and Companionship,” “The Hometown Newspaper Builds Community,” “Watchdogs of Government Serve Citizens,” “Journalism Builds New Democracies,” “Investigative Reporting Saves Lives,” and “Computer-Assisted Journalism Creates New Knowledge.” The overall effect is so relentlessly well meaning that it’s like being trapped in an eleva-

tor with delegates from a Sunday school teachers' convention.

The book's basic problem is not in its execution; it is in its concept. What this Missouri team discovers is that some (in fact, quite a few) journalists do their job well, and a good number do it considerably above and beyond the call of any duty. Not all that surprising. The same, I suspect, is true of real estate brokers or brothel keepers. What else did they expect to learn? Nothing, it would seem, since this book's intent shines through only as public relations, not academic or journalistic inquiry. The result is that it has all the intellectual depth of a press release.

Let's return to the subtitle for a moment to ask, what way of life are journalists saving? Whose life, more precisely, are they saving from what? And how are they doing this—deliberately or as a byproduct of some other, less elevating, activity? Then there's the book's title—"What Good Is Journalism?"—and the lack of an adequate response on its pages, all of which prompts a question of my own: If a university press provided 171 empty pages for a defense of journalism's *raison d'être*, how might those pages best be used?

Perhaps a good place to start would be in systematically searching the history of journalism for excellence and achievement. This book has some history in it, but where is Martha Gellhorn and David Halberstam, Seymour Hersh, Roland Thomas, Evelyn Shuler, and Herbert Bayard Swope? Editors like Ben Bradlee? Crusaders like Nellie Bly, I.F. Stone, George Seldes, Randy Shilts, and Winifred Bonfils? Great city reporters like Mike Berger of *The New York Times*? Beat reporters like Edna Buchanan, who was a crime correspondent for *The Miami Herald*? Poets like Richard Harding Davis? Critics like A.J. Liebling, Gay Talese, H.L. Mencken, and P.J. O'Rourke? History makers like J.A. MacGahan, whose revelations about the Bulgarian Atrocities led, in time, to the redrawing of Central Europe's map; Floyd Gibbons, whose account of the sinking of the *Laconia* for the *Chicago Tribune* helped propel America to war in 1917; Wilfred Burchett's reporting

that revealed the lies about the effects of radiation on Hiroshima's population, and Ernie Pyle, whose war reporting reflected a nation's will as perhaps no other reporter has done before or since? (The authors might respond that they were concerned only with contemporary journalism; but, if so, where are the honorable exceptions to the U.S. news media's uncritical approach to the Iraq War in 2002-2004? Such an approach, however, might call into question the project's upbeat mission statement.)

Yet to contemplate fully what good journalism does, examining its peaks of achievement is not enough. That exercise would merely prove, perhaps in some greater depth, the point this book superficially did, thus leaving us back where we began and aware of little we did not already suspect about journalists. More challenging and useful would be the construction of a new framework to consider journalism's benefits and the forces that help or hinder them. This means creating a far wider vantage point than the process of journalism.

The Past Informs the Present

As a starting point, I'd suggest taking a look at a book that is not about the press at all. It's a study of everyday life in preindustrial societies, written by the late Cambridge University historian, Peter Laslett. "*The World We Have Lost*" shows us what life was like before journalism, when people relied on friends, family, the local priest, and the gossip of the marketplace for information. Then, people usually traveled no more than five miles from their homes during their whole lives; what happened three valleys away often remained an uncorroborated rumor. Subsistence and family matters consumed nearly all their energies; these people weren't property owners, nor did they expect to live very long. They had, therefore, little investment in wider society and consequently very little interest in it. Their discourse was what passed by word of mouth in the highly limited circles they inhabited.

Knowing what this world was like

makes tracing journalism's impact possible. What journalism has done for many years is to facilitate society's discourse, which today is personal, local, regional, national and global and sectional. Each of these spheres has aspects in which citizens have an interest, or in which they are interested in gaining more information. Though journalists might, at times, suffer from a lack of information, shortage of time, conflicts of interest and, sometimes, just plain boneheadedness, what they do—imperfectly, at times—facilitates the discourse.

Among their tasks are these: keeping people informed of elected and appointed officials' activities; investigating what the powerful usually prefer kept out of public view; giving voice to those who lack an effective one; providing an arena for debate, communicating back to officials how citizens feel; finding information about extraordinary occurrences; holding a mirror up to society, correcting misconceptions, showing people how others lead their lives; giving information to help readers live, travel, consume and engage with what is of interest to them; providing entertainment and, most crucially of all, supplanting rumor.

Combine this exploration with a tour of journalism's historic high spots and far more important questions emerge. What enables a journalist to do these tasks well? Does doing well depend on the conditions in which a journalist works—a sympathetic legal framework or the lack of official interference in editorial freedom, for example? (Maybe America's way of life is responsible for saving journalism rather than the other way around.) An even more fundamental question to ask might be whether journalism, as an occupation, should set out to do good. Or should it be—is it actually—an honest attempt to find out and publish no matter what the consequences?

What limitations are there on the roles that journalism performs? Does the way journalism is performed impose its own limitations? And what best promotes good journalism? A benevolent proprietor? A management that doesn't demand a 30 percent

minimum return on turnover? A news organization with a monopoly grip on its own area? An editor with a mission in mind? Rugged individuality? Good training at j-school?

Or is it, as I learned after studying the best of reporting history for my book, “The Great Reporters,” being well read, applying intelligence to the subject being reported, and having a positively

dysfunctional (by any normal human standards) determination to find out? Finally, most important of all, we might ask: Why does some journalism fail to carry out its functions? It’s a question that the Missouri writers, having confined themselves to the sunny side of the street, ruled themselves out of investigating. They’ve presented us with some role models, but they haven’t

really answered their title’s question, let alone justified the mission statement that is their subtitle. ■

David Randall is assistant editor and columnist at The Independent on Sunday of London, columnist for Italy’s Internazionale, and author of “The Universal Journalist” and “The Great Reporters.”

The Humanity of Journalism

‘As journalists, we make moral and subjective choices all of the time, just like the people we cover.’

Letters from the Editor: Lessons on Journalism and Life

William F. Woo, edited by Philip Meyer

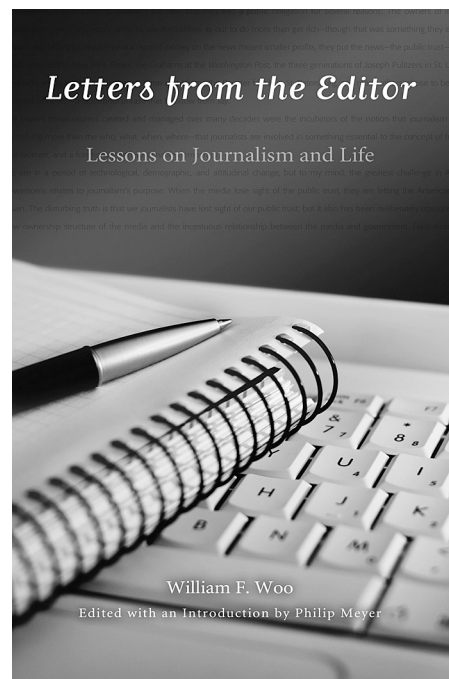
University of Missouri Press. 216 Pages. \$19.95.

By Brent Walth

William Woo earned his place in the chronicles of U.S. journalism when he became the first Asian-American to run a major U.S. newspaper. That would be the St. Louis Post Dispatch in 1986. But such distinctions are the stuff of book jacket blurbs and obits. They leave out what made someone a great journalist—what made him human. For Woo, the stuff of journalism and humanity could never be pulled apart.

During his 10 years as Post-Dispatch editor, he wrote a regular column, and when he retired and went on to Stanford University to teach, the habit never left him. Each week, his students opened their e-mail to find a column of sorts from their professor, who as it turned out hadn’t stopped thinking about them or their craft just because the closing classroom bell had rung. They found that Woo had been mulling and fretting over all things journalism while barbecuing that night’s lamb chops, puttering around the house, or having his evening Scotch. Once the pondering ended, he sat down and sent off his thoughts to his students.

Woo died at age 69 from cancer in 2006. His family later went through his computer and came back with a trove of these letters to students. We now can read the best of them. Edited



by his friend and Nieman classmate, Philip Meyer, these frank, reflective and often deeply personal missives to his students now make up a collection, “Letters from the Editor: Lessons on Journalism and Life.”

A lot of journalism instructors have typed out their pedagogy for textbooks. What Woo has left us is a map of how a veteran and committed journalist

moves through the world. I twice read this collection of 44 essays and came away wondering what essential idea or theme about journalism Woo overlooked. I can’t think of one. One moment, he speaks to the need to write clearly and simply; the next, the thorniest ethical choices we must make and, in others, the hard lessons we face when we put pride above our duty and lose our way.

He does it all in an easy, conversational manner that draws you in—a practiced intimacy that is the ideal of good writing, as if a friend, hand on your shoulder, is telling you a story. He tells his share of his own adventures from his 40-plus years in the business—like how as a young reporter he landed an exclusive interview with Lyndon Johnson—but never does so in a self-congratulatory manner. He had many career highlights he might have preened over, but that wasn’t his way. He is instead far more persuasive when he turns his analysis back on his own career and helps his students see what might be learned through his mistakes.

Beyond his topics at hand, Woo teaches through example. He finds inspiration in all manner of contact with the world—a headline in that

day's paper, Mozart, or a trip to the doctor's office as his illness steadily overcame him. The letters remind us how journalism is a daily education, and why so many of us stick with it: We're addicted to discovery and revelation and disclosure, usually involving others. Woo shows us that thrill can be just as powerful when discovering truths about ourselves.

Woo sought to embed each letter with lesson, but in many cases he went further and carefully laid out a moral. In that way, Woo's letters to his students make clear that a journalism education must not include simply instructions as to the techniques, mechanics and traditions of the craft. As journalists, we make moral and subjective choices all of the time, just like the people we cover. The failure to acknowledge

that—and hide behind the opaque sheeting of objectivity—denies what it is that makes journalism authentic.

As he wrote in one of the last letters in the book:

“The conscientious journalist, in short, is not immune from the uncertainties, the conflicting values, the likelihood for error that are part of the daily possibilities of every man and woman. The reason for this is that journalism is not an end in itself but grows out of the larger life we experience as human beings. If the end of journalism were journalism, then it would be a self-contained enterprise, existing outside of society. But the end of journalism is no more doing journalism than, say, the end of surgery is only to cut people apart instead of saving lives.

“The end of journalism, I believe, is to serve people in the most profound way possible.... So you will need intelligence and experience to do this kind of work and also a sense of your own humanity.”

Throughout this wonderful collection, Woo provides a model to emulate—someone connected to this humanity who, in telling his stories, never forgets his audience. Here that audience was his students, a lucky group that, thanks to this book, now includes all of us. ■

Brent Walth, a 2006 Nieman Fellow, is a senior reporter at The Oregonian and adjunct faculty at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication.

Hidden Codes and Competitive Trickery

In a coffee-table book, Associated Press correspondents and photographers describe what they and their colleagues did to be first with the news.

Breaking News: How The Associated Press Has Covered War, Peace, and Everything Else

Reporters of The Associated Press, with a foreword by David Halberstam
Princeton Architectural Press. 400 Pages. \$35.

By Robert H. Phelps

This coffee-table book, the first by and about The Associated Press as an institution in 66 years, apparently was edited by committee, or perhaps by anonymous editors in turns. Whoever was hands-on responsible, he/she/they faced the problem of pulling together thousands of anecdotes, hundreds of claims of glory, and a few confessions of error. Moreover, much of the material had already been published.

Thus it made little sense to write another history of the wire service, merely bringing its predecessor, “AP: The Story of the News,” by Oliver Gramling (1940), up to date. Instead of a chronology, those in charge decided to organize the book around the



theme of how AP correspondents and photographers got their stories. The 12 chapters, each written by a staffer, are based on subject matter, ranging from war, which gets two chapters, to sports.

Most, but not all, of the time this device works, with surprisingly little slopover from one chapter to another. When it does work, the passages demonstrate reportorial ingenuity. In 1903, Salvatore Cortesi worked out a code system to get around a two-hour ban on reporting the death of Pope Leo XIII. In nine minutes, New York AP flashed the news around the world, beating even the Italian press. Cortesi used friendship with a well-placed source,

the pope's personal physician, to provide intimate details of the pontiff's last minutes.

Codes are dangerous. In 1935, an AP Teletype operator secreted in a New Jersey courthouse attic misread a code and filed a flash: "Verdict Reached Guilty and Life" in the trial of Bruno Richard Hauptmann for the kidnapping and murder of air hero Charles A. Lindbergh's baby. Some newspapers and radio stations used the report before AP could correct the wording to the death penalty.

Friendship, even a professional relationship, is an obvious source of beats, but it also raises the question of neutrality—look at Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post* and his struggle in dealing with Deep Throat. "Breaking News" tells how the "passion, tumult, intimacy and shared confidences" between reporter Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt compromised the AP reporter. Roosevelt showed Hickok the text of the President's 1933 inaugural speech at a dinner the night before he gave it, but Hickok never thought of using it—with its ringing "we have nothing to fear" exhortation—in advance for an exclusive.

Getting to the telephone first has long made the difference between leading the pack or running second. The book's cover photograph shows Wes Gallagher, later president of AP, dashing for the phone to report the verdict at the Nuremberg war crimes trials on October 1, 1946. He used an old trick; his wife, Betty, held the line open for him.

Merriam Smith, long the United Press chief White House Correspondent, used another stratagem when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas on November 22, 1963. Riding in the front seat of the fourth car in the presidential motorcade, Smith, at the first sound of shots, grabbed the mobile phone hanging from the dashboard just in front of him. Smith called his office, dictated news of the shooting, and refused to give the phone to Jack Bell of AP, who was riding in the rear seat. Smith delayed even further, insisting that the story be read back to him. When Bell finally got the phone,

it went dead; apparently Smith broke the connection.

Of course, such ploys are no longer necessary with every reporter carrying a cell phone, BlackBerry and computer.

Ingenuity and Perseverance

What, then, is the value of "Breaking News" to journalists today? One of the important lessons is its reinforcement of an old one: keep after sources, don't give up. Before the body of the Lindbergh baby was found and the world wondered his fate, AP's Francis A. Jamieson sent two reporters to a state police news conference as a "decoy" while he called New Jersey Governor A. Harry Moore. But Moore had left his office and was on his way home. Jamieson kept dialing, finally reaching Moore, and asked him to check with the state police. While Moore called the police, Jamieson opened a second line to the national news desk. A few seconds later Moore shouted to Jamieson: "I have sad news for you. The Lindbergh baby has been found dead." Newspapers with Jamieson's story were on the street before the state police announcement more than an hour later. Other reporters accused the governor of favoritism, but he replied that Jamieson was the only reporter who had called him. "He caught the train," the governor said. "The others stood on the platform and watched it go by."

An AP beat reporter's persistence on another big story confirms the lesson. Harold Turnblad, in the Seattle bureau, was assigned to follow the flight of Wiley Post, a record-breaking pilot, and Will Rogers, the humorist, in Alaska in 1935. Based on information from the Signal Corps in Alaska, Turnblad sent out a flash on their plane's crash near Point Barrow, but in Washington the War Department questioned the story. "You got it straight," a Signal Corps captain told Turnblad when he checked back. "You're the only one I called because I didn't have the other fellows' numbers, and your office kept calling through the night."

Another lesson is to scream if the editor screws up. In 1970, AP editors

in New York deleted from a Peter Arnett story an account of GI looting wrecked stores in a rubber plantation during an "incursion" into Cambodia. Foreign editor Ben Bassett, concerned about domestic tensions after the killing of four student war protestors at Kent State University, sent a message to the Saigon bureau saying that stories should be "down the middle and subdue emotions" and added, "Let's play it cool." Arnett shot off an angry message to Wes Gallagher, AP's general manager, that he had been "personally and professionally" insulted. Gallagher ordered the material restored to the story.

While "Breaking News," as its title indicates, stresses the demand for getting the news first without sacrifice of accuracy, The Associated Press's finest performance, certainly in recent times, came with its refusal to be pushed into a story. Early returns from the 2000 presidential election led the AP and the television networks to call Florida, if not the White House, for Vice President Al Gore, only to pull back. Then the networks called the election for George Bush. But AP advised newspaper editors, many of them pushing for a decision, that Bush's lead was dwindling in Florida. It never did call the election, which ultimately was decided by the Supreme Court.

The Associated Press is rightfully proud of its accomplishments and never lets the reader forget it is the leading news agency in the world. Yet "Breaking News," by its very title, indicates the limited impact of this great organization. Major advances in our understanding of the world come not from two-minute beats on spot news but from careful, time-consuming reporting. By far most of these stories are published in big-city newspapers, especially *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times*. For these papers, The Associated Press is a backup to fill holes in coverage or a tip sheet of where to send their own reporters.

As a corollary, much of the fine work done by the AP is featured primarily in smaller papers. Even in those papers

the AP story is often pushed out, no longer by United Press, as in the old days, but by the big-city news services, like those of The New York Times and The Washington Post.

The Internet adds another dimension to AP's challenge. Online demands spot-news speed. Thus the challenge to AP is to meet the needs of all the media—of newspapers, large and small, or radio or television, and of the Internet-oriented who want the news sent to their Web sites, their desks, and

their cell phones.

"Breaking News" scarcely touches on the digital era. As Walter Mears, who witnessed 45 years of change as one of the best reporters in the country, puts the problem in the final chapter of this history, "Online news delivery simply exploded; it was a matter of getting aboard or being rolled over."

Despite resistance from holdout publishers—remember the wire service is a co-op financed primarily by assessments based on newspaper circulation,

which has been falling—The Associated Press is aboard. The question remains: Will it travel first class or ride in the caboose? ■

Robert H. Phelps, retired editor of Nieman Reports, learned to respect and occasionally beat The Associated Press while a cub reporter with United Press Associations in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in the 1940's.

Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

Confronting 'The Health Care World of Want'

A trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo results in a journalist's determination to find ways to report on the devastation she now knows exists.

By Susan Dentzer

The Congolese doctor ushered us into the small hospital room—the labor and delivery room, he told us. There, lying on a bed, was a woman who had just given birth to a stillborn baby. We stared briefly at her before shame overtook us, and we looked away. How could we invade her privacy at this moment—for her surely one of anguish and pain?

Moments later, the doctor walked over to a corner of a room, to an antiquated infant weighing scale standing on a table. Atop the scale was what appeared to be a pile of colorful African cloth. The doctor slowly unwrapped it and, inside, we saw a newborn baby. Its stomach and intestines were clearly visible, bulging out through the infant's navel and lying outside its body—a

condition called omphalocele. In the United States, the condition would be treated surgically, and the infant would probably go on to live a full and healthy life. Here in Eastern Congo, in a hamlet two hours over unpaved road from the nearest small city, the baby probably had just days, if not hours, to live.

These scenes, from a recent trip I took to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are seared into my memory. I traveled there for the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a New York-based humanitarian relief organization on whose board of directors I serve. The IRC operates relief programs for refugees and displaced persons in 24 countries around the world. A group of us from the board who oversee the organization's health-related relief ef-

forts had gone to the field to observe IRC's operations in war-torn Congo, the very definition of a fragile state.

If there's a hall of fame for countries that have been victims of the world's greatest injustices, Congo surely has a place of prominence. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the systematic looting and exploitation of the area by King Leopold II of Belgium resulted in the deaths of more than three million people. Following independence in 1960 came the three-decade reign of Mobutu Sese Seko, who renamed the country Zaire. It is hard to comprehend how thoroughly Mobutu looted this mineral-rich nation while simultaneously underinvesting in almost anything that could benefit his people. Even today this country, roughly the

size of the United States east of the Mississippi, has fewer than 500 miles of paved roads.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, Congo was embroiled in an eight-nation conflict that finally ended with a treaty in 2003. Democratic elections in 2006 put a president in power in Kinshasa, the capital, who even today confronts fighting among forces representing the government and rebel groups in the east. It's no stretch to say that Congo is a tinderbox from which conflict could spread to much of central and east Africa. And according to a major series of surveys carried out by IRC, nearly four million more Congolese died than might have been expected between 1998 and 2004 due to an imploded national health system and the inability to stop even preventable diseases, such as measles. Shockingly, about half of those overall deaths have been in children under age five.

In my professional life, as health correspondent for "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" on PBS, my feet are firmly planted in what I call the "Health Care World of Plenty." I mainly cover the U.S. healthcare system—that \$2 trillion-plus behemoth of high technology and innovation and, as we increasingly know, startling inefficiency, ineffectiveness and just plain old waste. In the work I do for IRC, I have a foot in the "Health Care World of Want." The contrasts are devastating and painful, but the knowledge of one has informed my coverage of the other. I am a better journalist, and a better person, for having feet in both camps.

For all the woes of U.S. health



Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo by Karen Hein.

As a journalist, I now know the humanitarian disaster in Congo is among the past decade's most underreported major stories. ... For all the stories I can tell here in the United States about the Health Care World of Plenty, I now understand how many more compelling ones exist in the Health Care World of Want.

care—and they are legion—I have learned a far greater respect for what we do have. Our superior advantage in knowledge, skill and technology of health care is self-evident. I increasingly also understand how our advantages in these areas have raised the value we place on life—or, at least, on many

lives lived here in America. At one end of the lifespan, we would think nothing of spending thousands of dollars to operate on a baby born in the United States with omphalocele—just as we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to save the lives of even one premature infant. At the other end of life's spectrum, new cancer drugs are deemed successful and worth paying tens of thousands of dollars for, if they extend the lives of patients with metastatic cancer by just several months. In this sense, we're indisputably pro-life in our national health policy, willing to spend just about anything to extend the lives of millions of our citizens—provided, of course, that they are among those fortunate enough to have health insurance.

The value we assign to our lives is also evident in other ways, like privacy. In a modern U.S. hospital, it's highly unlikely a doctor would ever have ushered me into a room of a woman who'd just given birth to a stillborn. It certainly would never happen without asking the woman's permission. Most likely she'd be asked to sign a document indicating that she had given her permission under a federal law known as HIPAA for her identity and condition to be disclosed. These federal privacy protections for patients have sometimes been the bane of my existence as a journalist; for example, after Hurricane Katrina, our TV crew was denied access to evacuees from New Orleans in a makeshift hospital in Baton Rouge on the ground that we'd be violating the patients' privacy. But when we walked in on the grieving woman in Congo, I couldn't help

but think what a societal advance the respect for the guarantee of privacy in health care settings represents.

Developing an appreciation for what we have in the United States is the upside of having a foot in both worlds. There is also a substantial downside. Mostly this stems from coming to grips with the industrialized world's indifference to Africa and the pain of coming to understand intimately the suffering of others in poor parts of the globe.

How could an estimated four million people have died in Congo from 1998 to 2004, with the world paying so little attention to the scope of this humanitarian disaster? How is it that

this high death rate is still tolerated, amid ongoing signs that the trend hasn't abated? Why is it that the world can focus its attention on some global crises, like Darfur, but not on others—particularly when, as in Congo, the violence happens over time through neglect? How is it that aid delivered to tsunami-affected areas in South and Southeast Asia in 2005 exceeded by 100 times the per-person amount of international assistance that went to Congo that same year?

As a journalist, I now know the humanitarian disaster in Congo is among the past decade's most underreported major stories. I may never have encoun-

tered it myself but for my work with IRC. For all the stories I can tell here in the United States about the Health Care World of Plenty, I now understand how many more compelling ones exist in the Health Care World of Want. And over the remaining years of my career in journalism, I'm determined to figure out a way to tell them. ■

Susan Dentzer, a 1987 Nieman Fellow, is health correspondent for "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" on PBS. She also serves on the boards of directors of the International Rescue Committee and the Global Health Council.

—1958—

J. Wesley Sullivan died on November 11th in Palm Springs, California, of a brain hemorrhage. He was 86.

Sullivan spent 56 years at the Statesman Journal and The Oregon Statesman, its predecessor. For 15 years he was editor, and then he wrote editorials and columns. After his retirement in 1986, he continued writing weekly columns until 2002. Dick Hughes, the editorial page editor of the Statesman Journal, described Sullivan in an article in that paper as "absolutely passionate about journalism and about the community." Among other ways of participating in his community, Sullivan was chairman of the Civic Buildings Committee, president of the local Red Cross chapter, and on the boards of a number of local organizations.

Hughes, who edited Sullivan's columns for years, said Sullivan was "the consummate columnist. ... He was a larger-than-life figure—albeit a highly opinionated one." Hughes continued, "Over time, Wes became a role model. He put his family and his faith first. He cherished the outdoors, rode his bike to work, and loved hiking or spending time with his family at a cabin on the

Siletz River. He welcomed every day as an adventure."

Sullivan is survived by four sons. His wife, **Elsie**, predeceased him.

—1959—

John Seigenthaler, founder of the First Amendment Center, was honored by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) with a First Amendment Award at a dinner at the SPJ Convention and National Journalism Conference in Washington, D.C., in October. The awards are described by SPJ as a way to "recognize individuals and groups for extraordinarily strong efforts to preserve and strengthen the First Amendment."

For 43 years, Seigenthaler worked at The Tennessean, having been editor, publisher, and CEO; he is now chairman emeritus. Seigenthaler also was the founding editorial director of USA Today in 1982, retiring 10 years later. During the early 1960's, he briefly left journalism to become administrative assistant to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in the U.S. Justice Department. He also played a role during the Freedom Rides in Montgomery, Alabama, as chief negotiator with

Alabama's governor.

Seigenthaler hosts "A Word on Words," in Nashville, Tennessee, a weekly book review program, and is the author of "James K. Polk," published in January 2004 by Times Books.

—1963—

John W. (Jack) Kole died on September 15th in Arlington, Virginia, after an apparent heart attack. He was 73.

Kole worked as Washington bureau chief for the Milwaukee Journal from 1970-1989. After leaving that position, he became press secretary to Rep. David R. Obey. Kole retired in 1997. Alan J. Borsuk, in the obituary he wrote about Kole for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, said that "Kole had strong and intimate knowledge of the worlds of politics and journalism and combined that knowledge with an affable personal style" Frank Aukofer, a colleague in the paper's Washington bureau, said "He was a great, great political reporter, a real student of politics. He had absolute integrity and honesty."

Kole started working at the Milwaukee Journal in 1956, covering city government. He began reporting on

politics in 1962 and joined the Washington bureau in 1964. In 1971, Kole was elected to the Gridiron Club. In 1985, its 100th anniversary year, he was the club's president.

Carl Schwartz, senior editor for national and international news for the Journal Sentinel and editor of many of Kole's articles, said in Borsuk's obituary: "Jack had two great areas of expertise, politics and economics, and strong backgrounds and sources in both areas. He was great at bringing many elements together gracefully in a story."

Kole is survived by his wife, **Betty Zuege Kole**, and five children. Kole died on the couple's 51st wedding anniversary.

—1967—

Hiranmay (Ronu) Karlekar's new book, "Savage Humans and Stray Dogs: A Study in Aggression" will be published by Sage in 2008. Nieman classmate **Joe Mohbat** along with his wife visited Karlekar in the fall. Anticipating their visit in an early October e-mail, Karlekar writes: "After a few days in Delhi, I will take them to our cottage in the hills for a stint in the Himalayas. I hope that the sky is clear and they get a view of the majestic peaks with their helmets of snow."

Karlekar, who has covered southern Asia for more than four decades, has written and edited a number of books, including "Independent India: The First Fifty Years" (1998), Bangladesh: "The Next Afghanistan?" (2005), and "In the Mirror of Mandal: Social Justice, Caste, Class, and the Individual" (1992). He has also written two novels in Bengali.

—1972—

Robert Deitz died on September 15th of complications from brain cancer in Dallas, Texas. He was 67.

Deitz began his career as journalist, editor and author in 1962, when he started as a reporter with the Herald-Leader in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1963, he moved to the Courier-Journal,

where he held a number of positions over the years: political reporter, editorial writer, senior editor in the Sunday news analysis sections, director of public relations, and executive editor of the newspaper's book publishing division, according to his obituary in the Lexington Herald and [Louisville] Courier-Journal.

After spending a year as business editor of The Dallas Times Herald, Deitz became director of public relations of Dallas-Zale Corporation and then vice president of investor relations in the Dallas office of Hill and Knowlton, Inc.. He picked up his work as a journalist in 1985 when he returned to the Times Herald as executive business editor and columnist. When the paper closed in 1991, Deitz freelanced in The Wall Street Journal, Business Week, banking industry publications, and in-flight airline magazines.

Deitz also wrote and collaborated on a number of books, including "Other People's Money: The Inside Story of the S&L Mess," "Presumed Guilty: The Tragedy of the Rodney King Affair," and "Crisis in the Oil Patch: How America's Energy Industry Is Being Destroyed and What Must Be Done to Save It."

Deitz is survived by his wife, **Sharon K. Deitz**, and three sons.

—1974—

Whitney Gould, who covered architecture and urban landscape for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel for 12 years, has retired. Here is an excerpt from her final column, dated November 18th:

"... I hope that I have played some modest role in stimulating debate about the built environment. It's one way to encourage honest, well-proportioned, sustainable buildings and engaging public places, both of which are essential to the quality of life in Milwaukee. Good urban design shapes our neighborhoods and buttresses our sense of place; it adds worth to property; it elevates our work life.

"Sad to say, there are still too many clients who undervalue that. Too often they treat inspired design as a frill,

forgetting that their own reputations, along with the urban experience for the rest of us, can be blighted by poorly conceived, bottom-line buildings. And architects aren't always willing to push clients hard enough to invest in first-rate design.

"In every project, this question should be foremost in the minds of all the major players: If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, is this the building you'd want to be remembered for? And if the answer is no, what are you going to do about it? ...

"For my own part, I hope that we can save reminders of where we came from even as we create memorable, 21st-century architecture. In that tension between continuity and change lies the seedbed for enormous creativity. Let's nurture it, and embrace urban life in all of its complexity and contradiction."

—1980—

Jim Boyd became the "editorial mentor" for the Minnesota Monitor, an independent online newsmagazine, this fall. He'll be "helping shape the vision and scope of the site's coverage" and "working to improve the writing and news sense of its journalistic fellows," according to an article by Paul Schmelzer of the Monitor. Boyd had been deputy editor of the Star Tribune's editorial page for 25 years.

—1985—

Peg Finucane died on November 18th of an infection she developed while being treated for pancreatic cancer. See **Mike Pride's** remembrance, on behalf of her classmates, in the box on page 99.

—1990—

John Harwood has joined The New York Times as political writer. While remaining Chief Washington Correspondent for CNBC television, he will provide political analysis in the Times and on its Web site, nytimes.com. Harwood had worked at The Wall Street Journal since 1991 as White

Classmates Remember Peg Finucane

For the Nieman class of 1985's last event together, a beery backyard pig-out on a lovely evening in late May, the self-anointed class bard mounted the steps to the deck. He caught the crowd's attention and began to read his sheets of doggerel. To each classmate, he devoted a four-line stanza immortalizing such high points of the year as **Ed Chen's** backward tumble into the bushes in front of Sever Hall and **Bernard Edinger's** three parts per question and twelve strokes per hole. For the stanza about our classmate Peg Finucane and her beau, **Bob Heisler**, there was only one possible subject. It went like this:

Peg came to Harvard with one course in mind,

Marriage 101, with the good parts underlined,

For a honeymoon, she and Bob plan to get lost on

The midnight shuttle from New York to Boston.

The news that Peg had died of complications from pancreatic cancer on November 18th at the age of 57 shocked and saddened all of us. In flashing back to our Nieman year, many of us conjured the same picture of Peg. She had braces on her teeth, an electric smile, a halo of curly brown hair, a wry sense of humor, and romance in her heart.

Peg went on to marry Bob in a lovely outdoor wedding on the Connecticut shore. Nineteen years ago, they had a daughter. When Sarah was born, Peg, in typically good form in the last days of the pre-PC era, cheerfully wrote to us that she'd been taken hostage by a dwarf.

Peg was a Midwesterner, born in Chicago. She wanted to be a journalist from a young age. After 20 years



Peg Finucane in 1985.

as an editor at *Newsday*, she found a second calling in 2001 and became a full-time journalism professor at Hofstra University.

She and Bob, also an editor, were a great fit, as we had all seen years ago. Peg became a proud mother, finding great pleasure in Sarah's successes.

Our class recollections of Peg go mainly to warm conversations in the Lippmann House kitchen and a welcoming presence for all occasions. **Jeri Eddings** summed up the essence of Peg: "She had a knack for finding what made her happy."

As an editor, Peg loved helping reporters get the most from their talent. Then, when Jeri saw Peg at our last reunion, "her face actually lit up when she talked about teaching."

Last year, Peg wrote a piece for *Nieman Reports* about teaching journalism at a time when the future of the craft seems so dark and

shaky. In the essay, she characterized herself as "a dinosaur who has learned to use tools." She and her fellow educators, she wrote, were trying to teach the next generation of journalists "how to evolve quickly while retaining the best parts of our dinosaur tools."

Unsurprisingly, Peg spoke up for the bedrock principles of journalists of our generation:

"Good journalism—good writing and editing—is just as important as ever. Good journalism works in all media—the delivery methods might change, but the content must be informative, interesting and reliable."

Journalist, teacher, wife, mother—Peg knew what she wanted, and she succeeded in every role she chose. We will all miss her ready smile and her good heart. ■
—Mike Pride for the Class of '85.

House correspondent, Congressional correspondent, and political editor. In addition to CNBC, he will continue to appear on MSNBC, NBC's "Meet the Press," and PBS's "Washington Week in Review," among other programs.

Paolo Valentino, after what he describes as "a long and freezing road via Moscow and Berlin," finally moved in September to Washington D.C., where he is the U.S. bureau chief for *Corriere della Sera*. His wife, **Albina**, and their three boys, Ivan (13), Giorgio (11) and Tancredi (5), are with him. He adds that they "have a large guest room," too, for any friends who might be passing through.

—1991—

Tim Giago has been inducted into the South Dakota Newspaper Hall of Fame. Giago, founding publisher and editor of *Indian Country Today*, is the first Native American to receive this honor. Giago and three other long-time journalists from South Dakota were inducted into the hall of fame at a luncheon at the Performing Arts Center at South Dakota State University in November. Newspaper editors and publishers choose the nominees.

Giago, a member of the Oglala Lakota Tribe, founded the *Lakota Times* in 1981 on the Pine Ridge Reservation. In an announcement by David Bordewyk

of the South Dakota Newspaper Association, he notes that "Giago and his newspaper withstood firebombs, office windows shot out, and multiple death threats." In 1992, the newspaper was renamed *Indian Country Today*. Giago, who was editor and publisher of the paper for 18 years, built it into the largest independent Indian newspaper before selling it in 1998. In 2000, he founded the *Lakota Journal*, where he worked as editor and publisher until he retired in 2004. He still writes a weekly column, "Notes from Indian Country," which appears in newspapers and Web sites across the country.

—1992—

Raymundo Riva-Palacio is now executive editor at *El Universal*, the largest newspaper in Mexico. He had been writing a column for the paper and editing the tabloid *El Grafico*, published by the same company.

—1994—

Lorie Conway brings us up to date on "Forgotten Ellis Island," the nine-year-in-the-making film/book project produced by her company, Boston Film and Video Productions:

- The "Forgotten Ellis Island" companion book was published October 9th by Smithsonian Books Harper Collins.
- The "Forgotten Ellis Island" documentary film, narrated by Elliott Gould, premiered at Ellis Island's Great Hall on October 22nd.
- An abbreviated version of the film will be shown daily at the Ellis Island Museum.
- Screenings and book signings have also taken place at the Tenement Museum and the MFA/Boston. More are being scheduled at the Boston Public Library, the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Public Library, and others.
- Distribution for the film is underway with either PBS, HBO, or another major cable network, in addition to film festivals and a nationwide the-

Narrative Journalism in a Multimedia World

The 2008 Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism continues its tradition of exploring the dimensions of literary work: how great journalists forage for rich material, structure fluent accounts, and flesh out stories with real-life characters. But this year we will also focus on how literary techniques can be best applied to sounds and images as well as words—and on how storytelling can be reinterpreted for multimedia.

Our goal remains to nurture the best of narrative journalism even as the forms it takes change before our eyes and ears. So this year, major figures in print journalism, film, broadcasting and books will be joined by bloggers, podcasters and producers of extraordinary multimedia. The best narrative journalists will offer trade secrets, and skills-building workshops will focus not just on the craft of writing and the art of editing but also on multimedia

storyboarding and how to create podcasts worthy of the best audiences.

This conference takes the successful legacy of previous conferences and builds on it to provide a way for narrative journalists to embrace the challenges and promises of new media. No matter how technology takes us in new directions, the desire for human stories told humanely will never disappear. Ultimately, of course, the conference celebrates the urge to tell stories. ■ —Constance Hale, Program Director, Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism

The 2008 Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism will be held on March 14-16 in Boston, Massachusetts. For information, visit the conference Web site at www.nieman.harvard.edu/events/conferences/narrative2008/index.html.

atrical release. Look for a broadcast and distribution in 2008.

- The project's Web site can be found at: www.forgottenellisland.com.

Maria Henson writes: "Something about the pastel colors of Botswana's national bird (the Lilac-breasted roller), the brilliance of the Southern Cross in a midnight sky, and the utter stillness of a vast wilderness caused me last summer to say it's time to move to Africa. I'm taking a leave from The Sacramento Bee in February and moving to Botswana to volunteer in the media studies program at the University of Botswana and to live in the Okavango Delta. I'd welcome any advice from fellows about what not to miss in the region during my year away and can be reached at mhenson1982@gmail.com.

Melanie Sill is now editor and senior vice president of The Sacramento (Calif.) Bee; she had been executive editor and senior vice president of The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina. As editor, Sill will be responsible for the paper's news content, editorial pages, and Web sites. Sill had been with The News & Observer since 1982 and executive editor since 2002. She also cohosted "Headline Saturday," a weekly television program aired on WRAL-TV in Raleigh. Under her leadership, The News & Observer received a 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for "Boss Hog: North Carolina's Pork Revolution." The series led to major changes in the hog farming industry in that state.

—1995—

Barbara Fölscher has a new book out, a political thriller entitled "Blind Faith," published in Cape Town by Human & Rousseau. The book begins in 1989, during the last months of apartheid, and the plot weaves through those difficult years in South Africa's history. Fölscher's first book, "Reisgenoot," a collection of Afrikaans short stories, was awarded the Eugene Marias Prize in 2003. Fölscher has worked for the SABC and has won a

A Redesign of the Nieman Web Site

With the mission of the Nieman Foundation to "... promote and elevate the standards of journalism and educate persons deemed especially qualified for journalism," our aim on the Nieman Web site is to create a gateway toward that mandate. With that goal in mind, we are working to improve the site, beginning with a complete reconstruction and redesign. This new site will feature a fresh, up-to-date look and approach that balances the needs of the foundation while providing an improved user experience.

At the site, you are able to:

- Read news coverage of our alumni in "Nieman's in the

News" as soon as the information is available.

- Gain easy access to the latest online version of Nieman Reports.
- Learn about upcoming events and conferences sponsored by the foundation.
- Understand and deploy the power of narrative in news writing with "Narrative Digest."

We hope you enjoy exploring the Nieman Foundation Web site during this evolution, and we welcome your comments and suggestions. The site can be accessed at www.nieman.harvard.edu. ■
—Barbara McCarthy, Nieman Web Communications Specialist

number of awards for her journalism and documentary filmmaking. She also conducts workshops on business writing and presentation skills at the London Business School and the Said Business School in Oxford.

—1998—

Phillip Martin, executive producer of Lifted Veils Productions, has embarked on a yearlong project, "The Color Initiative." This series examines the global issues of politics, culture, history and society through experiences related to color. The first report in the series aired in November on Public Radio International and focused on the clothing company Benetton, whose message of integration has come into conflict with immigration realities in modern day Europe. The second report, which is to air in early December, is about race relations in the United States seen through the prism of movies exported to Taiwan. Other reports on color will air in 2008.

Martin is the senior correspondent on the series. Lifted Veils is a Boston-based nonprofit radio journalism organization that explores issues that divide society. You can read about a separate Lifted Veils project in an article Martin wrote for the Fall 2006 issue of Nieman Reports. You can also read his blog at <http://liftedveilsproductions.blogspot.com/>.

—2000—

Kwang-chool Lee is now director of Korean Service, Radio Free Asia, based in Washington, D.C. He had been editor of KBS News, Korea's public service broadcaster. He can be reached at his e-mail address, kclee@rfa.org.

—2002—

Roberta Baskin now leads the investigative unit for WJLA-TV, an ABC affiliate in Washington D.C.. For Baskin, this is a homecoming—she was an investigative reporter at the station in

the 1980's. "I'm excited about coming back. When I reflect on the stories that made a difference, they were almost all in local news," Baskin said in an interview with John Maynard in *The Washington Post*. "The impact was greater because you are part of the community."

Baskin, most recently executive director of the Center for Public Integrity, has won more than 75 journalism awards during her broadcasting career, including two duPont-Columbia and Peabody Awards.

Michele McLellan writes that she completed her work as founding director of "Tomorrow's Workforce" and plans to travel to Cambodia. She will focus on a few consulting projects, including a new one for the Nieman Foundation's Web site, where McLellan will serve as editor for building and launching an interactive site about best practices in journalism. See **Bob Giles's** Curator's Corner on page 3 for more information.

—2006—

Brent Walth, class scribe, has an update on three of his classmates:

Kim Cloete has now taken over as parliamentary editor at South Africa's national public broadcaster, the SABC. She leads a team of television and radio journalists reporting on political and economic developments in South Africa.

Takashi Oshima, while in the Kennedy School of Government's (KSG) midcareer program in 2007, helped translate "Leadership on the Line" by KSG professor Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky, a KSG adjunct lecturer, for a forthcoming Japanese edition. Oshima works for Fujisankei Communications International, a division of Fuji TV, in New York City, where he helps produce a cable news program for Japanese people in the United States.

Altin Raxhimi was part of a six-reporter team who won the first-ever Global Shining Light Award for an inves-

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund has supported a variety of prominent initiatives at the Nieman Foundation since its endowment in November 1996. From 1998-2001, the fund supported four Watchdog Journalism Conferences that focused on the media's role of monitoring those in power as they exert control over public life. Currently, the fund fully supports the Nieman Watchdog Web site. The site was launched in the spring of 2004 and encourages watchdog reporting by drawing on authorities in various fields to suggest questions for the press to ask. Beginning in 2006 and into 2007, an international commentator was added to provide global insights.

The following is an accounting of revenue, expense, and fund balances from November 1, 2006 to October 31, 2007:

Beginning Balance at 11/1/2006	\$123,012.92
Income	
Interest on balance at end of FY07 (7/1/06-6/30/07)	646.26
Endowment Distribution for FY08 (7/1/07-6/30/08)	111,266.06
Fund Decapitalization for FY08 (7/1/07-6/30/08)	75,000.00
Total Income	186,912.32
Expense	
Editor, Intern, Intl. Commentator Fees	142,526.00
Travel/Lodging/Meals	3,144.67
Web site Hosting and Maintenance	3,372.32
Miscellaneous	1,754.38
Total Expense	150,797.37
<hr/> Ending Balance at 10/31/07	<hr/> \$159,127.87

—2007—

tigative series called "Power Brokers," a series that revealed manipulations in the electricity business that caused widespread shortages in Romania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Albania. The Canadian Association of Journalists, which sponsors the award to highlight international investigative reporting, said the series "exposed the questionable power deals cornered by shadowy businessmen operating across the Balkans. These deals brought huge profits to power traders but have resulted in exorbitant electricity rates that impoverished citizens cannot afford."

Alagi Yorro Jallow has been accepted into the Edward S. Mason Program in Public Policy and Management at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government for the 2007-2008 academic year. The Mason Program is a one-year Master in Public Administration degree program designed to give established leaders from developing countries time and opportunity to study the most demanding challenges facing their countries.

Jallow is an exiled Gambian journalist and managing editor and proprietor

of The Independent Newspaper in Banjul, the Gambia, West Africa.

—2008—

Alicia Anstead is one of three women to receive the Maryann Hartman Award, given by the University of Maine Women in the Curriculum and Women's Studies Program. The awards are given "to recognize Maine women whose achievements in the arts, politics, business, education, healthcare and community service provide inspiration for women." Anstead "inspires and teaches by example. Strong, determined and fearless, she is never satisfied with 'good enough' but instead pursues her story to the last possible interview and polishes her writing until it shines," the person who nominated Anstead wrote. Maryann Hartman was associate professor of Speech Communication at the University of Maine and is recognized as an educator, feminist and scholar.

Gaiutra Bahadur received a Media Recognition Award from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and Council for a series of stories she wrote for The Philadelphia Inquirer about Takky Zubeda, an asylum seeker from the Congo. Zubeda had been held in a county jail in Pennsylvania as an immigrant detainee for more than three years, as the government weighed her claims and then appealed a judge's decision to grant her Convention Against Torture protection. She was released after her story ran, and the Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals issued a precedential decision on the grounds for parole for asylum seekers.

Fernando Rodrigues, a columnist and reporter for Folha de S. Paulo in Brazil, the newspaper with the largest daily circulation in that country, received the Comuniquese award for "print media reporter 2006-07." The prize is awarded by a direct vote of journalists from throughout the

country. This year, the organizers of the award reported that a record number of votes were cast, 77,000.

Simon Wilson, editor of the Middle East bureau for BBC News, led a team that won an International Emmy Award in the news category for coverage of the 2006 war in Lebanon. The coverage also won the Prix Monte Carlo international news award. Jon Williams, the BBC world news editor, writes in the online BBC News site that "Last summer's conflict was challenging and complicated for the BBC. It was vital for our teams to get to the heart of the story, report events as they witnessed them, and remain measured and impartial." To do this, "reporters, producers, crews and engineers spent six weeks on both sides of the Israel/Lebanon border." Before Wilson moved to the Middle East bureau, he covered Europe and conflicts in the Balkans. He also has spent time working in Baghdad since the fall of Saddam Hussein. ■

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The People and Spirit of McClellan Street

Two brothers photographed life in a working-class neighborhood and found ‘kinship and camaraderie.’

The following are excerpts from the forward by John G. Morris and introductions to “McClellan Street” by David Turnley (NF '98) and Peter Turnley (NF '01). The three-block long street, which is now mostly destroyed, was in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The book was published in 2007 by the Indiana University Press.

“These photographs of McClellan Street by David and Peter Turnley, taken in 1972-1973, help us understand how America came to be the country that it is today. ... It was a time of war, the war in Vietnam, a war America came to regret.

Some men of McClellan Street fought there. Their children have grown into the adults who, with their children, face yet another unwanted war.

“With its rundown sidewalks and shabby houses, McClellan Street was never America the Beautiful. The photographs are not pretty, in the conventional sense. The street’s residents are not chic or stylish; many go barefoot. But they are beautiful members of the Family of Man. It was a friendly neighborhood, its residents enjoying life’s daily joys, sharing sadness, good weather and bad. It was for those reasons that the Turnley twins

felt at home there and made it their own neighborhood. Their subjects became their friends, proudly displaying Turnley pictures of themselves. This is the street’s family album.... Though the street itself is now an extended parking lot, its spirit, and the spirit of those times, lives on in this book.”
—John G. Morris

“Nineteen seventy-three was a time, as anyone alive with an honest memory would remember, of monumental change accompanied by great tumult in American life. ... It was also, as I remember it, a time of tension, but of



Photo by Peter Turnley.

a tension that seemed to be ultimately a force for much creativity.

“... I grew up in Fort Wayne and discovered [McClellan Street] one summer day in 1973, as my twin brother, David, and I searched for an elderly man who had been in one of our photographs that had won a prize in a Scholastic photography contest. The only way to receive the prize itself was to get a model release from the man featured in the image. I recall being struck immediately by a special sense of community on this hard working-class street where every house had a porch and people yelled back and forth. Adults and children played games together on the sidewalk and in the middle of the street. People lived, laughed, and argued out loud, amongst each other.

“On that day in 1973, my brother and I decided to photograph the life we found on McClellan Street over the course of most of a year. ... In the beginning, David and I shared one camera; one would use it, while the other would sit on a porch and speak to people on the street, and play with, or babysit, their children. Later, we would acquire a second camera so both of us could take pictures at the same time.

“In the evenings and on weekends, we would come home and develop our films and make prints in our basement darkroom.... We liked going to McClellan Street, not because the people there were subjects of some sort of study, but because we ... felt lucky to be around the people of McClellan Street, who offered us kinship and camaraderie. Their zest and spirit, in the face of their often tremendous economic struggles, opened our eyes and offered us inspiration and a sense of direction and a road map for approaching life....”
—Peter Turnley

“At the tail end of the late sixties, a generation was in the streets protesting the war in Vietnam. My sense of the world was of one in turmoil, but one with tremendous idealism. ... The McClellan Street project happened at this formative time of our lives when Peter and I were 17 years old. We are



Photo by David Turnley.

twins and followed an older brother and sister in a family who sat at the dinner table every night, with our parents and our paternal grandmother and great aunt who lived across the street. While growing up in Fort Wayne ... our family was actively engaged in discussion of the national and world affairs of our time.

“... I think that what struck [Peter and me] immediately with the camera was that so much in the world seemed to not make sense. While having been taught that we are all created equal, our city’s neighborhoods were mostly racially and economically divided, with the working-class poor living mostly in

the inner city, and the mostly white, middle and upper classes living on the suburban edge of town.

“I think that through photography we realized we had the ability to document what is equal—dignity, the human spirit—which has nothing to do with race, religion, ethnicity, or economic status. The camera gave us a voice with which to scream, an outlet for our creativity, and a window into a world filled with possibility and adventure....”
—David Turnley ■

Continued on the following pages. No captions for the photographs appear in the book.



Photo by Peter Turnley.



Photo by Peter Turnley.



Photo by David Turnley.



Photo by David Turnley.



Photo by Peter Turnley.



Photo by David Turnley.

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IS LOCAL NEWS THE ANSWER?

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY