

The Tennessee Press

Volume 83

March 2020

No. 9

INSIDE

Vass: TPA has good vibe

Page 3

Daniels: Lots to like about Winter Convention 2020

Page 3

Lee affirms support of First Amendment to TPA

Page 5

Hamilton County foils TFP records request

Page 5

TPA Members' Showcases

Pages 6-7, 12

Sheriff Bart: 11 reporting tips for going in-depth

Page 8

Obituaries

Pages 1, 8-9

Fisher: New legal support in TN for public records

Page 11

2020 Summer Convention set to drop in on Dollywood to mark TPA's 150th Anniversary

MIKE TOWLE
Managing Editor
February 14, 2020

Legendary singer, entertainment maven, entrepreneur and Tennessee's favorite daughter Dolly Parton had better have her alarm set for bright and early Thursday, June 18. She's about to receive a gaggle of visitors who sell ink and digital bytes (not moonshine whiskey) by the barrel.

The rooster is set to crow sometime that morning, as an anticipated throng of hundreds of newspaper professionals from across the state descend on Parton's hometown of Pigeon Forge, Tenn. That's where the TPA will ring in the 150th anniversary celebration of the Tennessee Press Association.

The 2020 TPA Summer Convention, in conjunction with the association's sesquicentennial obser-



Photos courtesy of Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism

vance, heads to Dolly's backyard, with the two-day event's kickoff being a day-long June 18 playday for TPA members and their families at Dollywood's Theme Park, complete with rides, shows, shops and other attractions and activities.

The convention runs June 18-19 and will be held at the Music Road

Resort in Pigeon Forge.

Friday's events will kick off with the Ad/Circ Conference and editorial sessions in addition to the Ideas Contest Awards luncheon and the convention's conclusion with the State Press Contests Awards Banquet.

More Summer Convention details will be available after March 18.



Photo by Tony Centonze, for Tennessee Press Association

Ken Paulson, director of the Free Speech Center at MTSU, Murfreesboro, and keynote speaker for the 2020 TPA Winter Convention luncheon held Thursday, Feb. 13, dons his red 'Superman cape' while making a point about the First Amendment and the future of newspaper journalism. See the special section inside for more coverage of this year's Winter Convention held Feb. 12-13 in Nashville, at the Double-Tree by Hilton Hotel.

OBITUARY

Williams, former TPA president, forged newspaper legacy

SUBMITTED
Paris Post-Intelligencer
February 7, 2020



Williams

Retired Post-Intelligencer editor and publisher and long-time community service advocate William Bryant "Bill" Williams Jr., 85, died Thursday, Feb. 6, at AHC Paris.

He battled Parkinson's disease and Lewy Body dementia for three years before suffering a massive stroke Feb. 5.

Born Aug. 20, 1934, to W. Bryant and Julia Williams of Paris, he is survived by his wife of 63 years, the former Anne Corbett. The couple married on June 21, 1956, at First Christian Church in Paris.

Other survivors include three daughters: Cindy Barnett of Murray, Julie (Doug) Ray of Gaines-

ville, Fla., and Joan (Skip) Howe of Paris; a son: Michael (Evonne) Williams of Paris; 14 grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren and another on the way at press time.

Williams began his newspaper career as a P-I carrier while a student at Atkins-Porter and Grove High Schools.

During his high school years, he worked as a reporter after school, on Saturdays and during the summers. After graduating third in his class at Grove High School in 1952, Williams went on to graduate with honors as a journalism and ROTC

student at Murray State University.

During his summers, Williams continued to be a P-I reporter. Throughout his college years, Williams was also a member of the college newspaper staff and was named the outstanding journalism student during his senior year.

After graduating from college, he was a reporter for The Memphis Press-Scimitar for a brief period before entering the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant.

He was stationed at Fort Sill, Okla., and served as a forward observer in an artillery unit, and helped work out the logistics of transporting howitzers by helicopter. He then served seven years in active reserve.

Later, he worked for The Tullahoma News for three years before

he returned to Paris in 1960 as The P-I's news editor. He spent the next 39 years working his way up to editor, then editor and publisher, finally retiring as publisher in late 1999. However, he continued to write editorials until late 2016.

He became editor and publisher at the retirement of his father, the late Bryant Williams. Bryant in turn had taken over as publisher at the retirement in 1967 of his father, the late W. Percy Williams, who had come from Alabama to purchase The P-I in 1927.

One of the things Bill Williams said he enjoyed about his work was that at the end of each day, he was able to hold a paper in his hands and say, "Here's what we did today."

See **WILLIAMS** Page 9

The Tennessee Press

(USPS 616-460)
Published monthly by the

TENNESSEE PRESS ASSOCIATION, INC.
412 N. Cedar Bluff Road, Suite 403
Knoxville, Tennessee 37923
Telephone (865) 584-5761/Fax (865) 558-8687/www.tnpress.com

Subscriptions: \$12 annually
Periodicals Postage Paid At Knoxville, TN

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Tennessee Press,
412 N. Cedar Bluff Road, Suite 403, Knoxville, TN 37923

The Tennessee Press is printed by The Standard Banner in Jefferson City, Tenn.

Carol Daniels Editor
Mike Towle Managing Editor
Robyn Gentile Production Coordinator



 The Tennessee Press
is printed on recycled paper
and is recyclable.

TENNESSEE PRESS ASSOCIATION

Chris Vass, Chattanooga Times Free Press President
Daniel Richardson, Carroll County News Leader, Huntingdon Vice President
Darrell Richardson, The Oak Ridger Vice President
Joseph Hurd, The Courier, Savannah Secretary
Eric Barnes, The Daily News, Memphis Treasurer
Doug Horne, Republic Newspapers, Knoxville Immediate Past President
Carol Daniels Executive Director

DIRECTORS

Scott Critchlow, Union City Daily Messenger District 1
Keith Ponder, The Daily Herald, Columbia District 1
Daniel Williams, The Paris Post-Intelligencer District 1
Maria De Varenne, The Tennessean, Nashville District 2
Jack McNeely, Herald-Citizen, Cookeville District 2
Vacant District 2
Paul Mauney, The Greeneville Sun District 3
Dale Gentry, The Standard Banner, Jefferson City District 3
Sara Jane Locke, The Herald-News, Dayton District 3

TENNESSEE PRESS SERVICE

Dave Gould, Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin President
Jana Thomasson, The Mountain Press, Sevierville Vice President
Ralph C. Baldwin, Cleveland Daily Banner Director
David Critchlow Jr., Union City Daily Messenger Director
W.R. (Ron) Fryar, Cannon Courier Director
Michael Williams, Paris Post-Intelligencer Director
Carol Daniels Executive Vice President

TENNESSEE PRESS ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION

Victor Parkins, The Milan Mirror-Exchange President
Mike Fishman, Lakeway Publishers, Morristown Vice President
Richard L. Hollow, Knoxville General Counsel
Carol Daniels Secretary-Treasurer

CONTACT THE MANAGING EDITOR

TPAers with suggestions, questions or comments about items in The Tennessee Press are welcome to contact the managing editor. Call Mike Towle, (615) 293-5771; send a note to 118 East Kingwood Drive, Suite F16, Murfreesboro, TN 37130, or email editor@tnpress.com. The deadline for the May 2020 issue is Tuesday, April 7.

Good vibes for TPA and members

In the decade or so since the technical end of the Great Recession, Tennessee Press Association members have come to realize our business has changed, and we have/are learning to adapt. We have accepted that fluidity is our normal state, and we are finding new ways to reach readers and deliver news to more tech-savvy consumers. It's hard work. Some days it's two steps forward and one step back. Other days it might feel like three steps back.

Our "new" normal — concurrent with a combative national political and cultural climate — also means that our commitment to protecting and defending the First Amendment, hold those in power accountable, and fulfill our mission of public service — in all of its forms — is a strong as ever.

Daily, bi-weekly, weekly, large, medium and small, we are tailoring our business and content strategies to our readers. Some papers have moved more aggressively into developing and/or fine-tuning their digital strategy. Others aren't as far along on that path; still others are betting on the value proposition of a print product aimed at targeted communities.

Look no further than Main Street Media of Tennessee for a solid example of what is working. Founded almost seven years ago by Dave Gould, the current president of the Tennessee Press Service, MSM launched with three newspapers and 2,000 subscribers in two counties. Acquiring existing papers and creating new weeklies in subsequent years, MSM has grown to 12 newspapers with 35,000 subscribers in 10 counties (with rack copies the company prints about 60,000 papers a week).

Gould's secret sauce? No surprise here: hyper-local content — government, citizens, high school sports, local events, schools, obits, you name it.

"While readers may be interested in national politics or world news, we stay focused on those things that truly impact their day-to-day lives," he said.

Earlier this month, the company debuted its most recent paper — Main Street Fairview. Last August, new papers in Montgomery County/Clarksville and in the Donelson area of Davidson County were introduced.



YOUR PRESIDING REPORTER

CHRIS VASS

CorningWare update:
Yep, that 5-year-old story is still cooking online — as of mid-February, pageviews totaled 140,000. And the reporter still is answering calls from folks all over the country who want to know what that blue cornflower casserole dish will fetch at auction.

"We believe there is still potential for us to grow in Davidson and Williamson counties, and we will be looking at both areas moving forward," Gould said.

MSM's first priority, he noted, is subscribers and giving them a top-notch weekly paper. MSM's 14 websites attract about a million page views a month but the primary focus is the print product as the majority of revenue comes through print advertising. Subscribers seem to appreciate the content mix and growing reader base he said.

Yes, I think TPA member newspapers are turning the corner, almost as if we have gone through at least some of the five stages of grief: denial (I vividly remember a meeting in which an advertising executive dismissed the iPad as a "fad" and confidently reassured everyone there was no "there" there. In short, stop wasting time thinking about that technology). Then anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance.

That's not to say we are beyond bad news as an industry. During the convention, sobering news

dropped: Family-owned McClatchy newspapers, which owns about 30 newspapers across the country, filed for bankruptcy.

We've heard the reasons before. Newspaper companies saddled with too much debt have no room to maneuver. The slide of ad revenue to the online giants is punishing. And the steady erosion of circulation revenue underscores that our playing field is filled with competitors of all kinds, especially the "free news" all over the internet.

The McClatchy announcement, and too many others like it, remind us that even when you do good work—great, award-winning work — if your business model and strategy are not solid and supple, things won't end well.

But hearing about this latest industry news during our convention felt a little incongruent with so many of the positive steps of TPA, the Tennessee Press Service and Tennessee Press Association Foundation have taken and are pursuing. The financial footing of TPS and TPA is stabilized. More training opportunities are in the works and a readership survey is under development — initiatives that add value to association members. We have strong, creative and passionate leadership in Carol Daniels, Gould and Victor Parkins.

The vibe is good, we are starting to figure it out, but the cautionary note, the takeaway is that in this environment, no one is going to "figure it out" permanently. We are far from figuring it out. We will always be in a constant state of evaluating and questioning what we do and how we do it. Our business is changing so fast there is no opportunity to sit back and say, "Oh, I've got it." The good news is that we seem to be getting comfortable with that.

Chris Vass is the 2019-2020 TPA president. Contact her at cvass@timesfreepress.com.

Sunshine Week observance set March 15-21

Join the News Leaders Association and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press in the annual nationwide celebration of access to public information and what it means for you and your



community.

The toolkit includes columns, editorial cartoons and more.

Find all of the free resources at: www.sunshineweek.org.

A beautiful ceremony, a great convention

On February 9, I attended the celebration of life for William Bryant "Bill" Williams. It was a beautiful ceremony for a man clearly loved by his family, his church, his newspaper staff and his community.

And the obituary written by his son Michael, who like his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, is the editor and publisher of the Post-Intelligencer, was also a beautiful tribute. The Tennessee Press Association has lost too many legacies over the past few years, men and women who carried the banner of our profession and industry with skill and honor. We all feel the loss.

During the celebration, the pastor talked about what an incredible storyteller Bill was, and it made me reflect upon how our industry is one of story tellers. We tell the stories of our communities, we celebrate the good, point out the ugly so it can be fixed, and hold up the bad so that our community can be aware. Newspapers document our communities, creating a written history that helps remind us of who we are and from where we came. It is a noble purpose, and one that the people of Paris showed their



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CAROL DANIELS

appreciation of.

Winter Convention 2020 has wrapped up, safely I might add, always a good thing! It was great seeing everyone at the convention; thank you for coming and participating in the programs. Planning for Summer Convention 2020 began several months ago, and it is shaping up to be another great destination convention, June 18-19 in Pigeon Forge.

I know our legislators and members enjoying chatting at the opening reception; thank you to everyone that attended. Our lawmakers notice when their local newspaper people are engaged. Other sessions that were presented included a great session from Jack McElroy talking about "uncovering the police." I talked with several publishers and editors afterward who said they're going to dig into their own local law enforcement and see if they are circumventing the press in any

way; I look forward to reading those stories!

We also heard from John Geer and Joshua Clinton about the new Vanderbilt Poll. I know several of you will be following up with them to dig deeper and get more information.

Ken Paulson did a great job as our entertainment at the luncheon, and it was incredibly informative. If you've not heard Ken speak yet, he is passionate about our businesses and is a very motivating speaker. Now, every time I see Superman, I will picture Ken as a child wearing his red towel!

Ken reintroduced the media campaign promoting the First Amendment. He also shared some of the ads that have been produced for both the national campaign and ads that have been created for the local newspapers using local 'celebrities.' Two such ads appear elsewhere in this section, on pages 2 and 11.

More exciting news that came from our meetings and the convention is that Tennessee Press Service will conduct a statewide readership survey. I know when I was a general manager, I was always looking for good data to support our sales efforts.

After we complete the survey and compile the data from across Tennessee, we will give our members an opportunity to get data that is specific to their communities they serve. We also plan to offer training across the state to sales professionals on how to use the data to strengthen their sales efforts.

I want to acknowledge and thank the team that put the winter convention together and supported it from beginning to end. TPA/TPS has a fantastic, professional staff, and I am very proud of them. Robyn Gentile is responsible for the lion's share of the work, and, as you have all experienced, she organizes a very full and informative convention. The entire team supports Robyn at the convention one way or another. This year, Rebecca McLeskey and Frank Zier were on deck to help with registration and any other logistics that needed extra attention. Earl Goodman, Becky Moats and Alisa Subhakul supported us by keeping our business going while the convention was taking place. Thank you!

Carol Daniels is executive director of the Tennessee Press Association.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

MARCH 2020

- 5-8: 2020 Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Computer-Assisted Reporting (CAR) Conference, New Orleans, La.
- 11-14: College Media Association Spring National College Media Convention 2020, New York Marriott Marquis, New York City
- 12: Free Webinar: Build Your Social Media Style Guides
- 15-21: Sunshine Week, www.sunshineweek.org

APRIL 2020

- 17-18: Journalism Education Association National Convention, Gaylord Opryland, Nashville
- 23-28: 2020 International News Media Association (INMA) World Congress of News Media, Paris, France

JUNE 2020

- 18-19: 2020 Tennessee Press Association 150th Anniversary Summer Convention and Advertising/Circulation Conference, Music Road Resort, Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
- 18-21: 2020 Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Annual Conference, Gaylord National, National Harbor, Md.
- 19: TPA State Press Contests Awards Dinner, Pigeon Forge

OCTOBER 2020

- 1-3: National Newspaper Association's 134th Annual Convention and Trade Show, Hyatt Regency, Jacksonville, Fla.
- 21-25: College Media Association Fall National College Media Convention 2020, in conjunction with Associated Collegiate Press, Atlanta Hyatt Regency, Atlanta, Ga.

JUNE 2021

- 24-26: 2021 Tennessee • Arkansas • Mississippi Press Associations Tri-State Convention, Memphis

NEWS

Main Street Media launches Fairview paper

Gallatin-based Main Street Media of Tennessee, a publisher of community newspapers, websites and social media pages across Middle Tennessee, has expanded into Fairview.

Main Street Fairview, a weekly newspaper, launched Feb. 5 with a focus on local news, sports, people and events in the area. Free mailed subscriptions for one year are available for Williamson County addresses.

The company has also introduced a corresponding website – www.mainstreetfairview.com – as well as social media pages.

Media veteran Nancy Stephens, who has covered Fairview for nearly 30 years, has been hired as editor of Main Street Fairview.

"We are so excited to be expanding into Fairview," said



Stephens

Dave Gould, owner of Main Street Media of Tennessee. "We are also thrilled that Nancy Stephens will be leading our efforts there. Nancy has been

covering Fairview for years and knows the market as well as anyone."

Main Street Media of Tennessee publishes 12 weekly newspapers as well as websites, magazines and social media pages throughout Middle Tennessee.

*Main Street Media, Gallatin
Feb. 5, 2020*

Wilhoite headed to TSSAA Hall of Fame

Longtime Daily Herald sports editor Marion Wilhoite will be honored along with eight other inductees into the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association's Hall of Fame during an April luncheon ceremony in Murfreesboro.



Wilhoite

of athletes, young and old, in one place is a rare thing in the news business. We are all richly blessed that he did it in and for Maury County."

Wilhoite, who passed away in

See **NEWS** Page 4

Applications Open for 2nd Annual Reporters Workshop

The Tennessee Bar Association, its Communication Law Section and the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters, with additional support from the Tennessee Press Association Foundation, have opened the application process for the Second Annual Reporters Workshop in Nashville May 1-2.

There is space for 15 print, online, television and/or radio journalists to be selected to participate in the training.

The sessions will focus on access to government information, defamation, privacy concerns in reporting and other timely topics.

Applications are due March 16. For additional information, contact program coordinator Maresa Whaley, mwhaley@tnbar.org.

When face-to-face with a client, it pays to pay attention

Abby, who owns a retail store, told me about an appointment with a salesperson from her local newspaper. “I did plenty of research before I contacted him and decided to run a campaign in his paper. When I called him, I made it clear that I was going to buy some advertising and just needed him to drop by to confirm a few details, so I could pay in advance.

“When he arrived, I reminded him that I had a tight schedule, but he launched into a full sales presentation. In an attempt to move things along, I pulled out my checkbook and asked if I should make the check payable to the newspaper or to the publishing company – which had different names.



AD-LIBS®

JOHN FOUST

“What happened next was one of the strangest things I’ve ever seen. He completely ignored my question and started talking about the corporate owner of the paper. He had positive things to say, but it had nothing to do with my advertising. After about five minutes of listening to that, I put the checkbook away, thanked him for his time and told him I might run some ads with his paper in the

future.”

Even though that happened years ago, Abby still remembers the frustration she felt at the time. “That salesperson wasn’t paying attention at all. He was completely out of touch with what was going on in our meeting.”

Hearing about Abby’s experience reminded me of something that once happened to a family friend. He was buying a used car from a dealership and thought it would be a simple process. The plan was to do online research, find a car of interest, take a test drive and make a decision. The transaction didn’t involve financing or a trade-in.

“The price fit my budget exactly,” he said. “I told the salesperson

there was no room to buy extras. But before he accepted my check and handed over the keys, I was introduced to a finance person and led into his office. Since I knew that was standard procedure at a lot of dealerships, I said right up front that I wasn’t interested in added features or an extended warranty. I’ve bought a number of cars over the years. Sometimes I’ve bought extended warranties and sometimes I haven’t. This time, I didn’t want one.

“The finance guy was new in his position and didn’t seem to know how to handle a customer who wasn’t in the market for extras. He was determined to stick to the script he had been taught, so I had to listen to a pitch on a variety of

extended warranties. I repeatedly asked him to cut it short, but he kept going until the bitter end. Even though he was pleasant and friendly, he was completely out of touch with the situation. It was a total waste of time for both of us.”

Two stories, one lesson. When you’re face-to-face with a client, it pays to pay attention.

(c) Copyright 2020 by John Foust. All rights reserved.

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

NEWS from Page 3

November 2017, had previously been recognized by the TSSAA with its Distinguished Service Award. He is also a member of the Tennessee Sports Writers Association’s Hall of Fame, and is a charter member of the Columbia Parks and Recreation Hall of Fame. He was named the Lawrenceburg Quarterback Club’s State Prep Writer of the Year in 1984. The press box at Maury County Park’s Lindsey Nelson Stadium is named in his honor.

Prior to his 2016 retirement, concluding a 54-year career at the Daily Herald, Wilhoite was honored by the Tennessee Press Association for 50 years of service.

The luncheon will be held April 18 at 11 a.m. at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in Murfreesboro. Tickets for the event are on sale and only available in advance. For more information, visit tssaa.org.

The Daily Herald, Columbia
Jan. 29, 2020

Germantown News sold to Paxton Media Group

Germantown News is now under new ownership. Paxton Media Group (PMG) announced Dec. 30, 2019 that they have purchased Germantown News and The Evening Times in West Memphis, Ark. effective Jan. 1.

Paxton Media is a family-owned company headquartered in Paducah, Ky. The company publishes daily and weekly newspapers in more than 50 communities in the Midwest and South, including six in Tennessee – The Lebanon Democrat, The Mountain Press (Sevierville), Macon County Times (Lafayette), The Portland Leader, The Mt. Juliet News and the Hartsville Vidette.

“This business combination creates a strong regional presence

for us and fits in with our other properties,” said Jamie Paxton, CEO of PMG. “PMG believes strongly in local journalism and the important role newspapers serve in their communities.”

Reece Terry, group publisher, will oversee management of both Germantown News and The Evening Times.

Thomas Ricketson, president of Ricketson Publications, Inc. of Lake City, Fla. and publisher of the Germantown News, said the decision to sell was difficult, but believes the resources that Paxton Media Group will provide will enhance the quality of the two newspapers, and also provide readers and subscribers a professional product.

Ricketson purchased the Germantown News in the late 1970s and his wife Lynnette Ricketson served as publisher until her death in 1999.

Germantown News
Jan. 8, 2020

Press, sister papers, now part of Six Rivers Media

The Johnson City Press began 2020 under a new company name — Six Rivers Media, LLC.

Former owner Sandusky Newspapers Inc. sold all properties outside Northeast Tennessee, thus the formation of the new company with a name more reflective of the paper’s local ownership and presence.

Principals in the new company are David Rau, Allen Rau (who

lives in the Tri-Cities) and Madeline Rau. David serves as CEO, Allen as vice president and Madeline as secretary. Rick Thomason, publisher of the Press and the Kingsport Times News, adds president of Six Rivers Media to his title.

In addition to the Press and the Times News, The Erwin Record, Jonesborough Herald & Tribune, the Mountain City Tomahawk, and digital agency NET360 round out Six Rivers Media.

Other than the name of the company and the fact that the Northeast Tennessee papers and accompanying digital agency operate as a single business instead of five separate businesses (NET360 formerly operated as part of Kingsport Publishing Company), the public will see little change.

“One of the first things we were all adamant about was that we keep our brands — some of them more than a century old — intact,” Thomason said. “Our communities know our newspapers by our long-established names and rely on those brands for more local, trusted and real news than from any other news source in the communities we serve.”

Johnson City Press
Feb. 4, 2020

Lee Enterprises buys Herald Courier

Lee Enterprises is buying Berkshire Hathaway Media Group’s newspaper publications, of which the Bristol Herald Courier is a part,

for \$140 million in cash.

The deal includes 29 other BH Media newspapers as well as The Buffalo News. Lee will now own and operate 81 daily newspapers, nearly doubling its size from 50.

Berkshire Hathaway will provide approximately \$576 million in long-term financing to Lee at a 9% annual rate, according to a press release. The proceeds will be used to pay for the acquisition, refinancing of Lee’s approximate \$400 million of existing debt and provide cash to allow for the termination of Lee’s revolving credit facility, the release said.

“Today’s announcement brings to close one chapter in the nearly 150 year history of the Bristol Herald Courier and turns the page to the next,” Bristol Herald Courier publisher Jim Maxwell said. “For the past 18 months we’ve worked very closely with Lee, and we have implemented many new processes and procedures, aligning our operations with theirs and positioning our operations to be able to successfully navigate and capitalize on opportunities provided in the ever-changing media landscape.”

BH Media has papers in 10 states, including 10 in Virginia, owning and operating 30 daily newspapers and 49 weekly publications, as well as 32 other print products.

In June of 2018, Lee took over managing all BH Media publications. Bristol Herald Courier
Jan. 29, 2020



Tennessee Press Service Advertising Placement Snapshot

	ROP:	Networks:
January 2020	\$160,684	\$14,749
Year* as of Jan. 31	\$284,659	\$30,608

* The TPS Fiscal Year runs Dec. 1 through Nov. 30

Lee expresses support of First Amendment

JOEL EBERT
The Tennessean, Nashville
February 16, 2020

On Thursday, Feb. 13, Gov. Bill Lee addressed the Tennessee Press Association, speaking to the group for about five minutes. In previous years, the governor, including former Gov. Bill Haslam, has served as the keynote speaker for the annual gathering.

During his brief remarks, Lee noted his first interaction with the press association came when he was running for governor and participated in a 2018 forum.

“To this day, I have an even greater awareness and appreciation for what it is that this organization does but mostly the responsibility that you have to protect what’s really important in this country and that’s the First Amendment,” Lee said.

The governor stressed the need for residents, including those living in rural areas, to have access to information provided by the media.

Although he didn’t directly discuss it, Lee indirectly alluded to a Breitbart story published last week that initially said the governor had signed onto a letter opposing legislation critics say is aimed at the LGBTQ community.

The governor’s office called the report a “complete fabrication.”

“Let me just say that I have a greater appreciation than ever before about the accurate dissemination of information through the press,” he said.

He later noted he was the subject of a story that he said was “totally created,” stressing the importance of journalists who accurately report.

“I just encourage you to stay at it,” he said. “Because it matters.” Lee said “it matters” to him that the people he represents “know what’s happening in the world around them.”

Overall, Lee did not discuss his administration’s decisions to deny access to public records citing executive privilege, overall transparency, media consolidation, or a multitude of other issues journalists face today.

But speaking to reporters after his remarks, Lee was asked about the progress of his vow during the 2018 governor’s race to overhaul the state’s public records system, which includes 538 exemptions, and public meetings law.



Photo by Tony Centonze, for TPA

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee answers media questions during an impromptu news conference on Thursday, Feb. 13, on the second day of the 2020 TPA Winter Convention at the Doubletree Hotel in Nashville.

Plus, explore our voter guide and the issues.

“There will be a constant call for us to provide greater transparency and an improved process for an open records process,” he said. “The citizens of Tennessee need to have quicker and easier access to the records that should be and are available to them. We’re always looking at processes to improve that.”

To date, Lee has introduced no legislation to address the issue, which places limits on the public’s access to information about their government.



This First Amendment print and digital ad campaign is available to your newspaper. Customizations are offered. Contact Ken Paulson, director of the Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University, at ken.paulson@mtsu.edu for access to the collection of 1 for All ads.

Hamilton County attorneys destroy public records after Times Free Press request

SARAH GRACE TAYLOR
Chattanooga Times Free Press
February 1, 2020

Hamilton County Attorney Rheubin Taylor speaks during a County Commission meeting in the County Commission assembly room at the Hamilton County Courthouse on Wednesday, April 17, 2019 in Chattanooga, Tenn.

The Hamilton County Attorney’s Office destroyed 98% of records requested by the Times Free Press, amid a disagreement over reasonable charges. The fight for the records, which were requested six months ago (as of Feb. 1, 2020), continued past the destruction of the records for four months before the office admitted destroying the more than 1,400 pages of documents in question.

Questions about the office’s compliance with public records laws were raised in the summer of 2019 when county attorneys initially unlawfully denied a different request by the paper, asserting that they do not provide any records from their office, despite serving as the custodian of county general records.

“If it comes into [the county attorney’s] office, it’s privileged,” records coordinator Dana Beltramo said in July, “Our stuff is off limits.”

While the paper ultimately received a partial sample of the records responsive to that request, the paper filed another request on Aug. 5 to inspect all records requests received by the office and the office’s responses to them over a one-year period, in order to

examine the office’s record request practices.

The office estimated that the request would contain 1,500 pages of records and asked that the Times Free Press pay \$717 in advance to inspect the records, which the paper refused to do. According to multiple state records experts, and the office’s own request form, a requester cannot be charged for the inspection of records under Tennessee State law.

Legality debated via numerous emails and phone calls

The paper and attorney’s office exchanged dozens of emails and phone calls debating the legality

of the charge, until the office provided part of the request — more than 200 pages of documents — digitally in late January.

The county only provided a sample of 268 pages of correspondence responsive to the request, spanning eight of the twelve months requested; and a letter from Beltramo stating for the first time the destruction of related documents.

“Because there is no statute regarding retention of public records requests, the Hamilton County Public Records Commission met October 2, 2019, and determined that requests and related correspondence need only be retained for a period of 30 days,” Beltramo wrote, explaining that the records provided were all responsive records received via mail or otherwise scanned and

saved.

Drafted minutes of the October meeting, which took place two months after the request was filed, show that Beltramo asked for and was unanimously granted authority to destroy public records requests and responses after 30 days.

The minutes also say, “[Beltramo] stated that 98% of the requests are in the form of emails.”

Beltramo did not respond to multiple requests for an interview by phone and in person late last week

County denies records destruction related to paper’s request

County Attorney Rheubin Taylor,

See **RECORDS** Page 10

TPA MEMBER COVERAGE SHOWCASE I: Rogersville Review

Two pens, two continents and 60 years of friendship

ALLISON F. GOLEY
Rogersville Review
October 30, 2019

Karen Wilcox was 13 years old in this photo and had been corresponding with Annie Beazley for around two years.

When Karen Wilcox and Annie Beazley first picked up their pens to write letters to each other, they never anticipated the impact their friendship would have.

The year was 1959, and both girls were 11 years old at the time. However, Wilcox was living in Plainview, New York, and Beazley was in Leeton, Australia, which is just south of Sydney.

The two maintained a close friendship, sending letters and mementos back and forth for around 27 years. Until one day in 1986, the letters stopped. Both women had busy lives, and they simply lost contact.

Wilcox and Beazley lived their separate lives on opposite sides of the globe for about 30 years until they were finally able to reconnect in 2016 using Facebook.

Last month (September 2019), the two were finally able to meet in person for the very first time when Beazley flew across the globe to stay in Wilcox's Church Hill home.

Their first connections

"My teacher said one day, 'Bring in 50 cents tomorrow, and I'll get you three pen pals,'" Wilcox explained. "So, I brought in the 50 cents. I got one pen pal in Blackburn, England, and we didn't continue a friendship. One was in France, and I couldn't speak the language, so that wasn't good. Then, Annie and I connected."

"I also had three pen pals," Beazley added. "One of mine was in England, too, and the other one was actually in Sydney."

Not only did the two girls live on opposite sides of the globe, but Wilcox was located in the heart of Long Island, New York, while Beazley lived a quiet, country lifestyle in a town with around 3,000 people.

"So, you can imagine a Long Island girl listening to her in the

country like that," Wilcox said. "Even seeing pictures — it was so different."

Both women remembered being fascinated by the differences in seasons between the two countries.

"I would be telling her, 'We're going down to the beach to go swimming,' and she would be in winter," Wilcox said.

"Because she had a different summer, our main school holidays (vacations) were at Christmas time, because that's the hottest part of the year," Beazley added. "On the first of September, we started spring, and Karen was heading for the fall."

Writing letters

Wilcox explained that it was expensive to send letters internationally at the time; however, the post office provided a tri-fold, blue card made specifically for air mail on which she wrote her letters to Annie.

"As much as you could write on that tri-fold is what you could send off," she said. "You might be writing along and suddenly realize you were about to run out of room and abruptly say, 'Okay, bye!' In 1959, that tri-fold was 50 cents, which was costly. It was especially expensive if I wanted to send anything with the letter. If I wanted to send Annie a package at Christmas or anything, I had to start around October because it had to go by boat."

In one particular letter that Wilcox remembered receiving from Beazley, Beazley had asked a "bloke" to write to Wilcox.

"He would write letters and use all of the slang — things you all say that I have no idea what they mean," Wilcox said. "The most interesting part was that he would translate the slang as he wrote the letter. It was interesting for me to hear what teenagers were saying."

"I don't remember that," Beazley



said with a laugh.

Language

Both women have always been fascinated in the difference between their accents and the difference in word pronunciation.

During her visit in America, Beazley has truly got to experience the variance in spoken American English, as Wilcox's northern accent shines through in comparison to the Southern drawl of other Church Hill residents.

"The accent — I think it's my favorite American accent," Beazley said of the iconic Southern drawl. "Just hearing two young women having a chat in the super market while Karen is trying to buy some cheese — it was all I could do not to crack up. It was just gorgeous."

"I will even say things, and Annie will ask me, 'How did you say that again?'" Wilcox added.

Both women then compared the way they pronounce the word 'bathroom.' Wilcox, like most Americans, pronounces the word with the short 'a' sound also found in the words 'cat' and 'glass.' Beazley, though, pronounces it almost as if it were spelled 'barthroom,'

Photo by Allison F. Goley,
Rogersville Review

Pen Pals for 60 years, Karen Wilcox (left) and Annie Beazley (right) connected through a school international pen pal program. They were finally able to meet in person in 2019 when Beazley hopped on a plane and flew from Australia to stay in Wilcox's Church Hill home.

using the same 'o' sound Americans use to pronounce 'often.'

Odd similarities

Since they first met in person, both women have also noticed "uncanny similarities" between them.

"Just look at how comfortable we are with each other," Wilcox observed, as both women sat relaxed on a couch in Wilcox's home. Though they have been writing letters on and off for roughly 60 years, the two had never met in person before this trip.

"We're already giving each other cheek," Beazley added with a laugh.

When Beazley explained during the interview that she had retired in 2013, Wilcox excitedly asked "Did you really? So did I!"

"We were both 65, but that's amazing because some people retire before or after — we went at the same time," she added.

The disconnect

The pair corresponded back and forth for around 27 years before they, unfortunately, lost contact.

"My mother died that year (the last year they corresponded, which was around 1986), and various other things happened," Beazley said. "I lost address books and things with moving around. I've had 32 different houses in 28 different towns in my lifetime."

They went around 30 years without corresponding, but both women explained that they tried various ways to find each other again. Beazley had reverted back to using her maiden name, so Wilcox had been looking for her under the wrong name. As aforementioned, Beazley also moved

around a lot, so Wilcox wasn't exactly sure in what town her friend would be.

"Time goes on, and you always think about each other and wonder whatever happened," Wilcox said.

Both eventually graduated from college, got married, had children and pursued careers.

Beazley now has four children and Wilcox has two.

Beazley joined the WRAAC (Women's Royal Australian Army Corps) at the young age of 17 before graduating from college later in life and became a senior psychologist who worked in administration. She worked as a psychologist for 26 years in Wagga Wagga before retiring to the East Coast in 2013.

Both Wilcox and her eventual husband graduated from Western Connecticut State University with teaching degrees. At the time, there were very few open teaching positions in the Northeast, so she and her husband moved to Florida three years later in search of work.

An Australian woman in the WRAAC

When she was only 17 and a half, Beazley actually joined the WRAAC. Though she explained that she enjoyed her time in the corps, she actually faced a lot of discrimination as a female.

"We were told that our role was only to replace the men so that they could go out and fight overseas because our soldiers had gone to Vietnam," Beazley said.

Even though she had grown up going to rifle shoots with her father and had won several awards in youth rifle shoots, she was not allowed to carry a weapon as part of the WRAAC or officially join any civilian rifle clubs as an adult.

"In those days, if you got married or got pregnant, you had to ask to be discharged," she said. "You didn't have any choice. This was the same for teachers, nurses or any government jobs."

Both men and women soldiers faced the same fate if they were found to practice homosexuality,

FRIENDSHIP from Page 6

as Beazley explained this was illegal in Australia at the time.

Beazley was forced out of the WRAAC in 1967 shortly after she announced her intent to get married. However, when she made the decision to get married, she wasn't yet aware of what would happen.

"It wasn't something that was talked about, and I didn't personally know anyone yet who had been forced to discharge," she said. "My discharge letter says, 'Soldier has requested her discharge.' But, the truth is that I was called in and told I would have to resign."

She explained that these rules later officially changed in 1974 after one dismissed teacher sued for her right to stay in the job and won the case, though "it was a long time before this was widely accepted," Beazley explained. The WRAAC was actually disbanded in 1984 along with all other women's corps.

Beazley's daughter is actually in the Royal Australian Navy and has had an active role as a medical doctor.

"When I saw her off to war on her ship in Western Australia, it really struck me how different it was and how incredible," Beazley said. "I always worried that my sons would be conscripted like my brother was. Never in a million years did I think it would be my daughter in the military. Girls weren't even allowed to go on ships when I was in the WRAAC."

She also is now part of a group of former WRAAC members, many of whom are soon due to receive the service medal they were denied because of discriminatory rules of the time. Beazley received hers last year.

"It's very important for us to let the young soldiers of today to know that things were very different then," she said.

The reconnection

In 2016, thanks to lots of online detective work on Beazley's part, she found the clue that led her back to Wilcox.

"I first found Karen's dad's death notice," she said. "The death notice said he was in Navy, and I had remembered that about him. Then, I saw Karen and Don's name in that death notice."

It took her three more weeks of searching to actually connect to Karen.

"I had never searched for Meredith (Karen's daughter) on Facebook because I thought she would have a different last name, but she didn't," Beazley said. "So, when I put in 'Meredith Wilcox,' there was a photo of a woman with the same coloring Karen had when we were kids—I knew because Karen and I had had photos of each other. I clicked on her photo, and up came a comment from this person called Karen Hammer Wilcox that said, 'That's my daughter, and I'm very proud of her.'"

Finally, Beazley had found her long-lost friend.

"I sent her a message and said, 'Annie Beazley here, but you might remember me as Annie Lockley,'" Beazley said. "I think you are my long-lost pen pal. Straight away, I got a message back that said, 'Oh, my gosh! We've found each other!'"

Coming to America

It was really Beazley's children who made sure the pens pals officially met in person.

"For my birthday this year, my children gave me a gift card for the flight center inside a card," Beazley said. "The card said, 'This travel card is going to expire in two years, so we give it to you on the condition that you go and visit Karen in America.' That's how it all started."

She had always wanted to see the Grand Canyon, so, on her way to Church Hill, she was able to stop for a few days in Las Vegas and take a helicopter ride over the Grand Canyon as well.

After her excursion, she hopped back on a plane to meet Wilcox at the Asheville Airport with a stuffed

Koala bear and miniature Australian flag in hand.

The first meeting

Ironically, Beazley's plane was an hour late. Though the two have waited 60 years to meet each other, Wilcox explained that those final moments before the plane landed were agonizing.

"I kept jumping up to go and check the time," she said. "I kept telling my husband, 'You can really tell I'm getting excited now!'"

When Beazley stepped off the airplane in Asheville, North Carolina, she explained that she immediately spotted Wilcox and her husband.

"I spotted them both, and I recognized them from the photos," Beazley said. "But Karen also had this (a large sign reading 'Welcome Annie') in her hand, which was

lovely."

"We were standing there, hugging onto each other, and we were both crying," Wilcox added. "That was the culmination — we had talked about that moment, and we

had even said 'just wait until we hug!'"

"It's been unreal," Beazley said. "I have to pinch myself because I think 'this is not really happening.'"



Submitted photo

Top left: Annie Beazley was around 12 years old in this photo and had been corresponding with Karen Wilcox for about a year. Top right: Karen Wilcox was 13 years old in this photo and had been corresponding with Annie Beazley for around two years.

TPA Summer Convention • Pigeon Forge

June 18-19, 2020 • Music Road Hotel & Conference Center



Thursday, June 18:

- TPA Day at Dollywood
- TPA Board of Directors Meeting

Friday, June 19:

- 8:00 a.m.—TPA Foundation Board Mtg.
- 9:00 a.m.—Ad/Circ Conference
- 9:00 a.m.—Newsroom Sessions
- Noon—Ideas Contest Awards Lunch
- Afternoon—Ad, Circ & Newsroom sessions
- 6:30 p.m.—State Press Contests Awards

This is a tentative schedule. The complete convention schedule will be available in late March. Photos courtesy of the Pigeon Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau.



The Tennessee Press Association Foundation gratefully acknowledges a contribution

**In memory of
Bill Williams**

*given in
remembrance by*

*Elizabeth Kennedy
Blackstone*

Digging deeper: How to find opportunities (and time) to go in-depth

Has the daily grind got you down? Are you missing on opportunities to move up in your career because your stories are stuck on average? Is it hard to remember the last time you broke a big story, produced a project or delved deep into an important topic?

In today's understaffed, over-worked journalism environment, many daily and weekly newspaper writers are likely to answer "yes" to one or more of those questions. And while I understand why, I simply refuse to accept the notion that it is impossible for anyone to produce in-depth material.

As a quick definition, "in-depth" is coverage that includes: a higher quantity and quality of sourcing than normal; multi-part packages; projects with maps, graphics and charts; coverage of topics that are controversial or which someone wants kept quiet; use of reports, public documents and data to draw conclusions; use of multi-media and improved photography; or use of narrative form or thematic storytelling.

Here are some tips to find the topics, and the time, to do deeper



BETTER WRITING WITH BART

BART PFANKUCH

work.

— **Prioritize.** We all have regular tasks to complete, meetings to cover or sections to fill. Commit yourself to doing those jobs more quickly and efficiently in order to maintain overall quality but to free up time each day or week to work on deeper or more long-range projects.

— **Use time wisely.** Sometimes you have to work late or on a weekend to land a big project. But to make in-depth work a habit, find ways to fit the work into your regular schedule. Reduce office chit-chat, avoid the time suck of social media; and stay on task when on the clock. Try to commit one hour a day or three hours a week only to project work.

— **Watch for opportunities, then dive in.** Great stories sometimes fall into our laps, but more often they must be found and cultivated. Always be on the hunt for topics that aren't obvious or that can lead to change. Look for stories that involve government waste or mismanagement, those that highlight people who are in peril or who are suffering or are without a voice, or topics that powerful people want to keep hidden. When you get a reputation as a watchdog, sources with good stories will flock to you. Never, ever blow them off; listen to anyone about anything.

— **Convince your editor, and yourself, of the importance.** Going deeper won't happen on its own; you will have to take the initiative and it will require extra work and energy. Don't approach your editor with an idea until you've done your homework and have established a plan for what the story might say, how long it will take to complete and when it can be done. Good editors won't turn away great work.

— **Start small.** Consider your first in-depth project a starter kit.

Take on a story that you know can be done and completed rather quickly, but which has the potential for impact. With a small victory in hand, then shoot bigger and you'll have the confidence to land larger stories. Try to complete a project every month, every quarter or even once a year if that is what time allows.

— **Think beyond your borders.** In small towns, or on busy beats, it can be tough to find topics that resonate widely. Tackle a topic that reaches beyond your town or your regular topic area by considering issues of statewide interest, industry-wide reach or those that touch on an entire population of people.

— **Keep clean, accurate notes.** After every interview, type up or clean up the notes immediately and identify anyone or anything you might forget. Longer stories require more organization.

— **Find a mentor.** If there's someone in your newsroom doing in-depth work, glom onto them and copy their best practices. If not, find someone outside the newsroom to confer with or go online to find someone in journalism

to ask for help or advice.

— **Emulate other good work.** Keep your eyes peeled for journalism that stands out and then replicate it. Go on awards websites and click on the winners to see what type of stories, and which topics, are rising to the top of our field. Then, redo your own version.

— **Keep it to yourself, at first.** Do not make a grand announcement that you are working on a project. Rather, do the work quietly at first, diligently, until a project takes shape. When you know you can bring it home, then tell your editor or your colleagues. At that point, ask for extra time or open space in the paper.

— **Collaborate.** Once you have a green light to go deep, seek input from editors, other reporters, web folks, photographers and designers or anyone else who can help make the project shine.

Bart Pfankuch is the content director and an investigative reporter for South Dakota News Watch, accessible online at sdnewswatch.org. Write to him at bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org.

OBITUARIES

David Climer

Former Tennessean columnist David Climer died Sunday, Jan. 19, in Nashville after a recent battle with cancer. He was 66.

Climer was a journalistic legend, serving Middle Tennessee readers for decades at some of the biggest events in sports, regionally and nationally.

A Lebanon native, Climer retired from The Tennessean in 2015, ending a storied career that dated back to 1974, when he worked for the publication on a part-time basis.

"Along the way, I've tried to call it like I see it," Climer wrote in his farewell column. "I take some sort of perverse pride in the fact that so many Tennessee fans think I'm a Vanderbilt homer and so many Vanderbilt fans think I'm all Vol. I'm neither. But I wish both programs well.

"It didn't take me long in the business to realize that it's best to check your allegiances at the gate. Instead of pulling for one team over another, I root for a good story."



Climer

He became a full-time writer at The Tennessean in 1977, covering Tennessee State University. In 1984, he became The Tennessean's beat writer covering University of Tennessee sports, which he did until 1993.

In 1994, he became a columnist. His work included the Titans' Super Bowl run to cap the 1999 season, annual trips to The Masters and a 2012 trip to Williamsport, Penn., to see the Goodlettsville team play in the Little League World Series.

He retired to Fripp Island, South Carolina, with his wife, Rebecca.

"Climer was legendary, not just in Nashville or the state, but throughout the South," said Maria De Varenne, executive editor of The Tennessean. "His Rolodex of contacts, home numbers and cell numbers was the envy of the staff. There wasn't anyone who he couldn't reach on deadline or during breaking news.

"He tended to focus his columns on the Vols and the Titans, telling our readers exactly what he thought of the teams, the players, the coaches and the fans. His columns evoked emotion in our readers — whether they were praising him for getting it right or yelling at him in disagreement."

Climer was on the scene at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta when a bomb exploded in Centennial Olympic Park. He subsequently wrote a story on his laptop while sitting on a curb in the park.

"David was a terrific journalist, who cared deeply about the city of Nashville," said Dave Ammenheuser, The Tennessean's sports editor from 2012-19.

*The Tennessean, Nashville
Jan. 19, 2020*

James 'Jim' L. Nicholson, III

James "Jim" L. Nicholson, III, former owner and editor of the Grundy County Herald, Tracy City, passed away Sunday, Jan. 5, in

Ephraim McDowell Hospital at 85 years of age. He was born in Hopkinsville, Ky., December 28, 1934, to Charlene Thomasson and James L. Nicholson Jr.

As a young man Nicholson loved sports, and excelled in running and swimming but was stricken by polio, which curtailed his participation in sports. He remained an avid runner and walker, throughout the remainder of his life.

He was educated at Los Angeles State College of Arts and Sciences and graduated with a bachelor's degree in English literature. He went on to achieve a master's degree at Vanderbilt University, also in English literature.

Literary pursuits remained at the core of Jim's endeavors for most of his life. He was the owner and editor of the Grundy County Herald during the 1960s and 70s. He took great pride in his work at the newspaper. Jim also served as a high school teacher and headmaster, a college professor, and always as a writer in venues across the United States. During his life, he completed 11 novels, numerous



Nicholson

poems, critiques and essays, as the written word was a common thread in his endeavors. He chose Danville, Ky., as his final home as it combined his love of literature and

learning through Centre College and his enduring joy of Central Kentucky.

He was preceded in death by his sister and brother, who both died in 2019.

He is survived by four children, Nancy Jones of Madison, Ala.; James (Jimmy) Nicholson IV of Auburn, Ala.; Ann (Annie) Burney of Columbus, Ga.; John (Jack) Nicholson of Lexington, Ky.; and stepson Richard Lowe of Richmond, Ky. He is also survived by seven grandchildren.

*Grundy County Herald,
Tracy City
Jan. 16, 2020*

See **OBITS** Page 9

OBITS from Page 8

Arthur “Butch” Rhea

Arthur David “Butch” Rhea, age 72, owner of The Fayette Falcon, resident of Somerville, and husband of Carolyn Griffin Rhea, died Friday, Feb. 7, 2020, from complications of Parkinson’s.

Butch was born Dec. 23, 1947, the son of Author and Edna Walls Rhea of Moscow, Tenn.



Rhea

He attended local schools and was a 1965 graduate of Fayette County High School. He was married July 7, 1969, to the former Carolyn Griffin.

Butch started working at The Fayette Falcon in 1965. There were no computers then, so copy was set with a linotype and hot metal. Ads and copy were put together by cut and paste. Butch also did job printing, and The Falcon printed stationery and envelopes for the banks and county offices and businesses. Butch was also the photographer and attended city and county meetings and school sports.

He served in the Army from 1968 to 1970 with one year of that time in Vietnam, and that was the only time he was away from the newspaper. He served a total of almost 55 years at the newspaper.

Butch was often called on by state troopers to take photos of vehicle crashes, most times in the middle of the night. This was before the time of digital cameras. They depended on him developing the photos for their records or trials, etc. He also was called to moonshine stills found by county deputies to photograph before they were destroyed.

He served as a reserve captain in the Town of Oakland Police Department for 11 years, was active in the NRA, serving on the Friends of NRA committee and helping with fundraising banquets for several years. He was also an avid supporter of Fayette County Animal Rescue.

Butch was honored in 2016 by Tennessee Press Association for induction into the 50-Year Club, for those working in the newspaper industry 50 years or more.

Butch is survived by his wife of 50½ years, Carolyn Rhea,

two sons, Randy Alan Rhea of Somerville, and Ryan (Claudia) Rhea of Collierville. He also leaves his beloved cats, Sissy, Sam, Rosie, Scooter, Precious, and Daisy.

The family requests that memorials be directed to Fayette County Animal Rescue, P.O. Box 44, Ross-ville, TN 38066.

*The Fayette Falcon, Somerville
Feb. 7, 2020*

Michael Kevin Silence

Michael Kevin Silence, 62, of Knoxville, Tenn., left this life on Feb. 5, with his wife and daughter by his side.

Michael was born Oct. 31, 1957, in Kokomo, Ind., the son of William L. and Nerita Kay (Eaton) Silence. He is survived by his wife, Mary Anne, and daughter McKinley. Also surviving are two brothers and sisters-in-law Greg



Silence

and Jennifer Silence, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Brian and Dorinda Silence, San Diego, Cal.; and brothers-in-law Michael Carter, Greensboro, N.C. and Chris Carter and wife Karen,

Yellville, Ark.

Michael’s parents and his in-laws, Frank and Jane Carter, preceded him in death.

Mike was a graduate of the distinguished Ernie Pyle School of Journalism at Indiana University with a double major in English and Journalism and a member of the Delta Chi Fraternity.

He was managing editor of the Indiana Daily Student, Indiana University’s nationally acclaimed student newspaper.

After graduation and an internship in Colorado Springs, he went to work as a reporter at the Knoxville News-Sentinel.

Assuming many roles at the paper, he was a columnist, editorial page assistant and the paper’s flagship blogger penning the popular “No Silence Here” blog.

As his career took off, he became one of the most knowledgeable and respected political journalists in the state of Tennessee.

He won numerous journalistic awards including Tennessee Top 10 blogger, Nashville Business Journal; Society of Professional Journalists’ Golden Press Card; and the Golden Quill Award for

outstanding education writing and news reporting from the Tennessee School Boards Association.

Mike spent his entire 30-year journalism career at the News-Sentinel and retired from the newspaper in 2011. Mike was a devoted father and exceptionally proud of his beloved daughter, McKinley, a talented young artist and dancer.

Mike was especially fond of sharing stories and photos of his daughter’s on-stage dance performances on Facebook.

He was a lifelong fan of Indiana University basketball, and his decades as a Knoxville resident saw Mike become an enthusiastic follower of the University of Tennessee Vols, as well.

*Knoxville News Sentinel
Feb. 6, 2020*

Robert ‘Bob’ Burnett Smith III

An integral member of the Citizen Tribune’s, Morristown, early years died Thursday, Jan. 16, in Lebanon, Missouri.

A Newport native, Robert ‘Bob’ Burnett Smith III joined the Tribune advertising department a few months after the paper opened, became advertising director and worked with the paper until 1980, when he left to pursue a career as a publisher, which further defined his career.



Smith

“He worked for me for 14 years,” said R. Jack Fishman, Tribune founder and president of Lakeway Publishers, Inc.

“We became very close friends. He was a great newspaperman and a wonderful friend.”

Smith was born March 19, 1939, and grew up in Newport before attending high school in Oak Ridge.

He matriculated to Walton Community College and studied communications at the University of Tennessee.

His career in newspapers began in 1955 as classified advertising manager of The Oak Ridger, where he stayed until 1963.

He was working for a paper in Kingsport when he saw the ad for the upstart Citizen Tribune. He drove for a night meeting in Janu-

ary with Fishman and advertising director Paul Miller.

The trio spent some time hammering out the details as a snowstorm rolled in.

By the time he left, he had the classifieds director job and had to deal with a drive back to Kingsport with a couple of inches of snow on the ground at night.

It wasn’t long into the job that Smith was promoted to advertising director, a role in which he proved very successful.

He left in 1980 to become publisher of the Tri-Lakes Newspapers in Branson, Mo.

“Jack and I had a very long tenure and we became life-long friends,” Smith told the Tribune in 2016. “Leaving there was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done.”

Smith served as publisher in Branson until 1988 before moving to Lebanon, Mo. to publish The Daily Record newspaper.

He left Lebanon and was the owner/publisher of Senior Living newspaper in Springfield and Joplin, Mo., from 1995 to 1998.

An active member of the Missouri Press Association, he served as president of the organization in 1991 and was inducted into the Missouri Newspaper Hall of Fame in 2005.

He played a key role working with the Missouri Division of Tourism, serving as the organization’s chair for five years. After leaving the commission, he worked for the Department of Tourism until his retirement in 2010.

In post-retirement years, he worked with the MPA and various newspapers, reuniting with his old friend R. Jack Fishman to work with some of Lakeway’s papers in Missouri. He returned to Morristown for the 50th anniversary celebration of the Citizen Tribune.

“It was a long, hard road,” Smith said in 2016. “It didn’t happen overnight . . . We really made the paper grow during my tenure. We went through the first year I was there and we lost every single department head we had. All of us long-term department heads were on the second tenure.

“The business was hard . . . It was just hard work. Jack and I and some of the other department heads were very demanding and we were working 12, 14 hours a day.”

*Citizen Tribune, Morristown
Jan. 19, 2020*

WILLIAMS from Page 1

Williams was very proud of the newspaper, once saying, “I’ve tried to see that it’s been a good citizen of our community.”

A longtime member and Sunday school teacher of First Presbyterian, he was a driving force behind numerous charitable and civic efforts throughout his life.

Williams was one of nine men active in the annual March of Dimes radio auction who met in 1978 out of concern that so much of the money raised went outside the county.

The group proposed carrying forward with an all-local organization . . . with the stipulation that the funds be used only to benefit local charities and nonprofits.

In 1994, he was part of the group that helped organize a unit of Habitat for Humanity in Paris. By 1996, Henry County’s chapter of Habitat for Humanity was building its first house. He was still climbing on Habitat house roofs when he was 80.

A lifelong advocate of literacy, Williams helped create and served as the first president of the Henry County Literacy Council.

He also served on the Tennessee Press Association’s Literacy Committee, and was a member of the Literacy Committee of Southern Newspaper Publishers Association.

An Eagle Scout, he remained active in Boy Scouts for more than 40 years, earning its highest award for adult leaders, the Silver Beaver Award.

Active in his church all his life, Williams sang in the choir, directed the choir, served as deacon, then elder, and served in the church’s upper echelons, including the Presbytery of West Tennessee, Synod of the South, the church’s national General Assembly and Living Waters for the World.

In 2013, he became a charter inductee of the Tennessee Journalism Hall of Fame at Murfreesboro, joining Chris Clark, Anne Holt, Dan Miller, John Seigenthaler and Dean Stone.

He wrote a number of award-winning editorials for The P-I, receiving first-place Tennessee State Press Association awards in the editorials category in 1983 and 1984, and in the Best Single Editorial Category in 1985, 1998, 2002 and 2005.

A 125th anniversary edition of The P-I won first place for Best Promotion of Newspapers in 1992.

Williams served as president of the TPA from 1982-83.

Check in regularly with readers; solicit their feedback

When is the last time one of your readers said they were misquoted in a story? Or called to say they're pleased with a story but irritated by a headline? Or took issue with how their ideas and statements were presented in a story?

News staffs translate hundreds of facts daily; some information is received firsthand and other secondhand. Some details are included in comprehensive reports on important community subjects. Others are part of the daily churn of police reports, obituaries, weddings and engagements, and government meetings.

The chances for missteps are multiplied today as everyone is expected to be adept at the broad spectrum of news gathering – writing breaking news for the web and a more complete story for the print edition, taking a photo or video and posting it on the web, tweeting about a sports event or city council meeting, updating your Facebook page. You can add to the list.

Through all of these reports, one tenet governs the work of newsrooms: accuracy. If the facts are wrong, the reporter as an individual and the newspaper as an institution lose their credibility.



COMMUNITY NEWSROOM SUCCESS

JIM PUMARLO

In the pursuit of fairness and accuracy, newspapers should consider implementing a “fact check” sheet. Individuals who either are sources or subjects of news stories are the best judge of how editors and reporters are doing their jobs. So why not ask them directly.

The process can be straightforward. Select a couple of stories from each edition and send a copy to an individual who either was contacted or who might have been identified in each story. Then ask a series of questions. For example:

Are the facts conveyed in the story/photo accurate, including spelling of names and addresses?

Were the quotes attributed to you used in proper context?

In general, do you consider this newspaper to be accurate?

Other broader questions regarding news content can be asked as

well. What are the most interesting sections of this newspaper? Do other topics or issues warrant attention? Are any “voices” or constituencies lacking in coverage?

The “fact check” is an excellent tool to ask additional questions about your newspaper beyond strictly the news product. For example: What’s your primary source of news? What are the strengths and weaknesses of our website? What other publications/media do you routinely depend on for information? How long have you subscribed to this newspaper? If you do not subscribe to this newspaper, why not? Can we improve upon customer service – in any department?

Use other avenues to check in with readers:

• **“Ask the editors” night** – Open the telephone lines to let readers ask anything on their minds. Managers from the various departments should be on hand with the goal of answering as many questions on the spot as possible.

• **“Brown bag” lunches** – Treat a sampling of your customers to lunch in exchange for their feedback on how you’re doing your job. Or maybe tailor the session and a selected audience to explore cover-

age of specific content – agriculture or business, for example.

• **Reader boards** – Organize a board comprised of readers with rotating membership. The individuals meet with the editor on a regular basis and offer everything from editorial ideas to a critique of newspaper content.

The “fact check” is most useful as a regular connection with readers. Be sure to vary your selection of stories from routine news briefs and meeting reports to in-depth series and feature stories. In addition, solicit feedback from a range of readers – new and longtime residents, young and old, men and women – and from a geographic representation of your markets.

If applicable, it might be worthwhile to send the same story to two different individuals to see if they offer similar or contrasting responses. Share the feedback with your staff and other departments.

Newspapers should be sincere in asking readers to be honest and straightforward, underscoring that their feedback will help direct your staffs to strive a stronger product. At minimum, these “fact checks” earn newspapers high marks for showing concern about accuracy,

fairness and breadth of coverage. The comments often can prompt a follow-up phone call and a fruitful conversation beneficial to both the reader and newspaper.

Your efforts to connect with readers are especially important in today’s competitive and fractured media landscape.

Editors also should seize the opportunity to explain to readers in a column what you’ve heard and what steps will be taken to address the concerns. Explain, too, if readers’ expectations fall short of what can be practically accomplished. In the end, you may not get everyone to agree, but your goal is to help them understand your decisions and operations.

Jim Pumarlo writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He is author of “Journalism Primer: A Guide to Community News Coverage,” “Votes and Quotes: A Guide to Outstanding Election Coverage” and “Bad News and Good Judgment: A Guide to Reporting on Sensitive Issues in Small-Town Newspapers.” He can be reached at www.pumarlo.com and welcomes comments and questions at jim@pumarlo.com.

RECORDS from Page 5

who participated in the meeting as well as discussions about the Times Free Press request and fees, denies the destruction was related in any way to the paper’s request.

“When the [public records commission] met in October, that was after you all had made the request and we hadn’t heard from you anymore and we had given you the price of the production that you wanted and you all said you weren’t going to pay it,” Taylor said to the paper on Friday. “Then the committee approved it and those documentations were destroyed.”

Though Taylor says the request was “closed” when the paper refused to pay, the paper had emailed Taylor directly asking if the office planned to reconsider the charge just two weeks before the meeting was held, after another county official said Taylor was reconsidering. Taylor stood by the original estimate.

According to emails obtained by the Times Free Press, an agenda

for the commission’s meeting that included Beltramo’s request to destroy the records was sent out five business days after this exchange.

Size of request cited as reason for charging fees

For months to come, the paper and attorney’s office corresponded regularly about the charge in question. The office stuck to its original reasoning, citing the size of the request for the fees, but also began to specify that potentially having to redact the estimated 1,500 pages contributed to labor charges. The state’s Office of Open Records Counsel told the paper that the office could not charge for inspection requests despite “supervision and the retrieval, review, and/or redaction of public records.”

When asked — after the office sent the letter saying most records were destroyed — how the cost, which was based on page count and labor for printing and redaction, could have remained the

same if 98% of records included in the first estimate were destroyed, Taylor said a request for an updated charge “never came up.”

“I don’t remember it coming up specifically, but I just know that we did what the commission said we could do,” Taylor said late last week. “When we were told you all weren’t going to pay anything, it didn’t matter if the charges had changed.”

Representatives of the paper were not the only ones left out of the loop on the destruction of records. Multiple officials in the county mayor’s office told the Times Free Press they were not made aware of the destruction of records until the paper was, roughly four months later.

Similarly, County Commission Chairman Randy Fairbanks said that the commission, which voted to allow the destruction, was unaware of the paper’s open request.

“It was never mentioned while we were in there,” Fairbanks said of the request. “It wasn’t like ‘Hey

can we destroy these? And oh, by the way, these are being requested by the paper right now.’”

Tennessee Coalition of Open Government Executive Director Deborah Fisher believes the action points to a broader theme in the county.

“I think it is highly questionable that they went and asked for permission to do this while the local newspaper was asking for the records,” Fisher said. “I guess destroying records is just another way to deny access to records.”

Moreover, Fisher suspects that the records in question do not meet the state standard for temporary records, which requires that records of value in documenting the functions of government entities be retained.

Fisher said that the office, which oversees public records for the county general government, would be destroying the bulk of records which document its primary function every 30 days, based on the October decision.

“I don’t think it would be wise for any government entity to destroy the documents that document the primary function of their office,” she added.

The Times Free Press considers the records request ongoing and has asked Taylor to retain any other records potentially responsive to the request.

Free webinars for TPA members

March 12
Build Your Social Media Style Guides

Register at www.OnlineMediaCampus.com

Contact rgentile@tnpress.com for the coupon code.

Nonprofit funds lawyers to defend news media in 5 states

TRAVIS LOLLER
Associated Press
January 21, 2020

A nonprofit press freedom group announced on Tuesday, Jan. 21, that it would provide pro bono legal services in five states to help local news organizations defend their right to gather and report the news.

The Local Legal Initiative of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press will fund attorneys in Colorado, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Tennessee, the group said in a news release.

The free legal services are aimed

at helping reporters gain access to public records and court proceedings. The five states were selected from among 30 where advocacy groups and news outlets submitted applications, the group said.

One of the reasons the committee chose Tennessee is because enforcing public records law in the state is so difficult, according to the Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, which was among the groups submitting an application for the state.

"In Tennessee, the only way to enforce the public records and open meetings law when a government

entity refuses to follow it is to file a petition in the courts," the coalition said in a news release. "Unlike in other states, there is no administrative appeals process and no automatic attorney fee award even if a journalist prevails."

Colorado was also selected, in part, because it has no administrative appeals process, according to the Reporters Committee's announcement.

Part of the reason Oklahoma was selected was because journalists in the state say public officials "have become increasingly resistant to news media demands that they

comply with open records and open meeting laws," according to the announcement.

In Oregon, a clash over government transparency caused the state's first public records advocate to resign. "Before resigning, the official produced reports on the limitations on access to government information, which could serve as a valuable roadmap," the announcement stated.

And in Pennsylvania, the state's Right to Know Law is only a decade old, creating an opportunity to help mold how it is applied.

The initiative is partially funded

by a \$10 million investment by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to strengthen local journalism.

"It's not enough to have First Amendment protections on paper," Knight Foundation president Alberto Ibargüen said in a news release. "Freedom of the press needs to be defended on the ground, where local journalists are doing the work of holding the powerful to account."

This story was republished here by permission of the Associated Press.

New legal support will help reporters fight for public records in Tennessee

Tennessee has a rich news media environment with more than 120 traditional subscription-based weekly and daily newspapers, several free newspapers, alternative press, an established black press, 34 television news stations, public and commercial radio stations, niche news outlets focused on single topics like education or the legislature, business journals and many other forms of news media.

All of these news outlets utilize our public records laws, open meetings laws and rights to court records and proceedings for investigative reporting and to simply report on public business.

They are the public's eyes and ears. However, most do not have funds for legal support when denied access to government information or when asked to pay unreasonable fees, even in obvious cases.

But this about to change.

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, a 50-year-old national organization known for its leadership in supporting journalists, has announced that it will fund an attorney in Tennessee to provide local newsrooms with direct legal services, including fighting for access to public records.

Tennessee was one of five states selected for RCFP's Local Legal Initiative program, funded by a \$10 million investment by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to strengthen local journalism.

TCOG, along with some news organizations in Memphis, made the application for Tennessee. (TCOG's membership includes major news associations, such as TPA, the Ten-



**TCOG
BLOG**

DEBORAH FISHER

nessee Association of Broadcasters and local chapters of the Society of Professional Journalists.)

In Tennessee, the only way to enforce the public records and open meetings law when a government entity refuses to follow it is to file a petition in the courts. Unlike in other states, there is no administrative appeals process and no automatic attorney fee award even if a journalist prevails. This makes the process an expensive option for journalists and citizens alike.

The news media has gone to court for decades to defend the public's right to know and to gain valuable public information for reporting. Some recent notable cases have included fighting for access to state agency travel and credit card records by NewsChannel 5 in Nashville, for death records of children under state supervision by The Tennessean, and to court filings in opioid-related litigation by the Knoxville News Sentinel.

But I've also talked to many journalists who walk away from what is likely a winnable court fight simply because they don't have the funds to challenge the government entity. Even those news organizations with legal resources have to pick and choose the fights they can fund.

Some government entities, however, seem to operate as if they have seemingly endless resources.

The Sumner County Board of Education spent almost \$250,000 of taxpayer money defending a public records lawsuit after refusing to turn over an essentially one-page policy document because the requester made his request by email and a follow-up phone call instead of appearing in person or sending the request via U.S. Postal Service. Such unreasonable antics were rejected by the local court and the Court of Appeals, but the entrenchment demonstrates the lengths some government officials will go to get between the public and public information. The requester? He had to pay all of his own attorney fees to win the point for the public.

Some of the top public records problems faced by journalists in Tennessee are government entities' overly broad interpretations of statutory exemptions, including by the state attorney general's office; overuse of the "investigative exemptions" to shield what should be ordinary administrative public records; excessive delays in production of public records; the refusal to provide access to government electronic data in data format; unreasonable fees for copies of public records; and, recently, application of a "deliberative process" exception to shield state agency records, including written recommendations by these agencies on top public issues to the governor.

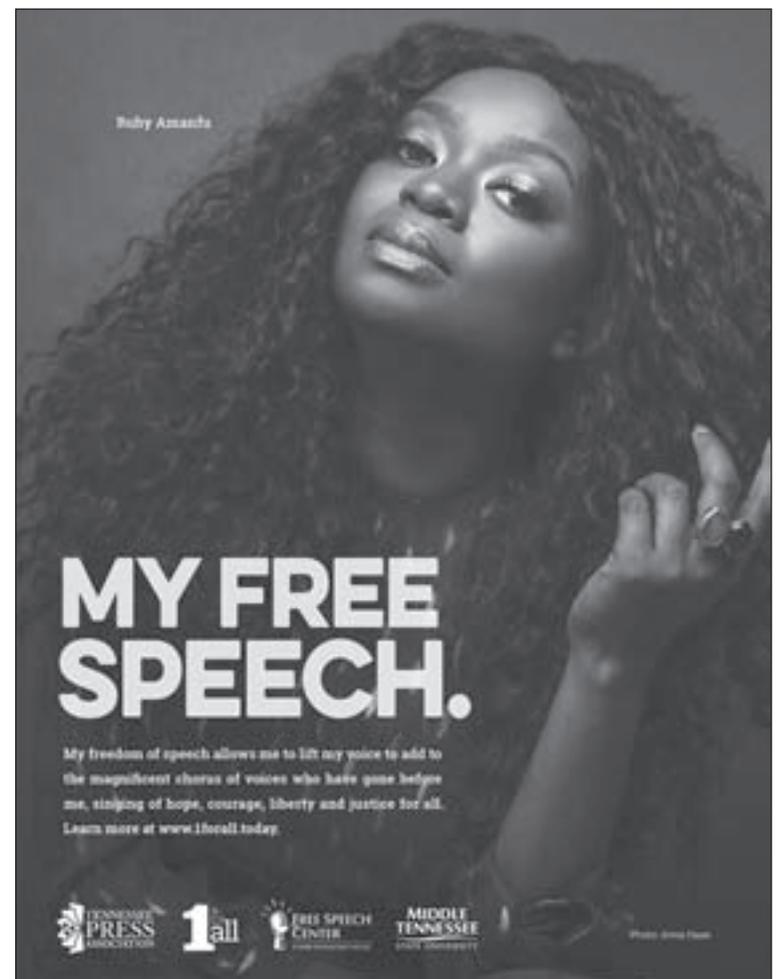
Our organization also has noticed questionable claims of trade secrets to keep secret how much

government is paying for services or giving away in economic development contracts.

News organizations need resources to fight for the public's right to know. The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press has the experience, history and heft to

make a difference in our state.

Deborah Fisher is executive director of Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, a nonprofit which provides education and advocacy for the public records and open meetings laws.



TPA MEMBER COVERAGE SHOWCASE II: The Standard Banner, Jefferson City

Could Cannabis replace tobacco as a reliable cash crop for local farmers?

STEVE MARION
The Standard Banner, Jefferson City
October 8, 2019

The process is familiar to anyone who grew up in East Tennessee.

Set out after danger of frost, the crop is ready for harvest as the summer days get shorter. It's hauled to the barn and hung in the rafters to cure. Soon the hard work of getting the leaves ready for harvest begins.

Twenty years ago, it was tobacco that gave farm families cash for Christmas. Now hemp has the potential to make similar money.

"Years ago, I would never have dreamed we'd be talking about growing hemp here in Jefferson County," University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension Agent Steven Huff said. "It was something in the history books that provided fiber before World War I."

Heavily-regulated tobacco was once grown on hundreds of acres in Jefferson County. Formerly illegal in all forms, cannabis was grown secretly here, mostly in small patches.

Today, government-regulated Cannabis (the non-marijuana form) is grown in large fields. Tobacco is the boutique crop, amounting to only two or three acres this year in Jefferson County.

The issue right now, said hemp farmer Danny Shelton, is that while East Tennessee farmers had tobacco-growing down to a science, "we don't really know what we're doing yet" with hemp.

Shelton was working in his 40 acres of hemp on a hot September morning. In a converted chickenhouse on the hill above him, a portion of his crop was drying, and hired workers were stripping the dried hemp buds from the stems to fill large cardboard produce boxes.

"I think we've got a window of a few years where we may be able to profit from hemp," Shelton said. "But about the time we get things figured out, they're going to start growing it on a bigger scale in the Midwest. Then prices are liable to go down, and our smaller fields won't pay us as well."

Shelton is one of 27 licensed hemp growers in Jefferson County working in that window.

"They're an eclectic group," said Huff. "You've got professional farmers like Danny all the way to

amateurs who may just have a few plants."

In 2014, the Tennessee Legislature enacted Public Chapter 916, which required the Tennessee Department of Agriculture to develop a licensing and inspection program for production of hemp in the state. The next year, there were 44 licensed growers. This year there are 2,900.

Most of them are trying to capitalize on the popularity of CBD (cannabidiol) oil, a popular remedy used for a wide range of ailments, ranging from arthritis pain to anxiety. Few farmers produce the extract themselves. They sell the dried leaves to processors.

Shelton would like to move toward producing the extract himself – in part in order to capitalize on the craze for everything locally-grown. Shelton Farms CBD Oil could be marketed the same way he handles another product from his fields that has become popular – grits.

Shelton's fields once grew tobacco. Now, other than hemp, they produce heirloom corn for the grits and hopefully the expanding moonshine market, and soybeans. Along the way, Shelton Farms also formerly grew market produce and chickens.

His former chickenhouses, with excellent ventilation, are perfect for drying hemp. The large cardboard boxes – almost big enough to fill a pick-up bed – are perfect for the stripped hemp buds.

But Shelton says farmers don't yet have an idea of which varieties of hemp will grow best in their soil. He's trying three different ones. Since seed is expensive, he propagated his own plants, nearly 60,000 of them, a process aided by his tobacco knowledge.

"That's not really that many plants," he said. "We used to start a million tobacco seedlings a year."

With their expertise, former East Tennessee tobacco farmers might have an opportunity in hemp seedling production, Shelton said.

In order to be marketed in Tennessee, hemp varieties must contain almost no tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the chemical in marijuana that produces its euphoric high when smoked or eaten.

"The level has to be at .3 percent or less," said Shelton. "I have mine



Photos by Steve Marion, The Standard Banner, Jefferson City

Top photo: New Market farmer Danny Shelton checks his 40-acre hemp crop, which is ready for harvest. Photo on right: Producer Danny Shelton holds a double handful of hemp leaves, from which CBD oil will be produced. Shelton is currently harvesting 40 acres of hemp – a crop he says he is still learning about



tested by an independent lab, and the first variety I did was at .1 percent. If it's too high, they destroy your crop."

Hemp and marijuana are both names for the same plant, cannabis, perhaps the first growing thing that man ever cultivated for textiles, beginning 10,000 years ago in Mesopotamia. The term "marijuana" didn't come along until the late 1800s. The word's exact origin is debated, but it appears to have come from Mexican Spanish, and some still feel the term has lingering racist connotations – as it was once used to denigrate people fleeing the Mexican Revolution to the United States, as well as those who didn't kowtow to prevailing racial stereotypes.

Marijuana contains up to 30 percent THC. States began passing anti-marijuana laws in the 1920s. Somewhere along the way, the plant's other important uses were temporarily forgotten.

Hemp is a fairly challenging crop to grow, Shelton said. Weeds

are an issue, of course – smaller fields can use black plastic underlayment, but Shelton's crop is too large for that to be cost-effective. He planted on seven-foot centers to give as much room as possible for cultivation and weed control.

"Pretty much any pest that likes tomatoes or tobacco will eat hemp," said Huff. "We have no labels at the present time for any type of spraying. It's too early in the game."

Buyers don't want any chemicals used, so Shelton has not treated his crop with anything at all. Hemp is also a thirsty crop, and that has been a major issue for growers since September was one of the hottest and driest on record in the state.

The CBD oil itself is produced on tiny hairs on the plant buds. Flowering takes place around the solstice, and the oil is at its most prevalent soon after.

"You can see the crystals turn

from a whitish color to more amber or yellow – if you use a magnifier," said Shelton. "That's when you want to start harvesting."

"The harvest – and the whole season, really – is very labor intensive," said Huff. "I think it may actually be more work than tobacco."

Since marijuana is still very much illegal in Tennessee, farmers need to establish a working relationship with local law enforcement, he suggested.

"You don't want to be hauling a load of hemp to the barn and have an officer think it's marijuana," he said. "Or even worse, have officers cut down the plants in the field."

So far, that hasn't been an issue, though local investigators did arrest several people for taking it upon themselves to harvest hemp plants in a Strawberry Plains field. The plants, which were found drying on a fence several miles away, were returned to the rightful owners – but they had been harvested too early.