

PRESS PASS



How does your newspaper stack up in Montana?

Enter the 2022 Better Newspaper Contest

Contest opens Jan. 3, 2022 (entry details emailed soon)
Costs \$25 per newspaper plus \$6 per entry.
First 4 entries free!

Division 1	Weekly	Circulation 0-1,250
Division 2	Weekly	Circulation 1,251-2,000
Division 3	Weekly	Circulation 2,001-4,500
Division 4	Weekly & Daily	Circulation 4,500 & up
Division 5	Daily (6 & 7 day) & Digital Only	

Contestants may voluntarily move to higher divisions.

Entry deadline is Feb. 14, 2022, 10 p.m. MST. Categories 601 & 602 must be postmarked no later than Feb. 14 and received no later than Feb. 18.

Contest to be judged by members of the North Dakota Press Association. In return, Montana Newspaper Association members will judge the North Dakota BNC contest.

Contact Sandy McIntyre, smcintyre@mtnewspapers.com for more contest information or to judge NDPA's contest.

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MNA INTERIM DIRECTOR NEWSLETTER



Mike Gullede

The feedback on the September MNA Press Pass was terrific and I hope the December issue is exactly what you are looking for in an industry newsletter.

It is with mixed feelings that I am finishing my role as the MNA Interim Director on December 17th, 2021. I have enjoyed working with the MNA staff of Sandy McIntyre, Ryan Stavnes and Stacy Wirtz. They were extremely

helpful in not only daily operations and planning but also throughout the financial cleanup process. Additionally, I would like to recognize the following MNA members for their guidance, support, and leadership: Anton Kaufer, Daily Interlake; Chad Knudson, Glendive Ranger-Review; Jeff and Melody Martinsen, Choteau Acantha; Scott Squillace, Livingston Enterprise and Erica Yakawich, Amplified Digital Lee Enterprises. I would like to also thank the MNA Board of Directors, and Montana Newspaper Association members for their feedback, insight, and interest. I will miss the direct connection with an industry that I respect,

admire, and enjoyed during 36 years with Lee Enterprises. Special thanks to Matt Baldwin and Nathan Bourne for their work on the BNC Committee.

The MNA is positioned to provide a crucial role in communication, education, training, and support during this continued pace of digital transformation in the industry. Plans are developing to explore new advertising revenues and identify training opportunities for reporters and sales teams. The MNA must continue to defend the public's right to know and aggressively address any issues that question the First Amendment.

Thank you for the opportunity to collaborate with you this year and I look forward to hearing about your future success.

Regards,

Michael Gullede

Interim Director • Montana Newspaper Association

LETTER FROM MNA BOARD PRESIDENT



Chad Knudson

Happy Holiday greetings to each and every one of our members!

I am pleased that as your association we are again delivering a newsletter to update and connect us all as we mark another crazy year and prepare for 2022.

As a newspaperman I value transparency above all. So the first thing I need to share is that Interim Director and consultant Mike Gullede has decided to leave his post effective Dec. 10. When we hired Mike, we didn't know what we needed or who could do the interim job or for how long we should expect he or she to do it. We hired Mike in May with a vague end date sometime in August. Here we are in December. He has been just what we needed and my hat is off to him for his exceptional service.

During his tenure Mike has focused the MNA staff and brought sense to the out of control bookkeeping we have battled for over a year.

Part of the reason Mike's service was extended beyond those initial months was driven by Mike. He enjoyed his post and some of his goals took longer to accomplish than any of us could have foreseen.

At the same time, part of the current uncertainty was driven by a confused hiring process initiated by the board back in April.

To be honest, there is ongoing doubt about how the Montana Newspaper Association should be staffed and administered. There has been a lot of board discussion about how to efficiently and effectively lead and staff the organization. These are ongoing considerations. Trust me when I say, these matters will be worked out, but also please provide feedback and input if you have

thoughts.

On other topics, we are gearing up for the Better Newspaper Contest. We have appointed a committee to review categories and divisions. This is always a fraught activity, but the process is underway. Information will be shared soon about the BNC.

The Foundation will also soon be soliciting applications for interns for the next year. We hope to have this process run more smoothly than last year!

I am planning the next MNA Annual Convention: Glendive 2022! I have arranged a variety of venues and have started conversations with some exciting possible guest speakers. We are going to arrange a (party?) bus to pick up convention goers at the nearest Amtrak station in Wolf Point. The hour plus ride to Glendive will be fun and care free. Anyone within reasonable distance to an Amtrak station should plan to travel care-free all the way to Glendive! More information about the convention will be available soon.

Finally, I recently spoke with Denise Dowling at UM School of Journalism and she has some truly exciting ideas about how to draw the Journalism School and the Montana news media closer. She wants to discuss ideas with the MNA board at our January meeting in Helena. I look forward to hearing and sharing more information soon.

So here's the theme: Soon! I really hope we can start to check boxes and move forward together. I believe we will accomplish a lot, very soon!

We will be in touch,

Chad C. Knudson

President MNA

ADVERTISING UPDATE



Stacy Wirtz

Statewide Program

As we come to the end of 2021, the MNA has had a successful year on the statewide programs. We are increasing sales each month for SOAP and SQD. The SQD ads have changed prices, from \$2995 to \$3495, effective immediately. If you have any questions on our statewide program and would like to

become a member, please contact our Business Development Director Stacy Wirtz at stacy@mtnewspapers.com.

Rate and Data Information

It is very important to fill out all 5 tabs of the survey, and any other information that would be important to better serve you and help out our industry. Circulation numbers

are also very important for the Better Newspaper Contest, to make sure you are set up in the right division. With 2022 being a political year, we will want to make sure all your rates are correct in order for the newspaper industry to have a successful year. Please have all Rate and Data information emailed to Stacy Wirtz at stacy@mtnewspapers.com by **December 15th**. Thanks so much for your continued support to the MNA, we look forward to helping you succeed in 2022.

Stacy Wirtz

*Business Development Director
Montana Newspaper Association*

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mtnewspapers.com

DEC. 2021 MILESTONES

Cascade Courier

- This small-town newspaper has been published for 111 years! With the stars aligning, The Courier is again operating in the heart of Cascade, in the very same maroon building where it published its very first edition: Volume 1, No.1, January 21, 1910.
- For the past two years, the Cascade Courier has been under new management with a fantastic staff. Our fearless leaders include Toni and Ray Castellanos. Toni runs the show and sets the pace, while Ray is seen around town capturing moments in time and narrating town stories. Our triple-threat family members include Kimberly, Jeb and Sarah Boettger. Kimberly takes care of legals, emails, subscriptions and ads. Jeb, our tech-savvy guru, puts the paper together, photoshops, works on design and sends it off to get printed. Sarah combines the newspaper with the inserts, handles logistics and keeps the office sparkling. The Courier's recent additions include Amanda and Alex Romero. As Marketing Director, Amanda welcomes new customers and promotes the paper. Alex is in charge of social media and website platforms.

Daily Inter Lake

- Margaret E. Davis joined Hagadone Montana Publishing in October as Audience Development Director for the Daily Inter Lake and the associated weekly newspapers serving



Cascade Courier Staff

Northwest Montana. Davis helps with community outreach, and reader retention and growth in print and online. Davis' journalism career has centered on editing and writing for various regional and national publications, including seven years at the Portland Tribune in Oregon. She is originally from Helena and obtained her bachelor's at Scripps College in Claremont, California, and her master's at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.

DEC. 2021 MILESTONES

- John Nichols recently joined Hagadone Montana Publishing as Production Manager. Nichols oversees prepress and production work for the Daily Inter Lake and the associated weekly newspapers serving Northwest Montana. Nichols grew up in the publishing industry, first working as a press operator and darkroom technician at the Clinton Daily Democrat in Missouri in the mid-1970s. He spent more than 20 years at the Detroit Free-Press and The Detroit News as director of commercial work. Nichols' career resume also includes prepress management at The Print Source in Wichita, Kansas from 2009-2020, and prepress supervisor with Gannett in Springfield, Missouri from 2006-2009.
- It is with great sadness, we learned of the passing of Kristy Geisler, former Advertising Director of the Daily Inter Lake who passed away Sept 19, 2021 at the age of 62. Kristy worked at the Inter Lake 2014-2016 before moving to Claremore, OK where she became Publisher of the Claremore Daily Progress until 2020. Kristy remained active in the community of Claremore until her death.

Miles City Star

- Michael J. Marracino is the new pressroom foreman at the Miles City Star. An Ohio native, Marracino has over 35 years of printing experience, most recently at the Livingston Enterprise. He holds a BS in Printing Management from LaRoche College in Pittsburgh, PA, and is also a 21-year member of the United States Search and Rescue Corps out of Beaver Falls, PA, through which he participated in rescue efforts in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina and in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake.

Mullen Newspaper Company

- In October 2021, Lyssa DePompa joined Mullen Newspaper Company as the new publisher for the **Bitterroot Star**, **Philipsburg Mail** and **Silver State Post**. Lyssa moved to Hamilton in the Bitterroot Valley almost a year ago. Born and raised in California, Lyssa says, "The truth is, we don't get to choose where we were born and raised. But we do get to choose how we live and where we celebrate life. When I visited Montana three years ago, I knew I wanted this to be my forever home." Her publishing background was established when she created and ran The Anchor Magazine for the community of Channel Islands Harbor, California. When not working, Lyssa enjoys hiking, camping, snowboarding and traveling.
- Mullen Newspaper Company, based in Deer Lodge, Mont., announced it is taking on management of operations for the newspapers formerly owned by Johnson Publications. Those newspapers are The Imperial Republican (Neb.), The Grant Tribune Sentinel (Neb.), and The Holyoke Enterprise (Colo.). Mullen Newspaper Company manages the Bitterroot

Star, Silver State Post, and Philipsburg Mail in Montana and the St. Maries Gazette Record in Idaho. It oversees operations of Browsing Bison Books with three locations in Southwest Montana. "We're honored to be the new caretakers," said Jesse Mullen, CEO of Mullen Newspaper Company. "Growing up in a newspaper family in Eastern Wyoming gave Lloyd and I a great love for small town journalism. We are excited to protect and grow these newspapers."

SPECIAL RECOGNITION – FRIENDS OF DEMOCRACY



Lyssa with sidekick Izzy

In his commentary, published in the October 12, 2021 issue of the Daily Montanan, retired Montana Supreme Court Justice James C. Nelson recognized the **Daily Montanan**, the **Montana Free Press** and the **Cut Bank Pioneer Press** as examples of what a free press is and should aspire to be. He specifically mentions investigative reporting and journalism by Keila Szpaller, Mara Silvers and LeAnne Kavanagh. In his article, Justice

Nelson notes, "There are many examples to be sure, but I only mention three—no slights intended to the media and journalists not mentioned." His commentary is available at <https://dailymontan.com/2021/10/12/democracy-in-three-different-montana-newspapers/>.

NEW Website Coming!

- Way back in 2010, a few brave Lee Enterprises employees ventured out to start Edge Marketing + Design. Three years later, they got back to their roots and partnered with the Montana Newspaper Association to create the Big Sky Big Impact campaign and a new website. Fast forward another eight years, and here we are again, thankful and excited for the opportunity to reorganize, refocus, and revamp the Montana Newspaper Association website. Watch for the new website coming in early 2022!





MNA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Boulder Monitor

By Keith Hammonds



Three years ago this month, I stood before a crowd of 200 strangers in the cafeteria of Jefferson High School in Boulder, Montana. They were there mostly to celebrate Jan Anderson, my predecessor, for her 17 years and over 900 issues as co-owner, publisher, and editor of The Boulder Monitor.

But they also were a bit curious about me. I was, after all, a New Yorker with no previous connection to Boulder — and my wife, Jackie Dyer, and I had just bought their newspaper. Several asked me that evening: Why?

The Monitor debuted on September 14, 1907, leading with news of the hold-up of a westbound Great Northern train by two masked men at Rexford. It was one of a small surfeit of papers that emerged in Jefferson County around the turn of that century: The Basin Progress, Jefferson County Enterprise, The Age, The Sentinel, the Lump Miner, Montana Sunlight, the Wickes Pioneer, and more.

All but one of those titles disappeared; The Monitor survived, its ownership passing to Adolph Eiselein in 1915 and, more than 50 years later, to Vern Sunderlin. Jan Anderson — who had once worked as a Monitor reporter — and her husband David purchased the paper in 2002, eventually merging it with their Jefferson County Courier.

And then, improbably, it was our turn. Jackie and I had bought a home in the western part of the state a few years earlier, expecting to shift our lives here over time. Separately, I had come to Montana via my work with the Solutions Journalism Network, a non-profit organization I've helped to lead. In 2017, SJN brought together 10 news organizations from across the state to collaborate on solutions-focused coverage of economic development and then mental health.

That's how I met The Monitor and Jan, who revealed that she had been trying to sell the paper. In a moment of...naivete? ...reckless ambition? ...something, I convinced myself that running a small weekly mostly from across the country made perfect sense. And that it was important, in a small but non-trivial way, to democratic function. And that it represented an opportunity to try out ideas that had been spinning around my head about the relationship between solutions-focused news, community engagement, trust in media and, most elusively, revenue.

I didn't explain all that in the high school cafeteria that evening. What I told folks, instead, was some version of this: Although I happen to have a notarized piece of paper attesting to our legal control of The Monitor, the reality is different. This newspaper has been around for 114 years. It has outlasted the whims, politics, and vagaries of publishers before me. While Jackie and I are the legal stewards of this news organization, its ownership really rests with the people of Boulder and Jefferson County.

We set out to bring the owners into our business. First, we mailed a survey to all Monitor subscribers — something we've repeated each January since.



Front page of the first Monitor issue, 9/14/07

The response was startling: Nearly half of readers returned the questionnaire; of those, 90% said they agreed with the statement "I trust The Monitor" — testament to the credibility Jan had established.

The feedback we received in that survey has informed our thinking since. Readers observed that The Monitor's coverage was overweighted in Boulder, a city of about 1200 people, at the expense of the growing communities at the north end of the county. And some criticized a lack of conservative perspective. We set to address both those gaps, beefing up coverage of Montana City, Clancy, and Jefferson City; and recruiting conservative voices to populate the "Views" page. I'd say both efforts are still works in progress.

We came up with a mission statement and put it on the front page, where it has appeared every issue since: The Monitor serves the people of Jefferson County, Montana, reflecting their reality, informing their ambitions, and helping them to navigate

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The Monitor serves the people of Jefferson County, Montana, reflecting their reality, informing their ambitions, and helping them to navigate their shared future. It endeavors to provide authoritative, fact-based reporting that surfaces and explains issues at the heart of our community — exploring both urgent challenges and the responses to those challenges.



MNA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



*Joshua Murdock, editor of
The Monitor*

their shared future. It endeavors to provide authoritative, fact-based reporting that surfaces and explains issues at the heart of our community — exploring both urgent challenges and the responses to those challenges.

We wanted to take newspapering out of its black box, being transparent about what we were up to and why. I've written regular notes to explain editorial decisions and changes in strategy. (One responded to queries about why we weren't reporting as frequently on crime. Another detailed

our decision, amid the racial justice unrest last year, to capitalize both "Black" and "White" in our coverage.)

And we've brought more solutions journalism — critical, evidence-based reporting on the responses to social challenges — into The Monitor's news coverage:

launched its dynamic news site two years ago. Since then, our print circulation has stayed flat; the net growth has come from online and email subscriptions.)

The Monitor faces the same challenge as most of our peers: How to sustain distinctive, high-quality coverage that provides value to our community. The real answer, I continue to believe, is tautological: provide distinctive, high-quality coverage that provides value to our community. But in the interim, we've scored grants from Facebook and Google News that have both plugged the gap and helped build capacity for the long run.

And we've asked our "owners" to co-invest. We raised subscription rates about 50% with the website launch — a paper mailed in-county now costs \$40 a year — without any noticeable attrition. And last year when it seemed that the COVID-19 pandemic might undermine the enterprise, we asked readers for contributions via the Local Media Foundation.

We received over \$5,000 from that appeal, mostly in modest gifts of \$50 to \$100. That was an important show of support. Even more encouraging were the many notes that came with

"The Monitor's circulation is up 20% in the last year, to about 820 — an indication that what we're doing has resonated, but not enough to ensure profitability."

- A four-part investigation into the perpetual shortage of affordable housing described efforts by the National Affordable Housing Network to develop new units in parts of Jefferson County— and explored barriers to that approach in Boulder.
- In assessing the Boulder Chamber of Commerce's weak engagement of potential members, The Monitor reporting on ways other rural communities, including neighboring Whitehall, had revitalized their Chambers.
- "Suffering in Silence" detailed mental health and suicides among farmers and ranchers in the county and other ag communities — and assessed grassroots efforts to highlight the problem and make resources more accessible.

This sort of reporting is vital, first, because it paints a truer, more complete picture of what's happening in our communities. It also confronts a gap we saw in that first subscriber survey: Only a quarter of readers agreed strongly with the statement, "I think I can help make a difference in our community." Solutions reporting, I hope, can help feed agency by surfacing what fixes are possible and how they work.

Is this approach working? The Monitor's circulation is up 20% in the last year, to about 820 — an indication that what we're doing has resonated, but not enough to ensure profitability. (The Monitor



*Keith Hammonds and Jackie Dyer,
The Monitor's owners*

the checks, which acknowledged the importance of local news to rural communities: "So important to have you as a part of our community," wrote one subscriber. "We appreciate the essential service the Monitor continues to provide," said another. "Democracy depends on ethical, honest news," a third observed.

And then, this: "My mind went to, 'how awful it would be if Boulder did not have a newspaper.' I have lived in other small towns that did not have one and you just never knew what was going on around you. I hope Boulder has a newspaper forever and forever."

We're working on that.

TRIBUTE TO FRANK DATTA

Montana newspapers lost a legend with the death of Wibaux Pioneer-Gazette publisher Frank Datta in October.

Despite working just over 20 miles apart, we at the Glendive Ranger-Review didn't often hear from Frank. When he did call, his favorite topic was the poor and deteriorating performance of the United States Postal Service – few things excited the quiet, understated man quite like the latest irritations of the USPS. His other favorite topic was his ever-lengthening tenure at the

Pioneer-Gazette, which ended in his 66th year of service.

So when the fiercely self-sufficient Frank called at the end of September to ask for help, we knew something was amiss. Frank said he was suffering from COVID-19 and finding it difficult to finish his most recent edition. The Pioneer-Gazette



One of the proudest moments for this newspaperman was being awarded Master Editor/ Publisher designation from his peers in 1995 by the Montana Newspaper Association, Frank served as MNA president in 1988.



Frank Datta puts the finishing touches on the Wibaux Pioneer-Gazette under deadline pressure. Behind, Gerald Job updates mailing labels.

had never missed an issue since its founding in 1907, so this was not a trivial matter to Frank. With a lot of help from Wendy Marsh at the Miles City Star, the paper continued to print. Not long after that last call, Frank passed away.

According to reporting in the Pioneer-Gazette shortly after Frank's death, he had started as a 'printer's devil' when he entered high school. At Frank's funeral, one classmate recalled that a failed sports physical had forced a young Frank off the basketball court and into the print shop. Having reluctantly given up the game he loved, he would soon find his life's work. In 1977 he became a partner in the business along with Frank Burke of the Ranger-Review.

Frank hit his stride in the mid 1980s winning eight Better Newspaper Contest awards in 1985 and serving as the Montana Newspaper Association President in 1988. In 1995 he was awarded the Master Editor/Publisher award by the MNA. He finally gained full control of the newspaper on Dec. 31, 2001 when he paid Frank Burke one silver dollar for it.

Despite being a nearly one-man operation in the later years, Frank was also deeply involved in the Wibaux community. Anyone from a small Montana town will recognize the many hats worn by Frank Datta. He was the disaster and emergency service coordinator there for 32 years, county coroner for 20 years and served as a volunteer member of both the fire department and ambulance service. He served the chamber of commerce and St. Peter's Catholic Church.

In Frank's absence and in tribute to his dedication to the newspaper and the town of Wibaux across seven decades, locals rallied to figure out how to "put out a paper." The Wibaux Pioneer-Gazette has still never missed a publication.

Wibaux Pioneer-Gazette

- 65 years and counting! 2021 marks Frank Datta's 65th year at the Wibaux Pioneer Gazette. Starting as a printer's devil when he was in junior high school, Datta is the paper's sole owner and one-man shop after his partner, Frank Burke, passed away about 20 years ago.
- Datta received the Master Editor/Publisher award in 1995 from the Montana Newspaper Association. He also served 10 years on the Association's board of directors and as MNA president in 1988.
- "We've never missed a publication," Datta proudly points out. According to the paper's archives, "The paper has never missed a publication since 1907, even in 1929 when the office was in a basement and a flood put five feet of water through the town. The paper was published in Glendive while the office was cleaned."

Photos courtesy of Goldenwest Electric News, February 2019

PROMOTIONAL CALENDAR

DECEMBER

Read a Book Month

Safe Toys and Gifts Month

Dec. 4: National Cookie Day

Dec. 7: National Pearl Harbor
Remembrance Day

Dec. 21: Crossword Puzzle Day

Dec. 24: Christmas Eve

Dec. 25: Christmas

Dec. 26: National Thank You
Note Day

Dec. 31: New Year's Eve

JANUARY

Career and Technical Education,
National Blood Donor, and
National Eye Care Month

Jan. 1: New Year's Day

Jan. 2-8: Thank You Customers Week

Jan. 17: Martin Luther King

Jan. 29: Puzzle Day

FEBRUARY

American Heart,
Black History, &
Children's Dental Health Month

Feb. 2: Groundhog Day

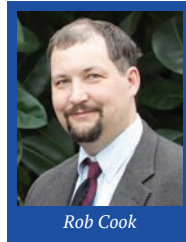
Feb. 4: Wear Red Day

Feb. 13-19: Cardiac Rehabilitation
Week

Feb. 14: Valentine's Day

Feb. 21: President's Day

FOIA Column/Update On Legislative Legal Action Column



Rob Cook

Last legislative session, Senator Tom Jacobson (Great Falls) requested a bill draft (SJ23) that would have allowed public notice via certain electronic publications.

When the MNA became aware of this request, we met with Senator Jacobson for the purpose of getting him to stop the introduction of his bill draft. Jacobson agreed to stop the introduction in exchange for the MNA's support of an interim study resolution on the same topic. We agreed to his request and his study bill, also numbered SJ23, passed both chambers of the legislature in late April.

Passage of a study bill by the legislature is not enough to guarantee that an interim committee will actually pursue the request. An interim committee must have a positive vote to pursue the study and, in the case of SJ23, the Local Government Interim Committee accepted the task.

The Local Government Interim Committee's first meeting on SJ23 was held on September 24th. At this hearing, the committee held a panel discussion with city and county clerks. A summary of the clerk's concerns with the present system follows:

- The local newspaper is not local anymore and it is very difficult to correct an error.
- Nobody reads the legal ad section and the notices that receive the most public participation are those that are accompanied by a news article (print, radio, or television).
- Frequently, local public notices do not have the viewership necessary to secure a bid from an experienced contractor on complex public works projects.

In addition to the panel discussion, the committee research analyst (Toni

Henneman) recommended that the committee review Florida's recent legislation (H35). Further, the Montana Broadcasters Association and the Cable Government Center testified in support of electronic public notices during the public comment phase.

When it was time for committee discussion, it became clear that this concept has strong bipartisan support. However, it did appear that there was more support for an 'all of the above' type solution rather than an either/or solution. Given that local newspapers already have access to print and electronic means of publication, the pursuit of electronic publication as an additional means to ensure that the public has been duly noticed might prove to be beneficial to the association's membership..

Thanks for all you do.

Rob Cook
MNA lobbyist