Best Sports Photo
Division 5: Daily newspapers (6 & 7-day)
2018 Better Newspaper Contest
By Bronte Wittpenn, Billings Gazette

Titled: Hillclimb

Brendon Cady of Billings rides up the hill toward the finish during the annual Nitro National Pro Hillclimb on Rapelje Road in Columbus on June 16.
# MNA Calendar

## May
- **24** Deadline to book lodging for 2019 annual convention at group rate
- **27** Federal holiday: Memorial Day
- **27** MNA office will be closed for Memorial Day holiday
- **27** Deadline to register for 2019 MNA annual convention

## 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
- **7** MNA Annual Meeting—Big Sky
- **7** Montana Newspaper Foundation Banquet—Big Sky
- **8** Past Presidents’ Luncheon—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

## August
- **16** Deadline to submit articles for August Press Pass newsletter

## September
- **2** Federal holiday: Labor Day
- **2** MNA office will be closed for Labor Day holiday
- **4** National Newspaper Carrier Day
- **20** Deadline to submit articles for September Press Pass newsletter

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**THANK YOU RENEWING 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
Stacy Wirtz, Business Development Director | stacy@mtnewspapers.com
Ryan Stavnes, Member Relations & Client Services | member@mtnewspapers.com
[mtnewspapers.com](http://mtnewspapers.com)

825 Great Northern Blvd., Ste. 202
Helena, MT 59601
Phone 406-443-2850
Fax 406-443-2860

May 24, 2019
2018 Better Newspaper Contest Winners

Best Page Layout & Design

2nd PLACE
Division 3
Weekly newspapers with circulation of 2,001 to 4,500
By Belgrade News

2nd PLACE
Division 4
Weekly newspapers with circulation of 4,501 or more
By Kou Moua, The Missoula Independent

To view all the first-place winners of the 2018 Better Newspaper Contest, please visit the following link:

Reminder: Code your legal ads and public notices

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 mgregson@mtnewspapers.com

May 24, 2019
Big Sky convention plan promises high mountains and high spirits
By Matt Gibson

With the 2019 legislative session safely in the rear view mirror, the association’s focus has turned quickly to the 134th annual convention, scheduled for June 7 and 8 in Big Sky. One of the most enjoyable destinations in Montana, Big Sky is a great place to convene, and we have a fun, informative couple of days planned there.

The resort, where we’ll be headquartered for the weekend, has some of the best conference facilities in the region, and they can easily handle the demands of our group. The amenities are fabulous.

With a full service spa and an intriguing selection of Base Camp activities like zip lining and rock climbing, there’ll be no shortage of lively diversions. MNA members can register for a tour of the 11,166 foot summit of Lone Peak, with a spectacular ride on the Lone Peak tram to the top. Or they can opt for the traditional golf scramble to benefit the Montana Newspaper Foundation at the resort’s golf course near the Meadow Village. Kids should remember their swim suits. One of the best features of the Huntley Lodge, where our convention activities are centered, is its heated swimming pools.

The program schedule promises to deliver plenty of useful information that you can apply to your work, with digital sales training from Jeff Avgeris of On the Fly Digital Marketing, editorial-writing pointers from the Missoulian’s Tyler Christensen, and a legislative affairs update with lobbyist John MacDonald.

I’m especially pleased to have University of Montana President Seth Bodnar, who will address us Saturday afternoon. A dynamic, unconventional university leader, Bodnar will likely touch on changes at the School of Journalism and the recent developments on campus. The university shares with newspapers the fundamental work of fostering an informed society, and I’m eager for Bodnar to connect with our members on that level.

The 2019 Better Newspaper Contest awards banquet will follow later Saturday night, with UM journalism professor Jason Begay presiding over the celebration of our best work. For our many winners, the awards banquet is a proud moment and a highlight of the year. I encourage members to send as many winners as possible to receive personal recognition.

To register for the convention, fill out the form on page 6 of this month’s Press Pass and send it in, or download the registration form from the MNA website at https://www.mtnewspapers.com/2019convention/. We’ve got a great weekend shaping up. I’ll be happy to see all of you there.

“Matt Gibson is the executive director of the Montana Newspaper Association.”
Montana Newspaper Association
134TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

Big News in Big Sky
June 7-8, 2019
Big Sky, Montana

Business Networking
Training & Professional Development

Cocktails • Awards Banquet
Plus all the fun Big Sky has to offer!

To register, visit www.mtnewspapers.com/2019convention
134th Annual Convention

Big News at Big Sky

Big Sky Resort, Big Sky, Mont., June 7-8

Attendee Registration

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Friday, June 7</th>
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Attendee’s Name: 

Total: $

No Payment Required At This Time

Total Of All Registration And Events Fees: $

Your Organization Name:

Please Send Convention Registration To:
Ryan Stavnes, member services
Email: member@mtnewspapers.com
or
Montana Newspaper Association
825 Great Northern Blvd, Ste 202
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 443-2850
Registration Deadline: May 27, 2019

Convention Lodging:
Big Sky Resort
50 Big Sky Resort Rd.
Big Sky, MT 59716
(800) 548-4486

Group Rate: $129 + tax

Group Rate Discount Deadline: May 24, 2019

Our Mission:
To advance and sustain the news publishing industry in Montana.
My last MNA Press Pass legislative update seems like an appropriate forum to express gratitude and say ‘thank you’ to the many members of the Montana Newspaper Association who helped out this session. It’s a reminder to me of what a great journalism community Montana has and the great work all of you do every day to keep Montanans informed and to protect their right to know how their government is operating.

The 2019 session proved to be as challenging as previous sessions, with the MNA taking the lead in defeating a number of bills that would have affected the industry negatively. This included a bill that would have exempted many state construction bid requests from being publicly noticed in newspapers, as well as legislation requiring all publication companies to note their corporate headquarters in large print on the front page. MNA members reached out through editorials, news coverage and even direct contact with their legislators to help us get these killed.

MNA members were also instrumental in our success this year in other ways. Reporter Tom Kuglin at the Helena Independent Record, whose coverage includes wildlife and outdoors, informed us of a bill that we likely would otherwise have missed. The legislation was intended to protect the location of certain wildlife being monitored by the state, but it contained what would have been a dramatic change to the public information law. His tip ensured we were able to get involved and get the bill amended so it did not create expansive loopholes for public information requirements.

Members from across the state were also instrumental in helping us narrowly defeat last-minute legislation that would have required the public to pay for the release of booking photos. We thought we had talked the sponsor out of introducing the bill, but he did so very late in the session. Editors and publishers reached out to their representatives personally to discuss problems with the legislation. And Montana Standard Editor David McCumber offered key testimony during public hearing. The bill died on a tie vote on the House floor. I know the efforts of our members were instrumental in getting the bill killed and avoiding a prolonged fight in the Senate.

And we owe a huge thank you to all the MNA members’ capitol reporters in Helena, whose constant vigilance assured we were always present to speak up when it appeared legislators were attempting to usurp the public’s right to know and participate.

With the legislature wrapped up, the MNA and its legal affairs committee are already looking to the next session and what issues we may need to prepare for and address. In May, I attended a conference of city attorneys along with Executive Director Matt Gibson and Bozeman Daily Chronicle Editor Nick Ehli to begin a dialogue over issues including fees or public records. We intend to have similar discussions, including at the MNA convention in June, to determine how best to protect the public’s right to access public information. I know we will be counting on MNA members to give us direction and provide input throughout the interim as well.

A lot can happen in the two-year interim between sessions, so I hope all MNA members will keep us informed on any issues that they see arising that we can attempt to address. And thank you again for all that you do.

John MacDonald has represented the Montana Newspaper Association as its primary lobbyist since 2013.
Press associations nationwide defend against erosion of public notice laws

We're only four months into the year and more public notice bills have already been enacted than in all of 2018. Like 2018, the truly bad bills—the existential threats to newspaper notice—are either going nowhere or have already been defeated. The two state press associations that appeared to face the greatest danger—Missouri and Indiana, both of which opposed bills that would have eliminated newspaper notice of foreclosure sales—survived to fight another day. Indiana HB1212 passed the House but died in the Senate when the legislature adjourned last week. Missouri HB686/SB50 hasn’t managed to make it out of committee in either chamber with only two weeks left in the session even though an almost-identical piece of legislation came dangerously close to passage in 2018.

Two other state press groups that saw heightened legislative activity around public notice this year ended their sessions with big wins. The Virginia Press Association helped to shepherd a bill to passage that revamps public notice eligibility rules in a way that could serve as a model for other states. The Arkansas Press Association helped to defeat or reshape three bills that would have chipped away at newspaper notice in their state.

The story in Virginia began two years ago, when a House member introduced a bill that would have stripped public notice from newspapers in towns with populations above 50,000. VPA convinced the legislator to withdraw the bill and then convened a task force of legislators, lobbyists and trade associations to look closely at the state’s public notice laws. VPA Executive Director Betsy Edwards credits the task force—and a presentation about the importance of public notice she made to legislators and government representatives—as changing the culture around the issue in the state. She notes this session was the first in many years in Virginia in which no legislation was introduced to move notices out of newspapers.

In 2018, VPA and other task force members pushed a bill that would have increased circulation, content, placement and archiving requirements for newspapers eligible to publish public notices. It would also have allowed localities to petition state courts to select another newspaper when none meeting those qualifications “publish” within its jurisdiction. It didn’t make it out of committee. This session, VPA took what Edwards considers a stronger bill to Jennifer Boysko, a Democratic state senator from Herndon, an exurb of Washington, D.C. that lost its newspaper and had limited options for publishing its notices. Sen. Boysko had introduced anti-public notice legislation in the past, but VPA had helped turn her into an advocate. Edwards considered her the perfect sponsor. Boysco’s Senate Bill 1638 (now §8.01-324 of the Virginia Code) passed both the Senate and House unanimously and takes effect on July 1. It beefs up requirements for newspapers to qualify to publish notices and provides towns and counties with options when they don’t have an eligible newspaper published in their jurisdiction. More specifically, it:

- Increases the publication frequency required to serve as an official newspaper from 24 to 50 weeks
- Requires public notice newspapers to provide news coverage for the area in which notice is published
- Changes the mailing permit mandate from “second-class” to “periodical” and requires newspapers to publish an annual USPA statement of ownership; it also allows papers that don’t meet this requirement to petition courts to serve as an official newspaper
- Requires papers to publish boldface section headers in at least 24-point type and to maintain at least three years of print archives
- Requires official newspapers to publish all notices on VPA’s statewide public notice website
- Allows localities without a newspaper meeting all of these conditions to petition courts to publish their notices “in another printed medium”

In addition to the task force and public-notice presentation, Edwards says she curried favor with government representatives by promising to maintain a qualified list of newspapers by town and county, and to publish a directory of every public notice in the Virginia Code. She credits the last idea to Oklahoma Press Association Executive Director Mark Thomas.

Unlike VPA, the Arkansas Press Association was forced to play defense from day one of the 2019 session. APA faced a slew of legislation that would have kneecapped newspaper notice. One bill even passed a House Committee the first week legislators met.

APA’s three primary public notice battles were fought over House Bills 1041 and 1896, and Senate Bill 409.

Continued on Page 9

May 24, 2019
HB1041 would have raised the threshold for bid notices for Arkansas cities from $20,000 to $50,000, which would have significantly diminished the number of bid notices they have to publish. The bill narrowly passed the House in January, with supporters arguing it would make procurement more efficient and less expensive. Executive Director Ashleigh Wimberley says APA had to kill the bill two or three times in the Senate but it kept coming back. In a last-ditch effort to get it passed, the sponsor reduced the amended threshold to $35,000 near the end of the session but was never able to get the bill out of committee in the upper chamber.

HB1896 would have allowed hearing notices for petitions to establish local “improvement districts” to be published on the Secretary of State’s website in lieu of newspapers. The bill that ultimately passed requires publication in both a newspaper and the SOS website.

The final disposition of SB409 was perhaps APA’s most impressive bit of maneuvering. As originally drafted, it would have allowed local government units to satisfy state purchasing requirements by providing notice of bid solicitations via their websites. The bill was being pushed by Louisiana-based Central Bidding, an electronic-bid-vendor. In addition to maintaining newspaper notice, the final version of the bill signed by the governor eliminated the option previously sanctioned by the statute to publish bid notices in trade journals instead of newspapers. It also requires five weeks of newspaper notice for local governments to announce when they sign a contract with an electronic-bid vendor. Wimberley credits APA’s highly engaged membership with making the difference in all of these battles. “APA members had a substantial influence on these bills through their calls, emails and meetings with legislators,” she says. “It was very important for legislators to hear from local publishers and to have everyone pushing in the same direction.”

Wimberley hopes not to have to repeat this year’s epic struggle and plans to be more proactive next session. APA is now working on establishing a public notice advisory committee that will include publishers, lobbyists and other interested parties, to help change the culture around public notice in Arkansas in time for next year’s session.

Darla Downs launches new papers to serve Wolf Point, Culbertson area

By Darla Downs, Northern Plains Independent

Starting with the inaugural issue of the Northern Plains Independent on May 16, Wolf Point and the surrounding area will be served by a newly-formed newspaper.

Publisher and owner of the Northern Plains Independent is lifetime Wolf Point resident and longtime publisher of The Herald-News, Darla Downs. We are not abandoning our eastern Roosevelt County’s readers either. A new publication, the Community News, will be serving the Culbertson area. Initially, it will be operated by Wolf Point’s staff as we work to get its subscriber base built and a Culbertson office set up.

The Downs family has been operating The Herald-News since 1945. Four generations—my grandparents, parents, siblings, cousins, children and I—have all dedicated at least some part of our lives to keeping the Wolf Point community and the surrounding area informed. I had been employed at The Herald-News since 1996 and have dedicated nearly 100,000 hours over the past 23 years to covering the community I call home.

My grandfather, Harry Downs Sr., was inducted into the Montana Newspaper Association Hall of Fame in 1999, the highest honor the Montana Newspaper Association bestows to journalists after their death. My father, Harry Downs Jr., was presented with the MNA’s Master Editor/Publisher Award in 1994.

I was honored with the Master Editor/Publisher Award in 2018. The MNA’s presentation of the Master Editor/Publisher Award to me last summer had a great deal to do with the decision to take on this new venture. Knowing that my colleagues across the state believed in me enough to honor me with that prestigious award helped me find the strength and courage to face the challenges of starting a new newspaper. After making my decision to go out on my own, the well-wishes from the community were overwhelming. I truly appreciate the support. The Northern Plains Independent will continue the Downs’ tradition of documenting the daily history of Wolf Point and the surrounding area. Our issues will be filled with the social and cultural happenings that our
area's residents expect from their local newspaper. We will provide fair and unbiased news coverage each and every week.

Former editor of the The Herald-News, James Walling, has joined the NPI staff and will assume the majority of the editorial and photographic duties for the newspaper.

Initially, the NPI sales and design department will be handled by Jessica Smith, who did ad sales/design in her previous position at The Herald-News.

John Plestina also joins the NPI staff as general correspondent for our sister paper, the Community News.

Kailey Williamson will be serving as an independent contractor photographer on an as-needed basis as we work to establish the new paper.

We will offer complete composition services, single to full-color printing and complete bindery services including collating, stapling, saddle and spiral binding and mailing. We have made arrangements with the Daniels County Leader and other printing partners to be able to continue providing printing services to our customers. Despite having less than a week to completely start a newspaper from scratch, my staff and I have accomplished it. We are operating this week on personal and borrowed equipment in an office space furnished with desks and chairs from our homes. A small loan from my mother will help me meet payroll and other expenses initially. I appreciate her trust and support.

The Northern Plains Independent looks forward to covering the news and special events—both in print and digitally—for our readers, near and far. Soon, we will have a website available. Watch for more information on that. In the meantime, “like” us on Facebook at Northern Plains Independent.

We know and love Wolf Point, and the Northern Plains Independent will reflect our commitment to our readers, our advertisers and our community. We hope you enjoy our first edition and we look forward to putting out many more.

Looking forward to serving Wolf Point and the surrounding area are the staff of the new locally-owned newspaper, the Northern Plains Independent. NPI staff members include (left to right) John Plestina, general correspondent; James Walling, editor; Darla Downs, publisher; and Jessica Smith, sales and design.

Photo credit: Kailey Williamson

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Newspapers must show complacent communities they are essential
By Al Cross

Does the reportedly mixed reaction to the death of a small newspaper on the Lake of the Woods show we are in “the golden age of ignorance,” as Minnesota Public Radio blogger Bob Collins declared? Maybe, if newspapers can’t convince communities that they are an essential civic asset.

Collins followed up on MPR reporter John Engler’s report on this week’s demise of the Warroad Pioneer, one of three weeklies in Roseau County, on Minnesota’s northern border. Engler paraphrased New York Times reporter Richard Fausset: “He said he spent a week in Warroad, talking to locals about the paper closing. He admitted that most folks, outside of the Pioneer staff and their husbands, didn’t seem too broken up about it.”

Fausset disputed that, in an interview with me: “I talked to a lot of people who were very worried the newspaper was going to quit. What MPR reported does not accurately reflect what I found in the town. There are a number of people concerned about what happens next.”

Engler did a little of his own reporting on the point. After paraphrasing Fausset, he wrote: “Out on the streets of Warroad, a handful of locals backed up his assessment,” and cited one as saying that “he gets his news from Google, just like everybody else.”

That comment reflects “monumental ignorance,” said Reed Anfinson, former president of the National Newspaper Association and publisher of the Swift County Monitor-News in Benson, in central Minnesota. “There is no local civic reporting from Google. Google captures our work and pirates it—if it is available.”

Anfinson also said, “A reporter finding some disgruntled, or disinterested, people and using them to imply definitive assessment of the community’s feelings about the newspaper, I find troubling.”

Publisher Rebecca Colden told me, “There were people coming in throughout the day who said just the opposite.” Interviewed before Fausset was, she said, “I think Richard’s saying they’re just complacent with the value of a newspaper. They like it, but they don’t value it as they should.”

Colden said that feeling played a role in her decision to get out of the newspaper business. She said she met with many people in the community, looking for ways to rejuvenate the paper, but “The challenge was that there is a complacency within these small communities, that they just feel like the paper will always be there, especially a paper of this age.” The Pioneer lasted more than 120 years. And it wasn’t as if she hadn’t warned the whole town, in stark fashion. Colden said the Pioneer was the first of many Minnesota newspapers to run a blank front page in 2017, asking readers to imagine that there was no local paper. She told me that she did the sort of accountability news coverage that readers expect, and “They’re gonna miss all the information they didn’t know they needed.”

Colden said she could have borrowed more money and taken the risk of converting to free, total-market circulation, “but I need to know that there’s really community buy-in to do that, and . . . the community buy-in was really lacking.” She said that showed in school news, a local-paper staple: “Teachers and coaches just throw some things up on social media rather than send it to the paper.”

Engler reported that Fausset was assigned to “tell the story of the prototypical American small town losing its voice.” If so, he seems to have made a good choice; the paper is like many rural weeklies that have closed in the last 15 years: in a small town outside a county seat, with a shrinking advertising base and independent ownership that couldn’t find a suitable successor or buyer.

Colden said she couldn’t work out a deal with the paper’s former owners, who have five nearby weeklies based in nearby Baudette. That was after she’d considered going to free distribution, which she concluded was too risky, and tried to compete more directly with the county-seat paper, the Roseau Times-Region, 22 miles away. As often happens, local loyalties trumped other factors, Colden said: “Because of that community loyalty over there, we were never able to capture that advertising base.”

She said her local ad base has shriveled because Marvin Windows and Doors, the main local employer, has “a new generation of workers” who were more willing than their predecessors to shop in other towns. “It doesn’t bug them to drive two hours to go to Walmart,” she said, so more than a dozen of Warroad’s approximately 50 storefronts are empty. “We’re really a community in transition.”

The Pioneer’s death “is more than a one-off loss of a newspaper,” Anfinson wrote. “I am hearing from newspaper publishers and executive directors of state newspaper associations that their concerns about the future of small-town weekly newspapers is growing.” Almost a year ago, Anfinson was featured in a Rural Blog item headlined, “Times get tougher for rural newspapers.”

Now it seems even tougher. As the old saying has it, when the going gets tough, the tough get going. And prove to their communities that they are needed.

Al Cross is a professor and director at the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, University of Kentucky.
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May 24, 2019