

# AlaPressa

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA PRESS ASSOCIATION

MARCH 2024

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APA elects new officers

Montgomery Advertiser press to shut  
down in May

Johnson inducted into the Upland  
Second Street Hall of Fame

Towns joins Alabama Media Group  
Remkus recognized by E & P

Internship grant opportunities  
available from APA Journalism  
Foundation

NNA Foundation offering chance to  
win a week's stay at the beach

Retired Navy man and attorney John  
Fry to serve Consolidated Publishing  
Co.

Blucher Ehringhaus to assist  
Consolidated Publishing Co. in  
serving area communities

Every salesperson needs a parachute

One checklist for evaluating,  
advocating coverage of sensitive issues

Uvalde editor, honored for his work,  
wishes he had done more before  
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## APA elects new officers

Denise DuBois, publisher and managing editor of the Citizen of East Alabama in Phenix City, has been elected president of the Alabama Press Association. DuBois succeeds Darrell Sandlin who became chairman of the board.

DuBois is a native of East Alabama. In 2007, she began her career as a reporter for the Citizen of East Alabama and fell in love with community news.



*From left to right: Darrell Sandlin, Denise DuBois, Teresa Woodruff, Robert Bozeman*

At 25 years-old, she became the executive editor and co-publisher of the now 70-year-old weekly publication, and led the newsroom through changes, including having a digital presence for readers and rebranding the newspaper into a tabloid-sized paper product that boasted a more modern look.

Denise has served on numerous community boards, including the East Alabama Chamber of Commerce, Young East Alabama Professionals, United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley, the Red Cross, Russell County's Alabama Bicentennial, Phenix City Art Park, and Miss Phenix City.

She has served on the APA board of directors since 2016, and previously served on the APA Journalism Foundation board.

Today, she also leads the newspaper's sister companies AMP 1 Advertising, Marketing, Production and Ch 7, a local access TV station and studio.

Teresa Woodruff, general manager of The Moulton Advertiser was elected first vice president, and Robert Bozeman, publisher of The Evergreen Courant, was elected second vice president.

New board members elected were: Catherine Hadaway, senior vice president of Boone Newsmedia; Eddie Dodd, publisher of The Abbeville Herald; Tom Mayer, editor and general manager of The Cullman Times; Tippy Hunter, general manager of The Outlook in Alexander City; and Ashley Trice, co-publisher of the Lagniappe in Mobile.

Members elected for a second two-year term are: Paige Windsor,

senior director, Local News for the Montgomery Advertiser/USA TODAY; Jeff Martin, publisher of The Montgomery Independent; and Arlan Blevins, publisher of the Mountain Valley News in Rainsville.

Members remaining on the board are: Brady Cox, editor of the East Lauderdale News in Rogersville; Vince Johnson, publisher of Gulf Coast Media; Robert Blankenship, publisher of The Brewton Standard; and Maury Wald, publisher of the Over The Mountain Journal in Birmingham.

The APA Journalism Foundation elected Barnett Wright, editor of The Birmingham Times, as president. Wright succeeds Gary Maitland, editor of The TimesDaily in Florence.

Wright became editor at The Times in 2016. He previously worked for 15 years at the Alabama Media Group which publishes AL.com and previously The Birmingham News.

He has covered municipal and county government and served as lead reporter on Jefferson County's historic municipal bankruptcy.

Wright served as lead reporter on AL.com/The Birmingham News coverage of the 50th anniversary commemorations of 1963 civil rights marches and is author of "1963: How the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement Changed America and the World (The Birmingham News Company)."

He also was the lead reporter on "Unseen Unforgotten," the publication of unseen photographs discovered in The Birmingham News archives tracing the progress of the civil rights movement.



*From left to right: Gary Maitland, Barnett Wright, Anthony Campbell*

The Times has won more than a dozen journalism awards since 2016 from the National Newspapers Publishers Association (NNPA) and the Alabama Press Association including a first place **board continued on page 3**

## board continued from page 2

award from the NNPA for General Excellence.

Anthony Campbell, general manager of The Advertiser-Glean in Guntersville, was elected vice president of the APA Journalism Foundation.

A new Foundation board member elected was Ashley Remkus, local investigative editor at AL.com.

Foundation board members remaining on the board are: Aimee Wilson, publisher of The Blount Countian in Oneonta; Chris McCarthy, publisher of The Messenger in Gadsden; Shannon Allen, publisher of The Sand Mountain

Reporter in Albertville; Jennifer Rash, editor of The Alabama Baptist; Bobby Rice, publisher of The Messenger in Troy; and Jonathan Stinson, editor of The Redstone Rocket; Cindy Fisher, publisher of the Selma Sun; Stephanie Rebman, editor of the Birmingham Business Journal; and Todd Stacy, publisher of Alabama Daily News.

## Internship grant opportunities available from APA Journalism Foundation

There are six \$2,000 summer internships available for APA members from the APA Journalism Foundation.

These internships are for college juniors, seniors and graduate students. These internships are also available

for adults in the community that may be interested in working at the newspaper.

There are also two \$1,000 internships for high school students to cover fall and spring sports or school events in area schools. This would be a great way for

you have extra help and get students interested in our industry.

Click [HERE](#) to apply. The deadline is Friday, March 29, 2024. Please call the APA office if you have questions or need any additional information.

## Montgomery Advertiser press to shut down in May

The Montgomery Advertiser's production facility, which handles the daily printing and packaging of the Advertiser and other publications, will close in May.

The Advertiser and its parent company,

Gannett, announced the plant closure to production staff Tuesday. The Advertiser's news staff will continue to cover the community from its new office on Dexter Avenue in downtown Montgomery.

The production facility at 425 Molton St. will print its last papers on May 5 for May 6 editions, after which production of the Advertiser and affiliated products will move to Jackson, Miss.

## People

### Johnson inducted into the Upland Second Street Hall of Fame

Gulf Coast Media Publisher Vince Johnson was inducted recently into the Second Street Promotions Hall of Fame during the 15th Annual Second Street Awards.

Johnson was among five people

inducted in the inaugural class recognizing work on promotions and local media space.

The "Best of" promotion has been a big success for Gulf Coast Media, working with Second Street.

Second Street works with more than 4,000 media partners across the country and has played a pivotal role in sustaining local media and building community over the past 15+ years.

### Towns joins Alabama Media Group

Hollis Towns will join Alabama Media Group as Vice President of Content and Editor in Chief, effective March 25.

Towns is a native of Fort Valley, GA, and most recently held the position of vice president for Local News and regional editor at Gannett. In that senior role, he oversaw 160 daily newspapers and news websites across the country. Newsroom teams under his leadership won multiple Emmy awards for investigative journalism, were Pulitzer finalists in Public Service in 2010 and were awarded the NABJ Public Service award in 2018.



Hollis Towns

Towns says Alabama Media Group's nationally recognized excellence drew him to the company. "Seeing the great journalism and bold digital moves taking place at Alabama Media Group was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. What's

not to love about working for a newsroom that has won multiple Pulitzer Prizes, Emmys and other top journalism awards by focusing on issues that impact local communities and where local journalism has led to new policies and laws that have helped Alabamians."

Natalie Pruitt, president of Alabama Media Group, introduced Towns to the staff. "It's a testament to our journalists and our work that we were able to attract someone with the talent and experience Hollis brings," Pruitt said. "Beyond his experience leading

newsrooms at a national scale, he is dedicated to becoming an active participant in our local communities. He is committed to listening to community members, civic activists, elected officials and all readers – including those voices

less likely to be heard."

In 2023, Towns created the Center for Community Journalism, a division of 150 Gannett news sites across the country focused on community coverage and leadership training.

Towns is dedicated to engaging Alabama's communities. "I hope to be very active in the local community whether it's a chamber event or at the local high school career day. I plan to be visible," he says. "I intend to keep my finger on the pulse of local and state issues listening and responding."

Towns' extensive newsroom leadership experience also includes a stint as managing and executive editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer. Before joining Gannett in 2004, he worked for Advance Local as managing editor of the Kalamazoo (Mich.) Gazette.

Towns replaces Kelly Ann Scott, who left in October 2023 to become editor in chief of the Houston Chronicle.

## Remkus recognized by E & P

Ashley Remkus, local investigative editor at AL.com, was recognized last month by Editor and Publisher magazine's top 25 Under 35.

Remkus earned a Bachelor of Science in mass communication from the University of North Alabama.

In 2023, she was part of the team that won the Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting for the investigative series that



Ashley Remkus

exposed predatory policing in the town of Brookside. The reporting freed people from jail, prompted Alabama legislators to pass new laws, and led to the traffic court judge being banned from the bench.

In 2021, she was part of the team that won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting for a yearlong investigation of police dogs and the injuries they inflict on Americans.

Her work has also been recognized by the George Polk Awards, Sidney Hillman Foundation, News Leaders Association, White House Correspondents Association, Investigative Reporters and Editors, Online News Association, Society of Professional Journalists and Alabama Press Association. She appeared in the documentary *State of Alabama v. Brittany Smith*, which premiered on Netflix in 2022.

Remkus was recently elected to the APA Journalism Foundation board of directors.

## NNA Foundation offering chance to win a week's stay at the beach

The National Newspaper Association Foundation is asking newspapers to participate in the 2024 Community Newspaper Postal Survey, an effort to collect data on the USPS handling of newspapers delivery.

Participants in the survey will be eligible to win a free stay in a condo on Pensacola Beach for a week.

A \$100 contribution is suggested, but is not necessary to enter. You also do not have to be a member of the National

Newspaper Association to participate.

The deadline to enter is midnight May 1, 2024. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

The winner will be drawn live through ZOOM on June 3, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. CT.

## Retired Navy man and attorney John Fry to serve Consolidated Publishing Co.

By Sherry Kughn, *The Anniston Star*

Now lending his outstanding leadership skills to Consolidated Publishing Company is a seasoned veteran, attorney and judge. John Fry is the new vice president and publisher of the east Alabama media company.

Fry's new role will allow him to continue serving as a special assistant administrative law judge in Atlanta, a position he has held for the past five years.

Fry is a retired captain in the U. S. Navy Reserve after having a 30-year career as an active Navy man and reservist. He is also retired as a partner from a law firm in Atlanta where he was an attorney.

A former Saks resident, Fry, 65, assumed the position of publisher through his longtime ties to the H. Brandt and Josephine Ayers family, previous owners of Consolidated Publishing. The ties started when Fry came to know the Charles and Juliette Doster family.

Even as a teenager, he admired a friend named Griffin, a Doster daughter. Their relationship grew while they were students at The Donoho School and they stayed in close contact during their college years. The Frys have been married for 44

years and have two daughters, Griffin Young and Juliette Fry, and a son, William.

The ties with Consolidated Publishing have grown throughout the years because Fry, now an Atlanta resident, became an attorney and assisted the Ayerses in legal matters.

As publisher, Fry will travel once a week to Calhoun County from Atlanta. He is looking forward to the time he spends at the newspaper office and making new and renewing former friends in Calhoun County.

His fondness of staying abreast of current events has always been a part of his life and careers.

"At first, I want to get my arms around the newspaper," he said. "Then, in terms of the community, my relationship will evolve with the time I spend here. Recently, I attended the annual banquet of the chamber of commerce, and the community leaders were welcoming and seemed glad to see faces in the roles of new publishers."

One of Fry's longtime acquaintances is former city attorney and city manager George Monk.

"For all practical purposes, John is a local boy who has done very well

and had an exemplary legal career, both as a practicing attorney and as an administrative judge," he said. "He knows Calhoun County very well, and he understands the issues that confront *The Anniston Star*."

Fry said he is glad to be a part of Consolidated Publishing, and he is impressed by its continuity considering how many community newspapers across the country have been closed. He credits the company's success to the late owners' dedication to journalism and to the community.

Currently, the company is publishing three hard-copy newspapers: *The Anniston Star*, *The Daily Home* and *The St. Clair Times*. All three also have digital formats and, as the transition to include digital journalism continues, the staff will be adding videos and more slide shows to grow the customer base.

Regarding digital news, Fry believes the changes will make the company a daily presence in customers' lives as more people get their news through their phones and tablets. Delivering the community's news to subscribers with such immediacy will help grow readership and grow the number of advertisers who will be able to reach more subscribers.

"Getting the news daily will help  
**Fry continued on page 5**

## Fry continued from page 4

people feel more connected to their community," Fry said. "Those who enjoy the print version will continue enjoying it, and those who use the digital version will become more connected in real time."

Fry's messages to the readers are as follows:

- To readers: "Being hyperlocal and inclusive throughout the county and beyond is a small, local newspaper's 'sweet spot' in community journalism. That's where Consolidated Publishing has stood for a long time. Our continued success is anchored and dependent on that."

- To advertisers: "We appreciate the past support, and we are moving forward. We are thinking about the newspaper in different ways, maybe adding a magazine that is published on a semi-annual basis. We have started two digital newsletters, The Slow Down and The Buzz, and we hope to add more. These are new opportunities for advertisers."

## Blucher Ehringhaus to assist Consolidated Publishing Co. in serving area communities

By Sherry Kughn, *The Anniston Star*

Sometimes the right person comes along at the right time. Blucher Ehringhaus, the new president and publisher Consolidated Publishing Company, which publishes *The Anniston Star*, *The Daily Home*, and the *St. Clair Times*, seems to be that person.

On Feb. 5, Ehringhaus, of Charlotte, N.C., announced his retirement from a 40-year career in banking to become the publisher and president of Consolidated Publishing. He will continue as the senior vice president and senior trust advisor for Regions Bank in Charlotte until sometime in March.

The death of *The Anniston Star*'s longtime publisher, H. Brandt Ayers, in May of 2020 and subsequent death in November 2023 of Josephine Ayers, who followed her husband as publisher, had readers asking who would steer the company. Josephine Ayers had asked Ehringhaus, her brother, to assume the role because she knew of his background as an experienced businessman.

Ehringhaus has successfully overseen not only the financial assets for the banks he has worked for, he led vital projects for The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and all of North Carolina. His background in supporting the arts, his altruism and personal relationship with the Ayers family made him a good fit.

Another benefit for the company is that he was exposed to the newspaper business throughout his adult life by virtue of his sister's marriage to *The Star* publisher.

Ehringhaus and his sister discussed the future of the newspaper company. Josephine, who had dedicated her life to many artistic and altruist endeavors in the community, such as the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, was always proud of the family's dedication to local journalism.



Blucher Ehringhaus

"She knew her death was imminent," Ehringhaus said from his office at *The Star*. "She was sad and disheartened, but our last conversation was about the responsibility she wanted me to take."

She asked two things: that he take an active role in preserving the history of the family and the company, along with fulfilling her desire that Consolidated Publishing continue its legacy, role and mission.

"She wanted to take care of the employees, which she considered as family," Ehringhaus said, "and she wanted to continue the outreach this institution has."

Of course, that includes the fulfillment of the words that appear on the front page of *The Star*, 'A home-owned newspaper,' along with the declaration that was on the editorial pages for years, that the newspaper would "speak with a strong voice for those who cannot speak for themselves."

Ehringhaus, the father of two daughters and grandfather of four with another on the way, lives with his wife, Nancy, in Chapel Hill, N.C. His serendipitous background for the job of publisher has "enthralled" him, a word he used to describe his plans, and although he does not plan to move to Anniston, he said he will visit often. Nancy is the admissions director for the largest private school in North Carolina.

Ehringhaus plans to take an active role in the company and in the cities and communities of Calhoun, Talladega, St. Clair and Cleburne counties.

Expansion of *The Star* and its sister newspapers is planned.

In the past three months, Ehringhaus has observed the potential of *The Star*.

"I think we can expand our service to readers because of the talent and dedication of the staff," he said. "We have people who are on the ground every day

doing their best for their communities."

Ehringhaus announced on Jan. 31, at a large meeting of community leaders attending the Calhoun County Area Chamber of Commerce's annual banquet, that he wants the newspaper to become "hyperlocal," meaning it will focus on the area's events, public meetings, businesses and people. State and national news will appear only if it affects the area's residents.

Currently, in addition to continuing to publishing the hard-copy newspapers that are delivered by mail twice a week, Ehringhaus said he, too, enjoys a hard-copy newspaper and sees the need for also publishing digitally because of the younger generations who are adept at using technology.

Even now, the newspapers are available in both formats, and there will be even more digital presence online. CPC has already invested in new software and hardware to distribute the daily news to readers' computers, notepads and cellphones.

Ehringhaus understands the need to connect to the business community throughout the entire area, and he understands that newspaper advertisements delivered in an efficient and effective manner will help the local economy and businesses.

Ehringhaus's messages for community members:

"Industrywide there are challenges to print media and to small town newspapers in particular," he said. "Layoffs and work shortages run all through the various media outlets against a backdrop of a shaky and unpredictable economy and corporate retrenchment.

"I have always believed this: a newspaper is the heart and soul of a community. There is nothing like it that can fill the role, not even a TV or radio station. Only a hometown newspaper gives you the full story, and those who write those stories are invested in the community."

To view full story [Click Here](#).

## Obituary

### Keith Ledbetter

Keith Ledbetter, former editor of The Red Bay News, passed away Saturday, February 17, 2024 at his residence. He was 72.

Ledbetter also worked as a DJ for more than 54 years at local radio station WRMG in Red Bay.

His career and life revolved around community service through the media

as an opportunity presented itself for Ledbetter to join the staff of The Red Bay News, in the middle of his radio career. Those same talents and qualities that had carried him in radio made a fast impression with the newspaper.

"Keith was a remarkable person," said LaVale Mills, former Red Bay News publisher. "He was dependable,

trustworthy, willing to do whatever it took to get a job done. He never missed a deadline, and he was one of the most unselfish people I've ever known. He did thoughtful things for people in quiet ways. He did it because that was the kind of person he was. It is hard to believe he's gone. He was a dear friend."

### Terry Everett

Former Alabama Congressman and APA Past President Terry Everett passed away Tuesday at his home in Rohobeth. He was 87.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Dewey Robert and Thelma Mae (Fowler) Everett, his brother Jerald Everett, and his sister Bobbie Jean Smith. He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Barbara Pitts Everett. He is also survived by his brother, Ronnie Everett (Sally) and several nieces and nephews.

Everett spent four years in the armed forces before starting his journalism career as a farm and police reporter at The Dothan Eagle. Over the years, he founded, owned and sold a number of newspapers.

In the 1960's, Everett was the editor and publisher of The Graceville (Fla.) News and The Hartford News-Herald. He founded weekly newspapers in Dothan and Daleville in the early 1970's

and bought The Enterpriser in Enterprise and the Union Springs Herald in 1976. He owned a group of six community newspapers in Baldwin County, Gulf Coast Media, from 1983 to 1988. He sold his last newspaper, The Union Springs Herald, in 2003.

Terry served as president of the Alabama Press Association in 1991-92. He was chairman of the APA board when Executive Director Mike Ryland passed away following a heart attack while lobbying for APA at the Statehouse. He served the association well as a strong leader during a very difficult transition.

Everett was elected to Congress in 1992, and represented Alabama's Second District. During his tenure, he served on the Agriculture Committee,

Veterans Affairs Committee, Armed Services Committee, and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.



After retiring from Congress in 2009, Everett became the first active or retired member of Congress to participate in the Air Force space war games. He was also appointed by President Obama to the U. S. Department of State's International Security Advisory Board, serving throughout the tenure of

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and into the tenure of John Kerry.

Visitation will take place at 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 16, 2024, followed by services at 11 a.m. at Rehobeth Baptist Church. Burial to follow at Gardens of Memory Cemetery in Headland.

See the full obituary [HERE](#).

## Columns

### Every salesperson needs a parachute



*Ad-libs  
by John Foust*

Anthony is a veteran ad salesperson with a common sense philosophy. "You've got to have a parachute," he told me. "When you're in the middle of a presentation, and you hit an unexpected glitch, your prospect throws you a curve or you can't think of what to say next, that's when you use your parachute."

He explained that the purpose of his kind of parachute is to pull a salesperson out of trouble and keep the conversation moving in the right direction. "The beauty of a well-stated parachute is that the other person doesn't know it's a rescue technique. It seems like it is a continuation of

the regular conversation. There are as many parachute possibilities as there are salespeople. The one I most rely on is benefits – not the benefits of running ads in my paper, but the benefits offered by that particular advertiser."

Based on my conversation with Anthony, four points come to mind:

1. Start with benefits. "The way I see it, there are a couple of advantages in focusing on benefits," he said. "First, it keeps the advertiser talking, and one topic that every advertiser loves to talk about is their products and services. The second advantage is that learning more about their benefits provides me with valuable details to use in their ads."

2. Bridge to the target audience. According to Anthony, target audiences and benefits are so closely connected that

they can be mentioned together. "If you're dealing with experienced prospects, it's a simple shift between the two areas. A big key is to help them visualize a smaller part of a larger group of people."

3. Ask questions. By asking questions, you can direct the discussion. In most cases, the person asking the questions is in control of the conversation – and that's a welcome confidence builder. "When the other person does most of the talking, it relieves pressure on the salesperson," he explained. "Plus, it provides you with a lot of information you can use. I might ask something like, 'What are some ways that people can benefit from the XYZ Widget?' Or – if benefits have already been discussed – 'What are some additional ways that people can benefit?'"

**parachute continued on page 7**

## parachute continued from page 6

“From that point, it’s easy to expand the discussion to target audiences with a question like, ‘And what types of people are most likely to need or appreciate those benefits?’ That can put everything back on track again.”

4. It’s okay to ask about audiences first.

“Sometimes it’s more practical to start with audiences, then talk about meaningful benefits,” he said. “For example, I might ask, ‘What types of people are likely to be interested in this model of Widget?’ Then I can ask, ‘What are the benefits that will appeal to that group?’ Benefits and audiences provide such easy transitions that there’s no trouble going back and forth between the two.”

Anthony’s technique makes a lot of

sense. When you feel like your sales presentation is losing altitude, the whole idea of a parachute is to give you a soft landing.

*John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. Email for information: [john@johnfoust.com](mailto:john@johnfoust.com).*

## One checklist for evaluating, advocating coverage of sensitive issues



by Jim  
Pumarlo

Editors are routinely challenged with making uncomfortable news decisions. To be certain, there is no universal right or wrong call on whether to publish a story and in how much detail. Several factors may be in play including community norms and longstanding newspaper policy.

The examples of tough and sensitive issues are numerous and surface in everyday coverage. Stories can range from monitoring public employee wage negotiations and publishing salaries of public officials to identifying suspended high school athletes and reporting on labor strikes to interviewing families of homicide victims and publishing photos of fatal accident scenes.

Nothing is more challenging than reporting on violence, specifically mass shootings that are becoming commonplace across the United States. Gun Violence Archive reported 656 mass shootings in 2023. Respective numbers for 2022 and 2021 were 646 and 689.

Newsrooms must be prepared to navigate a community in trauma – be sensitive in coverage and yet report the news. They must be ready to find their niche in reporting an event that will prompt widespread media coverage.

Rest assured, however, that other sensitive issues – those not so visible – are being talked about in communities. They have an impact on people. They must be reported if newspapers are to represent themselves as a living history of their hometowns.

Reporting these stories in a responsible fashion is a requisite if your newspaper is to remain relevant, especially in

today’s fractured media landscape.

It’s healthy and essential for newsrooms to pause and consider whether readers are best served by reporting certain news. Newsrooms may have faced some of these scenarios often enough to have developed policies. Many times, however, decisions must be made on a quick turnaround.

Here is one checklist, and accompanying rationale, that advocates giving attention to challenging stories.

### • Is it true?

Newspapers routinely report why athletes are “missing in action” – whether due to an injury, a family emergency or a college recruiting trip. Sitting on a bench for violat-

ating school or high school league rules is equally newsworthy.

### • What is the impact of an event?

It’s standard procedure at most schools to call in counselors in the wake of an untimely death of a classmate, whether the death is due to natural causes or a suicide. The death automatically becomes conversation in homes. Can newspapers ignore the story?

### • Is the report fair?

Teacher salary negotiations often are emotional and acrimonious. At the same time, salaries can represent 75 percent of a school district’s budget. Newspapers are performing a vital service by keeping a community abreast of contract talks, giving equal attention to all sides of all issues.

### • Is it a public or strictly private issue?

A closure of a major employer has a tremendous economic impact on a community. The news begs for explanation and interpretation.

### • Will the story make a

### difference?

A newspaper’s attention to a fatal accident, including a photo, can become a springboard for action to install traffic signals at a dangerous intersection.

### • Will the truth quell rumors?

A newspaper receives word from an elementary school student that a high school teacher lost all his fingers in a lab experiment – the “news” clearly spreading quickly. An investigation reveals that the teacher lost a fingertip, and a story sets the record straight.

How would you justify your decision to readers? Certain stories – an individual on trial for sexual abuse, for example – are expected to generate reader reaction, and editors should be prepared to answer questions. The hows and whys of coverage are ready-made fodder for an explanatory column to readers.

### • How would you treat the story if you were the subject?

This question is not intended to prompt rejection of a story. Rather, it’s a reminder to treat the story with sensitivity and balance.

In the end, fairness and consistency should be guiding principles for any story, and they are especially important when dealing with sensitive subjects.

Another element – community dialogue – is common to evaluating whether and what to publish. All decisions are stronger if the menu of options is explored with individuals within and outside your newspaper family. The conversations will not necessarily produce consensus, but seeking the opinions assures readers that decisions are not made on a whim.

*Jim Pumarlo is former editor of the Red Wing (Minn.) Republican Eagle. He writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He can be reached at [jim@pumarlo.com](mailto:jim@pumarlo.com).*

## Columns

# Uvalde editor, honored for his work, wishes he had done more before tragedy struck



by Al Cross

The town of Uvalde, Texas, pop. 15,000, and its same-named county of 25,000 were very unlucky in May 2022. That's when an 18-year-old with an assault rifle at an elementary school killed 19 students and two teachers – a toll that probably would have been less had police not botched the response.

But Uvalde was also lucky – that it had a newspaper with an editor-publisher, Craig Garnett, who had long been willing to tell hard truths about things that matter, and who kept doing that in the aftermath of the tragedy.

The day after the shooting, the twice-weekly Leader-News published a black front page, with “MAY 24, 2022” in reverse type. The next front page had portraits of the 19 children and the start of a story with biographies of each one. Inside was a column from Garnett, addressing the police delay in confronting the shooter.

He said regional police officials “could not answer why it took an hour to end the attack,” and quoted him as saying police were “measuring,” and wrote; “The question is how much measuring is permissible, while children are being murdered. Or perhaps they were already gone. It pains me to write these words of criticism about law enforcement, but parents and the community have the right to know. They must be told why police, whom parents at the scene begged to go in and save their children, failed to act. They have to know, to ever begin to heal.”

In an editorial a month later, Garnett named names and was blunt: “No mass school shooting in the United States has ended with such glaring failures in both the law enforcement response and school district security. . . Neither [school] Police Chief Pete Arredondo, acting city chief Mariano Pargas, Uvalde County Sheriff Ruben Nolasco nor any state or federal officer among the 376 responders

to the scene was willing to take the helm of what was clearly a rudderless ship cast into a hurricane.” That didn't sit well with local law enforcers and their supporters, but Garnett's initial reporting and commentary had already spoiled his good relationship with the school district and police agencies.

Meanwhile, Garnett spent much time “sitting with families who lost children, siblings, friends; interviewing survivors, teachers and students, about their experience,” Leader-News Managing Editor Meghann Garcia said in nominating him for the 2023 Tom and Pat Gish Award from the Institute for Rural Journalism at the University of Kentucky, which I ran at the time. Garnett wasn't able to attend our awards banquet in October, but in a recorded video for it, he reflected on his experience – and offered some advice for community editors and publishers:

“What happened in Uvalde was crushing. It continues to be an enormous weight on many of our shoulders, especially the families of victims. And we have endeavored to cover every aspect of that shooting. We still are working for information, accountability from various institutions, particularly our city and our school district and our law enforcement officials. We plan to follow that to its conclusion, whatever time it may take.

“But being successful at that and community journalism, as most publishers know, depends on your people. And I happen to have a group of journalists who are beyond amazing. None of us graduated from elite universities, some of us don't have college degrees, but after the tragedy on May 24, each one of them brought something extremely important to our coverage. And our grand total [is] five of us, so there wasn't a lot. It didn't take long to have our discussions with each other and to plan our day. And it's true in most of the newsrooms across this country and community journalism. But it brings you together in a way that nothing else can, I don't suppose, unless it would be a foxhole. We learned from that. And one of the things we've taken away from May 24 is that we didn't do enough before.

“We have a wall full of plaques from the South Texas Press Association, the Texas Press Association, but we didn't do enough. We didn't ask enough questions. We didn't hold people running for elected office to account like we should have. We didn't question people who wanted to run our institutions closely enough. What motivated them? What experience do they have? What would they do in a crisis? And we certainly didn't hold our law enforcement to a high enough standard, the people who swore to protect us.

“So, we will work harder in the future to do that, to make sure that we know as much as we can about people who intend to lead our community, especially in the aftermath of a tragedy. We want to know how they'll react. It's not entirely possible. There are all kinds of things that pop up that you can't plan for, but you can get a sense of where people's souls lie and what their commitment is to your community. And that's what I would advise to my fellow publishers in small towns. Pay attention. Pay attention to everything, to those people who run institutions, to the kid who's slipping between the cracks, who might one day become the same school shooter we had. Be invested beyond what you are now, if that's possible. I know most of you work your hearts out. But if there's one thing we would like to do better, it would've been that.”

Garnett received the Tom and Pat Gish Award Feb. 29 at the University of Texas during a symposium, “Courage, Tenacity, Integrity and Innovation in Rural Journalism,” sponsored by the Institute for Rural Journalism, the Texas Center for Community Journalism at Tarleton State University, and the Center for Ethical Leadership in Media in the University of Texas School of Journalism and Media. He was joined by fellow Texans Laurie Ezzell Brown of The Canadian Record, Randy Keck of The Community News in Aledo, Tara Huff of The Eagle Press in Fritch, John Starkey of Rambler Texas Media and Daniel Walker of the Vernon Daily Record, the Burkburnett Informer Star and the Clay County Leader.

*Al Cross edited and managed rural newspapers before covering politics for the Louisville Courier Journal and serving as president of the SPJ. He is director emeritus of the University of Kentucky's Institute for Rural Journalism.*



Craig Garnett



Winter Media Summit | Feb. 16, 2024 | Montgomery, AL



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The morning began with a panel of award winning student journalists from Troy University and Jacksonville State University. The panel was moderated by Barnett Wright, The Birmingham Times and Jeff Martin, The Montgomery Independent.

Dee Ann Campbell, The Choctaw Sun-Advocate/The Leader and Tommy Campbell, The Choctaw Sun-Advocate/The Leader and 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient



Incoming APA President Denise DuBois, Citizen of East Alabama, presents Chairman of the Board Darrell Sandlin, TimesDaily, with a plaque commemorating his time as President in 23-24.

Chairman of the Board Darrell Sandlin presents the 2024 Emerging Journalist award to Hadley Hitson, Montgomery Advertiser

Chairman of the Board Darrell Sandlin presents Gary Maitland, TimesDaily, with a plaque commemorating his time as APA Journalism Foundation President in 23-24.



The afternoon programming included a dive into AI for newsrooms with Alex Mahadevan, Director of the MediaWise program at the Poynter Institute and a presentation on media law and ethics from The University of Alabama journalism professors Dr. Dianne Bragg and Dr. Chris Roberts.

Help Wanted

**Editor – The LaGrange Daily News and The Valley Times-News; LaGrange, GA and Valley, AL**

**Publisher – The LaGrange Daily News and The Valley Times-News; LaGrange, GA and Valley, AL**

How would you like to lead the staff at two century-old newspapers, in beautiful small Southern towns that offer the amenities of a large city? The LaGrange Daily News publishes in LaGrange, Georgia, a city situated on Interstates 85 and 185, just an hour south of Atlanta. It is home to a number of musical entertainment venues, a craft brewery, one of the largest collections of Middle Eastern artifacts and world-renowned gardens. The Callaway Foundation supports the community by adding trails and parks, providing affordable housing and supporting small businesses. West Point Lake offers an incredible haven for fishing, kayaking, boating, camping and more.

Just thirty minutes down the road on the Chattahoochee River, the Valley-Times News serves Chambers County as well as West Point, Georgia. The newspaper office is located in Lanett, which is referred to as the “Gateway to Alabama” and is one of the most picturesque spots along the river. This area serves as an industrial and economic hub of the region.

Both newspapers are owned by Boone Newsmedia, Inc., a privately held, family-owned newspaper company with a long tradition of journalistic excellence in the communities it serves. Excellent benefits,

a fast-moving work atmosphere, and a tradition of letting local leaders create the pathway to success.

If you are looking for a place to put down roots and grow your career, this gem of an opportunity is for you. Drop your resume to BNI Senior Vice President Catherine Hadaway at [catherine.hadaway@boonenewsmedia.com](mailto:catherine.hadaway@boonenewsmedia.com) and BNI President and CEO Steve Stewart at [steve.stewart@boonenewsmedia.com](mailto:steve.stewart@boonenewsmedia.com) to apply.

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Birmingham Business Journal is looking for a reporter to cover technology, startups and innovation.

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Report and write short- and long-form stories for our website and weekly print edition.

Own the beat, dictating day-to-day coverage and thriving on digging out source-driven exclusives.

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Bachelor’s degree or equivalent work experience required.

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**News Editor- The Times-Record, Fayette, AL**

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**For more information on the above positions and the most current listings, visit the APA Help Wanted page [HERE](#).**

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