

AlaPressa

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA PRESS ASSOCIATION

JULY 2021

Important Dates

APA Football Pass Lottery
TENTATIVE August 12, 2021

(Please stay tuned as we are waiting for more information concerning the 2021 season.)

[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)

Gov. Ivey kicks off APA's 150th celebration

AL.com wins Pulitzer

Sean Dietrich columns available to APA members

Friends start newspaper in Alabama neighborhood

Poor customer service a threat to newspaper notice

Summer internship ends

A simple way to develop ad campaign ideas

Now we have to make people want local news

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Gov. Ivey kicks off APA's 150th celebration

APA's Summer Convention was a weekend of celebration, APA's 150th anniversary, the Lifetime Achievement recipients and the APA Media Award winners for 2021.

Gov. Kay Ivey kicked off the celebration at Friday's opening reception. In her remarks, Ivey praised APA members saying, "Alabama's newspapers play a vital role in each of our communities across the state. Our local publications know and understand the people that we serve. They help small businesses connect with consumers and encourage economic growth."



Gov. Ivey visits with her hometown publisher, Glenda Curl from the Wilcox Progressive Era in Camden.

"When folks open up your papers, they know they can expect balanced reporting from a trustworthy source, with the only priority being to report the news, and in many ways, they think of you as a trusted friend," Ivey said.

Programs included high-energy sales training from Kelly Wirges. She encouraged sales people to use referrals, testimonials and to always share success stories with clients. Take a look at her attached handouts.

Delegates participated in three roundtables that all exceeded the time limit. The topics included public notice and public records, circulation, and academics and the newsroom.

Les Walters, former managing editor of the Journal Record in Hamilton, and

the late Art Parker from The Montgomery Independent were recognized at the luncheon with the 2021 Lifetime Achievement awards.

Saturday evening was the presentation of the 2021 APA Media Awards. First place winners from 21 categories were presented with awards, including plaques from the editorial, advertising and magazine contests. Congratulations to all winners!

At the close of the banquet, delegates were served champagne in a commemorative flute for a toast offered by President K. A. Turner and Past President Kenneth Boone for APA's 150 years. The hotel also presented a surprise cake with APA's logo to finish off the evening.

The Winners tab, a publication of all of the winners in the contest, is available online [HERE](#).

Many thanks to Steven Stiefel, publisher of The Fort Payne Times-Journal, for stepping in as APA's photographer for the weekend. He did a great job.



Back row from left to right: Gary Maitland, TimesDaily in Florence; Bobby Rice, The Messenger in Troy; Barnett Wright, The Birmingham Times; Ty West, American City Business Journals; Anthony Campbell, The Advertiser-Glean in Guntersville and Jeff Martin, The Montgomery Independent.

Second row: Tim Altork, The Randolph Leader in Roanoke and Michelle Key, The Opelika Observer.

Kneeling: Shannon Allen, The Sand Mountain Reporter in Albertville.

AL.com wins Pulitzer

The AL.com team was part of a partnership that did a yearlong investigation of K-9 units and the damage that police inflict on Americans using their trained dogs. The project has captured multiple awards, and in June won the Pulitzer Prize for National

Reporting.

The series, Mauled: When Police Dogs are Weapons, was a joint effort with the Marshall Project, The Indianapolis Star and the Invisible Institute.

pulitzer continued on page 3

pulitzer continued from page 2

In April, the series won a national White House Correspondents' Association award for investigative journalism and the Katherine Graham Award for Courage and Accountability.

One of the stories in the series, The terrifying reign of a small town's police dog, by Challen Stephens, won Story of the Year in APA's media contest.

The yearlong investigation began

with AL.com reporter and editor Challen Stephens' investigation of violent encounters involving a police dog and its handler in a small Alabama town. Reporters Ashley Remkus and photographer Joe Songer also worked on the project that included creation of a first-of-its-kind database where police dogs caused serious injuries attaching suspects. Read more here: <https://trib.al/0edJE2p>

In the Pulitzer Commentary category, AL.com's Roy Johnson was named a

finalist for "evocative columns on race and remembrance written with style, urgency and moral clarity."

Johnson, who came to the Alabama Media Group in 2014, has previously been editor-in-chief at Men's Fitness, History Channel and Savoy magazines, editor at large at Fortune and assistant managing editor at Sports Illustrated. He also co-executive produced a sports documentary for ESPN's award-winning "30-for-30" series.

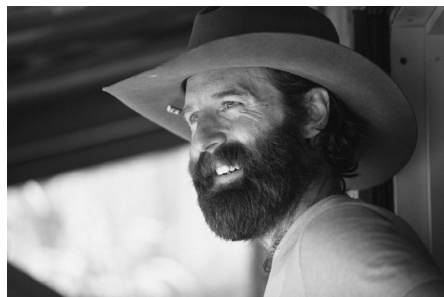
Congratulations to all!

Sean Dietrich columns available to APA members

Most of you have read Sean Dietrich's *Sean of the South* columns reflecting on life in the American South. His columns currently run in newspapers and magazines across the South.

Dietrich has also authored seven books, and is the creator of the Sean of the South blog and podcast.

Dietrich has agreed to allow APA members to run columns from his archives



in your newspapers at no cost. You can access his archives [HERE](#).

"This is very a generous offer from Sean Dietrich," APA Executive Director Felicia Mason said. "His columns are entertaining and very relative to the daily lives of our readers and will provide good content for our papers."

Please be sure to credit the columns when you run them.

Friends start newspaper in Alabama neighborhood

By Peggy Ussery, *The Dothan Eagle*

The rules for working at The Foxchase Times are fairly simple.

There are wipes for wiping down the office at the end of day — can't be too careful during a pandemic. Use your best handwriting. Don't tell anyone ideas for the newspaper. Don't lose supplies. Get your work done before you play. If you're unhappy with your job, don't complain; rather, talk to a supervisor about it. And if you're the last one to leave the dollhouse, make sure to turn off the lights and close the door behind you.

If you forget any of the rules, they're written on two large white boards as a reminder and surrounded by hand-drawn smiley faces.

Ann Louise Huskey, 9, and Caroline Kelly, 10, started their neighborhood newspaper The Foxchase Times a year ago. As the COVID-19 pandemic kept them home from classes at Houston Academy and away from all of their other activities, the friends decided to do something with their time at home. And while it appears they run a tight ship, all of the rules are really just part of the fun.

"Our favorite part is like getting letters from people because I know me and Caroline both love getting mail," Ann Louise said.

The name of their publication was easy — they live in the Foxchase neighborhood off Flowers Chapel Road in Dothan. They keep the newspaper to two pages because their printer (Ann Louise's father, Whit) could only photocopy so many pages. The paper

is handwritten and illustrated by both Ann Louise and Caroline, and they work on it on Mondays and Wednesdays from a playhouse at the Huskey home. Sometimes they include photos. On Sunday afternoons they deliver the paper to about 29 subscribers, who pay \$1 a week for the publication.

"We like to see that people actually enjoy it," Caroline said.

Both fifth-grader Caroline and fourth-grader Ann Louise like to read and write, so doing the newspaper has been both fun and educational. They've met a lot of neighbors and learned a lot about their Foxchase neighborhood.

"There was a 100-year-old tree we wrote about," Caroline said.

Coverage in The Foxchase Times includes regular features such as recipes and a neighborhood Pet of the Week. They've highlighted gardens in the neighborhood, helped find missing cats and profiled their neighbors. They held a pumpkin contest back in October and did a feature piece on a neighbor's eagle statue. They even held a toiletry drive for the Dothan Rescue Mission.

They also report breaking news on wildlife sightings — rabbits, raccoons, and especially snakes. Their latest sighting was a turtle, which they photographed for an upcoming issue.

"We just write about Foxchase and the people in Foxchase," Ann Louise said.

Neighbors have pitched in with information for the paper and have been

the subjects of Q&A stories — mostly done through The Foxchase Times email.



Ann Louise Huskey, 9, and Caroline Kelly, 10, hold up copies of *The Foxchase Times* in Dothan on Wednesday July 7, 2021. The two started the neighborhood newspaper last year as the COVID-19 pandemic kept them at home.

A portion of the money collected from subscriptions was donated to a charity called Smile Train, which helps children with cleft lips. The girls plan to donate to other charities as well. Their parents — Ann and Whit Huskey and Erin and Patrick Kelly — have been supportive of their efforts.

The neighborhood has also been supportive. "Everybody sends out letters and emails about how much they love the stuff and how great a job they think we're doing," Ann Louise said. "It's just fun for us to do that. Now, we pretty much know everybody in our neighborhood."

Poor customer service a threat to newspaper notice

From Public Notice Resource Center
Article III, Section 13(A) of Louisiana's Constitution requires legislators to publish two notices in a local paper when they plan to introduce a "local or special law" in the state legislature. The notices must "state the substance of the contemplated law, and every such bill shall recite that notice has been given."

So: No notice, no bill.

Some Louisiana lawmakers may have been prevented from introducing local bills this year due to a lack of notice. We know this because -- much to the chagrin of the Louisiana Press Association (LPA) -- it became a topic of discussion in the legislature during discussions over Senate Bill 101, which authorized self-storage facilities to advertise lien sales "on a publicly accessible website that conducts personal property auctions" in lieu of a newspaper.

According to Rep. Tanner Magee (R-Houma) and a few of his colleagues, the notices didn't get published because the newspapers they were sent to neglected to publish them.

"We lost four House bills this year -- four!" Rep. Magee said on the House floor on May 19 during debate on SB-101, holding up four fingers on each hand to emphasize the significance of the loss.

"Members introduced bills this year that they didn't get to run because the local paper didn't properly advertise it," Rep. Magee continued. "We did our job; they did not do theirs. So, this theory that the local paper is going to magnificently do the job better than a text message, email or website is kind of silly." Watch video of the debate over SB-101 [HERE](#) from 2:46:40 to 3:23:15]



A few minutes after those comments, SB-101 passed the House by a vote 75-24. It was signed into law by the Governor John Bel Edwards on June 7.

The bill almost certainly would have passed despite Rep. Magee's complaints about the negligence of a few newspapers in the state. The self-storage industry is dominated by venture capital investors who can afford to hire well-con-

nected, high-powered lobbyists. They're worthy adversaries. Bills eliminating self-storage notices were also signed into law this year in Kansas and North Dakota.

Rep. Magee didn't have all of his facts straight, according to LPA, but it's clear some newspapers in Louisiana failed to run timely notices for local bills this session. And there's no question that it's much more difficult to maintain legislative support for newspaper notice when some newspapers provide poor customer service to their public notice clients. Opponents will weaponize their neglect.

As if to underscore that point, the failure to run the local-bill notices came up again the following day during a committee hearing on another bill.

"These are not isolated issues," LPA Executive Director Jerry Raehal said in a column he wrote to members following the bill's passage. "I've received calls from people frustrated that they cannot get in touch with someone to place a public notice, as well as issues with public notices not running."

"I'm confident that 99% of public notices run without a hitch," Raehal added, "but difficulties in getting them placed, and the 1% of them that don't, are a problem exacerbated by the current climate."

Summer Internship ends

Editor's note: Jerrett Posey participated in the APA Journalism Foundation Summer Internship Program with The Clanton Advertiser. Here is a report from Posey and Managing Editor Joyanna Love.

My name is Jerrett Posey, and I would like to thank you for the grant you gave The Clanton Advertiser so that I could be paid during my internship. This experience has been invaluable to me, because there are some things you never truly grasp until you do it for yourself. Writing for a local newspaper would definitely be in that category for me.

Mississippi State University has done a great job of teaching me how to communicate, but being expected to produce newsworthy articles every day is something you cannot get in a classroom. This experience has been challenging at times, but I really have enjoyed doing it.

On my first day at work, I was a bit unsure of how the internship would go, but I was excited to get started. My supervisor gave me three potential leads to look into and a press release to rewrite in AP Style. Just after lunch, I had already set up two interviews for later in the week, and had

the press release printed out on my supervisor's desk ready for review. That first day helped me to settle in quickly, and gave me several connections that I came back to later in the summer.

The quality of work is also much different than in a classroom setting. For a class you receive a grade on how well you can write a piece, but you have several days to weeks to polish it. In a newsroom, you are expected to provide the best work you can write as soon as possible.

That can be daunting at times, because your reputation is on the line, not just a grade. A grade in a class can change from week to week, but your reputation is something that is earned only through hard work and time. While no one is perfect, my time at The Clanton Advertiser has taught me to have confidence in my work, and to always strive to be better.

Having the ability to find my own stories was one of the best things about the internship though. It gave me a sense of pride when I would write a story that I found, especially if it did well. I had a little bit of a leg up since I grew up in the county I was working in, but a lot of the connections I made were with people that I did

not know prior to the internship. I do not know where the future will bring me, but now I am confident I will be able to make professional connections wherever I end up.

Another big thing for me was learning to cover events and meetings that do not pertain to agriculture. I am studying Agricultural Communications, so I have written a lot about agricultural research and agriculture issues. While working for The Clanton Advertiser, I have covered city council meetings, a motorcycle race, county commission meetings and so much more. While I mostly tried to write about 4-H and FFA groups in the county when I could, because that is what I know and love, I now know how to write about a lot of different things that I would not know how to do otherwise.

While the end of my college career is nearing, I still have not decided on what exactly I would like to do once I graduate. That is why I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to grow as a writer, and to get to work with people that pushed me to be my best every day. I am so glad I

internship continued on page 5

internship continued from page 4

had this opportunity, and I hope I can work with some of these people again one day. This experience has given me a lot of confidence in myself and helped me to learn new things. Thank you again for helping this internship become a reality for me.

From Managing Editor Joyanna Love: Thank you for choosing The Clanton Advertiser as an internship grant recipient.

We are a small staff, and having an intern for 10 weeks allowed us to cover some of the fun community events that we may not have been able to make it to otherwise.

Our intern, Jerrett Posey, also helped in our government and education coverage.

His willingness to go to evening and weekend events was invaluable when multiple things were happening on the same day or when someone was out on vacation.

He will be leaving with plenty of published work for his portfolio on a variety of topics as well as experience taking photos and setting up interviews.

Jerrett had contacted us about an internship even before he knew it would be paid, but it felt good to be able to pay him for his work.

This was the second time that our paper had been able to secure this grant, and we hope the program continues to provide this valuable resource.



Obituaries

Michael Mayton Breedlove



Michael Mayton Breedlove died at his home in Jackson Sunday evening, July 18, 2021. He was 81.

He was born July 15, 1940 in Birmingham, a son of Charles and Helen Breedlove. He grew

up in Prattville and graduated from Autauga County High School. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps. He and his wife, Linda, married in December 1961 shortly after he completed basic training at Paris Island, S.C. He was in the newspaper business for 55 years. At the time of his death, he was one of the owners and publishers of The Thomasville Times. He owned and published The South Alabamian in Jackson for 29 years.

Mike started working at the Montgomery Advertiser in 1966 selling newspaper advertising. That same year, his wife, Linda, went to work for the Prattville Progress, the town's weekly newspaper, as office manager. Mike later moved to the Prattville Progress where he sold ads and covered sports.

In the early 1970s, they moved to Fairhope to operate the Fairhope Courier. In 1974, they purchased The South Alabamian and moved to Jackson. The Breedloves, along with Jim and Suzanne Cox, purchased The Thomasville Times in 1996 where Mike and Jim have been co-

publishers. In 2003, the Breedloves sold The South Alabamian to the Coxes but retained their interest in The Times.

Breedlove was active in the community and the newspaper community. He was president of the Alabama Press Association in 1985. His wife would later be president of the group. In recent years, he and Linda were awarded the association's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Mike Breedlove was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1986 and served one four-year term. He later worked as a legislative liaison for Gov. Guy Hunt. As a state legislator, Breedlove sponsored legislation to create the St. Stephens Historical Commission and served on the commission's board as well as chairman.

He also was a hands-on participant in archeological work there that uncovered a lot of the old town that was Alabama's territorial capital. An archeology work building at the St. Stephens Historical Park was named for Breedlove in honor of his work and support of the park.

Mike always regretted not completing his college education from Auburn University. In the 1990s, he attended night classes at the University of Mobile, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in 1999.

He was a past president of the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce and was a member of the Jackson Lions Club and active in other community organizations. He was a member of the First United Methodist Church in Jackson and was ac-

tive until his health failed due to Parkinson's disease.

Mike loved Auburn football and fishing in Mobile Bay near Fairhope where he and Linda lived part time. He loved his family. His parents died just six days apart of cancer at the age of 55 and two younger brothers came to live with his family; one a freshman at Auburn and the other an eleven-year-old.

Mike Breedlove is survived by his wife, Linda Hayes Breedlove of Jackson; son, Michael Mayton (Cammie) Breedlove, Jr. of Jackson; sister, Celia Breedlove of Knoxville, TN; brothers, Charles Randall (Libby) Breedlove of Baton Rouge, LA, Gregory Buford (Pam) Breedlove of Mobile, Scotty Garland (Donna) Breedlove of Willix, TX; grandson, Logan Hayes (Alana) Breedlove of Pike Road; granddaughter, Jordan (Kyle) Bailey of Carnesville, GA; two great-grandchildren, Averiett Elise Breedlove and Mary Hayes Breedlove of Pike Road.

A memorial service was held on Thursday, July 22, 2021 at Jackson First United Methodist Church with Drs. Jim DuFriend and Ralph Wooten officiating. Jim Cox and Ed Williams will be the eulogists.

Honorary pallbearers will be Bill Pearce, Buddy Boykin, Jim Cox, Fred Huggins, Bill Keller, Gaines McCorquodale, Mike Whitehead and Ed Williams.

Donations in his memory may be made to Jackson First United Methodist Church. Condolences may be offered at www.lathanfuneralhome.com.

People

James Jones, 51, has been named managing editor of The Selma Times-Journal, selmatimesjournal.com, and their affiliated publications.

Jones, a Tuscaloosa native, has been The Times-Journal's news editor since May 2018. He is a graduate of Holt High School in Tuscaloosa, and is a 1992 Stillman College graduate.

Before coming to The Times-Journal, Jones worked for the Biloxi Sun Herald for 26 years, primarily writing sports, and was a member of the news team that won a Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2006 for the newspaper's coverage of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. He replaces Adam Powell, who resigned his position to seek other opportunities.

Alabama Media Group's **Kyle Whitmire** won the first-ever MOLLY Prize for political commentary.

For 16 years, the award has gone to recognize outstanding works of investigative journalism across the country. This year, the Texas Observer and the Texas Democracy Foundation, which present the award, added a category for Excellence in Political Commentary/Columns.

Molly Ivins was a pioneering journalist and columnist for the Observer during the 1970s, gaining nationwide recognition for her unflinching coverage of Texas' "good-old boy politics," which she covered "like a flamethrower through a cactus patch," according to an NPR profile.

Congratulations, Kyle.

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Help Wanted

Press Operator- Florence, AL

The TimesDaily is seeking a printing press operator to join our northwestern Alabama printing facility. Hands-on experience with a Goss Urbanite or DGM 850 is a plus, but not required. Qualified candidates will be available to work nights, weekends. For more information on this position click [HERE](#) or visit the Help Wanted section of the APA website.

Regional Publisher - NE Georgia

Community Newspapers, Inc. is looking to hire a regional publisher for its Northeast Georgia Region. The responsibilities of this position include the following: being publisher of The Northeast Georgian, a

twice-weekly newspaper in Cornelia, and serving as a direct report for the publishers of The Dahlonga Nugget, White County News, The Clayton Tribune, The Toccoa Record, Franklin County Citizen Leader, The Hartwell Sun, The Elberton Star and The Georgia Mountain Press.

The right candidate must have newspaper publishing experience, be able to create and manage a budget, generate and execute revenue and circulation plans, build team spirit among associated and have a strong sense of community.

Community Newspapers Inc. is a forward thinking, local information company that believes in letting our publishers do what they do best: lead, manage and grow their associates and business.

If you are the right person for the job,

please email a cover letter, resume and professional references to Alan NeSmith, chairman, at anesmith@thenortheastgeorgian.com

Reporter - Fort Payne, AL

Times-Journal is seeking an individual who has a heart for our community. If you desire to use your words to help inform others, we would like to hear from you.

The qualified candidate will have a working knowledge of Word, and be able to cover stories when they happen. We offer a competitive wage and benefit package including 401K, BC/BS Insurance, Sick Days and more. If you are ready to start your career as a writer with Times-Journal, send your resume to publisher Steven Stiefel at: stiefel@times-journal.com.

Columns

Now we have to make people want local news



by Al Cross

In the last six years, interest in local news has declined, for several reasons. Community newspapers can't do much about most of the causes, but there are some things they can do. It starts with understanding the problem.

Media reporter Jack Shafer of Politico wrote about it recently, first laying out the familiar arguments for local news, with references and links at <https://politi.co/3zRT9ij>: "Local news makes representative government more accountable, scholars claim. Books and monographs extolling the virtues of local reporting on everything from public health to economic vitality abound. When local reporting goes south, researchers tell us, political polarization, civic corruption, lower voter turnout, reduced civic engagement and even authoritarianism follow."

Then he pointed out some hard facts: "A 2018 Duke University study of 16,000 local news outlets (including broadcasters) in 100 communities deemed only about 17 percent of articles as truly local (i.e., they took place in or were about the local municipality), and just over half were hard news. Another 2018 finding by Pew revealed that only 16 percent of Americans get their news 'often' from a newspaper, further lowering the status of the press."

When Facebook looked last year for local news to include in its new 'Today In' section, "It found that one in three of its users lived in places where there wasn't enough local news published to sustain the section," Shafer wrote. As for TV news, most Americans' main source of local news, Shafer cited a 2018 Emory University study suggesting that "low-cost, quality national news online . . . has siphoned off readers who might otherwise partake of local news."

Surprisingly, Shafer did not mention the study's top two findings. The researchers found "substantial increases in coverage of national politics at the expense of local politics," and "a significant rightward shift in the ideological slant of coverage," driven partly by Sinclair Broadcasting, which disproportionately serves TV markets with large rural audiences.

And what was going on during the study period? Donald Trump was getting

elected, dominating news coverage with his unorthodox approaches, and attacking traditional news media as "fake news" and "the enemy of the people."

That affected rural and community journalists even before Trump was inaugurated, as I wrote on The Rural Blog in 2017 (at bit.ly/35Mgi7V and bit.ly/3qnW1yV). The latter piece was about Walla Walla Editor Brian Hunt's "calm, respectful but strong defense of journalism and its essential role in democracy."

In the last four years, some newspapers (notably those of Arkansas-based publisher Walter Hussman) have done a better job of regularly explaining how journalism is supposed to work, but I don't think most news outlets do that well.



They also largely fail to remind Americans of the differences in news media and social media. You've probably read the following elevator speech in this space before, but it's worth repeating, so you can repeat it: News media practice a discipline of verification; we tell you how we know something, or we attribute it. Social media have virtually no discipline, and no verification.

Social media and the torrent of other online information leave readers with less time to consume local news. And that news is often not as interesting or entertaining as what they are getting from outside their community. Trump steered many people away from local news and toward national news, community editors and publishers have told me.

Mike Buffington, who publishes five Georgia weeklies, wrote, "During the Trump tenure, we saw a huge uptick in local interest of national news. When we'd write about local controversies, not much reaction. But when we'd write about Trump or national politics, all hell would hit. (All of our editors wrote mostly anti-Trumpism columns and editorials.)"

Mike also wrote that social media have "so distorted reality that a lot of people live more online than in their own towns."

Those towns, communities of geography, are the basis for local news outlets. They now compete with social media's communities of interest; the more time people spend with them, the less time they have for their geographic communities. That drives down newspaper readership, which means fewer ads, which leaves less room for news, which further reduces readership and continues the downward spiral.

Stopping the spiral requires smart decisions about giving readers what they want, while also giving them what they need to be good citizens. The real trick is making them want what they need.

If your readers don't seem to be interested in government coverage, maybe it's because you're not making it interesting. I read too many newspapers in which government coverage focuses on meetings. It's an essential watchdog function, but covering a meeting is like watching a train pull into a station, discharge and take on passengers, and leave. You get glimpses of the passengers, but have no idea of how they may be interacting on the train.

There's a lot more going on among members of local public agencies than among people on a train. Those members usually have different perspectives, and many like to share their views, which can produce good stories. They can also be good sources of fact — sometimes, facts that other officials would rather keep quiet.

Stories that go beyond meeting coverage are not only more interesting; they are testimony to the value of a local newspaper.

This is just one example of how we can get Americans interested in local news again. We can't just talk about why newspapers are needed. We have to prove it.

Al Cross edited and managed rural newspapers before covering politics for the Louisville Courier Journal and serving as president of the Society of Professional Journalists. He is the extension professor of journalism at the University of Kentucky and director of its Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, which publishes The Rural Blog at irjci.blogspot.com and the Midway Messenger at MidwayMessenger.org.

Columns

Advertisers' blind spots



Ad-libs
by John Foust

Let's say you're meeting with a florist who has been running ads with the headline, "For all your floral needs." Of course, you and I know this is an empty headline that speaks to no one in particular. It's a terrible idea and a waste of the advertiser's budget.

What should you do?

1. Have a conversation. The first step is to diplomatically encourage the advertiser to consider something else. The headline – as weak as it is – may be near and dear to his or her heart. The florist has been spending money to run it, so don't criticize. Simply say something like, "Your idea opens the door to a lot of ad possibilities. How would you feel about seeing where those possibilities lead?"

Every word of your statement is true. "All of your floral needs" does open the door to other ideas. And you do want to encourage a look at other possibilities.

This approach sends a signal that you

are not looking for a quick, hit-and-run sale. You're aiming for a low-pressure, collaborative effort to promote the florist shop.

2. Break it down. Like a technician who takes a machine apart to examine its inner workings, it's important to learn specifics. What does "all" really mean? Make a list of the needs which the florist meets. It's better to ask, "What do your customers need?" than, "What do you do?" That keeps the focus where it should be – on the florist's customers.

As you go through the process, you'll probably learn that the florist provides flowers for all kinds of occasions: weddings, anniversaries, proms, funerals, Christmas, church events, Valentine's Day and birthdays, among many others. The point is to turn a generality into specifics. With the right details, you'll have plenty of raw material for new ideas.

3. Develop a strategy. The next step is to look at the yearly calendar and figure out the best times to promote flowers for those occasions. While some are year-round and some are seasonal (spring for wedding planning, for example), other oc-

casions rely on the advertiser's records and industry trends for development of an ad schedule and a creative strategy.

4. Create continuity. How are you going to tie everything together? Each ad should look like – and sound like – it comes from the same advertiser. There are a number of elements to consider: typography, color, illustrative style, ad sizes, frequency, coordination between print and digital and ways to link to their web site.

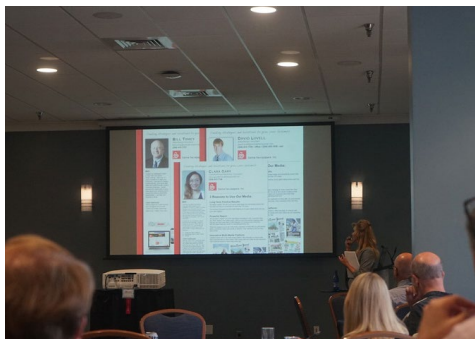
This four-step formula can help you generate more sales for your paper and for your advertisers. The end result will be a series of targeted and consistent messages, instead of the same watered-down ad over and over again. And the good news is that you don't even have to start with a bad idea like, "for all your fill-in-the-blank needs." Just start by figuring out what specific things your advertiser can do for their customers – and you'll find that the future looks rosy.

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

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