Best News Photo
Division 1: Weekly newspapers
2018 Better Newspaper Contest
By Nathan Bourne, Seeley Swan Pathfinder

Titled: Fire Bears Down on Seeley Lake

With Seeley Lake in the foreground, the DC-10 heavy air tanker drops a line of retardant on the south flank of the Rice Ridge Fire on Saturday, Sept. 2, 2017. The fire made a push towards the north end of Seeley Lake, but aerial resources were able to keep it in check.
## MNA Calendar

### March
- 22 Nomination deadline, 2019 Montana Newspaper Hall of Fame, Master Editor/Publisher Award and Distinguished Service Awards
- 29 Montana Freedom of Information Hotline Inc. event at the Montana Capitol

### April
- 5 MNA and MNAS Board of Directors’ meeting - Missoula
- 5 University of Montana School of Journalism Dean Stone awards banquet
- 12 Deadline to submit articles for April Press Pass newsletter
- 15 Montana Corporation Annual Report filing deadline with the Montana Secretary of State

### May
- 10 Deadline to submit articles for May Press Pass newsletter
- 27 Federal holiday: Memorial Day
- 27 MNA office will be closed for Memorial Day holiday

### June
- 6 MNA and MNAS Board of Directors’ Meeting–Big Sky
- 7,8 MNA office will be closed for annual convention
- 7,8 134th MNA annual convention–Big Sky
- 8 2019 MNA Better Newspaper Contest awards banquet–Big Sky
- 14 Deadline to submit articles for June Press Pass newsletter

### July
- 1 Deadline to file annual municipal and county sworn statements of circulation
- 4 Federal Holiday: Independence Day
- 4 MNA office closed for Independence Day holiday
- 12 Deadline to submit articles for July Press Pass newsletter

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### THANK YOU RENEWING ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

**Bronze Level Associate Member**

**Bronze Level Associate Member**

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**OUR MISSION:**

To advance and sustain the news publishing industry in Montana.

Matt Gibson, Executive Director | mgibson@mtnewspapers.com
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Ryan Stavnes, Member Relations & Client Services | member@mtnewspapers.com
mtnewspapers.com
No major damage but plenty of rattled nerves as 5.8 earthquake jolts Lincoln

Roger Dey, Blackfoot Valley Dispatch

A half mile below Ken and Sandy Crymble’s home in Mead Gulch, something moved.

“Something hit the cabin exploded, I didn’t know what it was,” Ken Crymble said. “I heard a loud, huge noise.”

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, a “shallow strike-slip” motion triggered a 5.8 magnitude earthquake almost directly beneath the Crymble home at 12:30 a.m., July 9.

As a retired fire chief, Crymble has years of experience being awoken out of a deep sleep by pages and alarms, and the area around Lincoln has a somewhat active seismic history.

“I was just kind of sitting on the edge, I didn’t know if it was an avalanche or an earthquake,” he said.

In an instant, the noise and tremors shook the Lincoln area for nearly a minute, jolting people awake across Montana.

“We were asleep inside, we were unharmed,”Susie Gehring said. She found the quake had cost her the flashlight function on her phone.

“With me, I was briefly unsure of what to do. I thought the cabin exploded, I didn’t know what it was,” she said. Eventually she remembered to grab her grandson Taylor Korth, she said.

Amanda Becker was asleep near the force of the state’s largest-ever earthquake.

“Just four miles straight north of the epicenter Susie Gehring was asleep were asleep inside, were unharmed. Becker’s son and daughter, who own a cabin in the Hogum Creek area, Tracy and Tyler MacKnight thought a plane had landed atop the roof of her home. Finding herself in the dark with her grandmother Taylor Korth, she was finally aware of what had happened.

“The next sec-ond I was on the phone and not knowing where it was,” she said. Eventually she remembered the flashlight function on her phone. She heard the quake had cost her an entire set of antique dishes that had been in her family for three generations.

Freighting damage to the home’s integrity, they headed to Lincoln to spend the night at a friend’s.

Some of the worst reported damage came from the home of Glory McElroy, who lives along Highway 200 east of Lincoln. He was out talking to his horse enjoying a fire with some friends when the quake hit. Inside bottles, wall hangings, several heavy mirrors fell to the floor. The building suffered damage to the foundation, chimney, walls and water line.

Becker’s son and daughter, who were asleep inside, were unharmed.

But fourth straight earth of the recent massive Goliath was no sleep in the vintage camper trailer she landed on the roof of her home.

“The one thing I just can’t explain is... Of course, you come out of a deep sleep and you’re grabbing each other simultaneously, and it was deafening. This one… I just can’t explain it. Of course, you come out of a deep sleep and you’re grabbing each other and you don’t know if the cables coming down, or what else,” he said.

In all, the home and fence were tossed and moved from one side to the other. The car with the camper was tossed and moved from one side to the other. The car with the camper was tossed and moved from one side to the other.

In the Hogum Creek area, Tracy MacKnight thought a plane had landed atop the roof of her home. Finding herself in the dark with her grandmother Taylor Korth, she was finally aware of what had happened.

“The next second I was on the phone and not knowing where it was,” she said. Eventually she remembered the flashlight function on her phone. She heard the quake had cost her an entire set of antique dishes that had been in her family for three generations.

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Can we talk about the weather? Seriously. I’ve been on the job here at the Montana Newspaper Association for about 80 days now, and if I had to tell you one thing that stood out from the experience, I’d have to single out the brutal cold we endured through February into the first week of March. I feel like it colored everything that happened last month. And things did happen. They just happened in well-heated indoor spaces while wearing multiple layers.

Credit the rugged weather if you like, but it looks like we’ll come out of the 2019 legislative session in a good place. None of the measures that caused us the most concern have survived transmittal. And we have a reasonable plan in place to work with the League of Cities and Towns and other stakeholders to develop clear guidelines for handling requests for public document requests. For openers, the league has invited Bozeman Daily Chronicle Editor Nick Ehli to attend a gathering of city attorneys with me in early May. I’m optimistic that a constructive dialogue can help us curb the worst government abuses and avoid a difficult legislative battle in the future.

Judging for the 2019 Better Newspaper Contest is well underway, thanks to our peers in Michigan who volunteered to judge the impressive 2,627 entries submitted. That’s a terrific level of participation from our members. We’ll be judging Michigan’s contest this fall, so please feel encouraged to reciprocate by judging their work when the time comes.

The Montana Newspaper Foundation convened a special board meeting in March to expand its range of activities to encourage and support other philanthropic efforts benefitting Montana newspapers. The decision will allow the Foundation to forge a relationship with the Solutions Journalism Network to advance the Montana Gap Project, a newsroom collaboration launched last year to tackle Montana issues with enterprising content carefully crafted to stimulate constructive response.

And we’re deep into our convention planning. In fact, I’m at Big Sky Resort as I write this, taking stock of the meeting and dining spaces to plan the best convention possible. We’ll arrange for some great fun and great programming, and I’m looking forward to seeing all of you here the weekend of June 7 and 8. I’ll make registration information available as soon as I’ve finalized all the arrangements.

Just my luck, the weather in Big Sky is lousy for skiing right now. It hasn’t snowed in a week. But the pavement is clear, and I’ll be back at my desk soon enough, wearing a layer or two less than a couple weeks ago. I’m calling that good progress.

Matt Gibson is the executive director of the Montana Newspaper Association.
Open government laws require vigilant defense

By Lee Banville

The students I teach at the University of Montana often show up with a powerful assumption: If there is some piece of information out there, Google can find it. It’s an understandable belief for 19-year-olds who have grown up in a world where ubiquitous connection to the Internet and easy access to vast reams of webpages is expected.

But for all those Wikipedia pages and Wayback Machines, there are countless documents that you, as a Montanan, have a constitutional right to see and you won’t find them no matter how many pages of search results you click on. That information is sitting in your county courthouse or the state agency in Helena. It is being discussed at the city council or at the local school board meeting.

And that is sort of the point of Sunshine Week. Sunshine Week runs from March 10-16 this year and is put together by the American Society of News Editors and Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. Its goal is pretty straightforward: highlight and promote transparency in government.

But transparency itself is sort of a strange word. The Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously wrote, “Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman.” The idea that the best way to keep the government representing all of us was for all of us to be able to see its workings, to contribute to its operation.

The Montanans who gathered to write our state constitution in 1972 knew and believed in this idea, incorporating two rights into the new document — the public’s right to know and its right to participate.

Donald Foster, a Lewistown Independent who served as a delegate to the state’s constitutional convention stressed that these two rights were to serve the public, saying during the deliberations, “[T]he citizens of the state will expect to participate in agency decisions prior to the time the agency makes up its mind .... It is also a commitment at the level of fundamental law to seek structures, rules and procedures that maximize the access of citizens to the decision-making institutions of state government.” For that participation to count, the public needs to know about the government’s work and the issues at stake.

For nearly 50 years, Montanans have stressed public participation and the transparency that makes that possible.

But these rights are fragile and in need of constant attention and defense. One misinformed county clerk or nervous school board member or one agency demanding money to hire a lawyer to review the document a member of the public requested could make those rights and the idea of transparent government mere words on a four-decades-old paper.

I am a member of the Montana Freedom of Information Hotline, a service that helps members of the public and journalists navigate the state’s laws and gray zones of public access, and we have seen some things in the past year that are both encouraging and worrying.

On the encouraging side, we have had more and more individuals — not journalists or lawyers, just Montanans trying to access information — contact us for help. We are happy to try and aid their efforts to ensure the system Delegate Foster envisioned continues here.

But we have also seen troubling developments that may make access to records a luxury only the wealthy can afford. Montana’s Supreme Court is currently considering a case about lawyer’s fees in a public records case. This all sounds pretty wonky, but think of it this way: If you go to get a public document and the government thinks you should not have it and then you take them to court and a judge says the state was wrong, should you have to pay for all that work your lawyer did to correct a government mistake? If the answer is “yes” or “maybe,” I worry that most of us out here in Montana will just throw up our hands and give up because the idea of hiring a lawyer seems pretty intimidating.

These issues often seem pretty distant from our day-to-day lives as we desperately try to hang on until spring, but making sure Montanans can access information from their government and be able to participate in the work of government is as important now as it was when Mr. Foster argued for it nearly 50 years ago. But for this to continue to be the Montana way, we must all stay vigilant. That way, we will continue to live in a world of sunshine and, maybe one day, some warmer temperatures.

Lee Banville is a professor of journalism at the University of Montana in Missoula. He can be reached at lee.banville@umontana.edu or at (406) 243-2577. He serves on the FOI Hotline Inc.

For years, news organizations have relied upon an organization called the Montana Freedom of Information Hotline to provide legal advice and assistance when confronted with closed or improperly advertised meetings or sealed documents.

The service also is available to individual citizens who believe they, too, are being kept in the dark.

You can reach the Hotline through its website, http://www.montanafoi.org/, or by calling the Meloy Law Firm at (406) 442-8670. Tax deductible donations to the Hotline may be made through the website. You can also read more about the Hotline at https://www.facebook.com/montanafoi/.
Troubling bills have died during 2019 legislative session

By John MacDonald

The halfway mark of the 2019 legislative session came and went in early March, but provided a long enough break for the Montana Newspaper Association to assess our successes at transmittal and get organized for the second half.

We are relieved to report that the half-dozen proposals causing the MNA the greatest concern all appear to be dead at this point. The MNA and its allies were either able to get them tabled in committee, or persuaded the sponsors against introducing them at all. Most concerning among those was LC2426, which would have greatly restricted when mug shots could be released to the public and press. Representatives of both the MNA and the Montana Broadcasters Association began discussions with the bill's sponsor before the session began, expressing our concerns. In those conversations, we also got a better understanding from the sponsor and others about their issues with how mug shots are sometimes used. In the end, those productive conversations seemed successful in persuading the sponsor, who is also chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, not to draft legislation.

Another top issue for the MNA was House Bill 504, which would have required the “corporate identification” of any “media company” be displayed in large font on the front page of every publication or online news story. Despite obvious constitutional and legal questions with the bill, it made it to the House State Administration Committee for a hearing. Before it got there, however, the MNA and the MBA had met individually with nearly every member of the committee, all of whom seemed perplexed by it. Both organizations spoke against the bill during its committee hearing as well. While the sponsor had significant, bipartisan co-sponsorship of the legislation, the bill was tabled in committee by a wide margin.

We also successfully opposed a bill to increase penalties for assaulting members of the press, arguing before the House Judiciary Committee that such protections were unnecessary, and successfully opposed a bill that would have exempted the state from public notice requirements for certain building projects.

Moving forward, we are monitoring and will likely be opposing two new bills. One, Senate Bill 324, revises the definition of elder abuse to include the publication or posting of images of residents of long-term care facilities if the intent is to cause them “personal degradation.” The other, SB323, could impact the tax-exempt status of nonprofits like the MNA and has significant opposition from a variety of interests. We are confident we can defeat both of these.

John MacDonald has represented the Montana Newspaper Association as its primary lobbyist since 2013.

Montana Newspaper Association Press ID cards

The Montana Newspaper Association provides Press ID cards (credentials) as a no-cost service to our Professional Members.

To order a Press ID, please contact: Ryan, Member Relations, at 443-2850 or member@mtnewspapers.com

1. Press IDs are for newspaper journalists, photographers, newsroom staff, correspondents, reporters
2. Allow four days for processing and mailing
3. Electronic IDs are available same day
4. Press IDs expire three years from date of issue/renewal

When placing an order, please e-mail the following:
1. Email a current JPEG photo as an attachment and please ID the person in the photo (Beth - red sweater, etc.) if you are requesting multiple passes
2. Include the job title

Guidelines for picture content
1. The picture should be a close-up showing your head and shoulders
2. Pay attention to the background and setting…a solid color background works best
3. The Press ID is a photo identification: remove hats, sunglasses and be sure to look straight on
In Memoriam

Aubrey Doyle Larson, who owned newspapers across the state, passes at 87.

The former owner of more than a half dozen Montana newspapers, Aubrey Doyle Larson, 87, of Stevensville passed away on Monday, February 11, 2019 from complications of multiple myeloma. He had endured this painful cancer for several months.

He was born on June 29, 1931 in Circle, Montana. He was raised there and learned the newspaper trade under the tutelage of his father, Ben M. Larson, who owned and published the Circle Banner for more than 50 years. He attended the University of Montana and did a stint in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

He married his wife, Marie Hunt Larson, on July 27, 1958 and together they shared 60 happy years of marriage. They have three daughters, Jana Larson, of Coon Rapids, Minnesota; Pam Larson, of Raleigh, North Carolina; and Julianne O’Brien, of Ponte Vedra, Florida. Over the course of his career, he was the owner and publisher of several small town newspapers including the Circle Banner, the Hysham Echo, the Broadus Powder River Examiner, the Jordan Tribune, the Fairview News, the Eaton Herald, and the Deer Lodge Silver State Post. He enjoyed publishing and being an integral part of the local community.

Aubrey enjoyed music and was at many a concert over the years. He especially liked choral music and was a regular attendee of the Missoula International Choral Festival. He was an avid gardener. He would grumble a bit each year that the frost came too early, or it was too dry, but his garden faithfully produced an abundant harvest each year. Traveling was another love of his and he logged a lot of miles in his car traveling to visit family or to explore some corner of the country. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, picnics, and time spent on his deck watching the sun set.

Family was important to Aubrey and he will be missed. He is survived by his wife Marie, his three daughters, and five grandchildren: Brittany Larson, Christian Larson, Nathan O’Brien, Megan O’Brien, and James O’Brien. His family requests that in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions go to Samaritan’s Purse or to Faith Lutheran Church in Hamilton, Montana.

A funeral service was held on Saturday, February 16, at Faith Lutheran Church, 171 Lewis Lane in Hamilton, with a reception held immediately following in the church’s fellowship hall. A graveside service with military honors was held at the Riverside Cemetery in Stevensville. Condolences and memories may be shared with the family at www.whitesittfuneralhome.com.
Into the Issues: Newspapers need to explain “How We Work”

By Al Cross

Newspapers cover almost every imaginable topic, but when it comes to understanding and explaining their own roles in society, many community newspapers fall short.

They keep doing business and journalism pretty much like they always did, with digital media as a sideline because they can’t make much money at it. Their presence on social media is often desultory and uninspired, even though social media have become the dominant form of mass communication.

These newspapers are disengaging from their audiences – or perhaps we should say their former audiences and their potential audiences – at a time when they need to be more engaged than ever. There’s a war on journalism in America, and it’s not just being waged in Washington, D.C.

Today’s media maelstrom has left much of the audience uncertain about what a newspaper is, or what it is supposed to be. Newspapers need to explain that clearly and consistently, through all available forms of media (more on those later).

At a time when Americans are more dubious than ever about sources of information, newspapers remain the primary finders of fact. But for some reason they have been bashful about making that their brand, or even thinking of themselves as having a brand.

What is our brand? At last month’s Ohio News Media Association convention, I said it can be built around three Rs: reliable, relevant information, delivered responsibly. The third R most needs explanation.

When I was first learning journalism and the news business, one newspaper I read regularly ran a standing box on its editorial page. “Daily News Platform” told readers what the paper stood for. It’s been a long time since I saw such a device, but it’s time to bring it back, in a different way.

If I were running a newspaper today, its home page would have a button labeled “How We Work.” It would take readers to a page explaining the paper’s purpose and the ways it tries to achieve it. Shorter versions of it would run in print every day, usually on the editorial page.

“How We Work” would start by explaining the different forms of information media, to help readers understand the different and special roles that newspapers play in our society, and the challenges they face. Here’s the version I offered in Ohio:

This is a newspaper. It reports facts. To do that, we verify information, or we attribute it to someone else. That is called the discipline of verification, and it is the essence of a craft called journalism, which you find in news media.

There are two other types of media: social media, which have no discipline, much less verification; and strategic media, which try to sell you something: goods, services, ideas, politicians, causes, beliefs, etc.

Newspapers once relied on one form of strategic media, advertising, for most of their income. Today, social media get more of the ad money, so newspapers must get more income from the only other

Continued on Page 9
The MNA is reminding members to double-check their legal advertising and public notices to make sure the “MNAXLP” code is on the page or with the ad. This includes all liner and display, legal and public notice ads.

The “MNAXLP” code allows the MNA to digitally transfer legal advertising and public notices to our critical public notice website: http://www.mtpublicnotices.com/mna/legals/

If you have any questions on the process, please contact Matt Gibson, executive director, at (406) 443-2850 or mgibson@mtnewspapers.com.
Research highlights role of newsrooms in politically divided United States

By Katalina Deaven

An "us versus them" mentality can make it difficult to find common ground. Lines of division are everywhere: religion, economic disparity, race, and political identity create invisible barriers to understanding. Bringing opposing groups together is a challenge, but it's an important task news media needs to take on.

To identify the most successful means to achieve this goal, the University of Texas at Austin Center for Media Engagement (CME) "Making Strangers Less Strange" study explored real-world newsroom examples and academic research on the topic.

CME analysed 25 newsroom projects that united groups from opposite sides of the political spectrum. The projects covered a range of formats and topics such as guns, immigration, the housing crisis, and the 2016 election. Some brought participants together in person; others brought people together through closed social media groups moderated by journalists.

A wide range of projects were studied for this report, including:

- KUOW Public Radio’s "Ask A…" series paired up individuals from a variety of groups (e.g. Trump voters, immigrants, transgender persons, police officers) with partners who do not usually interact with that group. In a speed-dating style event, the participants paired off, talked for a few minutes, and then switched to another partner. After the event, participants felt they had gained knowledge and empathy toward the other group.

- Your Vote Ohio involved 42 news organizations across Ohio partnering with the Jefferson Center, a non-partisan organization focused on democratic solutions and civic engagement, to figure out how to better serve communities during the 2016 election. The project brought together a group diverse in race, income level, age, and political beliefs. By asking for deeper reflection on contentious topics, they can help diverse groups understand each other.

- Spaceship Media’s "The Many" project brought together 5,000 women with diverse political convictions from across the country. The project was conducted in a closed Facebook group where participants were asked to share personal stories, political thoughts, and policy ideas. Spaceship Media journalists moderated the discussions, which changed each week to focus on specific topics such as race or immigration. Through the conversations, Spaceship Media hoped to foster understanding between communities that may not have otherwise had the opportunity to interact with each other.

CME also studied scholarly approaches to bringing diverse groups together. The research showed that positive experiences — even brief ones — can promote tolerance, respect, and activism. Participants do, however, need to be in the right frame of mind. Asking them to imagine the other person's experience makes them more likely to understand a different viewpoint. Emphasizing a shared background, like national identity, can also help bring them together.

The academic research pointed to several effective ways to bring diverse groups together:

- **Face to face:** The frequency and quality of these interactions matter. Superficial contact, like meeting someone on the bus, can affect attitude, but it depends on the experience.

- **Mediated:** A virtual meeting, like on social media, can reduce negative attitudes.

- **Media exposure:** The quantity and quality of news portrayals can influence attitudes. Negative media coverage leads to negative impressions of a group. That negative impact is more lasting and more damaging than a positive impact.

- **Imagined:** Imagining a positive interaction with an outgroup member can reduce prejudice and alleviate political polarization.

These findings can be applied to the newsroom. Bringing diverse groups together is a difficult task — and there is no one-size-fits-all answer. However, media can play an important role in bridging the divide, not only through specific programs geared toward this goal, but also through coverage that sympathetically portrays opposing groups.

The research revealed a few other key takeaways for the news media:

- **The need to increase diverse attendance:** Those who reach out or agree to participate in an event that brings opposing sides together are generally already open to hearing opposing ideas. Even participants found through a more random process need to agree to participate. To truly reach the groups that need it the most will require more creative thinking.

- **The need to create positive interactions:** The point is not just to expose participants to a different viewpoint, but to create a lasting, positive interaction. Through their programs, newsrooms can teach people how to handle conflict, keep discussions respectful, and examine the roots of their beliefs. By asking for deeper reflection on contentious topics, they can help diverse groups understand each other.

- **The need for more research on the effects of these interactions:** Though news projects provide anecdotal evidence, there is a need for a deeper understanding of which contexts and activities are most successful. For example, does having a communal activity, like sharing a meal, make people better prepared for a tough conversation? By continuing to study the concepts that come out of these projects, they can help newsrooms create more effective ways to bring people together.

The Center for Media Engagement’s full report is available online.

Katalina Deaven is marketing specialist at the Center for Media Engagement, based at The University of Texas in Austin, Texas. She can be reached at katalina.deaven@austin.utexas.edu.
Locally owned papers doing better than people think

By Kevin Slimp

It was a lot like other experiences I’ve had at conventions over the past couple of years. In March, as I gathered my backpack to head out of the room where I’d just spoken in Madison, Wisconsin, a man approached and said, “I really appreciated what you had to say. May I ask a question?”

I was in no rush. Immediately ahead was a five-hour drive to Des Moines, where I was speaking to a newspaper conference the next day.


His question was straightforward and deliberate. “What’s really going on at newspapers across the country?”

I knew it wouldn’t be a quick answer. I had been standing for two hours and there were a couple of chairs in the corner of the room, near the door. I suggested this was a conversation that required sitting.

As I began to answer his question, the area began to fill. Soon, there were a dozen or more publishers, editors and others standing in a semicircle, intently listening in on the conversation. I appreciated their interest. It’s a bit humbling to know people sincerely care what I think about anything.

I shared my thoughts with the group. Heads nodded as I mentioned most locally-owned papers seemed to be doing fine. Big metros, not so much.

Someone spoke up, “My paper is part of a small local group. That’s how it is with us.”

I went into more detail about the state of newspapers of various sizes and types, then explained that I should get on my way to Des Moines. As I began to walk toward the hallway, I heard a familiar refrain, “Thank you for what you do for all of us.”

You know, I hear that at every newspaper and convention I visit. I appreciate that people think that way. But the truth is I’m not really sure what I do. I study. I do research. I visit papers. I ask what’s going on. Then I share the information. It seems a lot like what journalists at newspapers do every day.

As I was leaving the Concourse Hotel in Madison – one of the nicest I’ve stayed at, by the way – I glanced at my email and text messages. There was an email from a magazine reporter in New York, asking if I had five minutes to talk.

I recognized the name. He had interviewed me a week or two earlier for a story he was writing about the state of newspapers. During the interview, when he shared who he had spoken with while doing his research, he mention Iris Chyi, University of Texas, and other names that could fill a “Who’s Who” list of researchers in the area of newspaper health.

In his brief email, he mentioned his editors were skeptical concerning the content of his story. Apparently the people he was interviewing were consistent in their findings. Most locally-owned newspapers are doing well. The same is not always true of other newspapers. The further the newspaper from the owner or ownership group, the more likely the paper isn’t doing well. That has been a consistent finding of my research for the past few years.

A few days later, the reporter and I talked on the phone and he asked if I could point him to some data that he could show to his editors. I did, reluctantly. I was reluctant because I’m starting to feel outnumbered. There seems to be stories on social media and in national publications almost daily about how one large newspaper group after another is falling apart. As I reminded this reporter, most newspapers aren’t part of large national groups. Most newspapers are still locally owned.

I didn’t even mention the publishers who I’ve run into over the past few weeks who are starting or have just started new papers. Frankly, I really didn’t care what the magazine ran, if anything.

Relaxing in the lobby of the hotel in Des Moines the next day, a publisher approached and I invited him to visit. He told me his newspaper is enjoying significant growth. It has been growing, he told me, several years in a row. The past year has been the best yet. Then – you guessed it – he said, “Thank you so much for what you do for our industry.”

I wanted to thank him. It’s folks like him – like the publishers, editors and journalists I met in Wisconsin and Iowa over the weekend – who give me the energy to keep up the fight. They remind me of others I’ve met recently in Wyoming, Texas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Vermont, Kansas and places I’ve momentarily forgotten.

One publisher in Iowa came up to the podium to tell me something. “Remember ten years ago when the university dean told you he didn’t think there would be a single newspaper left in America in ten years?”

“Yes,” I answered, “I remember.”

“You should mention that in every column you write. It’s been over ten years and we’re still here, and we’re not going anywhere,” he told me.

Consider yourself told.
Existing on small ads is not new
By Peter W. Wagner

Smaller ads sold mostly to locally-owned businesses are a part of a community paper’s DNA. There weren’t any supermarkets, department stores or automobile dealerships advertising in the majority of midwestern newspapers at the turn of the last century. I have a framed copy of the January 1, 1873 Sheldon Mail hanging on the wall of my office. What is most surprising is the largest display ad in the now 145-year-old publication is a one column by 3.5 inches. More importantly, all the ads in that first edition wouldn’t fill a half of a broadsheet page today.

When my wife and I put out our first publication, The Golden Shopper, our largest ad was a half-page on the front page. Most of the remaining pages were filled with 2 x 3, 2 x 5 and occasional quarter page ads. The nationally controlled firms all felt they had to advertise in the much older, more established newspaper. We were thankful for those locally purchased small ads, however, and somehow we survived.

In the boom times before corporate inserts, we regularly printed four process color broadsheet pages for our local Hy-Vee grocery store. That too, disappeared, and we still survived. We were thankful for them when we had them, however, and we survived.

The truth is our publishing industry is changing in ways that is making it difficult to sustain and be profitable in both the paid circulation and free distribution publishing business. The same is true of most other forms of local business. But, as long as papers have a commitment to providing solid local news and information to our communities, newspapers and shoppers alike will find new opportunities to sell print advertising to an appreciative local market.

Newspapers now are a local supplier of professionally written and edited information. Study after study has concluded communities need a printed publication to flourish. Without a competent local paper, communities suffer the eventual loss of everything from main street retail synergy to in-town grade and high schools to much needed sales and property tax revenues.

A study by the North Carolina School of Media and Journalism found that more than 1,300 communities have completely lost their sources of local news. The local printed paper must continue to exist, and it can through persistence, creativity and a commitment of the local ownership.

The secret of such success is “Telling your story!” For newspapers that means both sharing all the important local news of the community from the city chambers to the little league as well as the advertising and marketing services the publication offers. No business has ever succeeded in “saving itself out of financial difficulty.” Most successful business leaders turn a difficult corner by increasing the material and service delivered.

I was in Hawaii recently and saw an interesting large red poster in many windows on one island. It read: Here is what you did by buying from us ... 1) You contributed your dollars to local economy. 2) You celebrated the unique buying opportunities of our community. 3) You helped create local employment. 4) You encouraged the building of a community. 5) You kept important tax dollars at home. 6) You benefited from our expertise. 7) You invested in local enterprise. 8) You made this community and all it offers a destination.

Everything promoted on that poster could also be said, with a bit of a twist in the wording, of the local paper. Our biggest failing as a publishing industry is we don’t tell our story strongly or often enough. If we don’t blow our own horn, who will?

Michael Bugeja, author of Interpersonal Divide in the Age of the Machine, recently wrote: “Don’t overlook newspapers. They are the lifeblood of the community. Subscribe to your hometown paper. Go farther and buy gift subscriptions for your relatives and friends. Discuss the news face to face at the dinner table instead of on Facebook. If you have children, let them see you pouring over the pages of the paper, pointing out stories about school, hobbies, and upcoming events you might attend. If you want to get rid of fake news support your local newspaper. It takes a village to save a local newspaper. But saving a village is worth the price of a subscription.

Peter W. Wagner is founder and publisher of the award winning N’West Iowa REVIEW and 13 additional publications. This free monthly GET REAL newsletter is written exclusively for State and National Press Associations and distributed by them to their members. To get Wagner’s free PAPER DOLLARS email newsletter for publishers, editors and sales managers email him at pww@iowainformation.com. The two monthly email newsletters contain information completely different than found in Wagner’s monthly Publisher’s Auxiliary column. Wagner can be contacted by emailing pww@iowainformation.com or calling his cell at 712-348-3550.