

AlaPressa

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA PRESS ASSOCIATION

MARCH 2021

Important Dates

APA Summer Convention

June 24-26, 2021

Perdido Beach Resort
Orange Beach, Alabama

[*America's Newspapers
Archived Webinars*](#)

***Remember these webinars are
free to APA members.*** Some

recent topics covered include:

- Subscription Trends and 7 Ways to Leverage Them in 2021
- You Can Grow Revenue and Audience with Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Parker, Walters and Cahela
announced as the 2021 APA Lifetime
Achievement and Emerging Journalist
Award recipients

APA Past Presidents meet via Zoom
during the 2021 APA Media Summit

Auburn Plainsman goes online: 'A
spirit that is not afraid to change'

The Consulate General of Israel to the
Southeast returns to Alabama

News Media Alliance applauds
members of House and Senate for
reintroducing Journalism Competition
& Preservation Act: Bill will provide
safe harbor for news publishers to
negotiate with tech platforms

National Press Foundation offers
online fellowship: Holding Washington
Accountable from Afar

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150 YEARS
OF JOURNALISM



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Parker, Walters and Cahela announced as the 2021 APA Lifetime Achievement and Emerging Journalist Award recipients

The recognition of the 2021 APA Lifetime Achievement and Emerging Journalist awards is just another event impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

APA would normally celebrate these awards as part of the luncheon at the Winter Media Summit. Since this is a virtual event this year, the recipients are announced below, and will be recognized during the APA Summer Convention, June, 24-26 in Orange Beach.

The recipients of the 2021 Lifetime Achievement Award are the late Art Parker, editor of The Montgomery Independent, and Les Walters, retired editor of the Journal Record in Hamilton.

Art Parker passed away in November of 2020 from injuries he sustained in an automobile accident after covering a Friday night football game in Montgomery. No one was surprised to learn where Art had been when the horrible accident happened. Being a community newspaper editor was a passion for Art.

In his nomination, The Selma Times-Journal Editor Adam Powell said, "From the first day I met him, Art demonstrated an extreme passion for local journalism, a heavy-handed approach to ethics and a dogged determination to root out every morsel of truth. Art treated the tiny Millbrook paper as if every story were of the utmost importance, as if every subject might hold some hidden truth that needed to be ferreted out."

After working in insurance, Parker began his newspaper career at the Millbrook Independent, a sister publication owned by the late Bob Martin.

Montgomery Independent Publisher Jeff Martin said there were not many athletes or their families in Montgomery and surrounding areas that Parker did not know. He said Art recently told him that he was into his second generation of athletes, having covered both parents and children in some families.

Powell noted that Parker never worked at a large newspaper with a large staff. "Like so many Alabama journalists who toil in tiny, understaffed and underpaid newsrooms, Art made his career in small towns, small newsroom and small newspapers, which are the backbone of any community."

Les Walters, retired editor of the Journal Record in Hamilton, will also be recognized with the 2021 Lifetime Achievement Award.



Art Parker



Les Walters

Walters retired in November of 2019, after 41 years in the newspaper business. The native of Andalusia is a 1978 graduate of Troy State University with a journalism degree, and was named the Hall School of Journalism Outstanding Graduate of the Year.

He first went to Marion County with the Hamilton Progress, and was later hired by The Journal-Record. He is the longest-serving manager of the Journal Record, recording a 32-year tenure with the company, and 41 years in journalism.

Walters was the 1993 recipient of Troy State University's Hall School of Journalism Outstanding Print Alumnus. He has received numerous media awards from the Alabama Press Association, including his most-prized award, the APA Feature Story of the Year, which he was honored with for his article "Dr. Charlie Pyle's Hamilton Hillbillies Semi-Pro Baseball Team."

Walters was also honored with the Alabama Farmers Federation's Communications Award for Print Journalism in 2019.

In nominating Walters, Journal-Record Managing Editor Scott Johnson said Les cultivated a higher standard of journalism in Marion County. He was a vocal advocate of Alabama's Open Records and Open Meetings Acts, and kept county and municipal governments accountable for their actions.

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awards continued from page 2

Walters provided steady leadership through the newspaper when tragedy struck the community of Hackleburg, destroyed by a tornado in 2011, and after the 2016 office shootings in Hamilton.

Walters also volunteered with youth sports, served as Hamilton High School's athletic booster club president, and was inducted into the Marion County Sports Hall of Fame for his



Brannon Cahela

decades of sports coverage.

The Walters family are members of the First Baptist Church of Hamilton, where Les has taught Sunday School for youth and college-aged adults.

On the other end of the career spectrum is Brannon Cahela, a staff writer for The Selma Times-Journal, who will be recognized as the 2021 Emerging Journalist.

Cahela is a 2019 graduate of Jacksonville State University, where he studied communications with a focus on digital journalism. He

completed an internship with The Gadsden Times, and his job at the Times-Journal newspaper is his first job since college.

Cahela covers the county commission, city and county school systems and takes many other assignments in a newsroom of three – himself included.

In nominating Cahela, Times-Journal Editor Adam Powell said, "Beyond a passion for journalism and a sense of purpose that rivals any veteran news writer, Brannon's writing style has always been clear, concise and accurate."

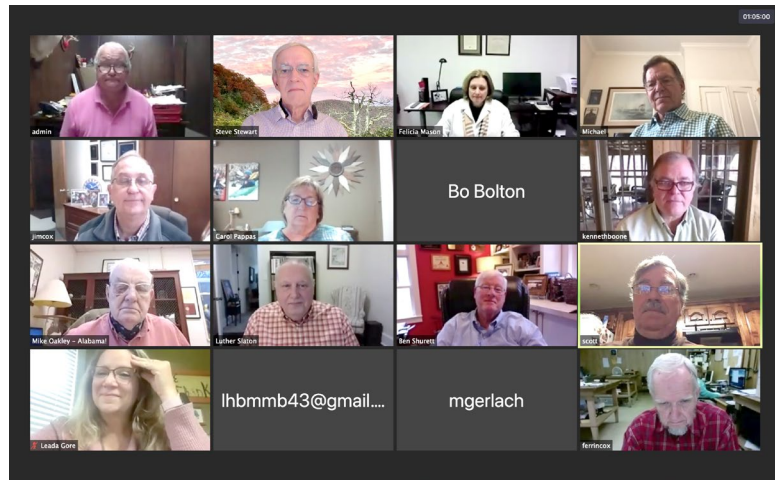
APA looks forward to recognizing these exceptional careers at the 2021 APA Summer Convention at the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, June 24-26.

APA Past Presidents meet via Zoom during the 2021 APA Media Summit

In another first for APA, the Past Presidents, who also serve as the APA Nominating Committee, met via Zoom during the Media Summit in February.

Those attending included: Joe Thomas, Steve Stewart, Mike Marshall, Jim Cox, Carol Pappas, Bo Bolton, Kenneth Boone, Jim Oakley, Luke Slaton, Ben Shurett, Scott Brown, Leada Gore, Linda Breedlove, Michele Gerlach and Ferrin Cox.

In addition to the duties this committee is charged with, it was nice to "see" each other and catch up on the events of the past year. We look forward to gathering in person in February 2022.



Auburn Plainsman goes online

Beginning March 1, 2021, the Auburn Plainsman, AU's student newspaper, went online only.

Please read below the editorial from Editor-in-Chief Jack West.

'A spirit that is not afraid to change'

On Nov. 7, 1894, Alabama Polytechnic Institute's two literary societies, the Websterians and the Wirts, joined together to publish the first edition of The Orange and Blue.

"With this issue of The Orange and Blue, we launch forth on the uncertain, and often perilous sea of college journalism," wrote the paper's first Editor-in-Chief Jas. A. Duncan. "Let us all pull together with a will and with a heart, and perhaps the day may not be far distant when a greater success than is hoped for in the wildest flights of our imagination shall crown our efforts put forth in this day."

Originally, the paper was only published twice a month and only had four pages,

but the editors set out with a bold vision of what it could be. They envisioned a publication that informed the student body and gave students a place to discuss their ideas and criticize their leaders.

The original editors opined about how they hoped that one day they would be able to publish on a weekly basis.

"A weekly is best of all, but circumstances are not such, we are sorry [sic] to say, as to permit us to attempt anything so 'big,' as yet," Duncan wrote. "Would that we could issue a weekly!"

But in the ensuing 127 years, the paper and its editors eventually reached that lofty goal. Naturally, that same span of time was also fraught with changes both undertaken by and thrust upon the paper.

In 1922, the paper changed its name to The Plainsman. In the 1950s and 2000s the organization moved offices, and in all of the years in between we have had a revolving door of editors, writers,

photographers and designers, all of whom have shepherded this organization through the trials and stresses of college journalism.

But throughout these changes, the overall goal of this organization has remained steadfast. Every day we do our best to inform the Auburn community about what's happening around them, to hold local and University officials accountable and to provide a space for students, faculty, staff and community members to voice their concerns and express their opinions.

In 127 years, we have printed everything from columns arguing against segregation to pictures of vigils held after 9/11. We have interviewed mayors and senators, freshmen and seniors.

And this past year — like plenty which have come before it — has been one of change.

Plainsman continued on page 4

Plainsman *continued from page 3*

The COVID-19 pandemic, along with its subsequent economic crisis, has put an immense amount of stress on, among many things, local news organizations. We have not been immune.

The lack of foot traffic, the overall cost of printing and the general trend of the journalism industry have consistently challenged us to justify our weekly schedule.

Now, we have reached a breaking point.

So, in following with this organization's history of change, The Plainsman is announcing that this week's paper will be our final weekly edition. Going forward, the vast majority of our time and effort will be focused on producing content for our website, our podcasts, our videos, our newsletter and our social media accounts.

For years we have resisted this change in order to retain a sense of tradition or comfort. For years we have held out the hope that print media would have its renaissance like vinyl records, scrunchies or the presidency of Jay Gogue. But that day has not come.

It's important to note here that even though this change is taking place during the pandemic, it has not been caused solely by the pandemic.

The Plainsman is a professional news organization, and we recognize that the majority of our readers already access us through our digital formats. Ironically, for most of you reading this, there won't be a huge amount of change.

The Plainsman is also a learning lab, and we recognize that when most — if not all — of our staff members graduate, they will be looking for jobs outside of the traditional realm of print media. By focusing on interactive and digital elements, we intend to give them opportunities to develop the journalistic skills that will benefit them after they've walked across the stage.

The Auburn Plainsman

Lastly, The Plainsman has always been more than a semi-monthly or weekly print product. We have always been worth more than the paper we have been printed on.

The Plainsman is the stories that we uncover and tell; we're the breaking news, the in-depth features and the sports coverage that you love. That part isn't changing because that part will never change. No matter the format or the time period, we will always be a place for news, discussion, learning and growth.

To keep up with all of this, we highly encourage you to regularly visit our website, sign up for our newsletter, subscribe to our podcasts and follow us on social media.

As we make this change, we would first

like to thank all of the former Plainsman staff members who dedicated large swaths of their college experiences and built this organization into what it is today.

We would also like to thank all of our current staff members who have continued to put out critical and entertaining work despite a virus, pay cuts, uncertainty and change.

Finally, we would like to thank you, our reader, for supporting, critiquing and believing in us.

For 127 years, this organization has maintained a spirit that is not afraid.

We aren't afraid to hold administrators or mayors to account. We aren't afraid to share diverse opinions from diverse individuals, and we aren't afraid to tell the truth.

This year, probably more than any other, we have had a spirit that is unafraid of change.

When that first group of editors in 1894 published The Orange and Blue, they were stepping into a new journalistic era. That first editorial spoke of doubt and concern, but it also ended with hopeful salutation.

"Godspeed and prosper 'The Orange and Blue,'" they wrote.

Now, we find ourselves at the cusp of another new era. And while the times may be different, the sentiment shouldn't be.

We are once again embarking onto the perilous sea of college journalism.

So, godspeed and prosper, The Auburn Plainsman.

People

Dr. Debra Worthington is the new director of the School of Communication at Auburn University. She replaces Jennifer Adams who has started a new position as

the executive director of Public Affairs in the Office of the President at AU.

Lorrie Bean, longtime publisher of the Centreville Press and the Marion

Times-Standard, is retiring in April. She will be replaced by Arline Dunkin, who has been working alongside Lorrie at the papers.

Obituary

Heddy Johnson Cox, age 77, of Elba, died Wednesday, February 17, 2021, at her home. She was born and reared in Mobile, Ala., and graduated from Floral High School. It was in Floral that she met her husband, Ferrin Cox, who courted her over the soda fountain at Moody Drug where she worked until their marriage on August 23, 1963.

As a young couple, the Coxes moved to Elba in 1964 where he took the helm of The Elba Clipper. After they purchased the business in 1971, she worked by his side daily in whatever role was needed as long as her health permitted.

The Coxes are members of Elba First United Methodist Church, where "Mrs.

Heddy" took great joy in working in the nursery for many years. For decades, they have shared the ups and downs of life with members of the Pairs and Spares Sunday School class, who are loved and appreciated as extended family.

In addition to her husband of more than 57 years, Mrs. Cox is survived by her children, Michele (Tom) Gerlach, of Andalusia, Chris (Penny) Cox, of Opelika, and Eric (Karen) Cox of Excel; her sister, Theresa Johnson Adams of Destin; her grandchildren, Sarah and Christopher Cox of Opelika; step-grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Kevin, Ann, Kate and Carson Gerlach, Anthony, Hillary, Gage and Emmy Brantley, Cody Crutchfield and Kaylen

Crutchfield; several sisters-and brothers-in-law, and a host of nieces and nephews.

The family also acknowledges with appreciation the many employees and associates of The Elba Clipper and The Graceville News, past and present, whom they also consider part of their extended family.

Mrs. Cox was preceded in death by her parents, Houston and Nellie Johnson, and two siblings, Mack and Clifford Johnson.

The family requests that contributions be made to the First United Methodist Church, 503 Davis St., Elba, AL 36323; the Alzheimer's Association, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Fl. 17, Chicago, IL 60601 or act.alz.org; or the charity of one's choice.

National Press Foundation offers online fellowship: Holding Washington Accountable from Afar

This online NPF fellowship will help journalists follow the money in Washington, whether they're reporting from the Capitol or covering the effects of federal spending and financial regulation on their states and local communities.

Sessions meet Fridays online for 2.5 hours, starting April 30, 2021, for eight weeks.

This fellowship will offer skills, sources and best practices to journalists who want to track the \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package and report on whether the funds are flowing to and/or having an effect in communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also designed to help journalists who wish to power their accountability reporting with deeper understanding of

congressional finance, corporate lobbying, antitrust, taxation and other federal regulatory issues that will be debated in 2021 and beyond.

Other topics will include:

- Holding Congress accountable: How to track congressional finance disclosures and report on insider trading by members of Congress and staff;

- How to use SEC and FEC filings and other databases to track lobbying;

- Understanding the latest in taxation policy, tax avoidance strategies and the IRS's dwindling resources;

- Use of trackers and databases to spot anomalies and disparities that can help break news.

Participants will be offered assistance from volunteer data scientists who

can bring difficult data-journalism stories to successful publication, through NPF's partnership with DataKind DC.

This is the second of three accountability fellowships offered by the National Press Foundation with sponsorship from the Evelyn Y. Davis Foundation. We greatly value diversity in all our programs and particularly seek applications from journalists covering communities that have been disproportionately hurt by the pandemic; Black, Indigenous and other journalists of color; and journalists attempting to report from news deserts.

This program is funded by the Evelyn Y. Davis Foundation. NPF is solely responsible for the content. Apply [HERE](#). Deadline to apply is Monday, April 12.

New Louisiana investigative journalism fund launches

From Evelyn Mateos, Editor & Publisher

"We're living in a world where there's a lot of misinformation and disinformation out there and people are having a hard time differentiating it... I think it's really important that we have factual information disseminated as widely as possible."

Investigative journalism has the capacity to change the world for the better, but to do so is incredibly expensive work. To expand their commitment to investigative reporting, The Times-Picayune and The Advocate have launched the Louisiana Fund for Investigative Journalism with the intention to utilize the funds to double the size of their investigative unit and expand coverage statewide. The initiative was created with the help of a Facebook Journalism Project grant.

"We want to make the state a better place, and we think the best way to start with that is to really shine a light on our problems," said Gordon Russell, managing editor for investigations. "Secondarily, we were concerned about that fact that so much of Louisiana—just like a lot of the country—is becoming a news desert...somebody needs to bring scrutiny to these forgotten corners of the state."

The goal is to raise \$1.5 million in three years in order to hire a data journalist, two reporters and a deputy editor. The investigative unit includes Russell and three reporters: John Simerman, Andrea Gallo and Bryn Stole, who recently left for the Baltimore Sun (The Times-Picayune and the Advocate are in the process of filling this position).

The idea formed last year when Russell and editors at The Times-Picayune and The Advocate began exploring the idea of journalism supported by philanthropy. They hired The Jones Group (an outside fundraising consultant) and drew up a few proposals to expand different areas of coverage. They spoke with philanthropists to see which idea they would be most willing to fund, and investigative journalism was the winner, Russell explained. At that point, they joined a Local Media Association's Center for Journalism Funding Lab, which is designed to develop this sort of model.

The fund will be administered by The Greater New Orleans Foundation. The news organization announced it last December, and within a month, they had raised nearly \$15,000. But the amount could change as philanthropists have not yet made contributions.



The next steps will be to continue raising funds until they are comfortable enough to begin the hiring process. Once the hires are complete, the new unit can begin to tackle their list of issues, Russell explained. Past investigative pieces have centered on topics like self-serving government officials or tax incentive giveaways to insiders dealing in the state prison system.

"The events of the last few years just show (investigative journalism's) importance more than ever," Russell said. "We're living in a world where there's a lot of misinformation and disinformation out there and people are having a hard time differentiating it...I think it's really important that we have factual information disseminated as widely as possible."

For more information about the fund, visit investigate.nola.com.

The Consulate General of Israel to the Southeast returns to Alabama

from Patrice Worthy, Consulate General of Israel in Atlanta

Earlier this year it was announced Alabama is back in the territory covered by The Consulate General of Israel in the Southeast. Alabama was covered by The Consulate General of Israel in Miami for the last few years, and now we are excited to continue their work.

During a Black History tour to Alabama and South Carolina our team was in awe at the treasure trove of Black



history in the great state of Alabama. We are so grateful for the local press coverage of our trip and thank the Alabama Press Association for assistance. We met so many wonderful members of the media and look forward to working with you in the future.

Recently, we sat down with the Alabama Department of Commerce to discuss how we can advance our partnership by taking advantage of the opportunity for trade in our region. Our meeting with Ala-

bama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield and Alabama International Trade Hilda Lockhart was about the importance of our strategic bi-lateral economic relationship and we look forward to further developing these relations that will strengthen our region.

We will be reaching out to local media to keep you up to date on what's next for us in Alabama.

Please contact Patrice Worthy, Director of Media Affairs and Communications, at pr@atlanta.mfa.gov.il with any press inquiries. We look forward to working with you.

News Media Alliance applauds members of House and Senate for reintroducing Journalism Competition & Preservation Act: Bill will provide safe harbor for news publishers to negotiate with tech platforms

The News Media Alliance applauds House Antitrust Chairman David Cicilline (D-RI), Ranking Member Ken Buck (R-CO), Senate Antitrust Chairwoman Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Senator John N. Kennedy (R-LA) for recently reintroducing the "Journalism Competition and Preservation Act" (JCPA). The bill would provide a limited antitrust safe harbor for news publishers to collectively negotiate with Facebook and Google for fair compensation for the use of their content.

In response to the bill reintroduction in both the House and Senate, News Media Alliance President & CEO, David Chavern, said, "This is a huge milestone for U.S. news publishers. As we have seen over the last several weeks in Australia and Europe, the world is moving toward new compensation systems for publishers. The cost of inaction, in terms of the spread of misinformation we are all experiencing, is simply too great to ignore any longer. Quality journalism is key to sustaining civic society and we must ensure that the digital ecosystem returns value back to the people who create that journalism."

Since 2018, the News Media Alliance has been vocally advocating for such legislation in the U.S., which it believes is needed to address the imbalance in

the news publisher-platform relationship. "Without an antitrust safe harbor, news publishers will have no capacity to collectively fight for their futures," Chavern said.

"Without an antitrust safe harbor, news publishers will have no capacity to collectively fight for their futures...News publishers need a fighting chance with the tech platforms that currently control who receives our content and how much we are paid."

The previous bill received support from several Representatives and Senators on both sides of the aisle and has

now been reintroduced in the 117th Congress to continue progressing forward.

Chavern added, "We are grateful to Chairs Cicilline and Klobuchar, Ranking Member Buck, and Senator Kennedy for their commitment to quality journalism, and we look forward to working with them on ways to further strengthen the bill to ensure equitable terms and fair compensation for the valuable content being produced by all news publishers, including small and community publishers. News publishers need a fighting chance with the tech platforms that currently control who receives our content and how much we are paid."

Currently, the Duopoly captures 90 percent of all digital ad revenue growth and approximately 60 percent of total U.S. digital advertising revenue. The Alliance joins the members of Congress in their belief that a safe harbor for news publishers to allow them to come together to negotiate with the platforms on their overall behalf is the solution to this problem.

That basic idea now has wide support across the political spectrum and is the cornerstone of all comprehensive solutions. More information on the bill can be found in the [News Media Alliance's JCPA Talking Points](#).

Columns

Section 230: Bringing you up to speed



by Tonda Rush,
National Newspaper
Association

Q. What is Section 230? Should I know about it for my website? Should it be changed?

A. This conversation is now upon us nationally. NNA and others are going to have to think about what it means and whether it needs to be changed. NNA's Board of Directors is in conversation about the challenges ahead.

Section 230 was enacted because of pressure from what was then America Online and other new "bulletin board" types of internet sites that had become concerned about lawsuits for things people posted on their platforms.

Here is what Section 230 says:

"No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."

This provision was stuck into a much larger bill called the Communications Decency Act, where the goal was to protect children from the ever-wilder internet frontier of pornography and other vices. At the time, Congress was focused on nurturing the economic promises of the growing internet and not necessarily thinking about how the future might develop. Indeed, at the time, no one knew.

Over the years, courts have had to grapple with lawsuits where people sued the platforms because of things people posted: threats of kidnapping, "doxing" where individual addresses or phone numbers are aired, egregious libels and so forth.

Courts developed a doctrine that basically said that if an internet provider manipulated, edited or changed content posted by someone, the provider could be making the content their own and then could be treated like a publisher and sued for liability in the case of harm. If it didn't alter the content, the only liability would be upon the writer or speaker, who didn't usually have the deep pockets to attract plaintiffs' lawyers.

Section 230 created an interesting conundrum for publishers. A letter to the editor libeling someone in print could expose the newspaper to a lawsuit. But the exact same letter could be posted on the publisher's website where the

publisher is immune. So, Section 230 protects publishers, as well as internet platforms.

Over the years, the rise of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, What's App and other platforms has been nurtured by Section 230. If lawsuits for content had occurred all these years, the platforms would never have grown to their present sizes.

Yet, public clamor for some policing of content has led to Terms of Service that allow platforms to remove content, remove accounts and unplug whole publishing enterprises. What they don't do is edit the content the way a publisher might edit a letter to the editor for length, language or other necessary alterations.



In the Trump era, the popularity of social media platforms and the nation's internal angst among segments of the population has brought Section 230 into the public eye. When Twitter and Facebook banned or snoozed some accounts after the riot on Capitol Hill, their power to unplug national conversations became increasingly visible.

The question now is: Does Section 230 need to be changed? If so, how?

One option is to treat it like the phone companies. People may libel each other in a telephone conversation but not be able to sue Verizon or AT&T for carrying the electrons. Those are common carriers. They are immune from content lawsuits, but they are legally required to treat similar customers similarly. The platforms do not want to be common carriers because of the many regulations involved.

Or, they could be treated like USPS. If someone sends hate mail to a recipient, the post office cannot be sued. But USPS has great powers of censorship. For example, if someone says they consider a mailing pornographic, USPS will not deliver that mail. But USPS is heavily regulated. The platforms might not want to be in that situation, either.

A third is to treat the platforms the

way common law has treated publishers and broadcasters, which is to subject them to liability for the most egregious libels and privacy invasions but to recognize the First Amendment value in a free flow of information. The half-century of public figure litigation in the newspaper world has developed a healthy body of law on how to balance liability with free speech. It does not work perfectly. It is expensive. Sometimes, it makes publishers risk averse.

But all of those inhibitions are not the main reason the platforms do not want to be subject to common law torts. They do not want to hire a phalanx of editors to do what newspaper editors do every day. They want solutions run by programmed bots that are sent out to look for key words automatically and lop them off when they appear.

What some political activists want is to eliminate all liability protection from a platform that unplugs accounts for content reasons. The sanctions against former President Trump and his supporters, to them, shows that the platforms are too powerful. But they should be careful what they ask for. Smaller alternative platforms are developing to house many of those political conversations. Clearly, they will want Section 230 protection. Can the big guys be regulated differently from the small startups? Tricky business. Can you distinguish them by size? Then you're setting a ceiling on growth of the new platforms. Can you distinguish them by reach? Same problem. Can you distinguish them by their use of content tools against certain types of political speech? Then you are creating First Amendment discrimination issues that courts will likely overturn at first blush.

For publishers, the question is a particularly thorny one. Section 230 does protect publishers in the digital environment from some liabilities. But the platforms' freedom to unplug smaller publishers' content, change financial terms of service and discourage some political content tends to bother free-speech advocates.

Like most of our thorniest national issues, there are no obvious and easy answers. But the conversation begins best when it is well informed. Clearly, we will be talking about Section 230 in 2021.

Tonda Rush is the director of public policy and serves as general counsel to the National Newspaper Association. Email her at tonda@nna.org.

Columns

Newspapers excel as your collective 'eyes and ears'



by Jim Pumarlo

My days of sitting behind an editor's desk have passed, but I'll never lose my newspaper blood. I regularly enjoy my first cup of coffee while scanning newspaper websites. It's a great way to keep current on what's happening in communities.

Public affairs have always been a passion, so I pay particular attention when the broad arena of issues is addressed. The role of newspapers as watchdogs of the dynamics in both the public and private sectors bears underscoring throughout the year.

Some recent headlines:

From the Chanhassen Villager: "Build, invest or tear down are all options for some District 112 elementary schools."

From the Rochester Post-Bulletin: "Court records show troubling past of Wabasha County administrator applicant."

From the International Falls Journal: "Campus officials talk gap years, hopes for fall enrollment."

From the Duluth News Tribune: "Do Duluth's legislative priorities reflect the community's?"

From the St. Cloud Times: "What are local economists expecting in 2021?"

These headlines, though from Minne-

sota newspapers, are representative of the breadth of public affairs reports delivered regularly by newspapers.

Some stories are firsthand meeting reports. Some reflect enterprise initiatives. Some are the result of digging beneath the initial set of facts. Some take the additional step of offering editorial perspective.

And they all are delivering news that is valuable but not always readily available to readers.

The examples reflect a personal philosophy. Community newspapers, at their best, are stewards of their communities. The news columns are a blend of stories that people like to read and stories they should read. The advertising columns promote and grow local commerce. And the editorial pages are a marketplace of ideas.

The news media landscape has never been more fractured. Newspapers have never been more challenged due to the economic impact of COVID-19.

Yet, the need for trained journalists to gather, deliver and interpret the news – the need for citizens' "right to know" – is more important than ever as we navigate the effects of the coronavirus. I remain a firm believer that local newspapers have an advantage in today's crowded media terrain by being the premier clearinghouse of information in your communities. They deliver the news on a range of platforms from print to digital.

The value of trained journalists in collecting and interpreting information is

especially important within the context of local public affairs.

Citizens are increasingly challenged to keep abreast of actions of a city council, school board, county board, or any of the numerous other local governing bodies. Then they have to decipher what the decisions, singularly and collectively, mean in their personal and business lives.

You have an advocate in your community newspapers.

Make no mistake. Editors and reporters are challenged as well in gaining access to everyday sources during the pandemic. At the same time, they have the tools that others may lack.

Journalists have relationships with government officials and staffs.

Journalists have been trained in the routine. They know how to flesh out information that is not readily volunteered or available. They know who to contact. They know where to look. They know the questions to ask.

Bottom line, journalists are underterred in their role as your community's collective set of eye and ears. They thrive on delivering the news; it's their full-time job. Readers can rest assured that editors and reporters will continue to present a full menu of news during the ordinary and extraordinary times.

Jim Pumarlo writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He can be reached at jim@pumarlo.com.

What makes a good headline?



Ad-libs
by John Foust

Imagine the editors of a prestigious news organization sitting around a conference table discussing a breaking story. The story is written and all they need is a headline to convey its importance to readers. Someone says, "I've got it. Let's use one word: 'Look.' We can give it more impact by making the two o's look like eyeballs." Everyone nods in agreement, and the headline runs.

Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But something similar must be happening in advertising conversations, because 'Look' has been a popular headline for

years.

Popularity doesn't equal effectiveness. Even though it's frequently used, "Look" is one of the worst headlines you'll ever see. It's a product of lazy writing. It communicates nothing of value to readers.

The headline deserves more respect than that, because it is the most important part of an ad. Research shows that four out of five readers do not get further than the headline. Unfortunately, this means that only 20 percent of the people who read an ad headline will read any of the body copy.

In other words, headlines have a lot of weight to carry. Pick up any newspaper – or go to any online news site – and you'll find article headlines that reveal the subjects of those articles. As a result, you can make split second de-

cisions on whether or not to read more.

Doesn't it make sense that the same should apply to advertising headlines?

The next time you write an ad headline, ask yourself three questions:

1. Does the headline tell readers what the ad is about? If your ad is selling banking services, say so in the headline. If you are selling kitchen remodeling, say so. If you are promoting furniture, say so.

We read at a glance. If readers can't determine quickly what an ad is about, they'll skip it completely.

2. Does the headline promise a benefit? There are several types of headlines: (1) those that promise a benefit, (2) those that provide news, and (3) those that surprise readers or arouse curiosity.

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While each type is capable of winning readership and selling products, benefit headlines have been shown to be the most reliable choice. Just about every buying decision we make is driven by real or perceived benefits. That's why it's a good idea to create benefits-oriented advertising – and then put the major benefit front and center in the headline.

3. Is the language believable? Without believable language, our first two questions are not worth answering. Consider a hardware store ad which is headlined, "Fantastic savings on the world's best lawnmowers." To answer our first two questions, the ad is about lawnmowers and the benefit is that customers can save money. But the puffery kills the message.

Copywriters should avoid exaggerations and unsubstantiated claims in advertising. No one believes sweeping

boasts like "fantastic," or "superior" or "best ever."

The right answers to these three questions can put your next ad in the top 20 percent. And you'll increase your chances of creating an ad that is worth a "look."

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

Help Wanted

News Reporter - Decatur, AL

The Decatur Daily, a five-day daily covering three counties in north Alabama, seeks an aggressive news reporter willing to ask tough questions, develop sources and dig for stories of importance to our readers. We are looking for a productive reporter who can handle hard news and tell a compelling story. The successful candidate will cover a wide range of topics, including local government, education and police. Accuracy is essential. Experience is a plus.

The Daily is an award-winning, family-owned newspaper founded in 1912. Decatur, on the banks of the Tennessee River, is home to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, United Launch Alliance, a high-tech manufacturing sector and a vibrant arts community. It is located 20 minutes from Huntsville.

Send a brief cover letter, five of your most current, relevant writing samples and resume including references to: Eric Fleischauer, metro

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Our properties include The Alexander City

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