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# The Tennessee Press

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## INSIDE

**Vass: 2020 reporting is sprint and marathon**

Page 2

**Daniels: National survey will shape ad pitches**

Page 3

**News**

Page 5

**Showcases: Man hikes Appalachian Trail; girl, 10, creates blankets for needy**

Pages 6-7

**2019 Tennessee AP contest winners by category**

Page 8

**Zinser: Contract protection during coronavirus**

Page 10

**Cross: Coronavirus is 'challenge of our time'**

Page 11

**Innovation in Focus**

Page 12

## Media groups sue campaign finance board over email vote

**JOEL EBERT**  
The Tennessean, Nashville  
April 29, 2020

A coalition of media organizations filed a lawsuit Wednesday, April 29, against a state panel for violating Tennessee's open meetings law.

The lawsuit, filed in Nashville chancery court, stems from the Tennessee Registry of Election Finance's decision to reduce previously issued fines against Rep. Joe Towns, D-Memphis.

The board — prompted by Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance Executive Director Bill Young — voted via email earlier in April to reduce Towns' fines to \$22,000.

Before the reduction, Towns owed the registry and the state Eth-



ics Commission more than \$66,000 for failing to file various reports.

According to the lawsuit, the email vote violated the state's Open Meetings Act, as well as an executive order from Gov. Bill Lee

Photo by Mark Humphrey, Associated Press

A lawsuit filed by a coalition of media organizations stems from the Tennessee Registry of Election Finance's decision to reduce previously issued fines against Rep. Joe Towns, D-Memphis (left).

seeking to allow government agencies to conduct business electronically during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Open Meetings Act requires all meetings of any governing bodies in Tennessee to be open to the public at all times while prohibiting "secret votes."

After the vote, Young told the USA TODAY Network - Tennessee he consulted with the state attorney general's office before asking the

six-member registry to cast a yes or no vote on the Towns settlement. Young said the AG's office said the action was allowed because there was no discussion and it was simply voting on a settlement.

The panel previously voted on such settlements in person.

The registry voted 4-2 to reduce Towns' fines, with Chairman Tom

See **LAWSUIT** Page 4

## Main Street begins podcasting, online broadcasts

**MIKE TOWLE**  
Managing Editor  
June 15, 2020

Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin, publisher of 12 weekly newspapers statewide, has enhanced its media distribution of local stories across the mid-state. It has done this by launching a podcast network, online social broadcasts and brand stories in conjunction with the company's current digital platforms.

As part of this expansion, Main Street Media has hired veteran radio and marketing professional Chris Kulick as new business development sales manager, and award-winning and career radio broadcaster Devon O'Day as new media host. Owned by Dave and Ellen Gould, Main Street Media focuses on relevant news and stories that impact readers where they live.

This innovative portal for local stories around the mid-state was officially announced March 25.

"We've really just gotten started," Dave Gould said in mid-June.

"Devon is hosting a twice-a-week podcast called 'Main Street Today,' where she interviews music artists, business owners and other interesting people.



Gould

communicate with their customers online and through social media. We are already on all of the major podcast platforms - iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcast, etc., so we are in a great position to grow quickly."

Kulick, voted one of Radio Ink's 2018 Best Managers, has an extensive radio and marketing background that includes sales and promotions at 99.7 WTN, the Titans Radio Network, and 104.5 The Zone. Both 99.7 WTN and 104.5

The Zone became the number-one billing stations in the market with Kulick's influence. While at WSM,



Kulick



O'Day

he created and monetized WSM Roadshow, Music City Mentors, Music for Kids, Route 650 Americana streaming station, and the Opry Radio streaming station.

"From the day I met Dave, I felt a special chemistry that I believe will allow us to continue to grow Main Street Media's vision, while allowing me to bring my unique skill set to the daily operations," Kulick said.

O'Day left Nashville Today on WSM this past February, a show

See **PODCASTS** Page 4

## TPA Board Meeting, Business Session set for July 17

TPA President Chris Vass has called a concurrent Board of Directors Meeting and Business Session for Friday, July 17, via a Zoom video conference at 11:00 a.m. EDT/ 10:00 a.m. CDT.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the summer convention, where this meeting is usually held, has been postponed. However, TPA has business that needs to be conducted.

All member newspapers are invited to participate in the Business Session, which includes the election of officers and directors.

## TPS Stockholders Meeting set July 17

The Tennessee Press Service will hold its annual stockholders meeting at 12:30 p.m. EDT on July 17. Stockholders will receive an update from TPS President Dave Gould and will elect two directors to serve three-year terms.

# The Tennessee Press

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## 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 September 2020 issue is August 4.

# 2020 has been both sprint and marathon

When the starter's pistol went off for 2020, we sprinted to the news of the day: chasing daily stories to meet the demands of a 24-hour news cycle, pursuing sales leads and running after print and digital subscribers with our best promotions.

This is our DNA: We are hard-wired to craft the first draft of our communities' history seven days a week. We aim to give readers the news they want and need, when and where they want it. The adrenaline rush of daily deadlines is intoxicating, addictive; the payoff is immediate. We breathe it, live it, love it.

But 2020 quickly threw up hurdles: in Tennessee, first, tornadoes in Middle and Southeast Tennessee.

Then, the coronavirus began its insidious spread, the pandemic forcing devastating business lockdowns and shelter-in-place orders that separated families, friends and work colleagues. It's been a stunning turnabout for where we thought we were going just months ago.

Weeks into this economic skid and unprecedented health threat, we came to grips that this is no sprint; our fast twitch muscles tested. We are in a marathon, a really long, slow-moving ordeal that will challenge us for years.

Then Memorial Day flipped the country over in a shocking, brutal way with the death of an unarmed black man who was suffocated under the knee of a police officer in Minneapolis. Another black man was killed in mid-June



## YOUR PRESIDING REPORTER

CHRIS VASS

by an Atlanta police officer. Video of both killings meant citizens nationwide shared in the horror of what they witnessed. It was an inflection point that galvanized weeks of protests.

And still, Tennessee journalists were there to chronicle the outcry, the anguish and sorrow over these deaths, dutifully covering protests over police brutality and systemic racism. This, too, will be another story of a generation.

These last few weeks have reminded me — again — that in spite of the blowback from some folks who believe we are all part of a liberal cabal bent on destroying the country, when the world is topsy-turvy, when other news sources (looking at you, Facebook and Twitter) fall short, only newspapers deliver.

Not that we are experiencing an apocalypse just yet, but how many apocalypse-themed movies have we seen in which, after civilization crumbles because the power grid is shot, and computers, TVs and cell phones are long gone, there's always someone finding a way to write stuff down on a piece of paper, a hunk of tree bark, a cave wall or piece of sheepskin to get news out, to connect with another human being?

While we might be feeling a little fatigued by COVID-19 or the important conversation and reflection that started with George Floyd's tragic death, let's not forget that most of our readers aren't. Now more than ever, readers are eager for what trusted news outlets provide: information that is fact-based, comprehensive, accurate and useful. Interest in our digital news sites is climbing, but I also hear from readers thankful for a print product they consider an invaluable source of news — and comfort.

On a recent call with editors organized by TPA Executive Director Carol Daniels and TPA Member Services Manager Robyn Gentile, it is clear that we are working hard to meet readers where they are to provide information they want as well as information they need. After all, the pandemic and protests have not affected all communities in the same way. The editors' conversation was energizing and affirming — TPA members care about their communities, and they think deeply about coverage decisions and how to meet readers' needs.

The course of this ultramarathon is evolving. We are training our slow-twitch muscles and our stamina is strengthening. We will keep running, even if the finish line is nowhere in sight.

*Chris Vass is president of the Tennessee Press Association. Contact her at cvass@timesfreepress.com*

# News, Lakeway partner for local print newspaper

## DAVID RILEY Marion County News, S. Pittsburg April 1, 2020

Marion County News will continue to provide news of the community in both electronic and print formats. Despite a previously announced suspension of print operations for the month of April for the newspaper, Marion County News has agreed to a partnership with Lakeway Publishers of Middle Tennessee to maintain an uninterrupted print edition for its readers in this essential time. Both parties are excited about the partnership and how their shared experiences



Riley

and strengths can better serve Marion County. Lakeway Publishers has served as the printing partner of the Marion County News for the past four years and has familiarity

with its operations.

David Riley, News publisher, said, "We're in uncharted waters both as a small business and as a hyper-local newspaper given the explicit and implicit effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the local



Blackley

news sources have never been more important to offer some voice of normalcy for its readership.

"That is why I was open to a partnership with a company like

Lakeway Publishers. They understand the value of local media with eight local newspapers here in Tennessee and, having worked with their people on other projects,

See **PARTNERS** Page 3

# Ad numbers from survey will help shape your pitches

Members of TPA and Tennessee Press Service have a wonderful and powerful story to tell, one that is backed up with numbers and solid statistics. And I do love a good statistic as well as emphasizing legislative conversations with compelling numbers; like how our TPA members collectively deliver more than 4 million printed newspapers each week or that total employment by TPA members make us one of the state's largest employers.

To enhance our knowledge and make our pitches more impactful, TPS has contracted with a national research company that has been executing a readership survey across Tennessee. I am looking forward to sharing those numbers with all of you when we have the results back. In the meantime, we have some amazing numbers to share about how readers are recognizing and taking action on ads that are running in your newspapers.

Coda Ventures has released its latest data on Newspaper Ad Effectiveness (see chart to the right), and their findings are incredible. Overall, 54% of your readers are able to recall ads in your paper and 66% of them take some kind of action on those ads. That means 36% of the people who read your newspaper do something in response to an advertisement they saw. The actions readers take range from looking at the advertiser up online, talking with a friend, making a recommendation, going to a store, or making a purchase. BUT they are taking action.

The money your advertisers spend with you works. And they should spend more. Let me tell you why. Recently, I read a study that talked about how 25% of consumers will be changing or already have changed their spending habits based on how retailers were responding to the pandemic with them, their customers in mind.



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CAROL DANIELS

That is a significant number of consumers your advertisers should be talking to right now – both to grab the customers who are changing their habits and to retain their customers who may be wavering.

The Newspaper Ad Effectiveness (NAE) summary was sent out to all of your papers and is also included in this issue for your convenience. If you have any questions or want to talk through how to present this to an advertiser, please give me a call.

The summary breaks down specific verticals about which you can talk with your advertisers. The data is based on more than 700,000 issue specific surveys measuring more than 6,000 ads across 40 newspapers around the country. It is NOT a small sample survey!

The information from these surveys allows your sales reps to give advertisers some of the same kind of information that have come to expect from their investment in running digital advertising with you. We have trained advertisers to evaluate the effectiveness of their advertising by looking at the number of impressions delivered, by the number of clicks an ad receives and other behaviors we track online.

Let's say your circulation is 50,000 and your readership is the industry standard 2.4 readers per copy. An ad in your paper is seen by 120,000 readers, or, in digital speak, you are delivering 120,000 impressions of that ad. Using the NAE ratio of readers taking an action, which is 36%, this ad will get 43,200 readers to "click."

Show advertisers how true the

Newspaper Ad Effectiveness Norms							
	Ad Recall		Reader Actions		Ad Liability		
All Display Ads	54%		66%		72%		
Circulars	66%		71%		79%		
CATEGORY	Ad Recall	Reader Actions	Ad Liability	CATEGORY	Ad Recall	Reader Actions	Ad Liability
Accessories	52%	69%	80%	Home Furnishings	51%	63%	74%
Apparel	52%	67%	75%	Home Improvement	48%	65%	72%
Appliances	47%	62%	70%	Home Services	46%	63%	66%
Area Development	54%	69%	70%	Hospitals & Clinics	46%	64%	77%
Automotive	51%	65%	72%	Insurance	51%	63%	72%
Automotive Services	61%	68%	84%	Jewelry & Watches	52%	63%	78%
Beauty Supplies	52%	62%	67%	Lawn & Garden	50%	67%	78%
Business Services	52%	66%	77%	Liquor	59%	67%	71%
Collectibles	61%	53%	65%	Medical Devices	43%	58%	61%
Computer & Technology	54%	72%	86%	Office Supplies	62%	68%	71%
Coupons	66%	84%	79%	Professional Services	47%	68%	72%
Crafts	60%	72%	73%	Real Estate	52%	65%	80%
Dental Services	52%	66%	63%	Residential Services	39%	55%	64%
Drugs & Remedies	38%	67%	63%	Restaurants	58%	77%	65%
Drug Stores	72%	73%	70%	Retail	60%	71%	75%
Education	43%	59%	66%	Software	50%	70%	80%
Electronics	61%	71%	76%	Sporting Events	65%	70%	83%
Energy	49%	60%	71%	Sporting Goods	57%	63%	69%
Eyewear	51%	64%	67%	Telecommunication	54%	61%	72%
Finance	46%	65%	72%	Theatre/Concerts	58%	69%	79%
General Entertainment	60%	68%	75%	Tools & Hardware	56%	71%	75%
Government	56%	60%	58%	Transportation & Shipping	53%	58%	66%
Grocery Stores	67%	80%	81%	Travel	50%	66%	81%
Healthcare Services	46%	64%	69%	TV & Movies	57%	65%	75%

Source: Coda Ventures Newspaper Ad Effectiveness Service  
Ad Recall based on issue-specific newspaper reader studies conducted from January 2014 - May 2020

NAE numbers are by having them pull a Google Analytics report that looks at traffic on their website before their print campaign, during the campaign and a few days after. Advertisers I've had track this has seen a spike in traffic corresponding with a print campaign.

These are amazing numbers and illustrate how consumers value the relationship they have with their local newspaper. Because they believe in your newspaper brand, they are more likely to associate the strong newspaper brand to the advertising they see in your papers.

The first half of 2020 has been rough, but I am so inspired by the resilience, creativity, and grit that TPA member papers have shown through each challenge that has been placed in front of you! Keep up the good work, keep your communities engaged and involved, and most of all, please keep safe!

Thank you!

Carol

*Carol Daniels is executive director of the Tennessee Press Association.*

## PARTNERS from Page 2

I knew their commitment was oriented toward the local communities first and foremost."

Riley will remain News publisher.

Brian Blackley, vice president of Lakeway Publishers of Middle Tennessee, echoed many of Riley's points. "Coming alongside Marion County News as a new

operations partner stays very much in line with our corporate goal to protect the legacy of the community newspaper," Blackley said. "We feel like the value of the local media has never been more important, and that cornerstone of our thinking is something that the existing staff has at their heart."

Blackley said the rest of the staff of Marion County News would

also remain intact, and under the direction of Riley.

"We're a Tennessee-based company with a 54-year record of service," Blackley said. "With operations in southern middle Tennessee, including Winchester, Manchester, Tullahoma, Tracy City, Lynchburg, and Fayetteville, incorporating South Pittsburg and Marion County into what we

do is a logical extension of our company and we're excited to be a part of this community and to bring the great team at the Marion County News on board.

"The quality of The News leaves us excited to work with David, Christy Sacks, Christie Pitts, and Debbie Keahey and the other contributors who make the Marion County News work."

## FOR YOUR CALENDAR

### July 2020

17: TPA Concurrent Board Meeting, Business Session via Zoom. 11 a.m. EDT / 10 a.m. CDT. TPA members invited to participate in Business Session, to include election of officers and directors.

17: Tennessee Press Service Stockholders Meeting via Zoom. 12:30 p.m. EDT / 11:30 a.m. CDT. All TPA members are TPS Stockholders and are invited to participate in this meeting to include election of officers and directors.

### August 2020

27-30: 2020 Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Annual Conference, Gaylord National, National Harbor, Md.

30: Deadline for Tennessee Newspaper Hall of Fame nominations

### September 2020

24-25: 2020 Tennessee Press Association 150th Anniversary Summer Convention and Advertising/Circulation Conference, Music Road Resort, Pigeon Forge, Tenn.

### October 2020

1-3: National Newspaper Association's 134th Annual Convention and Trade Show, Hyatt Regency, Jacksonville, Fla.

4-6: 2020 Annual Meeting of America's Newspapers, Watergate Hotel, Washington, D.C.

21-25: College Media Association Fall National College Media Convention 2020, in conjunction with Associated Collegiate Press, Atlanta Hyatt Regency, Atlanta, Ga.

### March 2021

9-14: Spring National College Media Convention 2021, New York Marriott Marquis, New York, N.Y.

### June 2021

23-26: 2021 Tennessee • Arkansas • Mississippi Press Associations Tri-State Convention, Memphis.

# The search for perfect headline begins with human nature

Years ago, a keynote speaker at a local Ad Club meeting asked us to put ourselves in a consumer's shoes. "Let's say your name is John Doe," he said. "One day you're turning the pages of the newspaper and see an ad with a headline that reads, 'The truth about John Doe.' Wouldn't you read every word of that ad?" Everyone in the room responded with a resounding "yes."

That was one of the simplest and most dramatic examples of perspective I've ever seen. John Doe doesn't care much about the advertisers in his town (unless he works for one of them). He's not concerned about the profit margins of his local newspaper. And he doesn't worry about the sales commissions of the salespeople who work there.



AD-LIBS®

JOHN FOUST

In other words, it's human nature for John Doe to care primarily about himself. The products which attract his interest are those that can solve a problem or make life easier and more enjoyable for him and his family.

While "The truth about John Doe" is the perfect headline – for John Doe – it's impossible to reach that level of perfection in the real world of advertising. Ad copy can't be personalized to that degree. The best we can do is to

address our messages to smaller demographic audiences within a larger readership group.

Once a target audience has been identified, it's important to look for connections between what the audience needs and how the advertiser can meet those needs. To get in step with consumers, focus your attention on their self-interest.

## Headlines are as important to ads as they are to stories

Then think about headlines. A headline can make or break an ad. Research shows that, for every five people who read a headline, only one will read the rest of the copy. This means that the John and Jane Does in your audience

rely on headlines to tell them whether to keep reading.

There are some ways to spark headline ideas. One of my favorites is the "how to" formula, because these two words set the stage for a benefit headline.

To illustrate, consider book titles. Let's say you want to build a piece of furniture, a rocking chair. You need step-by-step instructions, so you go online and browse through book choices. Woodworking and Woodworking Basics are too general. How to Build Furniture is better, but your interest is in rocking chairs, not other types of furniture. Then you see How to Build a Rocking Chair. That's the most enticing title of all, isn't it? And it promises a specific benefit, without resorting to puffed up claims or exaggerations.

It's the same with ad headlines. Use the words "how to" to put you on the right path. Then with your knowledge of the audience and the product or service your client is promoting, fill-in-the-blank to create a selection of benefit headlines. Pick the one you like best and build the ad concept from there.

It's all about giving people a reason to read beyond the headline.

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

## LAWSUIT from Page 1

Lawless and member Tom Morton casting no votes.

A lawsuit filed by a coalition of media organizations stems from the Tennessee Registry of Election Finance's decision to reduce previously issued fines against Rep. Joe Towns, D-Memphis.

The media organizations argue details of the email vote, including who moved to accept the settlement and who seconded the motion, have not been made public. "Because the Registry's vote occurred via email, rather than in a properly noticed public meeting, its actions violated the (Open Meetings Act)," the lawsuit states.

The plaintiffs include the USA TODAY Network-Tennessee, the Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, the Tennessee Press Association, the Daily Memphian, the Chattanooga Times Free Press, the

parent companies of WBIR, WTVF, WSMV, the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters, Gould Enterprises and The Associated Press.

"One the most important components of transparent government is making decisions in full view," said Joel Christopher, executive editor of the Knoxville News Sentinel. "This vote — with no notice and taken in secret — is so egregious we would not be living up to our watchdog responsibilities if we didn't fight for the public's right of oversight."

Deborah Fisher, executive director of the Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, said there's a "grave danger" across the state if officials are allowed to vote via email and make decisions without public notice or publishing minutes.

Paul McAdoo, a Tennessee-based attorney for the Local Legal Initiative, said the state's laws make clear that all votes by governing bodies must be done in public.

"While government officials implement necessary changes in how they conduct business during the pandemic consistent with Gov. Lee's executive order, they must still uphold both the letter and the spirit of Tennessee's transparency laws," he said.

## Fisher worried about impact on other state agencies

"If that's how the state interprets the open meetings law, how long will it be before this method spreads to all state boards and even beyond to all local governing bodies who might find such a method convenient to their purposes of the moment?" Fisher asked.

The media organizations are seeking a permanent injunction that would prohibit the registry from violating the open meetings law in the future while asking the court to oversee the panel for a year.

A spokeswoman from the attorney general's office, which will represent the registry, declined to comment.

The reduction of Towns' fines allowed him to quickly pay the penalties while still being eligible to run for reelection in the August primary. State law prohibits candidates with outstanding civil penalties from being able to run for office.

## PODCASTS from Page 1

that successfully mixed country music with lifestyle, events and guests with interviews and live performances daily. That same approach will expand in this new media position at Main Street Media.

"Media must do more to keep engagement with an audience. We have to give them what they can't get anywhere else," O'Day said. "We need to work harder for our advertising clients caring that the message works. We need content that is unique and available visually and audibly in many formats. Main Street Media with Dave Gould and Chris Kulick is a place where vision is not only encouraged but applauded. I'm thrilled to join this incredible team to tell our hometown stories."

As well as being a recognizable name in radio for 18 years with Gerry House and the House Foundation, five for WSM and three with Mix929, O'Day is an accomplished author for Thomas Nelson, Abingdon Press, and Guideposts. She has been a writer on songs recorded by Trace Adkins, Lee Ann Womack, Hank Williams, Jr, a number-one song for George Strait ("The Big One" with Gerry House) and many more. She has narrated more than seventy audio books for Audible and voiced commercials and programs heard around the world on every major network. She has had her own brand coaching company for more than thirty years.

"Main Street Today 'and the following Devon has built over the years has introduced a whole different group of people to the Main Street Media brand," Dave Gould added. "We are cross-promoting from print/digital/social to podcasts and back the other way.

"You have to have people who understand this business if you want to be successful. I knew very little about podcasting, and we would be dead in the water without their expertise and experience. We still have much to learn on the business side. We have a slew of product offerings we are getting out and presenting to local businesses, so we are going to eventually land on what makes the most sense and keep refining it."

Gould told The Tennessee Press that a key part of his inspiration for conceiving this expanded digital footprint was the Austin (Tex.) American-Statesman's starting a 24/7 streaming radio station known as Austin 360.

"I was very intrigued with that," Gould said. "Without getting too far ahead of ourselves, we are wanting to move in that direction. The challenge will be to make it financially valuable in chunks and pieces as we move toward the ultimate goal.

"I had been reading about the growth of podcasting over the past several years. Knowing we are already creating lots of good content, I thought this was an area we could break into and, hopefully, create a new revenue stream."



## Tennessee Press Service Advertising Placement Snapshot

	ROP:	Networks:
May 2020	\$54,543	\$20,184
Year* as of May 31	\$630,754	\$84,098

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

# Guide to aggressive reporting? Begin with the basics

A publisher once asked how I defined aggressive reporting. During my tenure at the Red Wing Republican Eagle, we considered it our badge of honor. If someone threw up roadblocks to information we considered pertinent to our readers, we doubled and tripled our efforts – and usually we were successful.

So what type of scenarios prompted stepped-up investigation and reporting? A handful of circumstances immediately come to mind:

- A local business makes significant layoffs with no public explanation.
- Starting players for no apparent reason fail to dress for high school sporting events.
- A government body awards a vendor contract worth thousands of dollars and takes the unusual measure of voting in secret.
- A company sends letters to landowners to gauge their interest in being a host site for storage of radioactive nuclear waste with all correspondence purposely kept under the public radar.
- A law enforcement chief is suspended for taking a joy ride with



## COMMUNITY NEWSROOM SUCCESS

JIM PUMARLO

his nephew in the new water patrol boat during working hours; the city makes a deal to not voluntarily disclose the suspension.

We pursued all of the stories and published the facts. Many of our arguments were grounded in the letter of the law on open meetings and government data. We pushed equally hard for the information in the spirit of the law.

But aggressive reporting extends beyond tackling the sensitive and contentious subjects in recording a community's living history. Being assertive also means delivering meaningful content. It means putting yourselves in the mindset of readers – paying attention to the 5 Ws and H of a solid story to make sure you have filled all gaps.

Consider these examples:

- A headline announces a local

chamber of commerce banquet. The two-sentence news brief reads, in part: "The Chamber of Commerce held its annual meeting and awards dinner Monday night. ... Results were not available at press time."

- A city council has its annual reorganizational meeting with contested balloting for the president and vice president positions. The two individuals are elected on split ballots, each by a different voting bloc. The story references some of the motions and debate, but nowhere does it report who voted for whom on the two ballots.

- An individual announces his candidacy for an elective office he unsuccessfully sought two years earlier. The report is accompanied by a two-year-old photo with his long hair; he now sports a conventional haircut. The photo was updated on the website, but was it caught in time for the print edition?

- A young woman decides to open a clothing store because she has difficulty finding wardrobes for her tall, slender build. The feature story omits the most important fact: her height.

- A local high school sports team

plays an away game on a Tuesday night. The result, not reported until the nondaily's Saturday edition, includes individual point totals for the host team but says home team player statistics were not available.

- Three residents speak up at a meeting, challenging a local government body's action on an issue that has gained communitywide attention. The reporter – remotely watching the cable broadcast of the meeting months before any social distancing precautions due to the coronavirus – quotes two of the speakers minus their names.

The examples should make all editors cringe. The lackadaisical reporting and disregard to elementary information erode a newspaper's foundational credibility. The examples are an embarrassment to a newspaper's self-promotion as the go-to source for local news. At a very basic level, the misfires in reporting prompt readers and advertisers alike to ask: What's the value of the product?

Make no mistake: today's media landscape is fractured and changing every day. The challenges to survive and thrive are even greater due to the economic impact of the

coronavirus.

Newspapers still have an inside track as the premier clearinghouse of information in your communities, and you have many platforms on which to deliver that news. Community newspapers, at their best, are stewards of your communities. The news columns are a blend of stories that people like to read and stories they should read.

But success depends on practicing the tenets of solid reporting. Ignore the basic elements of journalism, and the path to maintaining relevancy in your communities becomes much steeper.

*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](http://www.pumarlo.com) and welcomes comments and questions at [jim@pumarlo.com](mailto:jim@pumarlo.com).*

## NEWS

### Anderson appointed TPA District One director

Calvin Anderson, publisher of the New Tri-State Defender of Memphis, has been appointed as a Director of District One on the



Anderson

Tennessee Press Association (TPA) Board of Directors. His appointment by TPA President Chris Vass was effective as of June 5. Anderson was appointed to fill the unexpired

term previously held by Keith Ponder, former publisher of The Daily Herald, Columbia. His term will continue through the 2021 summer convention.

*Staff reports  
June 15, 2020*

### TPA President appoints Blackley as a director

Brian Blackley, publisher of The



Blackley

Tullahoma News and vice president of Lakeway Publishers—Middle Tennessee, has been appointed as a Director of District Two to the Tennessee Press Association (TPA) Board of

Directors. His appointment by TPA President Chris Vass was effective as of June 16. He was appointed to fill the unexpired term held by Amanda Bond, publisher of the Pickett County Press. Bond resigned in February. Blackley's term expires after the July 17 TPA Board of Directors meeting; however, he is eligible to be elected to a full two-year term when the TPA membership conducts its elections during the combined Board of Directors Meeting and Business Session July 17.

*Staff reports  
June 16, 2020*



Thomason

### Thomason appointed TPA Vice President for Dailies

Rick Thomason, publisher of the Kingsport Times News

and Johnson City Press, has been appointed by TPA President Chris Vass as Vice President for Daily Newspapers on the Tennessee Press Association Board of Directors. His appointment was effective as of June 22.

Thomason was appointed to fill the unexpired term previously held by Darrell Richardson, former publisher of The Oak Ridger. His term will end after the July 17 meeting; however, he is expected to be re-elected by the membership and anticipated to be nominated as TPA president in 2021.

TPA's bylaws require that the presidency rotate among TPA's

three divisions while also alternating between daily and non-daily newspapers.

*Staff reports  
June 22, 2020*

### Herald-Citizen curbs print to focus on digital

In response to the economic challenges presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the change in recent years in how readers consume community news and information, the Herald-Citizen, Cookeville was to begin publishing three print editions weekly,

See **NEWS** Page 8



### Tennessee Newspaper Hall of Fame nominations due by Aug. 31 for possible 2021 induction

All nominees must be deceased two or more years prior to the nomination. Nomination form available at [tnpress.com/hall-of-fame/](http://tnpress.com/hall-of-fame/) or contact [rgentile@tnpress.com](mailto:rgentile@tnpress.com) for the form.

TPA MEMBER COVERAGE SHOWCASE I: Citizen Tribune, Morristown

# Rogersville man conquers the Appalachian Trail

SHAWN SINGLETON  
Citizen Tribune, Morristown  
October 16, 2019

The hair is longer.  
The beard is bushier.  
The job is ... done.  
Charles Stephens recently finished an undertaking not too many people have seen through to the end: He hiked the Appalachian Trail.

"I've known it was there from the beginning to do," he said. "We had some pretty good hikes, but when I was in ROTC at Cherokee (High School), I talked to a hiker, and he told me, it could be done.

The Rogersville resident conquered the Appalachian Trail from start to finish, covering all 2,192 miles through 14 states over 198 days, from March 10 through Sept. 28 last year. Stephens said the decision to hike the trail had been on his mind, dating back to high school.

"If you want mountains, you'll get those. If you want waterfalls, you'll get those as well," he said.

Stephens said his military training prepared him for his trip along the trail. Stephens graduated from Marine boot camp at Parris Island in 2003, and served with the 2nd Light Armored Recon Battalion at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Once his Marine career ended, he joined the Army in 2011, and saw action in the Iraq War.

"The hardest part is to make you (get up to continue the hike). You have to do it every day," Stephens said. "The point is the perseverance. Every day has to have a purpose."

Only 25 percent of hikers who start the Appalachian Trail make it to Mount Kathadin in Maine, the official end of the trek. Beautiful in its brutality, the trail forces some hikers to stop the journey because of the weather or the terrain, while others suspended their treks due to injuries, illness or family reasons.

Stephens encountered rough weather and minor injuries on several occasions during the hike, but continued the trip through adversity nevertheless, saying "no pain, no rain, no main" is the attitude one has to have if success is on the horizon. He also said "no main" is part of his personal



Submitted photos

Rogersville's Charles Stephens (far right) hiked the entire Appalachian Trail in 2019. He was joined, for the first 210 miles of the trip, by his family, wife Julie, son Maximus and daughter Avalon.

philosophy, meaning the ultimate goal, the final destination for any undertaking.

"You have to be able to hike in poor weather. You can't take days off," he said. "You won't make it if you do that.

"There were a lot of hardcore dudes saying they can make it (down the trail), and you believe it because of their motivation and their attitude, they can make it – and they don't for one reason or another."

Stephens also said some hikers expect an easy and glamorous walk through the mountains, but that is far from the case.

"The realization of it is that it is not glamorous, like people think it is," he said. "The fun is quickly gone. No more rainbows and butterflies. All you have left is perseverance."

Stephens said his main reason for the trip was to fulfill a personal goal.

"Plenty of people have different reasons for doing this. I really needed to take some time to myself," he said.

Stephens said he couldn't have accomplished the feat without the support of his family. His wife Julie, his son Maximus, 13 and his daughter Avalon, 10, accompanied him for the first 210 miles of the journey from the approach trail in

Georgia to Clingman's Dome, the highest point in East Tennessee. This leg of the hike is roughly the same distance from East Tennessee to Nashville – only more elevated and mountainous.

"One of the big drivers for me was having my family for the first part (of the hike). My wife and kids did the first 200 or so miles with me. That's what helped me persevere," Stephens said. "It was amazing how the kids did it at their age.

"There were plenty of 'Are we almost there?' moments from the kids. They encountered some trials like (my wife and I) did. No amount of words or pictures will describe how hard the Appalachian Trail is."

Stephens' trip through the trail – and the mountains surrounding it – lasted longer than any trip he's taken with a vehicle, but he is thankful for those who helped him along the way. Several groups of people called "Trail Angels" provide hikers with supplies and dry places to stay for those looking to complete the trail.

"I've never even driven past Pennsylvania in a car. A lot of the trip is quite mountainous," he said. "A lot of the appeal is how hard it can be. You go into the small towns to resupply for the rest of the trip, but most of the people



Only about 25 percent of hikers who start the Appalachian Trail make it to the official end of the journey, which ends at Mount Kathadin in Maine. Charles Stephens encountered rough weather and minor injuries on several occasions during the hike, but continued the trip through adversity nevertheless.

along the trail will help with your supplies."

There is a perception of danger from animals or criminals on the trail. However, it is a rare occurrence, according to Brian King, a spokesman for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. About two million to three million people hike the trail each year.

"You have more of a chance of getting hurt in a four-wheeled death trap machine than on the trail," King said.

Stephens took a short hike the day before reaching the end of the arduous trek at Mount Kathadin. He said neither words nor pictures can describe the feeling of reaching a goal just one out of four people who begin the journey accomplish.

"It's hard to describe (the hike) when it's over. It hasn't dawned on you that you've finished," Stephens said. "It doesn't seem that it's finished. There's nowhere else. It's surreal.

"The end felt like the beginning to me. The lessons I learned I can apply them to real life. Pictures won't ever do it justice."

Stephens said he would do the trip again in a heartbeat. He also doesn't plan on shaving his beard or cutting his hair anytime soon.

"I would definitely do this again, but I'd start off a little lighter be-

cause I know what I'm doing now," he said. "I don't plan on shaving my face or cutting my hair. It's a memoir from my time on the trail."



Charles Stephens, of Rogersville, celebrates after reaching the end of the Appalachian Trail at Mount Kathadin in Maine on Sept. 28. The Rogersville resident and former serviceman started his journey in Georgia on March 10, and hiked the entire 2,192-mile trail through 14 states.

## TPA MEMBER COVERAGE SHOWCASE II: Gallatin News

# Student spreads compassion worldwide with handsewn blankets

JOSH CROSS  
Gallatin News  
February 13, 2020

With her handsewn blankets featuring stitched on felt hearts, a Gallatin fifth grader is getting national recognition for spreading love to children and adults around the world who are facing a variety of different challenges in their lives.

After making a blanket to give to a friend for their birthday, Lucy Blaylock, 10, wanted to do more for other children to help them feel loved. So, the Union Elementary STEM and Demonstration School student started making "Love Blankets" for others.

"It makes me happy to do something to make someone else feel happy and loved," Blaylock said. "If we could all think of things we can do to be kind, the world would be a better place."

With the help of her mother Veronica, Lucy asks people who visit her @LucysLoveBlankets account on Instagram to nominate anyone who could benefit from one of her handsewn blankets. The only qualification is that the recipient is someone who "needs a little extra love."

To date, Blaylock has made more than 375 Love Blankets that have gone mostly to children who are dealing with a variety of different challenges including illness, divorce, bullying and loneliness. In addition to local deliveries, Blaylock has also shipped blankets to people in 13 different countries worldwide.

"A lot of times people who



nominate the children will tell us what they love and what they're into," Veronica Blaylock said. "Lucy also loves when they send a picture. She'll look at it and read about the child. Then, we try to pick out fabric according to their age and what we think they would love."

Each blanket takes about four hours to make and comes with a personal note from Lucy, as well as

a poem she wrote that concludes by saying that "whether you're happy or sad or just feeling blue, I hope this reminds you that someone loves you."

Without a sale on fabric, materials for each blanket cost approximately \$24. The cost, along with shipping, is paid for primarily through donations. However, the Blaylocks contribute their own money when the funding is not enough.



Submitted photos

**Top photo: Each Love Blanket features a felt heart and is accompanied by a poem. Left photo: Lucy Blaylock, a fifth grader at Union Elementary STEM and Demonstration School, has made more than 375 handsewn Love Blankets for children and adults around the world.**

## National recognition

In early February, Blaylock was named Tennessee's middle-level state honoree by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program that recognizes the top two youth volunteers from each state as well as the District of Columbia.

All of the 102 state honorees from across the country were to receive \$1,000 along with an engraved silver medallion and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. for four days of national

recognition events.

"In our 25th year of honoring young volunteers, we are as inspired as ever by the work students are doing to address the needs of a changing world," Prudential Financial Chairman and CEO Charles Lowrey said in a prepared statement. "We hope that their resolve, their initiative and their perspectives on society's challenges move others to consider how they can make a difference, too."

While in the nation's capital, state honorees were to receive tour landmarks, meet top youth volunteers from around the world, attend a gala awards ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and visit their congressional representatives on Capitol Hill.

Union Elementary held an assembly to surprise Blaylock with the award announcement. During the program, Mayor Paige Brown also presented the fifth grader with a proclamation declaring Feb. 4 as Lucy Blaylock Day in Gallatin.

Union Principal Lance Taylor, who nominated Blaylock for the national recognition, said her example of servant leadership and compassion for others has not only inspired him but others at the school as well.

"I nominated Lucy for her huge heart for other people, especially those who are hurting whether it's physically or emotionally," Taylor said. "When she gives someone a blanket, she has also touched the lives of everyone in that family."

"If one kid can touch this many lives, then hundreds of us can do more."

# Turning a 'Bye' back to a Buy takes effort: Never give up

*Editor's note: The column was edited for length.*

The quickest way to ruin a publisher's or advertising director's day — or budget — is for a major advertiser to quit. As a former long-time publisher, I know that pain.

A Newspaper Association Managers (NAM) colleague called me wondering if I could recommend steps to help a member newspaper convince a major advertiser to return. Here are a few suggestions to consider as a step, or a series of actions, to win back the business:



## THE RELEVANCE PROJECT

TOM SILVESTRI

- Be thorough in constructing both sides of the departure: put yourself in the shoes of the advertiser and list its known reasons; then, hear out your ad team, especially

the sales representative assigned to the account. Facts, not feelings.

- Analyze both sets of reasons to determine your strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and further challenges. Here you can speculate in pursuit of more facts.
- Don't delay. Get to the advertiser's decision-maker and secure a meeting ASAP to learn more about the reasons.

- Match priorities. One of my colleagues at the Richmond Times-Dispatch would dig into the advertiser's key performance indicators. Our

Advertising VP would then rank them by importance. Did the advertiser, for example, focus on driving traffic to its store, or was it more interested in getting email addresses or text numbers for a digital campaign? Match your follow-up pitches appropriately.

- Win local hearts and minds. If it's a chain without outside ownership, strengthen the newspaper's relationship with local managers who know your market.

- Secure research and data that support your value. Local market

research is the best.

- Keep searching: If local market statistics don't exist, tap the research that regional and national organizations have compiled to show newspaper effectiveness.

- Know your competition, especially if they've gained your advertiser. Where can you show you're a better partner? Use discretion here, as merely badmouthing a competitor may backfire. Make it about your strengths, so it's easier

See **SILVESTRI** Page 8

**NEWS from Page 5**

effective July 1, while promoting real-time digital news reporting.

The newspaper is experiencing substantial revenue loss even as it continues to inform the community during the ongoing crisis, according to Herald-Citizen Publisher Jack McNeely. While the paper has seen record traffic to its website and new print subscribers, like all other newspapers across the country, has



**McNeely**

seen declines in advertising as non-essential businesses are closed and events are canceled.

“Our work immediately following the March 3 tornado and, since, the escalating COVID-19 story proves that we are ready to provide real-time, digital coverage,” McNeely said.

“The sharp increase in traffic on herald-citizen.com has indicated that more readers are consuming news digitally than ever before. Reducing print frequency enables us to meet our readers where they are and allows our news teams to focus their efforts on providing news online as it occurs.”

The weekday print editions of the Herald-Citizen will publish on Wednesdays and Fridays. The Saturday/Sunday edition, or Weekend Edition, will publish on Saturdays and include all the features and sales inserts regularly found in the newspaper’s long-standing Sunday

edition. All editions to Putnam County 385 zip code subscribers will be delivered same day via the U.S. Postal Service.

The local newspaper is reinventing its web site to feature news and sports items as they occur. Paid subscribers will have access to all digital offerings, which will include live video streams in the near future, digital access to published sales inserts and much more.

“For decades, newspapers have subsidized their subscription rates with advertising revenues,” McNeely said. “We can no longer afford to do that. Even though we are curbing our printed editions, we will be producing more content than ever before. That content has value.”

*Herald-Citizen, Cookeville  
June 13, 2020*

**EVT names editor, advertising staff**



**Guin**

Elk Valley Times publisher Jamie Bone has announced the addition of two new staff members. Fayetteville native Chris Guin is the new editor, and Jenny Berry has joined the EVT staff as an advertising consultant.

Guin is replacing 31-year veteran editor Sandy Williams, who has joined the Fayetteville City School System. Prior to joining the EVT staff, Guin was a legal assistant at Weil and Long PLLC in Chattanooga. “He will be instrumental in our overall plan to broaden our multi-generational readership and expand our digital news presence,” Bone said.

Guin said, “I am excited and honored to have some responsibility for an element of our community as fundamental and constant as the Elk Valley Times. I look forward to providing the same public service that Lucy and Sandy Williams did.”

Hazel Green, Ala. native Jenny Berry is the new advertising consultant at the Elk Valley Times. Berry is a 2007 graduate of Hazel Green High School and attended Calhoun Community College, majoring in



**Berry**

business management. She has been a Lincoln County resident since 2016.

Berry began her career in advertising as a client relationship manager for National Pen Company

in Shelbyville, Tenn., where she received the creativity award for serving customers and promoting businesses in the most creative way possible.

“I believe that success comes naturally when you serve from the heart,” Berry said. “Helping businesses in the community where I call home allows me to do exactly that.”

*Elk Valley Times, Fayetteville  
June 1, 2020*

**McAdoo joins Reporters Committee**

The Reporters Committee announced in February that Paul McAdoo was to join the organization March 2 as a Local Legal Initiative attorney based in Tennessee.

Through its new Local Legal Initiative, the Reporters Committee will expand its direct legal support for local enterprise and investigative reporting by hiring attorneys to provide targeted support in five jurisdictions across the country, including Tennessee.

“Paul’s extensive experience as a media attorney will be a tremendous asset to the Local Legal Initiative, and we are thrilled that he is joining the Reporters Committee as we expand to help more journalists pursue enterprise and investigative stories in their communities,” said Bruce Brown, executive director of Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

McAdoo is joining the Reporters



**McAdoo**

Committee from Adams and Reese LLP in Nashville, where he worked on a variety of litigation issues, including with media clients.

“I am thrilled to be joining the Reporters

Committee and the Local Legal Initiative,” McAdoo said. “Throughout my career, I’ve worked with news organizations on a wide variety of open government issues, and it’s always rewarding to see the stories that are told as a result.”

The Local Legal Initiative is funded with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

*Submitted  
February 21, 2020*

**Silvestri named director of industry Relevance Project**

Tom Silvestri, most recently president and publisher of the Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch, has been named executive director of the Relevance Project, the joint effort of newspaper trade groups to strengthen the industry’s unique role as the provider of quality journalism and the keeper of public forums for thousands of communities across the continent.

Silvestri recently retired after 15 years as publisher and vice president of the Richmond Group of BH Media. He has continued to consult with the company in a contract position.

In this contract position, Silvestri will lead planning and execution of the effort. NAM has been shaping The Relevance Project since 2018 to counter newspaper struggles and to help members redefine their businesses in a digital world. Rather than pull back during the COVID-19 pandemic,



**Silvestri**

NAM is pushing ahead at a time of intense urgency and sweeping uncertainty as some newspapers fight for their existence.

“We all know the challenges that newspapers

face. But we also know community newspapers still play a vital role as the relevant forum for concerned citizens. The pandemic heightens that need,” said Relevance Project Chair Michelle Rea, executive director of the New York Press Association. “The Relevance Project aims to re-establish and strengthen our connections to the communities we serve, and to expand our relevance to new audiences. There are plenty of success stories to share as well.”

Silvestri’s first steps in the new role will be to engage press association executives to confirm project priorities, especially for local journalism and revenue generation; to define fundraising avenues for the project; to build on press association collaborations with other industry groups and journalism advocates; and to refine branding for the project as it rolls out to NAM associations and newspaper members.

“Some people say we need to save newspapers. Others worry about democracy without an army of journalists to report the news. Still others call for reinvention. I agree on all accounts and add we can never give up looking for solutions to keep local journalism and community news organizations strong,” said Silvestri, who will be based in Richmond.

Founded in 1923, NAM is a coalition of state, provincial and national trade groups representing the newspaper media industry in the United States and Canada.

*Newspaper Association Managers*

**TPA Sponsored Webinars for members**

**July 16**  
Think COVID flattened your classifieds? Think again

**July 23**  
Keeping up with Digital Trends in 2020

Register at [www.OnlineMediaCampus.com](http://www.OnlineMediaCampus.com)  
Contact [rgentile@tnpress.com](mailto:rgentile@tnpress.com) for the coupon code.

**Post your newspaper’s open positions at [www.tnpress.com](http://www.tnpress.com).**

**SILVESTRI from Page 7**

to be compared to a competition’s shortcoming.

- Save all reader reaction when it’s discovered the advertiser decided to leave you. Ask readers how they used the ads to make shopping decisions. Compile and share with the advertiser to press your point further.

- Refrain from blasting the advertiser in public. Others will note that for future reference.

- Build up your options, just in case. I was always amazed just how many advertisers were surprised by our strong digital products. Repackage your advertising solutions with a multimedia approach..

- Get creative. Come up with a new campaign for the advertiser. Surprise them with interesting concepts and approaches. Reaffirm the message that you are really your advertiser’s creative services shop that’s on call to serve them.

- Find a middle ground apart

from, say, a store’s sale ads. Many businesses support local charitable efforts. Offer to partner there in terms of a sponsorship where you are hired to help inform what the non-profit group is doing. (Remember: Label this sponsored content to distinguish from news coverage.)

*Tom Silvestri is executive director of The Relevance Project, a new initiative to support community newspapers launched by the Newspaper Association Managers.*



# 2019 Tennessee AP Broadcasters & Media Editors Contest Winners

## Newspapers Division III

### Features

1. Knoxville News-Sentinel  
Ryan Wilusz
2. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Jessica Bliss
3. Knoxville News-Sentinel  
Hayes Hickman

### Sports-Outdoors

1. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Paul Skrbina
2. The Daily Memphian  
Jonah Jordan
3. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Adam Sparks

### Business News

1. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Sandy Mazza
2. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Anita Wadhvani and Mike Reicher
3. The Commercial Appeal,  
Memphis  
Max Garland

### Editorials

1. The Tennessean, Nashville  
David Plazas
2. Chattanooga Times Free Press  
Pam Sohn
3. The Tennessean, Nashville  
David Plazas

### Daily Deadline

1. The Commercial Appeal,  
Memphis
2. The Commercial Appeal,  
Memphis
3. The Commercial Appeal,  
Memphis

### Video

1. Knoxville News-Sentinel  
Caitlin McMekin
2. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Andrew Nelles

3. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Ayrika L. Whitney

### Multimedia

1. Knoxville News-Sentinel
2. The Tennessean, Nashville
3. The Tennessean, Nashville

### Malcolm Law Award for Investigative Reporting

1. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Anita Wadhvani, Natalie Allison and Brett Kelman

2. Chattanooga Times Free Press  
Mark Pace

3. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Anita Wadhvani and Mike Reicher

### Feature Photography

1. Chattanooga Times Free Press  
Robin Rudd
2. Chattanooga Times Free Press  
Tim Barber
3. The Daily Memphian  
Jim Weber

### Sports Photography

1. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Andrew Nelles

2. Chattanooga Times Free Press  
Robin Rudd

3. The Tennessean, Nashville  
George Walker IV

### Spot News Photography

1. The Daily Memphian  
Jim Weber
2. Knoxville News-Sentinel  
Caitlin McMekin
3. The Commercial Appeal,  
Memphis  
Max Gersh

### Photojournalism

1. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Mark Zaleski
2. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Larry McCormack
3. The Daily Memphian  
Jim Weber

## Individual Achievement/ Body of Work in Photography

1. Chattanooga Times Free Press  
C.B. Schmelter

2. The Daily Memphian  
Mark Weber

3. The Tennessean, Nashville  
Andrew Nelles

## Newspapers Division II

### Features

1. The Jackson Sun  
Cassandra Stephenson
2. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Jennifer Babich
3. The Jackson Sun  
Cassandra Stephenson

### Sports-Outdoors

1. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Tim Hayes
2. The Jackson Sun  
Michael Odom
3. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Allen Gregory

### Business News

1. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Jimmy Settle
2. The Jackson Sun  
Adam Friedman
3. The Jackson Sun  
Cassandra Stephenson

### Editorials

1. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Chris Smith
2. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Cliff Cumber
3. Johnson City Press  
Sam Watson

### Daily Deadline

1. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Robert Sorrell and Lurah Spell
2. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Robert Sorrell, Lurah Spell and

Leif Greiss

3. The Jackson Sun  
Cassandra Stephenson

### Video

1. The Jackson Sun  
Henry Taylor
2. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor
3. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Dalena Mathews, David McGee and David Crigger

### Multimedia

1. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor
2. The Jackson Sun  
Stephanie Amador and Kenneth Cummings
3. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor

### Malcolm Law Award for Investigative Reporting

1. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Staff
2. The Jackson Sun  
Cassandra Stephenson and Brett Kelman
3. The Jackson Sun  
Adam Friedman

### Feature Photography

1. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor
2. Johnson City Press  
Nathan Baker
3. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor

### Sports Photography

1. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Andre Teague
2. Bristol Herald-Courier  
David Crigger
3. Bristol Herald-Courier  
David Crigger

### Spot News Photography

1. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor

2. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor

3. Bristol Herald-Courier  
Andrew Teague

### Photojournalism

1. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor
2. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor
3. Bristol Herald-Courier  
David Crigger

## Individual Achievement/ Body of Work in Photography

1. The Leaf-Chronicle, Clarksville  
Henry Taylor
2. Bristol Herald-Courier
3. Bristol Herald-Courier  
David Crigger

## Newspapers Division I

### Features

1. The Daily News Journal,  
Murfreesboro

See **WINNERS** Page 10

**The UT-TPA Tennessee State Press Contests Awards are scheduled to be presented on Thursday, Sept. 24 in Pigeon Forge.**

**TPA will keep you updated on its plans. The Board of Directors will meet on July 17. One of the discussion topics will be the scheduled convention/awards presentation.**

**TPA members are invited to observe the meeting via Zoom and to participate in elections during the business session portion of the meeting.**

# Contract protection deserves plenty of attention during coronavirus

The Coronavirus from Wuhan, China, has turned life upside-down in the United States of America. Most of the governors nationwide issued stay-at-home orders. Businesses were closed. Unemployment claims are at record levels.

What about contractual obligations? Does this situation give parties to a contract an avenue to be relieved of those obligations? Hopefully, your contract has a Force Majeure provision.

What is Force Majeure? It is a provision commonly found in contracts that frees both parties from an obligation if an extraordinary event prevents one or both parties from performing. This event must be unforeseeable and unavoidable and not the result of a party's actions. Thus, they are considered "an act of God."

In my 40-plus years of law practice I have not had occasion to use a Force Majeure provision. Thank God for that, right? In a typical distribution contract that I have drafted for Publishing Companies, the Publishing Company has a right to terminate the agreement immediately:

The Company may terminate this



## LEGAL UPDATE

L. MICHAEL ZINSER

contract or suspend its performance hereunder, without prior notice, in the event the company's facilities are damaged or destroyed or the Company's performance hereunder is prevented or hindered by labor disturbances (including but not limited to strikes and picketing), acts of God, the elements, order of governmental, civil or military authority, or any other cause (whether similar or dissimilar to the above mentioned) not within the reasonable control of the Company.

Recently, publishing companies have invoked such a clause to immediately terminate contracts of various types due to the current crisis. Clearly, the virus was unforeseen and beyond the control of either party to the contract.

Many newspaper conventions have been postponed or cancelled.

Did Force Majeure provisions permit that? You bet!

The Force Majeure provision allowed the joint conference of the Southern Circulation Manager's Association and the Mid-Atlantic Circulation Manager's Association scheduled for Charlotte to be cancelled without penalty. 360 Media Alliance was able to cancel its hotel contract in St. Louis for its May conference using the Force Majeure provision. The Media Financial Management annual meeting that was scheduled for Los Angeles in May was cancelled. In both of those examples the hotel companies involved immediately recognized the applicability of the provision.

The Great Western Audience Alliance (GWAA), the merged entity of the Cal-Western Circulation Managers' Association and Northwest International Circulation Executives, had its annual conference scheduled for June in Las Vegas. The hotel contract that had been signed contained the following Force Majeure clause:

A party's performance of its obligations hereunder shall be excused due to the occurrence of an event

beyond the reasonable control of such party which make it commercially impracticable, illegal or impossible to perform as originally contracted under this Agreement, including without limitation, strikes, shortages, riots, insurrection, fires, flood, storm, explosions, acts of God, war, civil unrest, acts of terrorism, restrictive applicable laws or regulations, earthquakes ("Force Majeure Event"), provided however, that this section does not excuse any separate breach of this Agreement. In the event of a Force Majeure Event, either party may terminate the Agreement without any further liability, except for payment for any services rendered by Property prior to the effective date of termination.

GWAA had first tried consultation and negotiation to persuade the hotel to cancel this year's convention due to the crisis. Initially, the hotel played "hard ball." The hotel said it planned to be up and running in June 2020. However, the clause is bilateral, applying to both parties. When conversation failed, GWAA, in writing, invoked the Force Majeure clause, making the following

arguments:

- The Force Majeure Event is the Coronavirus Pandemic.
- President Trump has declared a National Emergency because of the pandemic.
- The Governor of Nevada has also declared a State of Emergency.
- The devastating impact on revenues of GWAA members and sponsors make it commercially impracticable/impossible for the association to perform.
- Conference attendees come from Nevada, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Hawaii and Alaska.
- With businesses shut down across the company, newspaper advertising revenues have plummeted.
- Discretionary travel has been cut.
- Layoffs loom.
- No one can predict with certainty just when public safety will permit convention-type gatherings contemplated by the original Agreement.

After receiving and considering the letter, the hotel backed off;

See **ZINSER** Page 11

## WINNERS from Page 9

- Joseph Choi
- 2. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Chris Menees
- 3. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Nancy DeGennaro and Brinley Hineman
- Sports-Outdoors**
- 1. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Joe Spears
- 2. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Cecil Joyce
- 3. The Greeneville Sun**  
Sam Bundy
- Business News**
- 1. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Scott Broden
- 2. The Greeneville Sun**

- Lorelei Goff
- 3. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Donna Ryder
- Editorials**
- 1. The Greeneville Sun**  
Scott Jenkins
- Daily Deadline**
- 1. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Brinley Hineman and Helen Comer
- 2. The Greeneville Sun**  
Ken Little
- 3. The Greeneville Sun**  
Ken Little
- Video**
- 1. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Helen Comer
- 2. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Helen Comer

- 3. The Greeneville Sun**  
Brian Cutshall
- Multimedia**
- 1. The Greeneville Sun**  
Ken Little and Brian Cutshall
- 2. The Greeneville Sun**  
Michael S. Reneau
- 3. The Greeneville Sun**  
Michael S. Reneau
- Malcolm Law Award for Investigative Reporting**
- 1. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Brinley Hineman
- 2. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Donna Ryder and Chris Menees
- Feature Photography**
- 1. The Greeneville Sun**  
Scott Jenkins
- 2. The Greeneville Sun**  
Brian Cutshall

- 3. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Chris Menees
- Sports Photography**
- 1. The Greeneville Sun**  
Tate Russell
- 2. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Kevin Weakes
- Spot News Photography**
- 1. The Greeneville Sun**  
Brian Cutshall
- 2. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Helen Comer
- 3. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Helen Comer
- Photojournalism**
- 1. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Helen Comer
- 2. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**

- Helen Comer and Nancy DeGennaro
- 3. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Donna Ryder
- Individual Achievement/ Body of Work in Photography**
- 1. The Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro**  
Helen Comer
- 2. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Donna Ryder
- 3. Union City Daily Messenger**  
Chris Menees
- Journalist of the Year - Newspaper**  
Anita Wadhvani,  
The Tennessean, Nashville
- Outstanding News Operation- Newspaper**  
Bristol Herald Courier

**ZINSER from Page 10**

GWAA avoided a sizable cancellation penalty. If the Coronavirus Pandemic is not a Force Majeure event, what is?

The moral of the story is that even if a clause is rarely used, do not discount its value. Be sure to build in a Force Majeure clause in your contracts.

**Independent Contractor Unemployment Claims**

There has been a spike nationwide in unemployment claims filed by independent contractor newspaper carriers. In some cases, this is due to the publicity that independent contractors can qualify for the \$600/week additional unemployment compensation paid by the federal government. In other cases, the independent contractor has been laid off by another employer, and they list the newspaper as the source of additional income, requiring the newspaper to reply.

Based upon the publicity that contractors could qualify for the extra federal funds, one newspaper asked whether it should report on its quarterly return to the state unemployment agency contract fees paid to the newspaper carriers. The answer is absolutely not. The newspaper should still vig-

orously defend against eligibility for unemployment that would be counted against the newspaper's account and experience rating. If the independent contractor newspaper carrier is eligible for the federal money, it will come from a fund specially set up for individuals who are not otherwise eligible for unemployment in the particular state.

It is also important to specifically review the unemployment statute in your state. These provisions vary from state to state. Many state press associations have successfully lobbied in years past to add a newspaper carrier specific exclusion in the statute. This makes it easy to defeat the claim. If the relationship is totally excluded from the statute, the case is over.

For example, Wisconsin and Mississippi exclude from the unemployment compensation statute individuals who deliver or distribute newspapers to subscribers. Citing this specific provision will get the claim dismissed promptly.

Other states, such as Oklahoma, have a specific exclusion for "services performed by an individual 18 years of age or older who meets the definition of a direct seller as defined in 26 USC Section 3508(b)(2)." That direct seller provision provides that the individual is excluded if the individual is engaged in the delivery or distribution of newspapers; that

the contract remuneration is directly related to sales or output and not hours worked; and the services are performed pursuant to a written contract making the contractor responsible for taxes. This is pretty easily established. The state of Nebraska has a similar provision.

**Layoffs, Furloughs & Pay Cuts**

The shutdowns ordered by most state governments have been devastating economically. Advertising has evaporated. Many newspapers are engaging in layoffs, furloughs and pay cuts. In the non-unionized setting, employers will have discretion to do whatever they need to do.

In the unionized setting, the first thing to do is to look to the provisions in the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

If the company has negotiated a good Collective Bargaining Agreement with strong management right's provisions, the newspaper will have the freedom to lay off employees. Most Collective Bargaining Agreements talk in terms of layoffs. The term furlough is not used as commonly. Additionally, there is no universally accepted definition of the word furlough. Thus, this writer recommends that employers track the language of the Collective Bargaining Agree-

ment. If you have the freedom to lay off, then do not refer to your action as a furlough. Unions will argue later that furlough has some sort of "temporary" connotation. Unless you have the word furlough in your Collective Bargaining Agreement and have given it a precise definition, I recommend against the use of that term in the union context.

Pay cuts will be a little more difficult. Unless you have reserved the contract right to reduce pay or hours in the event of acts of God or emergencies, this will be a more difficult task. There is case law to support the notion that an employer could reduce hours or pay in a situation like the Coronavirus Pandemic. However, that would be sustained for a temporary period of time. Each situation will require that you and your counsel carefully review your Collective Bargaining Agreement to determine your lawful course of action.

**Shared Work Programs**

Many state unemployment agencies have a Shared Work Program. What these programs allow is for an employer to reduce the hours of work of employees. The employee can then, while still working at reduced hours, file a claim for unemployment benefits. The combination of their wages

plus the unemployment does not make them whole, but it provides a substantial supplement to their reduced earnings. For example, the state of Washington has such a program. An employer makes application, and if approved, the employee's hours can be reduced up to 50%. The employee then can file a claim for unemployment benefits. In the current Coronavirus Pandemic situation, that employee is also eligible for the additional \$600.00/week from the federal government. Under this program, the waiting periods are waived as are requirements to seek work. The term of the program is twelve (12) months.

If the employees are represented by a union, the union must sign on and agree to the program. One of my clients in the state of Washington has such a shared work program approved. One of the departments of the newspaper is represented by a union. The union agreed to sign on and become part of the program. This a win-win. The employer saves lots of money in the form of reduced wages, and the employee is receiving unemployment benefits on top of wages.

*L. Michael Zinser is president of The Zinser Law Firm, P.C., in Nashville. He can be reached at 615.255.9700 and zinser@zinserslaw.com.*

**Coronavirus pandemic meets definition of 'the challenge of our time'**

Politicians have long liked to say this or that is "the challenge of our time." It's an over-used phrase, but for those of us born after World War II, the coronavirus pandemic is surely that. And it is especially a challenge for community newspapers, because it comes on top of another unprecedented challenge they already faced. How will they respond?

The first unprecedented challenge is the shift of local advertising to the digital space, where most newspapers have difficulty making enough money, so they must get more revenue from the audience – or even expand into other forms of publishing, as exemplified by David Woronoff of The Pilot, a great twice-weekly in North Carolina.

Newspapers have been infamously inept with their audiences. In much the same way that daily publishers were reluctant to make readers pay for their digital prod-

**INTO THE ISSUES**

AL CROSS

ucts, weekly publishers have been reluctant to raise subscription and single-copy prices. In both cases, many publishers lacked confidence in the quality of their products. In some cases, that lack of confidence was justified. This country has a lot of lousy newspapers. But it has a lot of good ones, and more than ever, they are examples to follow.

I believe that the essential solution to both of these challenges is quality: good journalism, including watchdog reporting and a good editorial page; sharp business prac-

tices, partnering with advertisers to innovate, including digitally; and a spirit of community service that becomes a recognized part of the newspaper's brand. As the saying goes, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

The second unprecedented challenge of our time gives community newspapers an opportunity to redouble their efforts to meet the first challenge. As David Woronoff put it in a March 23 letter to readers, "The Pilot exists for moments like this. Readers and advertisers need us — now more than ever — to be the source of fair, thorough and accurate information as well as a voice for compassion, civility and kindness." (We noted it on The Rural Blog at [tinyurl.com/tfvp67d](http://tinyurl.com/tfvp67d).)

**Competitors team up to help small town and county**

In Douglas, Wyo., NNA President Matt Adelman and his competitor of 30 years, Dennis Switzer of Douglas Broadcasting, teamed up for the first time to help the town of 6,300 and Converse County, pop. 13,600, survive the economic strain of measures designed to limit the spread of the coronavirus by reminding their audiences that "it's up to them to help their communities' small businesses survive the failing economy," as Adelman said in an editorial. (We put it on The Rural Blog at [tinyurl.com/wrf5t7b](http://tinyurl.com/wrf5t7b).)

This wasn't just another "shop local" campaign; it was a fire bell in the night, and local businesses stepped up, buying sponsorships to support the campaign, The Douglas Budget, the Glenrock Independent and the radio stations. In a March 25 NNA webinar, Matt said they collected three and a half times as much as expected.

"This really hit a nerve with people," he said. "They recognize how important it is to shop local." And he said they were surprised by "how important they think the local newspaper and radio station are in their life." In other words, once they contemplated the prospect of life without them, they were willing to invest in them. And they knew, as those of us in NNA do, the quality of Matt's papers – and presumably the radio stations, too. Converse is a county well served; it just needed reminding.

"People are looking for correct information, valued information, and local news media is where they trust," Matt said, echoing David's letter from the editor and giving us a buck-up message in a time of tighter belts and fewer pages.

When Warren Buffett went on a newspaper-buying spree

See **CROSS** Page 12

# Tips and tools for producing voice-delivered news

The Innovation Lab (at the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute, University of Missouri) recently explored three voice-activated devices, including Google Assistants, Amazon's Alexa, and Siri for newsrooms to integrate their content for storytelling purposes. Here are five tips to get started:

## 1. Decide on its function

Currently, news and briefings, podcasts, quizzes, and recipes are major content areas on VAA devices. However, VAA platforms are adding new capabilities that you should explore when building a skill. You could deliver nuggets of information (e.g., "The City Council voted 5:4 to approve... The newest restaurant in town is... Traffic this morning is..."),



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IN  
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KAT DUNCAN

answer questions about your news service, products, or explore a topic you've extensively reported.

It might also help to research how your audience interacts with VAA.

Find out whether your listeners typically use their devices in the morning, evening, at work, at home, or even on a smartwatch during their afternoon jog!

These will all influence how your skill is used and can help decide on an ideal skill.

## 2. Choose your platform

Similar to developing an app, each virtual assistant will need to be created differently on each platform. Gathering insights into the home assistants that your typical audience owns as well as its primary utility may help determine the platform to choose.

## 3. Integrate

Customization on each platform can be difficult, but the smart platforms do have opportunities to integrate into existing services. For example, if you already maintain an audio podcast or news channel, upload your audio RSS feed directly to the voice assistant. This will help keep your content up-to-date.

## 4. Explore templates

Similar to other technologies, coding is required for custom-built skills. However, there are tons of templates that allow you to create helpful and easy-to-use tools without coding on your end. Try out a few templates to get a feel for which best suits your purposes.

## 5. Have a plan to update content

If you are creating a flash briefing or daily update, keep in mind that it may require manual updates. The two main reasons for

poor reviews were due to outdated content and long advertisements. Think of outdated news briefings as sending yesterday's newspaper to the newsstand. If you don't have the resources to update regularly or integrate into existing services, try out a more evergreen skill such as features, how-tos, and interest-

ing interviews that audiences will enjoy weeks later.

*Kat Duncan is the interim Director of Innovation of Reynolds Journalism Institute. She runs the fellowship program, student competition, founded the WIJ Workshop and produces Innovation in Focus.*



## CROSS from Page 11

in 2012, he declared, "I believe newspapers that intensively cover their communities will have a good future. It's your job to make your paper indispensable to anyone who cares about what is going on in your city or town. That will mean both maintaining your news hole; a newspaper that reduces its coverage of the news important to its community is certain to reduce its readership as well and thoroughly covering all aspects of area life, particularly local sports. No one has ever stopped reading when halfway through a story that was about them or their neighbors."

In other words, maintain quality, and you can stay in business and still render public service. Buffett apparently did not anticipate how much local advertising would shift

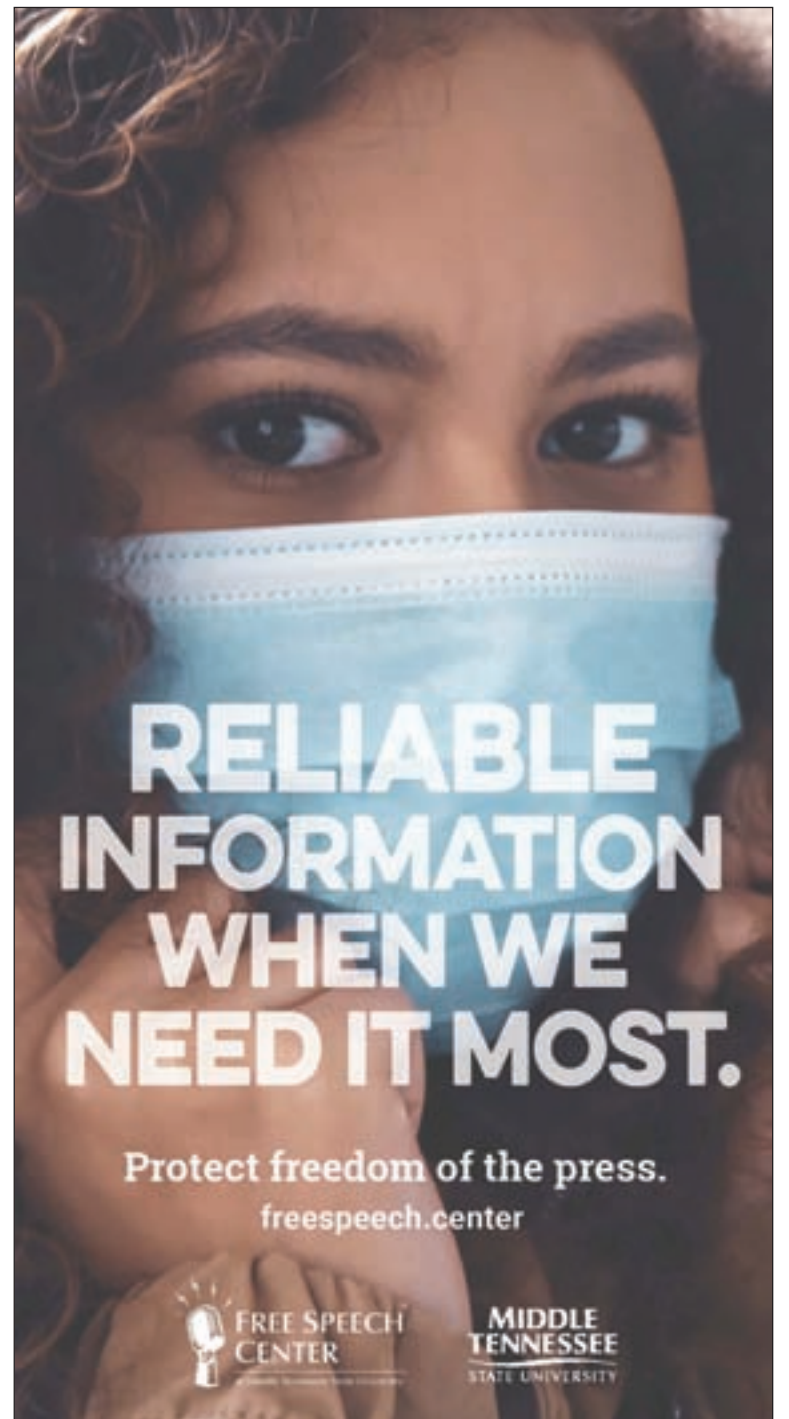
from paper to digital, so he sold his papers recently, saying most newspapers are "toast." I don't believe he was thinking about most community papers. In communities without TV stations, especially outside metropolitan areas, they are still the main source of local news and information.

That is still a valuable franchise, but we can't take it for granted; its value depends greatly on the value that your audience places on your paper, and these days you need to keep reminding them of that value. We need to constantly explain the difference in news media and social media, an example of which we had on The Rural Blog at [tinyurl.com/wl9oklv](http://tinyurl.com/wl9oklv). Here's a condensed version:

"We practice journalism, which reports facts. To do that, we verify information, or we attribute it to someone else. That is called the

discipline of verification, and it is the essence of the news media. Social media have no discipline, and hardly any verification, and they emphasize opinion. Newspapers separate fact from opinion, reserving our own views for the editorial page. Of course, our views influence what news we choose to cover, so if you think we're not covering what should be covered, or have failed to separate fact from opinion, or make another mistake, we want you to tell us."

*Al Cross edited and managed rural newspapers before covering politics for the Louisville Courier Journal and serving as president of the Society of Professional Journalists. He is director of the University of Kentucky's Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, which publishes The Rural Blog at <http://irjci.blogspot.com>.*



Newspapers may download this series of ads at: <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/page/1forall-gallery>  
A new campaign with celebrities will launch on July 4.