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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA PRESS ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 2018

Important Dates

Publisher Statement
Remit to APA Deadline
October 31

2019 APA Media
Summit
February 8
Renaissance Marriott
Montgomery, AL

2019 APA Summer
Convention
June 27-29
Perdido Beach Resort

Online Media Campus
November 8
[5 In 24: Ideas To Grow Your
Business](#)
Presenter: Michael Libbie

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JMS offering journalism to middle school
students

Using social media as a sales tool makes
sense, but don't forget the personal touch

Into the Issues

Caring for our readers

Too many opinions spoil a presentation

You could win free pizza from APA



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Nominate someone for APA's Lifetime Achievement and Emerging Journalists awards

The APA board of directors is seeking nominations for the Alabama Press Association Lifetime Achievement and Emerging Journalist Awards for 2019.

The Lifetime Achievement recognizes outstanding service and accomplishments spanning a career in journalism in Alabama. The honorees will be recognized at the APA Media Summit on Feb. 8, 2019 at the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel and Spa.

For Lifetime Achievement, APA members may nominate any person who, at the time of selection, is a living, present or former newspaper executive or employee of a newspaper in Alabama. Nominees must have spent a significant percentage of their newspaper careers in Alabama. Nominees must also have a minimum of 25 years of service in the newspaper industry and may not be nominated by a family member. Areas of service include production, editorial, advertising and circulation.

This will be the second year APA has presented the Emerging Journalist Award, which was designed to recognize a young journalist with excellence in the field and someone who maintains high standards of quality and ethics. The award aims to reinforce the importance of a journalist's role by recognizing and nurturing talent to promote quality journalism.

Nominees must be an employee or regular contributor to an APA-member newspaper. This award is open to nominees younger than 30 with less than five years of experience writing professionally for a newspaper. It will also be presented on Feb. 8 in Montgomery.

The selection committee will consist of APA's four officers and two additional board members. Nomination forms are available at <https://www.alabamapress.org/contests-awards/emerging-journalist/> and <https://www.alabamapress.org/lifetime-achievement/>

Annual awards name change and important dates

The former 'Better Newspaper Contest' will now be called the 'APA Media Awards' (AMA). This was done in consideration of the contestants that compete in expanded categories which include digital and magazine subjects.

After hearing from our members regarding the best timeline allowing for compilation and entries, the contest will be open for entries on December 20, 2018.

APA is now calling for judges (a requirement to enter the AMA contest) for our 2019 contest partner, the Illinois Press Associa-



tion. The judging will be assigned in early February, 2019 and be due March 11, 2019. Visit <http://ilpress.formstack.com/forms/ipa-judge2019> to sign up as a judge in either editorial or advertising categories.

New owner at The Blount Countian

Aimee Wilson has purchased The Blount Countian in Oneonta, after the death of previous owner, Rob Rice, who passed away in April of this year. Wilson will be the third female owner of the 126-year-old newspaper.

Rice purchased the newspaper from Molly Howard in 2010. The Blount Countian was founded in 1894 by Forney G. Stephens, a relative of Molly Howard, as The Southern Democrat. The name was changed in 1989 to The Blount Countian.

Wilson has a journalism degree from Auburn University and was the chamber of commerce director for Oneonta-Blount County prior to purchasing the newspaper.



In the photo to the left, Wilson is standing with Patsy Britt, a cousin of Molly Howard, who is holding a picture of Howard in front of a painting of Howard's mother, Mary Howard.

In her column during National Newspaper Week, Wilson wrote, "I'm obsessed with newspapers. Always have been. I've loved reading the stories of people, places, and things as long as I can remember...Newspapers across the nation continue to be the leading source of reliable information in all the communities they serve."

The desk in the painting is still at the newspaper office, and Wilson says she plans to use it in honor of the two women who have owned the newspaper in the past.

Marshall County papers join forces to host debate

Newspapers in neighboring towns may seem like competitors, but they can also cooperate on a project to help educate the public about something like politics.

That's what happened on Oct. 16 in Marshall County. The Advertiser-Gleam, The Arab Tribune and The Sand Mountain Reporter – all long-time papers with strong readerships – joined forces to host the 2018 Marshall County Political Debate at Guntersville Town Hall. The newspapers also got a radio station, Fun 92.7 out of Arab, involved. Fun 92.7 broadcast the debate live.

Over 130 spectators attend-

ed the debate, nearly filling the venue. It featured all the local candidates on the Nov. 6 general election ballot - coroner, District 27 representative, county school superintendent; and two county school board seats.

There was a slight technical glitch in the beginning of the proceedings when it was determined there were not enough microphones, but that was quickly remedied, and the debate drew rave reviews from those attending.

Representatives of the three newspapers – Anthony Campbell of the Gleam, Charles Whisenant of the Tribune and Kim Patterson

of the Reporter – met 10 days ahead of the debate and worked out the questions to be asked.

The Advertiser-Gleam is owned by Tennessee Valley Media Inc, The Arab Tribune by Reed Publishing and The Sand Mountain Reporter by Southern Newspapers.

A citizen, Kerry Chatham, owner of Team Wealth Solutions, served as the moderator for the debate.

The newspapers often assist one another in various editorial efforts, and they hope to collaborate on more community events like the debate in the future.

Archibald and Wright honored at Auburn University

John Archibald and Barnett Wright were honored recently at the Auburn University Journalism Advisory Council 14th Annual Awards Luncheon and Ceremony.

Archibald received the Roy Bain Distinguished Special Achievement in Journalism Award. He was awarded the 2018 Pulitzer Prize in Commentary earlier this year.

Archibald graduated in journalism from the University of Alabama. While in school, he was a copy editor and editorial page editor at the student newspaper, The

Crimson White.

He began working at The Birmingham News in 1986. He has been a government reporter covering City Hall and investigative reporter, before starting his column in 2004.

Wright received the Distinguished Alabama Community Journalist award. He is currently the executive editor of The Birmingham Times.

Wright came to Alabama in 2000 and became a reporter for The Birmingham News. He cov-

ered county and city governments, and spearheaded the commemorative coverage of the al.com/The Birmingham News civil rights movement in Birmingham and wrote a book, "1963: How the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement Changed America and The World," published by Alabama Media Group.

Wright joined The Birmingham Times in 2016, and the newspaper won first place this year for General Excellence among African-American newspapers.

Former UA dean publishes book

Former dean of the University of Alabama College of Communication and Information Sciences and journalism professor, Dr. Ed Mullins, has published a book with his brother, Southern Brothers.

Ed Mullins, the journalist/educator, and Dick Mullins, the lawyer, collaborated to write about growing up in south Alabama where Dick was quarterback of the undefeated Enterprise Wildcats (10-0), and Ed had been the quarterback of the defeated Enterprise Wildcats (0-

10) a few years earlier.

"Mostly it is about our small-town life's experiences and work experiences (ranging from picking cotton to trying a case in court, to practicing and teaching the art/craft of journalism)," Ed Mullins said. "Some of you will find your names in the book as I tried to include a few of the hundreds of journalism students, journalists and journalism educators I've worked with over the years, many of whom made far greater marks on the field



of journalism than I did."

To read more and to purchase the book, visit southernbrothers-book.com.

AL.com and Reckon unveil Chasing Corruption

Chasing Corruption is a new Facebook Watch Video produced by al.com, Reckon and Alabama Media Group. It is a weekly series that looks at corruption throughout America as uncovered by the hard-working investigative journalists throughout the country.

The series is directed and hosted by Ian Hoppe, a video editor at Alabama Media Group, and produced by Marsha Oglesby, a Hollywood film and television producer who recently moved to Birmingham.

The Reckon team travels across the country to meet some of America's toughest watchdog journalists and relay the stories of conspiracy, bribery and fraud they have uncovered.

In each video, Hoppe introduces a case of corruption, shows how a local journalist investigated and reported it, then talks about what happened next. "So far, 'Chasing Corruption' has brought in more than 800,000 views for the stories of a sneaky sheriff in Kentucky, a vote-suppressing governor in Alabama and



"The series uses video, animation and a dash of humor to show that local investigative reporting comes from newsrooms of all sizes and from journalists of all backgrounds. 'Chasing Corruption' doesn't just show corrupt elected officials, either, but how systematic corruption impacts whole communities."

a dangerously negligent and well-paid housing official in Illinois," Kristen Hare reports for the Poynter Institute. "The series uses video, animation and a dash of humor to show that local investigative reporting comes from newsrooms of all sizes and from journalists of all

backgrounds. 'Chasing Corruption' doesn't just show corrupt elected officials, either, but how systematic corruption impacts whole communities."

One of the first episodes was about the Atlanta Public School system where a team of journalists at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution uncovered a massive cheating scandal where teachers were changing standardized test scores to improve average scores.

In this case, the reporting resulted in 35 teachers and administrators being indicted and 11 convictions, carrying as many as 20 years in prison. [Click here](https://www.facebook.com/ChasingCorruption/videos/778362419162461/) to view the video (or visit <https://www.facebook.com/ChasingCorruption/videos/778362419162461/>)

The series is an example of why local reporting and the use of open records is so important. In the Atlanta Public School case, it was the children that stood to lose the most if the corruption was allowed to continue. It likely would have if not for the investigative reporting of the AJC.

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JMS offering journalism to middle school students

Editor's note: This story, written by Caroline Carmichael, first speared in The Clanton Advertiser on July 20, 2018.

Jemison Middle School has consulted creativity to bring students new elective options, this year offering a journalism program to seventh and eighth graders.

The goal? To hone writing and grammar skills of students while enhancing their other coursework.

"In journalism, you write a lot," JMS Principal Kendall Jackson, who was a journalism major in college, said.

"I'm hoping that we see that transition into their other classes — that their writing skills improve, because you've got to be able to do some basic sort of writing before you can write an English paper, before you can write a piece in your science class or a research paper in history."

The seventh-grade course, instructed by Ashlin Castleberry, concentrates on print journalism and is intended to build into the eighth grade broadcast journalism course taught by Shonda Copen.

"A lot of students don't understand: if you can't write a story, you

can't do a broadcast piece," Jackson said. "Somebody has to write that story."

The print journalism course will focus on the basic framework of writing, while the broadcast journalism course will focus primarily on creating broadcast pieces.

Jackson said the two classes may work together, particularly if the

"A lot of students don't understand: if you can't write a story, you can't do a broadcast piece. Somebody has to write that story."

classes explore photojournalism. Broadcast students can take photos and footage for the print journalism students to caption with stories.

Students will be trained to better discern newsworthiness and report facts, producing a consistent newsletter and potentially an arts magazine in the future — designed to showcase student artwork from various projects throughout the year. "I have these ideas of where I want to go," Jackson said, adding that some expectations may be too extensive to tackle with the first run-through of the program. "We're just

going to start at the bottom, and we're going to start working to meet those expectations."

Community spotlights highlighting local businesses, business owners and community members are anticipated to be regular projects for the students.

"It's about their school and what they see going on in their school.

It's not necessarily what we're telling them to see. But they will be writing on what they have going on in their school and in their community, and they will spotlight what's important to them," Jackson said. "I want this to be a way to give our students a voice."

Update from JMS: "The students have learned basic terminology and have been working on writing original pieces, interviewing, and creating a layout, Instructor Ashlin Castleberry said. "We are hoping to publish our first paper in two weeks. Students have the opportunity to sign up for sections that interest them, and they write articles that will fit within that section. We also have editors for each section and an editor in chief."

New name. Same game.

THE APA BETTER NEWSPAPER
CONTEST IS NOW THE APA
MEDIA AWARDS.

Open for entries on December 20, 2018.



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Media
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Print | Digital | Magazine

People

Nick Hall is the new sports writer at the Mountain Valley News in Rainsville. Hall is a lifelong resident of Rainsville and spent 20 years as an educator. He has spent the last five years with the Alabama Department of Labor before joining the newspaper.

Kim Kirk is the new sales manager at the News Journal, the Consoli-

dated Publishing newspaper covering Jacksonville and Piedmont areas in Calhoun County.

Kirk is a Spring Garden native and a graduate of Piedmont High School and Jacksonville State University with a bachelor's degree in marketing.

Kirk joined Consolidated in 2002, and has worked in several positions, most recently as national account manager.

Michael Tonder has joined the staff at The Monroe Journal as a staff writer. Tonder is a native of Excel and a graduate of the University of South Alabama. He earned a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law and practiced law in Mobile from 2004 to 2018, after which he and his family returned home to Monroe County.

Help Wanted

Opelika-Auburn News-Press Operator

The Opelika-Auburn News has an immediate opening an experienced press operator for a seven day a week publication. Work includes nights and weekends and wages will be based on experience. The Opelika-Auburn News is a BH Media newspaper located near Auburn University. Must have good mechanical ability; Job Skills: Must be capable of performing physical tasks for at least eight hours per shift. Involves standing for long periods of time with repetitive lifting, pushing and pulling of heavy materials (up to 75 lbs). Must also be capable of repetitive climbing, stooping and bending; Hearing, eyesight (including ability to see colors), ability to understand and follow instructions, follow safety rules and work in a safe manner around moving equipment are required. Minimum Education: High school graduate or equivalent. Company benefits including medical, dental, vision, paid vacation, and 401K. Pre-employment drug and background screen required. EOE/M/F/MV; you may apply online at www.bhmginc.com.

General Assignment Reporter-Selma, AL

The Selma Times-Journal, an award-winning daily newspaper in west central Alabama, has an immediate opening for a general assignment reporter to report on a variety of beats including county/city government, cops/courts, features and much more. The position offers an excellent opportunity for advancement within our parent company, Boone Newspapers, Inc. (www.boonenewspapers.com). The successful candidate must be organized, have an optimistic personality, enjoy meeting new people and understand what

makes a community newspaper important to its readers. They must also enjoy small town life, getting involved in the community they serve while practicing true community journalism. Interested candidates should send resume, cover letter, references, work samples and salary requirements to Will Whaley, Managing Editor, The Selma Times-Journal at will.whaley@selmatimesjournal.com.


Managing Editor-Alexander City, AL

Nationally recognized, progressive newspaper that has successfully blended print and social media, the Alexander City (Ala.) Outlook wants you. We are strong and growing, producing quality local journalism, compelling design and exceptional sports coverage for a dynamic area.

Our properties include 5 community newspapers located around Lake Martin in east central Alabama; The Alexander City Outlook, a five-day daily; a twice weekly; and four weeklies, The Wetumpka Herald, the Tallassee Tribune, The Eclectic Observer and The Dadeville Record and associated websites. The successful candidate will help us move the organization forward with strong leadership skills, have a vision of our continued integration of print and social media, be able to identify and develop talent and be willing to become immersed in our communities. The ability to write, edit and contribute to the daily product when needed is essential. Pagination skills are helpful but not required.

Pay commensurate with experience, excellent benefits package and opportunity to advance based on performance. E-mail resume to steve.baker@alexcityoutlook.com.

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Deaths

Claude E. Sparks

From the Franklin County Times 9/25/18

Former Franklin County Times owner and Alabama Press Association Past President Claude E. Sparks, 89, passed away Sept. 19 at his home in Huntsville.

Sparks is survived by his wife of 66 years, Anne Weldy Sparks; daughter, Amy Sparks Epps (Bruce) of Huntsville; son, Thomas Weldy Sparks of Birmingham; two granddaughters, Dr. Sarah Grace Epps and Emily Anne Epps; and daughter-in-law, Lisa Sparks of Hazel Green. He was preceded in death by his beloved son, Joseph Andrew Sparks.

Sparks was born Feb. 16, 1929, in Imboden, Ark., to the late Lucy and Claude E. Sparks Sr.

He graduated from the University of Missouri with a bachelor's degree in journalism. His lifelong career was in the newspaper business, which started with delivering newspapers for the Arkansas Gazette in Imboden and working at the Jonesboro Sun in Jonesboro. Post-college, he worked for several newspapers in Arkansas and Texas before moving to Russellville in 1953 to establish The Franklin Citizen along with Arthur F. Slaton of Moulton.

Sparks was a committed journalist, dedicated to bringing superior news coverage to Franklin County. Dec. 24, 1953, following his pur-



chase of the Franklin County Times, he published an editorial that read, "It is our earnest desire to serve you to a greater degree in the next and succeeding years. We serve you honestly to the best of our abilities. We are appreciative of your patronage, whether you are a reader, a subscriber, an advertiser or a resident. Plans are now being made for acquisition of modern machinery and equipment to serve you better in the coming years. These changes will be made as rapidly as possible."

In 1965 Sparks purchased Slaton's interest in the newspaper and remained the publisher until 1978, when he sold the business to James B. Boone Jr. The Times is owned by Boone Newspapers Inc., to this day.

"Claude Sparks was a great man by any measure, among them his accomplishments as a reporter, editor and publisher, businessman, citizen and family man. He had the courage to match his convictions, and at times that was not easy. His understanding of people and his love for Russellville and Franklin County were among his many outstanding traits," said James B. Boone Jr., chairman of the board of Boone Newspapers and a former publisher of The Tuscaloosa News. "Claude set high standards for us all, and he was a man I admired and respected over many years.

One hurts in the loss to a community of a friend like Claude Sparks."

Sparks served as the president of the Alabama Press Association in 1976; served as chairman of a committee to pass an ad valorem tax to build a new high school for Russellville; served on a three-man committee to settle a violent strike at a Russellville apparel plant, which saved 300 jobs and \$3.5 million payroll for Russellville; and received a community service award from the Alabama Press Association as a result.

"Claude Sparks made a significant impact on the newspaper industry in Alabama during his career at the Franklin County Times in Russellville and the Red Bay News," APA President Kenneth Boone said. "He was president of APA in 1976 and led with a group of association officers who set an example for those who followed him."

Sparks was also awarded U.S. Steel Corporation's weekly newspaper "Alabama Journalist of the Year" in 1964. His editorial page took on several other community issues, including the retirement of the party-line telephone system and the effort to fluoridate the water system in Russellville, both of which ended successfully.

"We enjoyed hearing from Mr. Sparks at the APA office from time to time. He remained interested in the association and in our newspapers," APA Executive Director Felicia Mason said.

Graveside services were held Saturday, Sept. 22 in Russellville.

Cindy West McGregor

Cindy West McGregor died October 1, 2018 at her home in Adler Springs. She was 56.

She was a journalist for The Gadsden Times and later The Advertiser-Gleam, and was known for her love of animals and travel.

McGregor grew up in Alder Springs and graduated from Albertville High School. She attended Samford University and the Uni-

versity of Alabama in Birmingham. She worked many years as the Marshall County correspondent for The Gadsden Times before joining the staff of The Advertiser-Gleam.

Cindy had no children of her own, but considered her dogs



her beloved "fur babies." She often told of the misdeeds of her pets Moose, Bella and Buffalo in her newspaper column entitled "The One Thing." Her columns about her animals were among her best and most widely read works.

Using social media as a sales tool makes sense, but don't forget the personal touch.



by Brad English
APA

At my sister-in-law's after rehearsal dinner, my father-in-law stood up to welcome the guests and introduce some of the family members. "My wife and I have been married 23 wonderful years," he said. "We've actually been married 28 years, but only 23 of them have been wonderful." We laughed. And many of us can quietly relate.

So it is with relationships. And fostering strong relationships is important, if not critical, to the health of any organization, institution or business. Strong relationships provide a bridge to effective communication, trust and openness. All of which are key ingredients to success in sales.

And speaking of relationship building, it seems social media is becoming a valuable tool for many sales people. Not only are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn used to keep tabs on our friends, but more and more successful sales reps are finding leads through social media.

Jim Keenan, the social sales specialist and contributing author of the book *The Rise of Social Salespeople*, argues that using social media to sell increases profits. His firm released a study that supports his arguments. Consider that over half (54%) of the respondents who used social media tracked its usage to at least one "closed deal." Over 40% say it contributed to two or more sales, with 10% indicating it is the single biggest

factor in closing the sale. But the most telling statistic is that 78.6% of those using social media to sell, out-performed those he didn't. By the way, the top social selling sites are, in order, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

ing rep was a "follower" of hers on Twitter and managed to parlay this nugget of knowledge into an appointment of his own.

Now, for those managers that are cringing over the prospect of seeing your sales reps spending all of their time on Facebook, fear not. 50.1% of sales people who report using social media as a sales tool say it takes up less than 10% of their selling time.

But for all of the advances technology allows, there is still no replacing the personal touch. A handwritten thank you note. Or perhaps something completely unexpected and unnecessary.

Three and a half years ago I took a spill in a Publix that resulted in a long and painful shoulder surgery and rehab. Some folks who didn't have to, took the time to send a "get well soon" plant. It was a gesture I've never forgotten.

A few weeks ago I sent a plant just like it to my buddy as a house-warming gift. It was really a preemptive "get out of jail free" card to all of us who will frequently take advantage of her gracious hospitality this football season.

So while there's certainly a place for utilizing social media as a sales tool, be careful that your sales reps don't allow it to become a crutch or an excuse to actually stop by for a face-to-face meeting. There will never be a replacement for

the human, personal touch. After all, that's what relationships are all about.

Brad English is advertising manager for APA. He can be reached at 205.871.7737 or email him at brad@alabamapress.org



I ran across an interesting story of one woman who was a media director at a prominent agency. After being harassed by one media rep about getting an appointment, she went to her Twitter account to complain the rep "was so annoying." Just so happens a compet-

Into the Issues



by Al Cross

For the next month, most community newspapers will be busy covering election campaigns, and most of those will limit their coverage to local races. But state and federal offices are also on the ballot, and nationally the mid-term elections are shaping up as a referendum on one of the most controversial presidents ever. That could have a spillover effect on state and even local races.

Elections have always involved claims and counterclaims, and an essential part of political coverage is separating fact from fiction, and let voters know when they are being misled. But things are different this time, because the whole idea of independent journalism in search of truth is under attack. It's time for newspapers to reclaim their role as the main finders and arbiters of fact, and not just locally.

Community newspapers exist for the benefit of their communities, but too many papers forget that their readers are also citizens of a congressional district, a state that has two senators, and the nation. Who helps them decide how to vote in such races?

Daily newspapers provide detailed coverage of state and federal races, but most of your readers probably don't read a newspaper daily, or even a daily newspaper. They likely get most of their information about non-local races from television stations, which provide little in-depth coverage while they rake in millions for misleading ads that they rarely fact-check. We wrote about that on The Rural Bog at [https://irjci.blogspot.com/2013/05/political-ads-enrich-tv-stations-](https://irjci.blogspot.com/2013/05/political-ads-enrich-tv-stations-which.html)

[which.html](https://irjci.blogspot.com/2013/05/political-ads-enrich-tv-stations-which.html).

What your readers get from TV isn't likely to be of much help in casting a vote, so your newspaper can be a valuable, trusted source of information.

Television is actually a place to start, by picking apart those ads and giving voters the facts. Three national fact-checking services provide models, and if your state has a big Senate race, or even a hotly contested race for the House, they can provide analyses that you can use.

The services are Fact Checker, by Glenn Kessler at The Washington Post; PolitiFact, the Pulitzer-winning service of the Tampa Bay Times; and Factcheck.org, from the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, which allows free republication of its analyses.



Follow these services to keep current on issues, because federal races usually involve the same issues from state to state, and some of the same campaign spin. It's important to keep current because these candidates may visit your locality only once, so you should be ready to do a first-class interview when they show up.

This election season, The Rural Blog is running a special feature each Monday with some of the most relevant analyses from FactCheck.org, because you can use that service without paying a fee or asking permission, and its analyses are usually the most detailed.

We started the series with a blog item about two unsubstantiated claims by President Trump on hurricane deaths and wind energy, and two recent examples of former President Obama cherry-picking

information and downplaying how his administration dealt with Fox News. Read it at <https://irjci.blogspot.com/2018/09/fact-check-did-fema-funding-get.html>.

Earlier, we did an item that fact-checked the president on immigration, with help from The Associated Press and USA Today, and provided resources for local reporting on the issue. You can read that item at <https://irjci.blogspot.com/2018/06/fact-checking-trump-on-immigration.html>.

Around the same time, we did an item on The Fact Checker's revelation that some campaigns have started "fact checking" sites that deal more in argument than fact. Read it at <https://irjci.blogspot.com/2018/06/campaign-sites-say-they-offer-fact.html>. It's another example of why it's more important than ever for local and state news media to provide reliable fact checking.

The Fact Checker cooperates with local news media to fact-checking local and state leaders and members of Congress, especially those facing re-election. We did an item on that, with The Fact Checker's contact information and a link to the form the Post uses to receive information on campaign claims. Read it at <https://irjci.blogspot.com/2017/04/the-washington-post-wants-to-fact-check.html>.

Check The Rural Blog every Monday until the election for the latest relevant fact checks. And don't be afraid to use your trusted position to be an arbiter of the facts. Your readers need it more than ever, and they will appreciate your efforts. Make it a regular column!

Al Cross (Twitter @ruralj) is the director of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, based at the University of Kentucky. See www.RuralJournalism.org.

Caring for our readers



by
Jerry Bellune

Who do you think is our first priority? Our readers, of course, you say. And you are right. Without readers, we are nothing.

Let me share with you a brief newspaper war story. When a smart publisher hired me years ago, he gave me a challenge: "We have a good newspaper for the 1940s," he said. "But our people have forgotten who they work for – and it isn't me. Talk with everybody and let me know who mentions our readers first."

This gave me a chance to talk with people throughout the building. I rode with truck drivers delivering our newspapers in early morning

darkness. I talked with more than 100 reporters, editors and photographers. I visited our bureaus and went on calls with our advertising sales people. I asked them what they thought of the paper and what we could do to improve it.

Finally, our tough, aging chief photographer said the magic word. "I'll tell you what's wrong with this newspaper," he said bluntly. "Nobody here thinks about or cares about our readers anymore." I could have kissed him.

We have not made this mistake here. All of us care about our readers. But caring for readers means planning, writing, photographing and editing for them. Here are three ways we do that:

1. In our reporting, we leave no questions unanswered. We think like readers. We gather facts and question sources like readers. Readers want to know the 'why' as

well as the 'what' of news.

2. We think visually. How can we convey this information visually? we ask. We think about photographs, maps and charts as well as words in our planning. Readers want to see as well as read about the news.

3. We write short, easy-to-follow stories and sentences. That means 250- to 300-word stories and sentences averaging 15 words. We segment lengthy stories into shorter segments. That helps readers understand what we share with them.

Do we not run longer stories anymore? Of course, we do. Inside feature stories can go 500 to 750 words. We do not continue stories from one page to another as some thoughtless editors do. And this applies to our electronic editions, too.

Readers lead busy lives. They have short attention spans. Let's make reading our newspapers a pleasure for them.

Too many opinions spoil a presentation



Ad-libs
by John Foust

Back when I was in the ad agency business, I made a logo presentation that turned into a fiasco. It was an uncomfortable reminder of the importance of a presentation environment.

This particular client was a real estate development company which was on a fast growth track. They were going through a name change and needed a sleek new brand identity for their newspaper ads, stationery and signage. We had been through preliminary meetings and this was the unveiling of (what I thought was) the final version of the logo.

The meeting started innocently enough. Dan, the company president, and I were in his office. We reviewed our previous strategy conversations, and I summarized their long-term corporate image plans. When I showed the logo design, his face lit up in a big smile. He said, "That's exactly what we need," and

described the steps they could take to replace their existing logo. Then he said, "Let's get a second opinion," walked out of his office and returned a minute later with their office manager. When she frowned and said she liked the old logo better, I could see Don's enthusiasm fading. She had not participated in our strategy meetings – and she had no knowledge of the reasoning behind a logo change – but all of a sudden, she had become a key influencer in the decision process.

Dan said, "Wait here. Let's get another opinion." He invited several more people into his office. Within minutes, a group was huddled around his desk, critiquing the logo that I had spent so much time designing. They seemed to be competing with each other to see who could make the most negative comments. It was a selling nightmare. They ignored my efforts to steer the conversation back on track.

The incident seems comical now, but it wasn't funny when it happened. One person said she didn't like the logo, because it had one of the colors in the Romanian flag. I checked later and learned that the Romanian flag is blue, yellow and

red (I also learned that she was born in Romania, the only possible explanation for such a strange comment.)

It was no surprise that Dan rejected the logo design. Although he was a corporate executive, he frequently struggled with decisions. His attempt to get objective input from others had created a chaotic decision-making environment. The only solution was for me to go back to the drawing board to tweak the idea. When I presented that one, I explained that he was the only one in the company who was in position to make a fair judgment. I truly believed that he was uniquely qualified to see the big picture and make the decision. Fortunately, he took the compliment to heart, and we had a positive one-to-one meeting which resulted in a sale.

The lesson was crystal clear. Too many opinions spoil a presentation. Do everything you can to limit the number of decision makers in the room.

John Foust conducts training programs for newspaper advertising professionals. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com



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