Best News Photo
Division 4: Weekly and Daily Newspapers
2019 Better Newspaper Contest
By Justin Franz, Flathead Beacon

Watching the Flood
Judge’s comments: A nice find by this photographer, and good job working several elements into this storytelling image. Would love to read this man’s thoughts on the floods in the caption.
MNA Calendar

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

October
1  Deadline to file USPS Statement of Ownership Form 3526
4  MNA and MNAS Board of Directors Meeting—Sage Lodge, Pray
7  Federal holiday: Columbus Day
11  Deadline to submit articles for the October Press Pass newsletter

November
1  MNA member Rate and Data Survey deadline
6  Montana Newspaper Foundation 2020 Internship Grant opens for applications
8  Deadline to submit articles for the November Press Pass newsletter
11  Federal holiday: Veterans Day
28  Federal holiday: Thanksgiving Day
28, 29  MNA office will be closed for the Thanksgiving holiday

December
2  Montana Newspaper Foundation 2020 Internship Grant application deadline
13  Deadline to submit articles for the December Press Pass newsletter
19  Montana Newspaper Foundation 2020 Internship Grant winners announced
24, 25  MNA office will be closed for the Christmas holiday
25  Federal holiday: Christmas Day

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

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To view all the first-place winners of the 2019 Better Newspaper Contest, please visit the following link:

The Mountaineer has opened a new chapter in its history. Last week, Lorrie Merrill took over as editor and owner of the 110-year-old Mountaineer. Previous owners, Keith and Keri Hanson, bought it from Linda Rettig in 2009 after Jim’s passing. They have run the Mountaineer for 10 years, making improvements to the business over the years. They still own the Blaine County Journal in Chinook.

Lorrie Merrill started writing for the Mountaineer part-time about two years ago. She was also very busy being the director of Big Sandy Activities. She stepped up when Robert Lucke got sick. Keith and Keri Hanson were sure happy to welcome her to the Mountaineer family. It was the perfect time. Lorrie has always loved writing and thought this was a great place to hone that talent of hers. She started covering all local meetings and events. She has even reported on human interest stories.

Lorrie retired in December from Big Sandy Activities and she started working full-time as a reporter for the paper. When the opportunity arose to buy the Mountaineer, she thought that maybe this was the opportunity to start a new chapter in her life. I asked her why she decided to buy the Mountaineer and she said, “The Mountaineer is 110 years old, and it needs to continue. It is an important tool for our community, and I thought it was important to be locally owned.”

Lorrie is new to the newspaper business and all it entails, but she is hitting the ground running and is so excited to make her mark on The Mountaineer. I asked her what changes she would like to make to the Mountaineer and she said, “Colored pictures on the front page every week is the first thing I want to make happen.” She would like to also fill ‘Don’t be Late’ with everything happening in the community, so it will be more effectively used. Lorrie is planning to have a true sports page every week, which will include all sports for all age groups. One thing she is hoping to create is an advisory committee to determine what the community wants in the paper. Lorrie is very excited to make these changes. They won’t happen right away, but this is the direction she would like to take. A huge goal is to make the paper an eight-pager every week to make sure everything she wants in is covered and printed.

Keith and Keri Hanson have done a great job bringing the paper up to the next level. They have been a big part of Big Sandy Mountaineer history. They made big changes to the paper that will continue on and will always be a part of making it great. When asked what they will miss about owning the Mountaineer, they replied, “The people and the downtown business people, who were very welcoming when we took over the Mountaineer.” They will be helping Lorrie get her bearings about the business for the next three months. They will be there for all the questions she may have and help her stand on her own.

“We wish the Merrills the best and hope the community will support them like they supported us and the Rettigs by submitting pictures and articles and not being afraid to let them know how they feel about things,” Keith said.

The Mountaineer will still continue to be out on Wednesdays. You may see changes, small at first, and more along the way. Deadlines will remain the same, as will the policies for letters to the editor and obituaries. You can still submit articles and such at any time. If you have ideas, Lorrie is always willing to listen. Please feel free to stop in and congratulate Lorrie on her new adventure.
Early this year, the Montana Newspaper Association was approached by the Solutions Journalism Network to form a partnership to expand the Montana Gap Project. A collaborative effort among 12 Montana newsrooms, the Montana Gap Project produced two feature packages of shared news content last year. The first package consisted of 27 stories focused on rural economic development. The second package included 16 stories highlighting mental health treatment.

The MNA leapt at the chance to participate this year, and through the Montana Newspaper Foundation, the MNA has taken a leadership role in the effort to expand the SJN’s ambitious Montana newsroom initiative.

I’m excited to announce that the project is poised to add another great partner this summer, the Montana Free Press. The Montana Free Press will serve as the project coordinator, helping identify collaborators, lead discussion, and oversee publication of the content created.

MNA members should be receiving an introductory message from me and the Montana Free Press shortly, if they haven’t already, with an invitation to join the collaboration. The message links to a brief online survey that will help us get a sense of the direction the participating newsrooms want to take the project this year.

And setting the direction will be entirely up to the collaborators, who will determine what subjects to pursue, how to pursue them, and how the content will be shared. The broad latitude granted to the participants to find their own cooperative path forward is one of the most unique and exciting elements of the project, and I can’t wait to find out how it’s all going to turn out!

For more information, please feel encouraged to reach out to me or to Brad Tyer, the editor of the Montana Free Press, at btyer@montanafreepress.org. Brad, the former editor of the Missoula Independent and past participant in the Montana Gap Project, will be the point person on the initiative and handle much of the heavy lifting.

Statewide advertising
A special thanks to MNA Business Development Director Stacy Wirtz and all those who came to the energizing training she lead this month in Kalispell. To help members maximize the benefits of the MNA’s statewide advertising programs, Stacy walked sales leaders and advertising representatives through a motivating session detailing the terrific sales programs the Montana Newspaper Advertising Service offers for classifieds, display advertising, and digital packages statewide. Members keep 50 percent of any statewide sales placed through the MNAS, and there’s legitimate revenue available for active newspapers.

To invite Stacy to organize a similar training session in your part of the state, please call her at the MNA office, (406) 443-2850, or shoot her an email at stacy@mtnewspapers.com and ask her to arrange a training near you. She’s eager to stoke interest in our advertising programs and help your newspaper make the most of its MNA membership.

Matt Gibson is the executive director of the Montana Newspaper Association.
In Everett, Washington, The Daily Herald has about 37 people. In Montana, The Billings Gazette has about 35.

So how did they do big projects?

Staffers at both shared similar answers – they made tough choices.

The stories highlighted here continue a refrain we heard last week from The Baltimore Sun, which is a good deal bigger with about 100 people:

- Make choices.
- Dig deeper.
- And there's real power to the time, work and attention of local journalism.

What did you learn?

I’ve learned a lot about thinking much longer-term on a focused project. We’ve never done anything quite like this since I’ve been at the Gazette, and it’s been a challenge to balance the daily demands of our reporters’ beats and such with a long-term team project. The daily news doesn’t stop for projects. I’ve also learned that sometimes the best reporters for a story don’t always work together the smoothest. And we’re often unaware of our biases until we say them aloud in our planning meetings. But what matters at the end of the day is that everyone on that team cares deeply about the project’s goals and the well-being of our sources, and that we are all swimming in the same direction in our own ways.

After a 14-year-old girl went missing from a nearby reservation, then was later found dead, a team of six at The Billings Gazette started digging into why these disappearances keep happening.

“When local kids go missing, they’re often found within hours. When women and children go missing in Native communities, they are rarely found, and if they are, they are rarely alive. Rather than continuing our reactive approach to covering the issue, we decided to take a closer look at why it’s so rare missing Native women and girls are found alive and what could be done to improve that culture and statistic,” said Alyssa Small.

About 35 people work at the Gazette, including part-timers. This series brought together Tom Lutey, Sam Wilson, Michael Kordenbrock, Chris Jorgensen, Bethany Baker, Alyssa Small, Darrell Ehrlick, and Chase Doak.

Here’s what Small told us about the Gazette’s ongoing coverage of missing indigenous women:

How did you make this story happen?

We formed a team of three reporters, a photographer and two editors to meet regularly and essentially keep the fire burning on this chronic issue. We’ve discussed social strategy, publish times with specific action in our state legislature in mind and what we hope the series will inspire in our community. We’re nowhere near done, but we’re proud of what we’ve started.

How can other local newsrooms do work like this?

We’ve had to say no to a lot of smaller daily stories to make time for this project. It’s been an uncomfortable prioritization, but it’s served us well when we’ve been able to share these deeper looks at a chronic issue, rather than one-off spot-coverage. Teaming up, planning and saying no to the stuff that’s less important has made this possible.
GateHouse, Gannett to merge for $1.4B, build newspaper giant
By Tali Arbell, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Two of the largest U.S. newspaper companies have agreed to combine for roughly $1.4 billion, creating a new industry giant that hopes to manage the crisis of print’s decline through sheer size.

GateHouse Media, a fast-growing chain backed by an investment firm, is buying USA Today owner Gannett, promising to speed up a digital transformation as readers shift online. The companies say they are committed to “journalistic excellence”—while also cutting $300 million in costs every year.

The resulting company would be the largest U.S. newspaper company by far, with a print circulation of 8.7 million, 7 million more than the new No. 2, McClatchy, according to media expert Ken Doctor.

Local papers, faced with the complex and expensive process of building digital businesses to replace declines in print ads and circulation, have been consolidating madly in recent years. Although papers with national readerships like The New York Times and The Washington Post have had success adding digital subscribers, local papers with local readerships find it much more difficult. Hundreds of such papers have closed, and newsrooms have slashed jobs.

According to a study by the University of North Carolina, the U.S. has lost almost 1,800 local newspapers since 2004. Newsroom employment fell by a quarter from 2008 to 2018, according to Pew Research, and layoffs have continued this year.

Both GateHouse and Gannett are known as buyers of other papers. Bulking up lets companies cut costs—via newsroom layoffs and other measures—and centralize operations. The combined company would have more than 260 daily papers in the U.S. along with more than 300 weeklies.

Those cuts could give the owners “a cushion of time” to figure out how to improve their digital businesses, longtime industry analyst Rick Edmonds of the Poynter Institute wrote Sunday.

But it’s no panacea. “I don’t think, just by these companies merging, they’re going to somehow magically find a new business model, make everything all right and produce robust journalism at a local level,” Butler University journalism professor Nancy Whitmore said. Still, a bigger, combined newspaper company could sell more national ads and boost their ad revenue, she said.

GateHouse’s owner, New Media, is taking on new debt to get the deal done—a $1.8 billion loan from private equity firm Apollo Global Management. That will have to be paid back.

“We’ve been hearing for years and years about the glories of cost efficiencies,” said Northeastern University professor Dan Kennedy, a proponent of local ownership for media outlets. But it’s unclear, based on past media mergers, whether those savings will benefit the papers, its employees or their readers, he said.

He wonders whether combined companies make more or fewer cuts than they would have if they had remained separate.

Several experts said they do not expect the Justice Department to have an issue with the deal, as the two companies have papers in different markets. The companies expect it to close this year.

The combined company would take the Gannett name and keep its headquarters in Gannett’s current home of McLean, Virginia. GateHouse’s owner, New Media, is buying Gannett Co. for $12.06 a share in cash and stock.

Consolidation is nothing new to either company. Gannett’s last big U.S. print purchase was in 2016, when it bought papers in the Journal Media Group chain for $280 million, including the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and The Commercial Appeal in Memphis. Gannett also owns dailies in major cities such as the Detroit Free Press and Arizona Republic.

2019 USPS Statement of Ownership

The deadline for filing your Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (PS Form 3526) with the U.S. Postal Service is October 1 of each year. The filing and publication of this form is a requirement for maintaining Periodicals mailing privileges. Dailies must publish a completed copy of this form in their newspaper by October 10, and non-dailies by October 31.

The USPS has revised PS form 3526. The latest form has a July 2014 date at the very bottom. The ability to claim electronic subscribers has been incorporated into the form. PS Form 3526x (worksheet) is no longer necessary. Claiming electronic paid subscribers is voluntary. If you choose to not claim electronic copies, page three has a box to certify that at least 50% of all distributed copies are paid for above a nominal price, and a signature section.

There are specific requirements as to what defines a paid electronic subscriber. A print subscriber that is given free access to your electronic version is not a paid electronic subscriber. A paid electronic subscriber must pay a separate subscription rate that you have established for electronic subscribers. You are allowed to offer discounts to this rate but there are limitations. Additionally, reporting less than 60% total paid subscribers on your Statement of Ownership could trigger a USPS circulation audit to verify your Periodicals eligibility. Also, at least 40% of your paid circulation must consist of printed copies.

The form, including instructions, can be found at: https://about.usps.com/forms/ps3526.pdf
Rural communities have been disproportionately affected by the opioid epidemic, but rural newspapers have been disproportionately quiet about it. They seem to cover it as a criminal-justice problem, when it is primarily a health problem. Smart law enforcers and first responders will tell you that, but many if not most rural papers seem reluctant to cover it that way — to dig into the reasons for addiction, the struggles to overcome it, the search for treatment and the stories of success.

Part of this, I know from experience, is the natural reluctance of community journalists to report facts that reflect poorly on their communities. In many places, they probably think there's already enough bad news.

Another big factor is the stigma that still surrounds people with drug problems. That is more prevalent in rural areas, and it keeps people from seeking help — and clings to those who do, putting them at risk for relapse. The role of stigma was well researched by Oak Ridge Associated Universities, and The Rural Blog reported on it at https://bit.ly/2MhNYYlq.

The folks at Oak Ridge said local news media can counteract stigma with reporting. To help rural journalists cover substance abuse, behavioral health and recovery, they and the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues (which publishes The Rural Blog) are planning a one-day workshop in mid-November. Watch for details on it soon.

Meanwhile, start reporting. Get local data. Ask your coroner each month for death certificates, and for advice on what families might be willing to talk about the struggles of addiction that ended in death. Talk to people in the treatment community, and then to people with substance abuse disorder.

See how the problem developed in your area, by using the pill distribution database that The Washington Post and the Charleston Gazette-Mail uncovered. Aaron Nelson of The Paintsville (Ky.) Herald did, and gave his readers the names of the stores that sold the most pills. The Rural Blog took note at bit.ly/2MjX4Os.

The opioid epidemic has had a disproportionate effect on poor areas, but prosperous farm counties are part of it, too. The Farm Bureau and the Cooperative Extension Service are active on this front; we had a blog item about their program in Ohio at bit.ly/30R1Mc2.

Farmers have been struggling for years with financial instability, loneliness, lack of insurance or access to mental health care, and the pressure to not quit what may have been a way of life for generations. Now they have to deal with a trade war and unfavorable weather, and are five times more likely to commit suicide than other Americans. The federal government is funneling more money to help them. Read about it at bit.ly/2GuQjqk.

Suicide and drugs go hand in hand. In rural areas, jail suicides are increasing, and the trend is linked to drug withdrawal and mental illness, says The Crime Report, a publication of the Center on Media, Crime and Justice in the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York, a good source for cutting-edge information on those topics. Read more at bit.ly/2GvQVF1.

Suicide is another touchy subject for community journalists, but it's time to stop being timid about it. Did you know rural residents are more likely than those in large cities to think about, plan or attempt suicide? They are, and The Rural Blog took note at bit.ly/2yhmcgy.

Here some other topics we've had on the blog lately that you can localize:

A U.S. Senate report revealed nearly 400 poor-performing nursing homes whose problems were not made clear by a government website. Local papers picked up on it, and we did at bit.ly/2SOCqra.

Many rural hospitals are in trouble, but some have found ways to overcome adversity, survive and thrive. “The secret sauce is always . . . strong, collaborative leadership,” National Rural Health Association CEO Alan Morgan told U.S. News and World Report. This is just one of many hospital stories on The Rural Blog; read it at bit.ly/2Y8DUlH.

Rural electric cooperatives are overly reliant on coal, the Nebraska-based Center for Rural Affairs and two other non-profits charged. We contacted the co-ops' national trade group, which said they are moving to “cleaner energy sources.” What's your co-op doing? Start reporting with our blog item at bit.ly/2ZjNuV.

Electronic cigarettes are an epidemic among young people, but many school districts are lax about it. Not in Fairbury, Neb., which requires any student in grades 7-12 to be subject to random nicotine testing if they participate in extracurricular activities. We took note at bit.ly/2GwGHKO. What is your school district doing about “vaping”? (By the way, it's not really vapor, as the tobacco companies say; it's an aerosol, and it has a lot of nasty stuff.)

Community newspapers increasingly charge for obituaries, an unfortunate result of digital media's erosion of their advertising base. But the news columns of the best papers still include news obits about people who made their mark on the community or region. And sometimes a paper will double down and run a long tribute to a truly unique individual. The Valley News of Lebanon, N.H., and White River Junction, Vt., did that with the moving, funny and insightful eulogy for a well-known dairy farmer and former state legislator, David Ainsworth. We picked it up at bit.ly/2YhoW8k.

Valley News Editor John Gregg sent us that story. If you do or see—stories that should be on The Rural Blog, email them to me at al.cross@uky.edu.

Al Cross edited and managed rural newspapers before covering politics for the Louisville Courier Journal and serving as president of the Society of Professional Journalists. He is a journalism professor at the University of Kentucky and director of its Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, which publishes The Rural Blog at http://irjci.blogspot.com.
Brace yourselves.
The AP Stylebook says the percentage sign is now acceptable when paired with a numeral in most cases.
Stylebook Editor Paula Froke announced the latest round of changes to the grammar bible for journalists at the annual con-ference for ACES: The Society for Editing. This year’s changes are yet another shift toward more common usage.

Here’s part of the updated entry:
Percent, percentage, percentage points: Use the % sign when paired with a numeral, with no space, in most cases (a change in 2019): Average hourly pay rose 3.1% from a year ago; her mortgage rate is 4.75%; about 60% of Americans agreed; he won 56.2% of the vote. Use figures: 1%, 4 percentage points.
For amounts less than 1%, precede the decimal with a zero: The cost of living rose 0.6%.
In casual uses, use words rather than figures and numbers: She said he has a zero percent chance of winning.

Past changes like this one include:
2017: Singular “they” became acceptable as a non-gendered pronoun.
2014: Over and more than became interchangeable and we have to spell out state names.

The 2019 AP Stylebook has more than 200 new and modified entries, according to the AP. Other changes include guidelines on the terms race and racism and more, which you can read about here.

A few other changes:
• Accent marks can now be used with people’s names when they request it, are known to use them or if quoting from a language that uses them (also taking effect next week).
• Avoid the word casualties “which is vague and can refer to either injuries or deaths. Instead, be specific about what is meant. If authorities use the term, press for specifics. If specifics aren’t available, say so: Officer Riya Kumar said the crash resulted in casualties, but she did not know whether those were injuries or deaths.”
• Don’t use cocktail “in reference to a mixture of drugs. Instead: drug combination or simply drugs or medications: HIV drugs.”
• Don’t use the word suspect “to mean a person of unknown identity who definitely committed a crime. In other words, don’t substitute suspect for robber, killer, rapist, etc., in describing an event, even if authorities phrase it that way. Correct: Police said the robber stole 14 diamond rings; the thief ran away. Incorrect: Police said the suspect stole 14 diamond rings; the suspect ran away. Conversely, don’t substitute robber, killer, rapist, etc., when suspect is indeed the correct word. Correct: Police arrested the suspect the next day. Incorrect: Police arrested the robber the next day.”

If you need a little balm from the changes, check out these old stylebooks, which you can now explore online. Back in 1911, diseases were in the “don’t cover” category, “unless decidedly epidemic.”
Sales Contest
October-December 2019

The MNA wants to register your entire staff to attend the 135th annual Montana Newspaper Association annual convention, FOR FREE!!!

To promote our statewide advertising programs, we’re running a contest during the fall quarter, and the member newspaper that sells the most advertising in our statewide SCAN, SDAP and SOAP programs will win the opportunity to send its entire staff to our next convention without paying registration fees! And there are chances for additional winners among the newspapers that generate the most revenue in each statewide program.

DATES: Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, 2019

GRAND PRIZE

Newspaper generating the most overall revenue for the statewide programs:

Entire staff may attend 2020 convention and Better Newspaper Contest awards banquet FOR FREE!

SECOND PRIZES

Newspaper with the most SDAP sales:

One free convention registration and BNC awards dinner

Member with most SCAN sales:

One free convention registration and BNC awards dinner

Any member that sells a SOAP ad:

One free convention registration and BNC awards dinner for each ad sold

For more information, contact Stacy Wirtz at (406) 443-2850 or email stacy@mtnewspapers.com.