

# AlaPressa

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA PRESS ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 2020

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The Decatur Daily sues for access to  
911 transcripts

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APA Journalism Foundation  
Summer Internship with The  
Messenger in Gadsden

Bennett named executive editor in  
Anniston

'Now is not the time to stop talking  
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American Hometown Media deploys  
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## The Decatur Daily sues for access to 911 transcripts

*By Marian Accardi, The Decatur Daily staff writer*

The parent company of The Decatur Daily has sued the Morgan County Emergency Management Communication District, asking that it be required to comply with state law dealing with public records and provide 911 transcripts on a liquor store incident and a triple homicide.

The complaint was filed this week in Morgan County Circuit Court by Tennessee Valley Media. The requested transcripts are "public records subject to public inspection," the lawsuit claims.

"Every citizen in Alabama has the right to documents defined as public records," said Scott Brown, director of operations for Tennessee Valley Media. "Transparency promotes accountability." Brown said that "the Legislature by statute says these transcripts are public documents."

"How can you now say you don't have to disclose them?" he asked. "And now they're going to use the public's money through litigation to further keep the documents from the public."

The lawsuit notes that the state's emergency management districts operate 911 emergency call networks, using public funds from monthly charges on residents' phone bills.

The newspaper is seeking access specifically to 911 transcripts for a March 15 incident in which a caller reported that someone had tried to steal from a Decatur liquor store, with the responding police officer and store owner becoming involved in a physical altercation; and a May 24 triple homicide in the Danville area of Morgan County, in which the alleged suspect turned himself in to authorities on May 26. "Upon information and belief, there were one or more 911 calls made to the district" related to both of the incidents, the suit claims.

The triple homicide was in the Decatur police jurisdiction.

The lawsuit charges that the district's denial of access to the requested documents is in violation of an Alabama code providing that "any written or electronic record detailing the circumstances, response, or other events related to a 911 call which is kept by the emergency communications district in its regular course of business shall be deemed a public writing" under the state's open records law "and subject

to public inspection unless otherwise provided by law."

The complaint claims the district's actions to avoid disclosure of the transcripts "were intended to cause inordinate expense in order to discourage citizens of Alabama from challenging a decision to withhold public records in the future."

"The district's actions indicate it will continue to unilaterally decide when and if 911 transcripts will be disclosed to Alabama citizens in the future based on the objections of the City of Decatur or its law enforcement officers," the lawsuit alleges.

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"Every citizen in Alabama has the right to documents defined as public records. Transparency promotes accountability."

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Shortly after the liquor store incident and triple homicide, Decatur Daily reporters requested written or electronic records, specifically call transcripts, on these incidents from the district, and the district didn't deny the transcripts existed but refused to produce them. In a Sept. 18 letter to the district, TVM attorney Evans Bailey requested the 911 transcripts related to the two incidents within seven days.

The district's attorney, Julian Butler, responded in an email that the Decatur City Attorney's Office informed the district "that their objection to releasing the material you requested at this time is 'pending criminal case and pending civil litigation.' Records regarding pending criminal investigations have long been held as not subject to public disclosure."

Butler could not be reached for comment on the complaint.

Then on Sept. 29, TVM's attorneys emailed Butler asking that the city attorney's office withdraw its objections,

**access continued on page 3**

**access**

continued from page 2

explaining there is no "pending civil litigation" exception to the open records law and the "pending criminal investigation" exception did not apply on its face and based on the plain language of the code, did not apply to the district and did not apply to the transcripts at issue under the circumstances.

"An essential function of TVM is gathering information from public records for publication in The Decatur Daily in order that the workings of public institutions not be conducted in secret but rather be subject to public

review," according to the complaint. "The public is entitled to understand and intelligently consider the affairs of such institutions and cannot do so without access to information from public records."

The district was given an additional seven days to produce the requested records, but did not produce them, according to the complaint.

According to the complaint, the district routinely releases 911 transcripts involving alleged crimes to Tennessee Valley Media when requested, and several examples are cited. "These transcripts were released without regard to the investigative status of any alleged crimes," the suit charges.

The suit further states that none of the requested transcripts are "investigative reports, records, field notes, witness statements or other investigative writings or recordings" generated as part of a criminal investigation which would be protected by law. "The 911 calls which have been transcribed were made before any criminal investigation was begun," according to the lawsuit. "The district is not a branch of law enforcement and cannot borrow a law enforcement privilege from another branch of government."

The lawsuit states that "the fact that public records are collected as part of a criminal investigation does not transform public records into confidential records."



**Tried and true, award winning journalist Greg Markley offers an intelligent, centered opinion column on politics, education and life.**

## On Smart Voting

In the comic strip Pogo, the Possum says: "We have met the enemy and he is us." The enemy is us when we don't even spend 10 minutes to find out about down-ballot candidates. The enemy is us when we see campaign ads and don't try to determine if their claims are true. In the end, as President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "The future of this Republic is in the hands of the American voter." Do your research, and choose wisely. Good luck!

## On Protests vs. Riots

Politicians often try to gain "law and order cred" (credibility) by labeling a peaceful protest as a riot. Don't be gullible to that scam. On my first visit to Faneuil Hall I never imagined it would draw protests 50 years later. Especially not with a pandemic in place! I couldn't imagine the Hall's name would change because Peter Faneuil had slaves. I am delighted that free speech is strong and that we are rectifying past errors.

- Go to [opelikaobserver.com/markley](http://opelikaobserver.com/markley); select any two articles; use them in your newspaper until the end of December, for FREE.
- Starting January 1, you can access any of my new columns every week or a la carte, for a small fee.

**For more information**

**[gm.markley@charter.net](mailto:gm.markley@charter.net) or (334) 742-3041.**

## APA Journalism Foundation Summer Internship with The Messenger in Gadsden

By Emma Kirkemier, Auburn University

*Editor's Note: The APA Journalism Foundation awarded eight \$1,500 internships over the summer. Here is a report from Abby Driggers, summer intern for The Messenger in Gadsden. This is just one example of the benefits of your support of the Foundation. If you have not made a pledge this year, please consider joining other APA member newspapers in supporting the Foundation.*

Reflecting on my experience this summer in my Alabama Press Association internship at The Messenger newspaper in Gadsden, I have learned a lot. While I do work at my university's student newspaper at Auburn, I had not worked as a copy editor until this summer, so I had no experience in interviewing, reporting or writing for a newspaper. When I was brought on board at The Messenger, however, I quickly learned how to do all three and more.

My editor, Chris McCarthy, gradually gave me more responsibility, first allowing me to cover an event with a prewritten set of questions, and later allowing me to research, report and write my own stories. I was given opportunities to take photos to be used in the paper and even to design pages. While I already had an eye for detail, I began to cultivate an eye for overall design and aesthetics in page design.

My interviewing skills grew the most throughout my weeks at The Messenger. I learned the mechanics of recording and note-taking, awkwardly at first, but as I gained experience, I gained confidence. Instead of merely reciting a list of questions, I learned to turn my interviews

into more fluid conversations, taking cues from my interviewees and letting them speak instead of speaking over them with my next question. I became more effective at note taking and more efficient at going back through my recordings.

One of my proudest moments this summer was when I conducted a completely impromptu interview with a speaker at the county commission meeting I was covering. I interviewed her during the meeting's break for an executive session and asked her questions on the fly that contributed later to a well-researched and thorough article on the event her organization was conducting. The event, which was held at the Family Success Center in Gadsden, featured a blood drive, voter registration and assistance for completing the 2020 census. The article, which is also some of my best journalistic writing, would never have existed without that chance meeting and impromptu interview. My editor complimented my reporter instincts, and I believe that sense of who to talk to and when and how, which I was able to use effectively that day, is one of the most valuable tools I have gained through my experience in this internship.

I have gained confidence in my writing and reporting skills. Writing multiple articles enabled me to hone my writing skills, most prominently learning to balance quotes with my own paraphrasing and reporting. I learned how to attribute quotes and titles properly without making a sentence or paragraph unnecessarily clunky. I practiced succinct writing and including comprehensive, but not overwhelming detail. One of my

favorite writing tools has been learning to incorporate quotes and detail in a way that lets the subject or interviewee's voice shine. Highlighting the voices of people and groups in my community has been valuable and empowering. Reporting the news, and in my case, especially the good news, has been a valuable way to serve my community.

One of my favorite aspects of my job as an intern and as a journalist is that if I can write a story about a community event - such as a blood drive or a voting registration event, both of which I have covered - and if I can publicize that event, that perhaps I can encourage a few more people to participate and by doing so do good for my community. In that way, my work in this internship has been doubly rewarding.

I have enjoyed the content of my work, and I am glad to help The Messenger in public service to the Gadsden/Etowah community. I have come to understand the responsibility to their communities that journalists hold and the real and practical need to do truthful and thorough reporting. Interviewing members of my community about things that are important to them, things that I can help to bring more attention and support to, has been the most valuable aspect of my internship to me. Engaging with people, especially in a time when communities are necessarily socially distanced and even isolated, has been a privilege. Working as an intern in a time when many are out of work has also been a privilege and a blessing for which I am thankful. This internship has been a learning opportunity for me in many ways, and I am grateful for it.

## Bennett named executive editor in Anniston

James Bennett is the new executive editor for The Anniston Star and other Consolidated Publishing products. Bennett comes from The Daily Herald in Columbia, Tenn., where he was editor for the last six years.

The Daily Herald is part of GateHouse Media, which acquired the Gannett Company last year. The newspaper won the Tennessee Press Association's General Excellence Award in 2017. Bennett, who studied journalism at the University of Tennessee, won nine



individual first-place awards in nine different categories in press association contests since 2015, ranging from best editorials to best news coverage. The newspaper won more than 60 awards overall.

Anniston Publisher Josephine Ayers said she hired the 59-year-old Bennett because of his experience in print and digital media. Bennett has worked at community and metro newspapers since he was 16, starting as a part-time sportswriter in his hometown of Cookeville.



## Obituaries

## Roy M. Greene, Sr.



Roy M. Greene, Sr., owner of The Citizen of East Alabama in Phenix City, died Sunday, October 4, 2020. He was 99.

He was born in Auburn on March 7, 1921 to Leslie Mitchell Greene and Virgil Roy Greene. The oldest of three children, Mr. Greene lived most of his childhood in Camp Hill, where both of his parents were teachers. The family moved to Phenix City in 1934 when his father took a job as the County Agriculture Extension Agent.

Greene graduated from Columbus High School in 1939. He attended the University of Alabama. There, he was a member of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity; included in the Who's Who in colleges; was a member of the Alabama football team; was a member of the Debate Team; and was elected senior class president, as well as being in other honor societies.

Greene served in the Infantry in the Pacific during World War II, and was discharged as a first lieutenant in 1946. After the war, Mr. Greene returned to the University of Alabama School of Law,

where he earned his law degree. He was a member of the famous class of '48, which was composed mostly of war veterans attending law school on the GI Bill and anxious to make something of their lives. They elected Mr. Greene as the president of the Veterans Association.

After law school, Greene returned to Phenix City and began his law practice. He served as city judge, city commissioner, county attorney, and district attorney for the 26th Judicial Circuit. In 1960, Gov. John Patterson appointed him as lieutenant colonel on his staff. Mr. Greene was elected by a landslide to the state Legislature, but soon he decided to give up politics and become a businessman.

In 1952, Greene gave Phenix City a voice of its own when he founded its first radio station WPNX. He also went on to co-found what is now The Citizen of East Alabama newspaper, further giving the citizens of Phenix City a voice of their own.

After selling WPNX, Mr. Greene purchased F&M Bank of Hartsboro and moved it to Phenix City. There, he operated the bank for several years before selling to Synovus. He was privileged to serve on the Synovus Board of Directors for many years.

In 1964, Greene heard of a new method of delivering television to the home now known as cable TV. He founded a new company, which began operating out of his barn, that is now known as BEAM and is one of the largest independent cable operators in the State of Alabama.

Greene's business accomplishments were many, but he also had a passion for community engagement and believed in helping others. He was a humble man that touched so many lives in this community and will be dearly missed by many.

He is preceded in death by his parents Leslie Mitchell Greene and Virgil Roy Greene; his brother Robert C. Greene; and his son Daniel Greene.

He is survived by his wife of 68 years Janie Moore Greene, his sister EllyAnn Greene Eason, his children Lynne Greene Frakes (Keith), Mitch Greene, and David Greene. His grandchildren Katie Waldrep (Mal), Leslie Anne Jones (Scott), Roy Greene, III, Janie Lynn Greene, Myriell Greene, Leslie Greene, John Daniel Greene, Dudley Greene, and Brooks Greene; and five great grandchildren Mal Waldrep, Jr., Virginia Waldrep, Lola Waldrep, Rosie Jones, and Scott Jones, III.

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## More content available for your news products

In August, we announced a grant program funded by the Alabama Power Foundation and administered by the APA Journalism Foundation for journalists to write stories of statewide interest for use in APA newspapers.

These are for journalists that have been struggling due to layoffs, furloughs or reduced wages during this pandemic. There are now three stories, with photos, available for your use. They are:

- Jasper Mall, written by Nicole Smith, is a story about how one town in Alabama has transformed abandoned mall space into space where nonprofits can

serve the community.

- Rebuild Alabama Act, written by Joyanna Love, covers much needed road improvement projects funded by the Rebuild Alabama Act. The legislation raised the gasoline and diesel taxes by 6 cents a gallon in September of 2019, another 2 cents Oct. 1, 2020, and will happen again Oct. 1, 2021.

- Farm Center, written by Anthony Richards, spotlights this coming tourist attraction in Clanton that is part of the Alfa Centennial Park, with construction to begin in spring of 2021.

There are two more stories in progress.

Retired editor and journalism professor, Steve Stewart, is working with the journalists to help form the stories and edit the final products.

These story and others that will follow are for your use to provide feature stories for your newspapers and websites. You can access the stories on BamaNet on the APA website in the "Journalist Grant Articles" folders.

Contact Felicia (felicia@alabamapress.org) or Leigh Leigh (leigh2@alabamapress.org) with any questions or if you need help logging in. Please let us know when you use these stories.

## Industry

### American Hometown Media deploys CuratorCrowd™ onto all digital properties

American Hometown Media (AHM), a top 15 Inc. 5000 honoree in the digital media, food content and technology category, has partnered with AIM Media out of Dallas, Texas in the rollout of the CuratorCrowd™ Traffic & Engagement Platform.

Built specifically to help digital website's drive audience engagement, increase traffic and earn new, additional revenue, the Trending Content feature of CuratorCrowd™ is a turn-key solution. It generates high-quality recipe content and video through a proprietary platform.

Stephan Wingert, regional vice president/publisher of AIM Media, stated, "These CuratorCrowd recipes and videos have proven to be a big hit with our readers. On our websites people get to see recipes from their neighbors alongside submissions from around the globe. Not only has this partnership increased our website traffic and engagement, we also receive revenue. Launching the program was easy and we are pleased with the results."

"The featured content is from the award-winning and largest collection of user-submitted recipes to AHM's Just A Pinch Recipes," said Jerry Lyles, chief development officer for AHM. "And the revenues associated with the display of this highly desirable content is significant."

This expansion of CuratorCrowd™ follows on the heels of AHM's introduction

of the Recipe Box Plugin™, a powerful cloud-based recipe storage solution for food publisher and blogger websites that increases user engagement and creates an onsite central hub for saved recipes from around the web. That proven technology, based on 8 years of development, already powers over 2 million online recipe boxes with more than 24 million saved recipes from over 24,000 different food sites and blogs.

About American Hometown Media:

CuratorCrowd™  
Your traffic & engagement platform

American Hometown Media (AHM) is the parent company to Just A Pinch Recipes (JustAPinch.com), one of the largest non-major media owned food sites and the largest repository of user-posted recipes on the internet, the Just A Pinch Food Group, a Premium Publisher Group (PPG) for a select group of food-only bloggers, the AHM Ad Management Platform which delivers programmatic monetization of websites for a wide range of verticals including food, lifestyle, tech, and beauty, and CuratorCrowd™ cloud-based technology offerings that increase revenue by driving new traffic, expanding reach, increasing user engagement, enhancing SEO, and growing email lists.

About AIM Media:

AIM Media Texas, LLC was formed

in 2012 by Jeremy L. Halbreich and Rick Starks for the purpose of acquiring Freedom Communications' Texas-based newspapers. In 2015 they formed AIM Media Indiana, LLC, and in 2017 AIM Media Midwest, LLC. These two veterans of the publishing industry of more than 40 years each have focused on local content across all forms of media, including print, digital, direct mail and video.

Today AIM Media groups combined owns and operates 29 daily newspapers and 21 weekly publications along with their corresponding websites with properties in Texas, Indiana, Ohio and West Virginia.

Under their leadership — with Halbreich serving as chairman and CEO, and Starks as president and COO — these companies have kept local communities well informed while also serving the business needs in these regional markets. In all cases, the focus is on local news and information, advertising and marketing services, and commitment to the local communities.

We are the leading information source in our communities. Through our demonstrated integrity and our dedicated and comprehensive approach to balanced and credible journalism, we earn the trust and support of local readers, viewers, businesses and advertisers.

For more information, please contact Halbreich at 214-697-9779 or halbreich@aimmediamgt.com.

## Industry

## Now is not the time to stop talking about COVID-19

By Tom Silvestri, *Relevance Project*

How to survive COVID-19 dominates newspaper conferences and headlines in 2020, but as the pandemic continues a new urgent issue apart from capturing revenue is emerging.

It's mental health.

The care of people's well-being is becoming a more important factor, albeit a tough one, as the pandemic drags us into a ninth month of lockdowns, uncertainty, and continuing to work remotely.

Adding to the anxiety is the raised awareness of an expected second outbreak during the winter and what that could mean.

Concerns about mental health was a somber Relevant Point during the Oct. 21 panel discussion on "COVID Recovery" by the Lineup Systems Thought Leadership program.

The consensus among the panelists from the United States, England and Ireland is that asking for and needing help should be out in the open and companies can't get tired of asking, "Is Everyone OK?"

Investing in people for media companies includes making sure you have a strong Human Resources staff or point person. The Axios@Work newsletter even offered this big picture:

"HR departments across the world have pulled off the incredible feat of turning companies from in-person to remote overnight, and as the pandemic continues to determine the future of work, HR has been elevated from a back-office function to a C-suite conversation."

Newspaper staffs will see more programs address mental health, including those focused on helping weary reporters covering the pandemic — as trusted journalism remains in big demand by readers and communities.

The workforce of the future likely will be a blended or hybrid one based on the pandemic experiences — the flexibility of working at home combined with coming into the office when needed or desired.

Amid the mental health concerns, more people also acknowledge that getting to spend more time at home has been a good thing, even if work and home lives now mesh into one.

Starting in July, COVID-19 has been the keynote at newspaper industry conventions and conferences. Individual webinars by

associations or companies have added to the exploration of solutions and this-point-in-time discussions.

Early on, the focus was on figuring out how to work remotely and recover from a huge decline in April revenue as businesses and economies shut down.

The rush to working at home surprised a lot of managers in how quickly and smoothly it occurred. Those companies with crappy computers and terrible technology struggled, however.

Empathy became an early attitude to adopt when dealing with clients whose businesses were closed and employees forced to adopt Zoom and Slack as new tools.

We also saw a wave of reductions in publication days, the stampede to apply for relief from the government, technology giants and foundations, some newspaper closings, and initial cost-cutting, including furloughs.

During the summer, newspapers were finding success with revenue programs where advertisers applied for "grants" that matched spending dollar-for-dollar to increase their ad presence.

Another positive occurred online as digital subscriptions soared at many newspapers. A regional editor at a major chain remarked that newsrooms finally realized the Internet wasn't a fad.

One of the best summaries of COVID-19 and 2020 was offered by Neil Brown, president of the Poynter Institute, during America's Newspapers' Pivot 2020, a virtual convention.

Among Brown's key findings:

**\*Marketing budgets and advertising are down.**

**\*COVID-19 changed media behaviors, with more streaming of video and greater use of social.**

**\*Publishers are finding markets for new products, with newsletters becoming more valuable in many ways.**

**\*Paid subscriptions can grow, even as the "COVID bump" subsides.**

**\*Audiences want a broad content and are craving non-coronavirus stories and**

**material.**

**\*People are feeling isolated, looking for opportunities to build relationships with businesses and brands they trust.**

Brown then provided several interesting "key takeaways" for the audience to act on. They included:

**\*Depart from the "island of crisis management" and "begin strategy anew."**

**\*Overcommunicate, overcommunicate, overcommunicate your goals. (He may have said it a few more times, but you get the point.)**

**\*And when the goals change, overcommunicate they have.**

**\*Believe in the distinctive. "Do it and make noise about it."**

**\*Stop doing things by doing other things.**

**\* Ruthlessly pursue priorities.**

**\* Invest in your people — "they want a culture of personal growth."**

**\* "If your customer service sucks, you lose."**

He added: Print is now distinct. But don't let that dull your innovation as the world is digital.

Presentations like Brown's are invaluable because we are being pushed to reinvent our businesses and to fight harder for sustaining revenues.

The backdrop is that we can't ignore the unprecedented times.

You know it's weird when people are already lamenting there will be no Christmas party at work this year.

And an advertising leader says a silver lining in the pandemic is hiring really good people from a publication that had to close.

That observation made this comment, repeated several times during conferences, stand out:

"When we come out of this, we'll be stronger."

## Columns

## Pandemic no excuse for lazy reporting



by Jim Pumarlo

Editors and reporters are facing some of their biggest challenges in gathering news during the pandemic. Access to everyday sources is increasingly limited with no relief on the horizon.

Reporters no longer can walk into offices unannounced, and appointments are restricted. Remote work remains the norm at many places.

And don't expect immediate responses to phone calls. Individuals are often consumed by Zoom meetings as the new norm for communications.

Logistics are demanding enough to connect with your regular corps of newsmakers. Then consider everyday readers – the local names and faces who provide so many distinctive stories – who may be approached by a reporter for the first time. They are likely more hesitant – at least extra cautious – as they protect personal health.

Solid reporting still can be done during these extraordinary times, but it takes extra effort. Small and large newspapers are generating excellent stories not only on the pandemic but also on the everyday churn of news.

At the same time, it's disheartening to see those newsrooms that have taken the shortcuts, all to the detriment of substantive content.

- Residents object to a proposal under consideration by a school board. The reporter, watching a TV broadcast of the meeting, quotes the speakers but fails to identify them.

- The primary election determines which candidates for local offices will advance to the general election. Winners are reported – but no vote totals and no apparent attempt to get comments from any of the winners or losers.

- Three longtime city employees retire, representing nearly 100 years of service. The communications director is the sole source for the story, which is basically a brief bio of each employee.

- Any number of announcements from new sports coaches to political candidacies to community ini-

tiatives are handled by press releases only – no conversation with a reporter.

- A major employer reopens after being shut down during the pandemic. The story recites what is on the company's website.

Navigating the pandemic unfortunately has resulted in far too many single-source stories without the benefit of Q&A by reporters. Press releases are published verbatim. Questions are posed, and responses returned via email or text message. Government actions are reported, but there is no follow-up on how decisions affect residents and businesses.

Reporting indeed demands additional effort during the pandemic. It also takes more planning as contacting individuals often requires multiple inquiries.

So take the extra steps. Connect via Zoom or telephone. Zoom offers reporters the option to record and post video of their interviews. Also, digital recording via Zoom offers automatic transcription so reporters can use bits and pieces for tweets, Facebook and other social media, and video clips for YouTube. Meet face to face, wearing a mask and practicing social distancing. In-person interviews allow reporters to describe the environment and elaborate on details that distinguish feature stories.

At minimum, reporters need to be honest and transparent with readers. Let them know the nature of the "interviews" – whether information is gathered by an exchange of emails or text messages, participation in a virtual event, or watching a broadcast.

And don't forget the long-term impact of lackadaisical reporting. Sources will become accustomed to "feeding" stories word-for-word to reporters and may well be more reluctant to engage in an interview.

I remain a firm believer that local newspapers have an edge in the fractured media landscape by being the premier clearinghouse of information in your communities. Your newspaper family represents a valuable, collective set of eyes and ears. But you must use those resources to remain the go-to source for news and advertising.

Consider this event that caught the attention of an entire town and was reported in media across the state.

A speeding vehicle crashed into a historic building causing extensive damage to the business and upstairs apartments. The building was immediately condemned until next steps were determined. Onlookers streamed to the site; roads were closed.

The post went up on the newspaper's website. The report included comments from an eye witness to the crash, but otherwise relied solely on press releases.

Two days later, the same two stories appeared verbatim in the print edition. Still no interview with the business owner, the employees present when the accident occurred, or the upstairs tenants who felt the building shake. No identification of the displaced residents or information about assistance for temporary shelter. No mention of fundraising efforts or accompanying contact information. No initial dollar estimate of the damage. The fundamental 5Ws and H of all stories were nonexistent in the report.

For other aggressive reporters, what is the tool you'll use for your live channel? When a story breaks, how fast can you be there live and broadcast in real time? Do you have a URL set up, and do your readers know about it?

Then consider other missed opportunities for the newspaper to shine in its coverage and distinguish itself from competing media. Connect with the building inspector and an engineer to offer perspective on how such a crash resulted in such extensive damage. Chronicle the origins and tenants of the building, one of the more historic structures in the downtown. Work with city officials to videotape the damage and post it on the website. You can add to the list.

Newspapers across the country are fighting for their survival due to economic repercussions of COVID-19. Circumstances have prompted editors and publishers to regularly promote the message: "We're here 24/7 reporting on the stories in your community."

Such pronouncements are only as persuasive as the supporting evidence.

*Jim Pumarlo writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He can be reached at [jim@pumarlo.com](mailto:jim@pumarlo.com).*



## Columns

## Lessons from other advertising sources



*Ad-libs  
by John Foust*

As a co-founder of Southwest Airlines, Herb Kelleher was focused on innovation and efficiency. According to legend, he once took his executive team to the Indianapolis 500 to study the pit crews. He wanted to see if some of their techniques could help Southwest's ground crews reduce turnaround times at the gates.

Kelleher knew there was a lot to learn from outside sources. It's the same in the newspaper industry. For example, let's take a look at what can be learned from some other advertising vehicles.

1. Billboards: An outdoor sign has to grab attention immediately. As drivers pass by at highway speeds, it has one shot to attract readership. As a result, the words should be few (aim for eight words or less) and bold. And the graphic element should be big and simple.

Like billboards, newspaper ads should be easy to read at a glance.

2. Television/video: With the one-two punch of sight and sound, TV is tailor-

made for the human side of storytelling. Customer testimonials are especially effective here. Newspaper advertisers can follow that example by featuring testimonials in online as well as print editions. That would strengthen campaign continuity.

3. Magazines: One of the most striking lessons from magazines is the way they use color. In addition to color photographs and illustrations, they usually feature a high percentage of four-color and spot color ads. In fact, color seems to be the price of admission to be noticed in many magazines.

4. Radio: It's all about the right voice. If the tone, enunciation and pacing are not clear, the message will be lost. In the newspaper business, this translates to typography – which has been called “the voice of print.” If the type is difficult to read, even the most brilliantly written copy will be wasted.

5. Yellow Pages: The strength of Yellow Page advertising is in its directness and simplicity. There's usually no doubt about what Company XYZ does, because the book is categorized by business type. And consumers don't have to go on a scavenger hunt to find phone numbers. After all, it's a phone directory.

Newspaper advertisers would be wise to strive for this kind of clarity.

6. Point-of Purchase: Store displays are strategically placed to generate as much attention as possible. How many times have you gone into a store to buy Product A and ended up buying product B, too – because an aisle display caught your eye? And don't forget impulse items, like candy bars and mints at the checkout counter.

Urgency is a key factor in point-of-purchase. Newspaper advertisers can establish similar urgency with time-sensitive sales and product scarcity (“Only six new homes left”).

7. Direct mail: “Target audience” is the key phrase here. A mail campaign can aim messages at accountants, real estate brokers, or restaurant owners. While newspapers can't target readers to that degree, they can strive to address ads to certain demographic groups in copy themes. And many can use zoned coverage to reach specific geographic areas.

*John Foust conducts training programs for newspaper advertising professionals. E-mail for information: [john@johnfoust.com](mailto:john@johnfoust.com)*

## Into the Issues



*Into the Issues  
by Al Cross*

Just as some people are tiring of taking precautions against the novel coronavirus, helping it spread, I'm sure some newsrooms are tiring of covering it. And that helps it spread, too, by making it seem less of a threat, and discouraging precautions.

And I fear that some newsrooms aren't just tired of covering the pandemic, but have scaled back their coverage because of objections from people who think the pandemic is overblown or even a hoax.

Let me be quick to say that I haven't seen such a trend in the newspapers I read regularly, but I tend to read high-quality newspapers, so that's not probative evidence.

What I do know is that news organizations all over the country are getting

pushback.

“No matter how carefully we report . . . for the first time, our readers are questioning the credibility of our reporting on the virus, and that's dismaying,” said Les Zaitz, editor-publisher of the weekly Malheur Enterprise in eastern Oregon.

Zaitz made the comment on a panel during the Society of Professional Journalists conference this month, and I followed up with him via email.

“We consistently have people telling us they don't believe the numbers we report about total coronavirus infections, and the positive testing rate,” he wrote. “They accuse us of being in league with government officials to overstate the cases. Some say this is to affect more government control over people. We cite our sources, link to those government sources, and regularly explain the data in plain terms.”

He added, “We also get pushback in reporting on when government imposes restrictions (limiting restaurants, for in-

stance). We are accused of fearmongering and trying to panic people. Again, we clearly cite our sources.”

I got similar reports from some editors of Landmark Community Newspapers, with the help of Editorial Director John Nelson, who surveyed them at my request.

“The most intense feedback has been on social media, specifically Facebook,” wrote Editor Hugh Willett of the Roane County News in East Tennessee. “We are posting the regular updates on positive cases, deaths, etc., that come from the county mayor's office. These posts generate a large number of responses and quickly deteriorate into name calling over mask use, government overreach, etc.”

“We have gotten a lot negative feedback on Facebook,” wrote Editor Travis Jenkins of The News & Reporter in Chester, S.C.

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"Lots of folks calling it the 'pandemic' and so forth. Lots of people arguing masks don't work, it infringes on their rights, and such as that. Anytime we post anything about mask ordinances or covid, it goes berserk."

Ben Sheroan, who edits one of Landmark's two dailies, The News-Enterprise in Elizabethtown, Ky., wrote that the paper "sees a lot of rude remarks and argumentative interaction on posts about daily covid reports and other covid-related stories."

Sheroan said the paper has sometimes changed its coverage "by simply being responsive to questions raised. For example, adding the positivity rate in a subsequent daily report, or providing data about the number of people hospitalized in a neighboring county. We have found sources to do stories about people who have lost family members or suffered illness."

The stories of the sick are important, to impress upon skeptical readers that covid-19 is a real disease, and a tough one. Leads can come from social media. That's what the weekly Licking Valley Courier in

West Liberty, Ky., did when a county official posted on Facebook, "For those who don't think covid-19 is real, it is. I tested positive."

Editor Miranda Cantrell put a note at the end of her story about the official's post, asking other victims to tell their stories, because locals wonder "whether the effects are as severe as mainstream media outlets have reported."

Yes, they do wonder about the effects, but they are more likely to trust a local news outlet than one based somewhere else, so local editors and reports have a responsibility to tell the story of the pandemic and not flinch from friction or fatigue.

"Our main obligation is to give information to the public that's authoritative, truthful and important," Rick Berke, executive editor of Stat, said during another SPJ session. He said it's "urgent" to write more stories "about how bad this is and how it affects people."

Berke, who covered politics for The New York Times, recalled that covering the topic after the 2001 terrorist attacks "was really hard because everyone was so nice to each other," so he was shocked to see the pandemic "become so politicized."

Another editor in the session, Steve Riley of the Houston Chronicle, said some readers are suspicious of national newspapers. He said anytime his paper publishes a front-page story from the Times or The Washington Post, both of which President Trump has attacked, it gets "emails that seem scripted from Fox News . . . It's our job to cut through the crap and provided unfettered, straight, reliable news, no matter where it falls."

Times science correspondent Donald McNeil Jr. said, "Every organ of government has been corrupted in this pandemic. Our role in this pandemic has been more important in many more crises in this country because there has been such an effort to suppress the truth, and we're fighting that."

Riley advised, "Be engaged with your critics." He said he tries to "explain in a calming way the role that we have. . . the folks will at least nod their head and appreciate the response."

*Al Cross is director of the University of Kentucky's Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, which publishes The Rural Blog at <http://irjci.blogspot.com>.*

## Help Wanted

### Feature Writer/Managing Editor - Alexander City

Tallapoosa Publishers, Inc., has an exciting opportunity available in our award-winning magazine division. TPI publishes two monthly magazines – Lake and Lake Martin Living; one quarterly magazine – Elmore County Living; and five annual special editions: Horizons and the FYI Newcomers' Guide in Elmore County and Parade, The South's Best Kept Secret Newcomers' Guide and Dadeville magazine in Tallapoosa County. We are looking for an excellent, accurate feature writer who can transition very quickly into a managing editor's position. Prefer journalism or English degree with magazine, social media, video and website experience and great face-to-face communication skills who can meet deadlines and engage our readers in the Central Alabama and Lake Martin communities and beyond. Please send resume and writing samples to [editor@lakemartinmagazine.com](mailto:editor@lakemartinmagazine.com).

### Reporter- Mobile

Lagniappe, Mobile's largest independent weekly newspaper, seeks a news reporter to join our award-winning team of journalists. Ideal candidate would be familiar with the Mo-

bile area (or willing to get up to speed quickly), not afraid to ask tough but fair questions and possess excellent writing skills. This position will have some assigned beats but enterprise, feature and investigative reporting are what have made Lagniappe one of the best newspapers in Alabama and the Southeast. We are not looking to fill the typical cop shop, public meeting beat you might expect at a smaller newspaper. We believe in digging deep and going after big stories. We also believe in objectivity. We don't back away from tough stories, and we tell them fairly without a political agenda. Social media, videography/editing, multimedia skills a plus. Please email resume and writing samples to publishers [atrice@lagniappemobile.com](mailto:atrice@lagniappemobile.com) and [rhobert@lagniappe-mobile.com](mailto:rhobert@lagniappe-mobile.com).

### City Editor - Florence

The Times Daily, an award-winning newspaper, is looking for a full-time city editor who can help drive digital and print growth in a bustling north Alabama region. The city editor will help develop less experienced as well as veteran reporters. The successful candidate must be willing to evolve as news delivery changes.

### Responsibilities:

- Supervises reporting staff of three
- Plans and executes reporting for digital and print breaking, watchdog, and enterprise news
- Conducts daily planning meetings with staff
- Creates daily and Sunday web and news budgets
- Assigns local content for front page and Region front page
- Shares daily copy-editing responsibilities with the executive editor
- Selects wire stories daily and helps handle copy flow to the remote desk
- Assists with reporting and writing stories and filling voids when reporters are out for vacation/sick days, prioritizing time to tackle only major stories
- Manages the newsroom while the executive editor is out of the office
- Works some nights and weekends

### Required Qualifications:

- 10 years combined reporting and editing experience
- Experience in daily journalism reporting, management, and digital media

Qualified candidates should send three writing samples, cover letter, and resume to: Gary Maitland, Times Daily, 219 W. Tennessee St., Florence, AL 35630; or email to [gary.maitland@timesdaily.com](mailto:gary.maitland@timesdaily.com). EO/EE