

# The Tennessee Press

Official Publication of the Tennessee Press Association

Volume 84

May 2021

No. 11

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## When our readers told us what they wanted to know

**MARCUS FITZSIMMONS**  
Adams Publishing Group  
December 19, 2020

*Editor's note: Adams Publishing owns dozens of media products nationwide, including eight Tennessee Press Association member newspapers such as The Greeneville Sun, The Daily Post-Athenian and The Daily Times, Maryville.*

All of our papers have learned lessons over the last 14 months of the pandemic, but I take this case from Maryville, as a multiple-purpose example worth sharing. Not because the content itself is unique, checking out e-editions from all over APG is part of the job, and I've seen lots of approaches to providing readers with similar content. In this case the solution provided two good lessons.

First, it shows how listening to the readers can lead to better results.

Second, it shows a flexibility to adapt content and not just do it the way it was decided at the start.

When COVID-19 arrived in the U.S. in 2020 and papers began trying to decipher how to report vital

numbers on the pandemic, there were, and continue to be, multiple approaches.

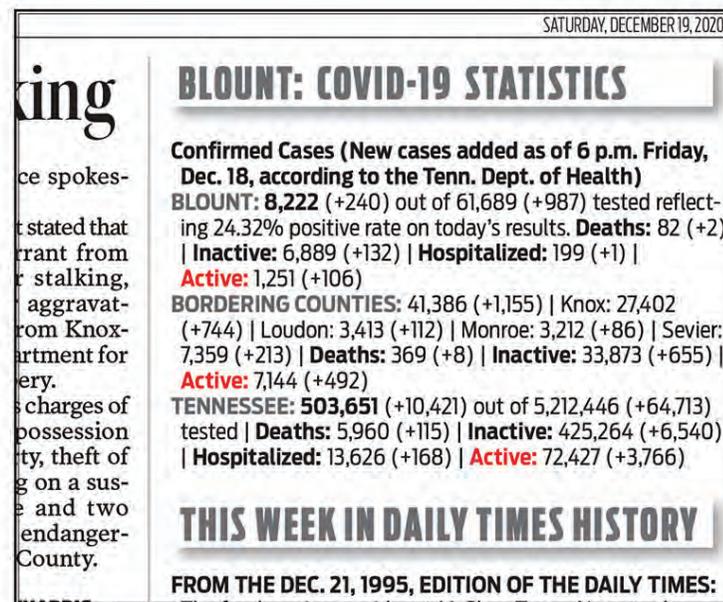
In Maryville's case, The Daily Times began with stories on the first case, then the first death and the second, third and fourth in rapid succession.

When the State of Tennessee began providing statistics on the county level, reporter Shelby Harris asked aloud in the newsroom, "Should we make something out of this?" which started a conversation that ended up concluding in City Editor Mike Sisco's office.

After some discussion on the merits, the planning went into place. Realizing from the outset data was likely to evolve, a universal spreadsheet was set up and shared via googlesheets to track the numbers and do basic math independent of the state's as a verification.

MDT took that data and began producing a two-column daily blurb listing the numbers on testing, positives and deaths within

See **READERS** Page 6



Submitted

The Daily Times in Maryville, Tenn., used a COVID blurb at top of page 2A each day from April 3 to Dec. 19, 2020. It introduced a 6 column graphic at the top of 2A on Dec. 20 and is on its fourth version of that chart as the statistics its readers wanted have changed from spread to vaccination rates. (See page 6 for their improved version of the graphic.)

## Bodycam footage from officer-involved shooting inside Knoxville school might be confidential for a long while

Police body camera footage from a shooting that left a 17-year-old dead inside a Knox County high school is likely to be kept confidential for a while, and it's possible some of it may be confidential forever based on state laws protecting juveniles and mandating confidentiality of some types of body camera footage.

Anthony J. Thompson Jr., 17, was killed in the shooting. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation has said that police were responding to reports of a student in the school possibly armed with a gun.



**TN COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT**

DEBORAH FISHER

A school resource officer was shot and injured, but it was from a bullet from a police weapon, the TBI has said.

Knoxville District Attorney Charme Allen said she will not release the body camera footage

that presumably captures what happened in the confrontation until her investigation is concluded. When a police officer shoots someone, an investigation takes place to see if the shooting was justified. Very rarely are criminal charges filed. Allen said she would release all the evidence if a decision is made to not file charges. If charges are filed, the evidence won't be revealed until the criminal trial, she said.

Here are the laws that govern the confidentiality of public records in this type of situation.

1. Investigative exemption. The

Tennessee Supreme Court has said that law enforcement records that are relevant to an ongoing investigation may be kept confidential and not released to the public while an investigation is ongoing. The exemption to public records law can last until a case is resolved, if criminal charges are filed, and after all appeals are exhausted. This is a discretionary exemption. Police may release all or parts of information they've gathered during an investigation.

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# The Tennessee Press

Official Publication of the Tennessee Press Association

(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.

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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; or email editor@tnpress.com. The deadline for the July 2021 issue is June 8, 2021.

# Good people, coming and going

Meeting and building relationships with like-minded people is one of the biggest benefits of being involved in newspapers and the Tennessee Press Association.

Recently we heard the unfortunate (for us) news that Brian Blackley of Lakeway Publishers of Middle Tennessee was leaving the newspaper industry to pursue other endeavors. Brian had worked as publisher of The Leader in Covington before joining Lakeway in a newspaper career that spans back to high school. He took the media relations/director position with the Tennessee Department of Education.

On a positive note, former TPA director Keith Ponder has jumped back into the industry, signing on as publisher of the Tullahoma News and Vice President of Lakeway Publishers, Middle Tennessee. Ponder was instrumental to the TPA before and I'm sure will continue to be. He served on the board of directors as



**YOUR  
PRESIDING  
REPORTER**

DANIEL RICHARDSON

chair of the Membership Committee during a time when we brought on several new members.

Waverly News-Democrat Publisher Ward Phillips will be retiring from a long newspaper career in May. Ward originally worked for the Shopper's Guide in Waverly as a competitor to the News-Democrat before the publications came under the same roof. Ward will be missed by the Magic Valley Publishing family, and we wish him well in his next chapter of life.

For those nearby, a reception will be held 2-4 p.m., May 11 at the Apex Bank Community Build-

ing in Waverly.

Matthew Wolfe is the new general manager of The Rogersville Review and regional audience development marketing director for Adams Publishing Group's Tennessee/Western North Carolina Region.

Richard Clark is the new advertising director for The Greeneville Sun. Artie Wehenkel, longtime Sun advertising director, recently retired. Wehenkel served TPA as chairman of the Advertising committee. Clark is also regional advertising director for Adams Publishing Group's Tennessee/Western North Carolina Region.

I hope that all involved with TPA have a wonderful summer and travel safely while you find some time to step away from the ink.

*Daniel Richardson, publisher of the Carroll County News Leader, Huntingdon, and group publisher of the eastern division of Music Valley Publishing, is TPA president.*

## FISHER from Page 1

And records entered as evidence into court are public.

2. Body camera footage. Body camera video of a minor, when taken within a school that serves any grades from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12), is confidential under a state law passed in 2017. The statute, § 10-7-504 (u), says that nothing would prohibit the body camera footage from being redacted and released, as long as the video of the minor remained confidential.

3. All investigative records of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation are confidential forever, but in the case of a TBI investigation into an officer-involved death, the district attorney may release all or part of the record after the "completion of the prosecutorial function of the district attorney." T.C.A. 38-3-311.

4. A photographic or video depiction of a minor victim of a criminal offense is confidential. So if charges are filed against the officer, and the teen is considered a victim, this exemption would make the video confidential. T.C.A. 10-7-504(t). The only way it would become public is if it was entered as evidence in court and was not sealed by a judge. It's not clear whether the video could be redacted, but presumably, it could be.

In addition, legislation has been



Submitted

## File art of a policeman's mounted bodycam.

passed by the House and by the Senate this year that would make

Note: The Knox County District Attorney's office released the body camera footage on April 21.

confidential "(a) record of a minor student attending an institution of secondary or elementary education that is created by a school resource or other law enforcement officer, or that is maintained by a law enforcement agency as the result of an incident involving the minor that occurred on school property and did not result in a charge of delinquency."

The legislation says that the record could be released if the

"request is made subject to a court order" but it is not exactly clear what that process would be. At any rate, that legislation may not apply because even if it goes into law in the coming weeks, the Knoxville shooting happened before.

That bill was being carried by state Rep. Ryan Williams and state Sen. Paul Bailey. The House refused to conform to an amendment by the Senate that would have put a sunset date on the amendment.

*This column was originally published by the Tennessee Coalition for Open Government on April 15, 2021. Deborah Fisher has been executive director of Tennessee Coalition for Open Government since 2013.*

## Legislative session showed importance of in-person contact

I hope by the time you read this, the 112th General Assembly will have been completed (my fingers are crossed!)

According to those who've been doing this for much longer than me, this was by far and away one of the most difficult years to work with the General Assembly and lobby on behalf and in opposition to proposed legislation. At the beginning of the session very few people were allowed in the building and meetings were difficult to get. We did do quite a few ZOOM meetings and obviously a lot of phone calls, but it is not the same as talking face-to-face. Perhaps it was the lack of interaction, but it seemed that most of the lawmakers had already determined the bills they were going to pass and the ones they weren't. Lobbying seemed to have little effect on the outcome of several bills.

This year we opposed two bills that eroded public notice and several other bills that impacted open meeting requirements.

The public notice bills included one brought by a single school board (SB1200/HB1261) that



### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CAROL DANIELS

would have raised the requirement for notifying the public on contract opportunities from \$10,000 to \$25,000. We were able to negotiate with the bill sponsors to limit the increase to just one-third of Tennessee counties; bidding minimums for the rest of Tennessee counties will remain at \$10,000. The Tennessee Comptroller was successful (no legislator appeared willing to go against the comptroller) in eliminating the newspaper notice requirement for Tennessee Governmental Entity Review Law, allowing the meeting to be noticed on the General Assembly's website, which is consistent with how other legislative committees operate (SB1294/HB573).

Bills impacting open meetings included SB301/HB327, which would allow meetings to be

attended by council members via video or phone. This bill just failed in the House Finance, Ways and Means committee, but according to rules that if a bill has passed through three committees, it needs to be put back on the calendar to be voted on again the following week. So, we are in a wait and see phase with that bill. We are not sure what the Senate will do at this point, but if it voted down again in the House, it will be off the books for this year. Hopefully this will be on the win side. All three leaders - Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, Speaker Cameron Sexton and Gov. Bill Lee - have all told us during calls that they are not interested in passing legislation that deals with the pandemic and have them in effect in our post-pandemic world.

We can hope that a legislative session like this one will not be repeated, but the silver lining of this experience is how it has crystalized how important deep relationships are with legislators. I think that one of the best and easiest things we can do to be a bigger voice for next session is start creating and

nourishing the relationships with your local representatives as soon as this session ends.

It is also abundantly apparent to me just how important the Tennessee Press Association Winter Convention is to our efforts with the General Assembly. Just having that small amount of face-time with our lawmakers in that setting is very impactful.

I would like to challenge each of you between now and the winter convention 2022 to set up a luncheon with your local representatives and invite me along for the conversation, and if their calendars allows I would like to have lobbyists Megan Lane and Matt King along for the luncheon. I would like to dedicate one day each week to meet with you and your legislator. I know it will benefit your newspapers and our association.

Thank you.

Carol

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

## NEWS & MOVES

### Ponder named News publisher, Lakeway VP

Keith Ponder has been named Publisher of The Tullahoma News and Vice President Lakeway Publishers, Inc., of Middle Tennessee.

The 29-year publishing veteran takes the helm of the division after leading the Daily Herald in Columbia for five years. Prior to that time, he worked in Iowa, Texas, Arkansas and Kentucky, where he spent 20 years as a publisher at CNHI (Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc.) and Stephens Media.

"I'm thrilled to be given the opportunity to work for Lakeway," Ponder said during his introduction as vice president. "I've known the Fishman family through the Tennessee Press Association and have always admired them."

After CNHI and Stephens Media, Ponder worked with GateHouse Media in Columbia in 2015 and was there until the merger of Gatehouse and Gannett. He said what drew him to Tullahoma was



Ponder

it reminded him of the small town where he raised his family in Kentucky.

"I'm most proud of the people who have advanced within the organization and the work

we did that was recognized as the best in the state," Ponder said. "That's pretty cool to hang that on your wall, but it's a sign you're serving your community."

He stated he's a firm believer of former Tennessee Lady Vols Basketball Coach Pat Summitt's quote that you "win with people."

"I've been fortunate to work with some great people and to help them grow," Ponder said. "I think that's my role as a leader in the organization, to be a teacher and a coach."

While he had the opportunity to work in metro journalism, Ponder said he loves community journalism, as it lets him be avail-

able to readers.

"I think we have a tremendous opportunity to serve the Tullahoma community," Ponder said. "I'm here to help the team get better and do better."

Ponder is replacing Brian Blackley, who left Lakeway to pursue an opportunity with the Tennessee Department of Education.

*Tullahoma News  
April 6, 2021*

### Walters named Times-News editor

Rob Walters, an award-winning journalist with decades of experience, has been named editor of the Kingsport Times-News. Walters joined the Six Rivers Media family on Monday. He came from the Bristol Herald Courier, where he had served as managing editor since 2016.

Immediately prior to his start in Bristol, Walters was assistant managing editor at the Frederick News-Post. His career began in 1982 at the Bakersfield Californian.

Walters, 59, has lived in Kingsport for nearly five years with his wife, Anna, and their two dogs.

"Rob brings four decades of experience in a diverse variety of markets," said Times News Publisher Rick Thomason. "Each of those stops in his career has given him challenges he has met and expectations he has exceeded. With almost five years under his belt in the Tri-Cities, he has a broad knowledge of the region and understands the myriad opportunities."



Walters

Walters fills a position left open in January when Stephanie McClellan, who served as Times News editor for more than five years — and was city editor for nearly 20 years prior to that, transferred to the Johnson City Press.

"Stephanie agreed to take the

See **NEWS & MOVES** Page 5

## FOR YOUR CALENDAR

### May 2021

- 6: Webinar on InDesign Data Merge. [www.onlinemedia-campus.com](http://www.onlinemedia-campus.com). Contact TPA for the free access code.
- 20: Photoshop Webinar. Using Good Old Photoshop in New Ways. [www.onlinemedia-campus.com](http://www.onlinemedia-campus.com). Contact TPA for the free access code.
- 11-27: 2021 International News Media Association (INMA) 91st Annual World Congress of News Media. Zoom meeting. [www.inma.org](http://www.inma.org)
- 17-21: 2021 Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Data Boot Camp for Educators Online. Includes hands-on training on spreadsheets. [www.ire.org](http://www.ire.org)

### June 2021

- 14-18: Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Conference. [www.ire.org](http://www.ire.org)
- 23-25: The American Jewish Press Association annual conference, virtual. [www.ajpa.org](http://www.ajpa.org)

### September 2021

- Sept. 30-Oct. 2: National Newspaper Association's 135th Annual Convention and Trade Show, Hyatt Regency, Jacksonville, Fla.

### October 2021

- 14-17: Fall National College Media Association Convention 2021, offered in conjunction with Associated Collegiate Press, New Orleans, Sheraton New Orleans

### June 2022

- 23-25: Tri-State Press Convention June 23-25, 2022 Arkansas • Mississippi • Tennessee, to be held in Memphis

# Advertisers have their blind spots: tread carefully

When we learned how to drive, we heard about blind spots. Those are the areas which are not visible in our rear- and side-view mirrors. As a result, we have to be extra careful when we change lanes.

The term “blind spots” has become popular in today’s business environment. It refers to significant things that are not acknowledged or given fair consideration by management. Outside observers are often perplexed by the fact that certain obvious factors are always ignored.

Blind spots are common in the advertising business. Let’s take a look at a few examples:

**1. Family.** This can be a big blind spot in family-owned businesses. It’s a clear sign if you hear something like, “My grandfather



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wrote our ad slogan, and if it was good enough for him, it’s good enough for me.” Or, “My son just finished a marketing class, and he’s got some good ad ideas.” Or, “My niece says we need to have a bigger presence on social media.”

**2. Do-it-yourself mentality.** A lot of entrepreneurs and Mom-and-Pop businesses are used to doing just about everything themselves. They don’t like to delegate tasks and they resist outside help. They

hire and fire, they set office policies, they select inventories, and they keep their own books.

They also maintain tight control of their marketing. In their minds, no one could know more about promoting their businesses than they do.

**3. Competitor distractions.** Someone told me about his experience in working for a furniture manufacturer. His company suddenly started losing orders, because a competing company was dramatically cutting prices. His CEO called an all-staff meeting and announced that their new focus was to beat the competitor at their own game. “From that point on,” he said, “it was like Captain Ahab going after Moby Dick. But along the way, we lost our focus on qual-

ity, which had been our big selling point. It was like the CEO became blind to what we had going for us all along. It took a while to regain our balance in the market.”

Some advertisers make the same mistake. They spend so much time thinking about their competitors that they lose sight of what differentiates them in the marketplace.

**4. History.** We’re all products of our past experiences. It should be no surprise when we encounter otherwise savvy business people who are wedded to old media choices – or old ad campaigns – even if those choices are no longer producing results. There may be long-standing relationships with those media outlets. Or there may be a bias against a particular newspaper or newspapers in

general.

Blind spots are real, but not necessarily fatal for an ad campaign. After all, we have blind spots, too – and some of them involve our perspectives on advertising.

How should you handle an advertiser with a blind spot that is blocking the way? A good place to start is to look for common ground and bite your tongue if you are tempted to criticize.

*(c) Copyright 2021 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*

## Bold, persistent experimentation needed

*Editor’s note: This column was written and originally published in June 2020, but almost a year later it still discusses some important points relative to the COVID-19 pandemic every bit as relevant today.*

Our country may not be in a depression, but the newspaper business is, and its fatality rate may be as great as that of the coronavirus. The pandemic and its economic restrictions have accelerated closures and mergers, which have increasingly affected county-seat weeklies, long the most stable type of American newspaper.

The economy is gradually reopening, but with no vaccine or proven treatment, the virus remains a threat, and that threatens a resurgence of covid-19 cases and more economic reversals. To get through this, newspapers need to prove their value, and they need to try new things.

The pandemic is spawning rivers of misinformation, and if there was ever a time for newspapers to reassert their franchise as the main finders of fact for democracy, this is it. But they must remember to assert that on social media, too, and to remind social-media consumers how those media and newspapers differ.

We must repeatedly explain that news media offer journalism, which has a discipline of verification: we emphasize facts, attribute



**THE RURAL BLOG**

AL CROSS

opinion, and clearly separate the two. (That separation has eroded lately, and needs shoring up.) Social media have almost no discipline and no verification, so the facts get lost in a sea of opinion and invective, driven by algorithms giving people what they want, not what they need. They need to know that.

Don’t like online arguments? This is a fight for your life, so you should wage it on all fronts. Ask your critics to cite specifics, and when they do, remind them that it’s easy to pick examples of bad journalism from thousands of reports. As someone who got into journalism as a youth baseball scorekeeper and correspondent, I like to say journalism has a fielding percentage about as good as Major League players, around .984. By my reckoning, we’re fair and accurate 49 times out of 50. We do make two-base errors sometimes, but unlike social media and ballplayers, we correct them.

Newspapers’ survival depends on more than trust. They must

provide value, which means good public-service journalism. How do you pay for that when advertising has dried up? Community newspapers need to be more aggressive in following their metro counterparts in asking their audiences to provide a greater share of revenue, and they need to be frank with their readers about their paper’s finances.

They also need explore a source of revenue that’s becoming more common: philanthropy. It’s unlikely that many community papers will have reporters paid by nonprofits, or get grants from foundations, but in every county in this country, there are people with money who would like to put it to good use. Many of them would define becoming a sponsor of a newspaper, to help it offer good journalism and stay alive, as a good use of their money.

Perhaps the best example of that is the Foothills Forum, a nonprofit in Rappahanock County, Virginia, that finances high-quality, in-depth journalism for the weekly Rappahanock News. The county has more money and more journalists than average, because it’s a little over an hour from Washington, D.C., but its paper has more than four years of experience that could provide guidance for others. We’ve written about it several times on The Rural Blog.

See **CROSS** Page 8

## Become a ‘harmless linker’ in 3 steps

**SUBMITTED**  
**Reynolds Journalism Institute**  
**March 1, 2021**

Mis- and dis-information are spread a number of ways and the thought of trying to free the news ecosystem of misleading, disingenuous and fraudulent news items can be overwhelming and disillusioning. But former RJF Fellow Barrett Golding is advocating one small step for mankind with some new research on his Iffy.news site.

Golding has taken a look at the unintended consequences of newsrooms linking to the same sites they are citing for bad behavior. “The lax linking habits of many fact-based news sites inadvertently help fake news profit and propagate,” Golding writes in his recent post about the problem.

And while there has been a fair amount of advocacy on Twitter encouraging journalists to post screenshots of awful posts rather than sending running up numbers for the original tweet, there hasn’t been as much attention directed to the URL dilemma.

The problem, in a nutshell, is that linking to an actual page of an offending site helps that site gain revenue, boosts its search-engine results and burnishes its brand. All with just a simple “insert hyperlink” click.

Some newsrooms have opted to leave out offending URLs all to-

gether but that’s not ideal because transparency and showing the evidence has become increasingly critical for suspicious and skeptical readers.

Another option, Golding notes, is using a screenshot, similar to the Twitter effort. The problem with that approach, he points out, is that a screenshot is out of context, easy to forge and hard to verify.

A screenshot “doesn’t provide the same depth of information or make the source as easy to share and monitor over time,” says Ed McCain, RJF’s digital curator and digital archiving expert.

So, what’s the answer? Take advantage of the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. Golding outlines the three-step process to make a URL link informative but harmless. Here are the steps he outlines in his article:

1. Find a copy of the untrustworthy source in (or save the page into) a web archive.
2. Copy the web-archive’s URL that you found or saved.
3. Paste that URL into your article.

Also, you might want to consider adding a quick explainer sentence after the link that let’s your audience know what you did. Something like: “To avoid spreading the information on this site, we are linking to an inactive archived version of the website.”

# A salute of appreciation to those who wave the editorial banner

Last summer's Grassroots Editor still sits in my stack of journalism publications. The edition announced the Golden Quill winners in annual competition sponsored by the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors.

I have a passion for vibrant, local editorials. I believe energized, local editorials are at the foundation of energized communities. The Golden Quill recognizes the top 12 editorials written among nondailies.

The competition is a reminder that many newspapers – even the smallest – still wave the banner of local editorials. They are a bright note amid a disappointing landscape of more and more newspapers giving less attention to their editorial consciences.

Among last year's honorees:

Overall winner Brian Wilson at the Star News in Medford, Wis., addressed the death of a mentally ill man who was killed after shooting at and injuring a police officer during a standoff. "Legislative leadership cares more about playing political games than in having a grown-up discussion about firearms and lack of mental health care," he wrote. "... No action will be perfect, but action needs to take place in order to prevent the next tragedy."

Marcia Martinek at the Herald Democrat in Leadville, Colo., gave



## COMMUNITY NEWSROOM SUCCESS

JIM PUMARLO

accolades to a deputy who brought to light official misconduct in the sheriff's department that was reinforced by a grand jury investigation. "For several years, we've been writing stories about how various law enforcement officers in Leadville and Lake County have run amok," she wrote. "... So what a relief it is to be able to talk about a law enforcement officer who did the right thing."

Dan Wehmer at the Webster County Citizen in Seymour, Mo., articulated in detail why residents should support a levy increase for the school district. "Over the past two decades, this newspaper has never endorsed a tax increase of any type," he wrote. "Our tax-bump tally is zero. Until today."

The editorials represent the best in community journalism. Many newsrooms devote immense resources to coverage of local public affairs. Yet they often fall short in the final step: advancing the exchange of opinions through local editorials.

It's pretty easy to weigh in on national issues. Yes, you'll have your detractors. But the response from readers – even those strongly opposed – will likely be less animated than if you take issue with the local human rights or economic development commission or criticize a decision by the school board.

Courageous publishers and editors take those stances, regardless of potential repercussions. That does not mean advancing positions with reckless abandon. Editorials, especially those certain to generate strong reaction, should be thoroughly researched and carefully crafted.

Here is one set of principles to guide editorial writing:

- Don't portray yourself as an ivory tower: Editorials should not be positioned as the "correct" opinion or the final word on a subject. Editorials should present a well-reasoned argument and conclusion.

- Welcome rebuttals: Newspapers should readily publish contrary opinions.

- Be consistent in stances: Editorials should be unwavering in promoting common themes. Newspapers often are labeled – and criticized – for promoting a conservative or liberal agenda. But newspapers that regularly flip-flop on issues will lose their credibility. At the same time, be open to

revisiting an issue and changing an editorial perspective if circumstances change.

- Offer kudos, too: Don't hesitate to write complimentary editorials. Your credibility will take a hit – and communication with key individuals will be hindered – if certain bodies are always on the receiving end of an editorial rant.

- Think local: Editorials should be localized in the same manner as news stories are.

- Write with substance: Effective editorials, by definition, should leave an impression. In contrast, nondescript editorials are easily forgotten.

I fondly remember my late wife, who I often used as a sounding board. She'd admit, on occasion, that the aggressive local editorials could be uncomfortable among our circle of friends. We once were walking downtown about to cross paths with a local official who we had taken to task in our coverage. I could almost hear her saying, "Can we turn around?"

But, as I would remind her, many subjects received their editorial due at one time or another: Democrats and Republicans, downtown and strip mall merchants, business and labor leaders, school administrators and coaches. We'd never leave the house if we wanted to shy away from potential confrontations.

She knew that, too, and was my biggest booster. She admired and respected the fact that we took strong stances on local issues as an institution in the community. She'd suggest ideas, too. As you sit down to write an editorial, keep that at the forefront: Strive for the same admiration and respect from your community, and you'll have the foundation for a strong editorial.

In truth, writing the editorial is almost the easiest part. You should introduce the subject, present the pros and cons, and reach a conclusion. The challenge is getting the ideas, then approaching a topic with facts and self-confidence. It's not as foreboding as you might think if you devote attention to your editorial page on a regular basis and create an editorial mind-set.

The Golden Quill winners should inspire us all to strive for that editorial excellence.

*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 & MOVES from Page 3

helm at the Johnson City Press when we were looking for an editor there," Thomason said. "She's a lifelong Johnson City resident, so it just made sense to bring that sense of community to the Press."

Thomason said under Walters' leadership of the newsroom, Times News readers should expect to see more depth of reporting when topics call for some deeper digging.

"They will see reader-centric reporting that focuses on why a topic matters to both the reader and the area," Thomason said. "And they will see more analytical stories that give meaning to statistics and numbers."

Of his time at the Bristol newspaper, Walters said the focus was on community journalism, stories that hit readers where they live, trying to go a little deeper, and looking at the big picture. He said he is most

proud of a project that won national recognition.

"I'm particularly proud of our staff project 'Addicted at Birth,' that focused on the problem of infants being born addicted to opioids," Walters said. "That series took seven months to report, involved every member of the staff and won a couple of national awards — including the Scripps Howard Award for Community Journalism."

*Kingsport Times News  
March 30, 2021*

## Main Street Nashville debuts as news source

*From Dave Gould, owner of Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin:* On behalf of my wife, Ellen, and our company, Main Street Media of Tennessee, please allow me to share with you how excited we are to launch a new suite of digital

products, including Main Street Nashville, a daily e-newsletter.

Our 8-year-old company owns and operates 12 local weekly newspapers along with websites, social media pages and magazines in eight Middle Tennessee counties — Davidson, Montgomery, Cheatham, Robertson, Dickson, Sumner, Wilson and Rutherford — as well as the Fort Campbell Courier, the official weekly newspaper of Fort Campbell.

We also produce podcasts, videos, virtual events, radio shows, e-newsletters and much more.

Ours is a family business. Ellen and I work in it full time, and some of our eight kids, who range in age from 13 to 28, help as needed when they have time.

Main Street Nashville includes a suite of digital products headlined by a five-day-a-week e-newsletter delivered to mobile devices and computers at 5 a.m. Monday-Friday. Main Street Nashville also will



Gould

include a website and e-newsletters.

Formatted and designed like a traditional newspaper, the e-newsletter can be accessed at [mainstreet-nashville.com](http://mainstreet-nashville.com) and will soon be distributed

through an app. It is optimized to provide an outstanding reader experience, and the addition of rich media will bring the e-newsletter to life. Interactive features will allow readers to adjust a story's text size, tap to watch videos, flip through photo galleries and more.

We have engaged with some of the best-in-class technology companies in our industry to make sure our suite of digital products (website, e-newsletter, email newsletters) provide an outstanding experience for our readers.

We strongly believe cutting-edge products like these are the future of media, and we are very proud to share them with you.

The focus of our content will be local. Coverage topics will include local government, crime and courts, schools, growth and development, transportation, business, the state legislature, health, events, arts and culture, music, comics and interactive puzzles.

We will have a separate sports section every day with a strong focus on high school sports.

We have hired a 12-person newsroom to produce our content. We will also include the best work from our 30-person suburban newsroom so readers have a good sense of what is happening across the region.

*Main Street Media of Tennessee,  
Gallatin  
March 2, 2021*

COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS																						
AREA		CASES				ACTIVE CASES			HOSPITALIZED				DEATHS				VACCINATIONS		Fully Vaccinated			
COUNTY	EST. POP	New Today	New last seven days	New last 30 days	TOTAL	Today	Week Ago	Month ago	New Today	New last seven days	New last 30 days	TOTAL	New Today	New last seven days	New last 30 days	TOTAL	Received 1st Dose	Total Fully Vaccinated	New Today	New last seven days	New last 30 days	Perc. Pop. Vaccinated
Blount	133,088	24	105	575	14,822	159	163	250	5	7	39	333	0	1	10	195	39,821	23,838	553	2,474	12,201	17.91%
Knox	470,313	79	473	2,239	48,915	738	819	941	4	15	71	1,333	2	8	35	625	158,830	90,962	2,929	14,872	48,090	19.34%
Loudon	54,068	9	46	183	5,950	60	62	105	1	3	14	133	0	1	3	69	21,108	14,118	434	2,153	8,244	26.11%
Monroe	46,064	18	54	218	5,633	81	68	122	0	4	14	152	0	0	3	95	11,263	7,474	141	980	4,509	16.23%
Sevier	98,250	24	114	755	12,973	193	230	229	1	3	19	273	1	2	9	174	24,599	13,257	88	1,746	6,322	13.49%
<b>Region</b>	<b>801,783</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>3,970</b>	<b>88,293</b>	<b>1,231</b>	<b>1,342</b>	<b>1,647</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>2,224</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1,158</b>	<b>255,621</b>	<b>149,649</b>	<b>4,145</b>	<b>22,225</b>	<b>79,366</b>	<b>18.66%</b>
Tenn.	6,829,000	1,460	7,351	35,723	820,965	13,083	13,487	12,744	79	318	1,338	20,293	21	85	409	11,997	1,994,508	1,187,784	33,047	163,211	586,185	17.39%

NOTES: Hospital is total hospitalizations, not current hospitalized cases. | Population based on 2019 estimate used by state. | The one-shot Johnson&Johnson vaccine appears as Fully Vaccinated and is not reflected in 1st dose only.

SOURCE: Tenn. Dept. of Health

The Daily Times in Maryville, Tenn., currently publishes this version of a 6-column graphic each day for the top of 2A and publishes the .jpg via Blox to the COVID-19 section on its website. This is the fourth version of the graphic that has evolved largely by reader request and feedback. . . . The line in tiny type directly beneath the "COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS" chart reads as follows: NOTES: Hospital is total hospitalizations, not current hospitalized cases. | Population based on 2019 estimate used by state. | The one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine appears as Fully Vaccinated and is not reflected in 1st dose only.

## READERS from Page 1

the paper's home county, its border counties and the state as a whole. It went in the same location every day starting with the April 3, 2020, edition. The blurb was intended to let readers compare home county versus neighbors and versus the state to let them make their own judgments regarding their routines of daily pandemic life.

There were several points where conceptions about wearing masks, students in the schools versus remote, safer-at-home and other items of contention could be compared county A versus county B a few weeks after one change or the other was made one place but not another.

The staff was able to take the googlesheet and with some creativity on using "=CONCATENATE" let the spreadsheet produce all the blurb based on the numbers added from that day's state reports.

The Daily Times is a seven-day a.m. paper. Putting in the numbers each day was shared out among a group of three reporters with other staff able to use a help page that provided the links to the state's COVID-19 portal and other stat resources along with instructions on downloading and explanations of some of the quirks that began to appear in the data due to revisions by the state. In a rough count, half the design desk, the three-man sports department and every reporter ended up doing the numbers at least once over the last year.

As new data points became available over summer and fall, terms like Active Case County and Transmission Rate and Hospitalization Rate were added to the blurb. And

that once compact two-column blurb had evolved into something too long and too cumbersome for the readers.

It took a reader's letter for the staff to reexamine that now standing item of the paper.

The letter from a reader arrived at The Daily Times in early December. It didn't take long for that letter and the enclosed clipping of a chart being used by a weekly paper in Virginia to land on my desk with a note from Publisher Bryan Sandmeier and Editor Todd Foster asking, "Can you do something like this?"

To the copy desk chief, when one of your pubs seeks input upfront on a graphic element rather than NIRTsing you, you relish the chance to define the intent and ask why before how.

Turning the why loose in the newsroom, prompted conversations that began asking "What numbers need to be included?" and "What numbers are readers actually looking for?" The reader's letter provided a starting point, but it took a little bit of indirect asking and listening to sort out what was possible from the data available and what readers were actually looking for when they looked at the numbers.

There was a realization that while in some ways readers had become numb to the numbers, they had also become extremely well-versed in pandemic terms. No matter their belief on validity and source, eight months of COVID-19 coverage had educated the readers and that level of understanding had eliminated some of the need to provide continual context in text form.

They just wanted the numbers. They just wanted the ones that

mattered to them.

They didn't want to scan a quarter page of data to find the few numbers they wanted.

When getting a test was a struggle, there was much more interest in how many tests were being done and it had been included for months, long after the staff had valid firsthand experience that when you needed a test, you could get one. By the time the first six-column graphic appeared in the Dec. 20 edition, testing wasn't included in the categories, it was no longer a concern to the reader.

## See Sidebar on top of Page 7

What readers said they wanted was a chart showing what had happened that day, over the last week, last month and a total and they wanted it in categories that mattered to them — how many positives, how many active cases, how many hospitalized and how many had died.

Fortunately, the staff had all that data already available in that googlesheet. Using some query functions, a table was created that provided the numbers in a format reflecting the daily value, the last seven days, the last 30 days and a total. It then became a matter of finding the simplest way to get that table into a format that worked best for print and web uses.

Another reader request in January led to the inclusion of the transmission rate in each county that was being calculated by the University of Tennessee Center for

Business and Economic Research.

When the winter surge began to lift and vaccine distribution went beyond frontline workers to the public, the chart evolved again as readers became more interested in how many had been vaccinated as they counted down to their turn.

After being prompted by that first letter and the conversations that resulted, asking readers what they thought or wanted to know helped guide and continues to guide what is important to be included right now.

In response, transmission rate was dropped and a section reflecting how many had received first dose and second dose was added in February. That was later refined in March to the current version which also uses the state's population estimates to provide a percentage of the fully vaccinated.

There were two lessons from Maryville's experience:

### 1) Asking ourselves "why" is just as important as it is to ask the subject of an interview.

A reporter asked why and the blurb was born. A reader asked why and in turn the paper's leadership asked why, and the graphic was born to replace the blurb.

Asking ourselves why we do things a certain way is always an opportunity. There's either a defined answer, such as "because that's AP Style" or "because our rulesets in Blox look for that in the slug," which is expanding your career knowledge base (or to paraphrase Star Trek II, understanding why things work the

way they do in a newsroom).

But when there's no defined answer, as in "that's the way we've always done it" and nobody knows a reason for it being done that way, there's the opportunity to find the real answer or an opportunity to make an improvement to something better.

### 2) Readers do have good ideas.

One of the casualties in a lot of newsrooms in recent years has been reader trust. We talk a lot about how the public view of newspapers and media has suffered.

What we don't always realize is that our trust of readers has also taken a hit. As the fake news complaints and accusations of bias have intensified our frustration on the receiving end has grown as well. When a simple typo of an athlete's name is no longer an angry mom's phone call but instead splashed on social media as proof of fake news and our bias against, well, something, (it's often difficult to follow the rambling wreck of explanation past the fact they believe the paper intentionally misspelled the child's name) we tend to start tuning out all the readers as noise.

Our readers are our customers, and the reason we write, design, sell ads, etc. We can't let a loud minority, that often aren't even our readers, deafen us to what the average reader actually desires.

*Marcus Fitzsimmons is the copy desk chief at Adams Publishing's design center for southeastern Tennessee.*

## BUT WHAT ABOUT?

(Sidebar continuation from Page 6)

### How did it work out in BLOX?

The blurb was simply a story asset and it was directed by slug to a ruleset that formatted it like a Maryville breakout box. (The same basic style your seeing in this breakout.) At first it was simple but by the end, the print version was using color to signal areas and it didn't display nearly as clean on-line as it did in print. The current graphic is a photo asset by the time it goes into BLOX. It's much easier for users to find and share since as a photo it has a preview. On the print page it's much easier to manage in most regards. The downside is any errors that get through to the

late proofing are more time-consuming to fix. This hasn't been an issue often but has once or twice created some hurried fixes and re-export of a new .jpg file to replace the old photo in Blox.

### Is it hard to replicate?

The main place that costs time is in building the spreadsheet and getting all the data added. Some states have very different reports than are provided by Tennessee. If your state provides county level data as either a spreadsheet or where there's an archive to get past reports, the process of organizing the data is straight forward. Customizing it to what your paper's readers want, that's the trick. A copy of Maryville's sheet can provide a template. Staffing wise it's less time than a status update

story in each edition. You'll also need your hub on board, as they will have a perspective for what works best in BLOX.

### The Set Up

The table text was based on the paper's existing paragraph styles for breakout box text, cutlines and breakout head so it would appear as a native element and not coming from an outside source. The color was based on the press. The press printing for MDT tends to get the C and M plates synced up before the Y. So there was no Y used in the table.

### What about this letter?

The reader sent the paper a clipped out graphic from a weekly paper with a note asking if Maryville could do a chart each

week just like it. The end result was so much cleaner, that rather than making the chart a once-a-week addition, it just replaced the daily blurb.

### How do you know when to change?

In many cases the readers let the paper know. When the current version went into print, it took about a week before a reader called with a question about if the vaccination totals meant 1st dose or 2nd and what about the one-dose J&J? That resulted in the current formatting to clarify. Asking staff what they hear, asking circulation what they get on the phone and just listening to what readers are talking about help. (Eavesdropping isn't polite, but just listening in public can be extremely informative.) As a per-

sonal barometer, I fall back on the adage "write like your mother will read it." Mom's 70-something with subscriptions to four papers. If she says text is too small, it's too small.

### What is NIRTS?

Need the impossible right this second. Refers to requests for a graphic element when that edition is hours from being off the floor.

### Tech note

The chart data is copied out of googlesheets and put in Apple Numbers using match style and then exported as a file for Blox. Numbers has CMYK controls so the black value could be set to 0:0:0:100 to avoid full color black used by many spreadsheet programs.

- Fitzsimmons

## TPA MEMBER COVERAGE SHOWCASE: Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin

# 'God wasn't done with me': One man's brush with death

MONTE HALE, JR.  
Main Street Media, Gallatin  
November 26, 2020

Ben Dotson was headed to Cool Springs Mall with his birthday girl, C.J., on June 19, 2020.

After merging onto Interstate 65 off I-840, his life would change forever.

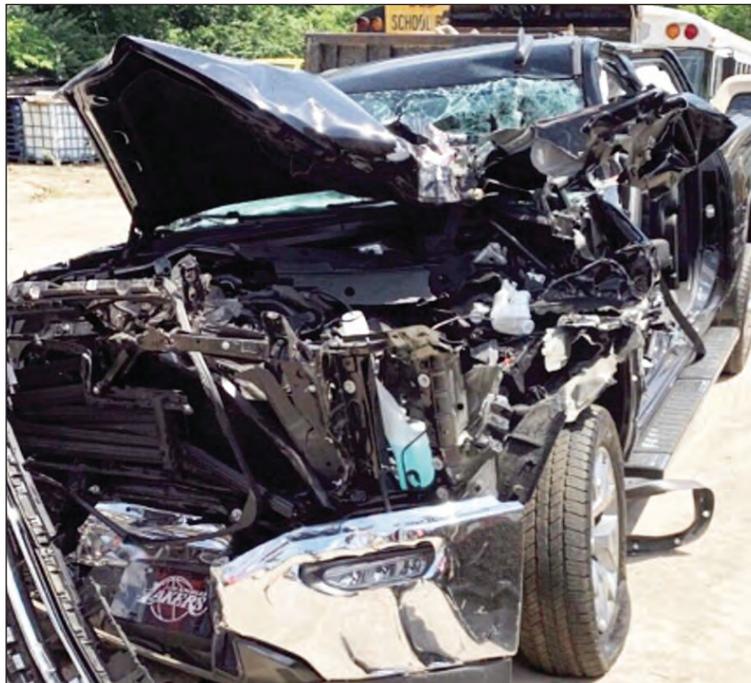
"She was in the backseat; it was my daughter's fifth birthday," Dotson said. "I was just getting onto I-65 and an 18-wheeler came over on me from what they tell me."

In a flash, Dotson's truck was mangled. It had to be cut open to safely get him out, and he was transported to Ascension Saint Thomas Rutherford Hospital in Murfreesboro.

Soon afterward, he was taken by LifeFlight to Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville.

"(My daughter) didn't have a scratch," Dotson said. "She was in the backseat in her car seat and everything happened on the driver's side. Just so blessed. I was basically in a coma five and a half weeks and on my back eight weeks total.

"The only thing broke was my head. They cut from ear to ear, pulled my face down and worked on me a little. They said a couple of millimeters left or right I'd been a vegetable, or a couple of millimeters either way I would have been dead."



Submitted

An 18-wheel truck rolled over onto Ben Dotson's truck on I-65 in June 2020. The former Siegel boys basketball coach as of November 2020 was still recovering from his injuries. His 5-year-old daughter who was sitting in the back seat was unharmed.

Dotson defied a lot of odds along the way and was later taken to TrustPoint Hospital to begin therapy.

### The road to recovery

The former Siegel boys' basketball coach, who took the Stars to four state tournaments in eight years and two Final Four appearances between 2008-2016, admits he wasn't the best of patients.

"I went to TrustPoint (Hospital) and those people are awesome," Dotson said. "They were great with the speech therapy, physical therapy and OT therapy. I had a tracheotomy down my throat to help me breathe.

"They busted my butt pretty good.

I would recommend them to anybody. Being a coach myself, I would have cut myself from my team, but they pushed me and pushed me like I did my kids. My family and my daughter were my motivation."

See **CRASH** Page 8



CELEBRATING 150 YEARS  
OF SERVING THE  
NEWSPAPERS OF TENNESSEE

**CRASH** from Page 7

Like a basketball season, it has been a grind for Dotson as he tries to return to normalcy.

“Physically, I’m doing much better. Mentally, all of the brain trauma still slows me down,” Dotson said. “I’m good for about 20 or 25 minutes before I just stop and rest. It’s just the pressure (on the brain). It doesn’t really hurt. I don’t need my walker as much. I call it an adult stroller. I’ve just been blessed.”

During Dotson’s recovery, he missed some emotional moments, including his daughter’s first day of school.

“She started kindergarten, and her first day of school I’m lying flat on my back and can’t move,” he recalled. “I’ve got pictures and videos, but still . . .

“Every time I talk to her I get teary-eyed. The very first time we talked, the first 10 minutes were me and her crying. When you have a 5-year-old telling you it’s going to be OK . . . I just don’t know what to say about that. I’m totally blessed and thank the Lord. I can get up now and use the restroom and get dressed on my own — just the little things you take for granted. I didn’t do anything on my own until the middle of September. We pray



Submitted

**Former Siegel boys basketball coach Ben Dotson took the Stars to four state tournaments and two Final Four appearances in eight years. He was involved in a near-fatal car accident in June 2020.**

together every day and every night. I thank Jesus every day. My voice is still raspy and I have a hole in neck that will eventually close up.

“I can’t scream anymore. I know

my players wished that would have been the case back in the day. The emails, the texts, I don’t know if I could have gotten through it without them. I got an email the other day from a player thanking me for teaching him how to become a man. Stuff like that is better than any championship. It just gives you a reason, you know?”

“My family has been there every day,” he continued. “I’m way ahead of where I should be and that’s because of my family, friends, email and texts. When I got to TrustPoint in July, I had over 200 texts. It took me a week to read them all. I still can’t say enough about TrustPoint. Those people really busted my tail.”

Dotson’s difficulties were compounded before he got to TrustPoint, even though he didn’t know it.

His older brother, Guy Jr., died of cancer July 3 while Ben was still in a coma.

“Guy got really sick at the first

part of June,” said Ben, whose father, Guy Sr., passed away in 2018. “When I had my wreck, he was in and out of the hospital. They buried him when I was in a coma. When I came out of the coma, I would ask every day how is Guy Jr. doing. (My family) would say that he didn’t have a good day today, or they would say he had a good day today.

“When I went to TrustPoint where he had been, my sister (Bethe) pulled me aside to tell me Guy Jr. had passed. He had been there and my family didn’t want anyone there to tell me. I learned about 30 seconds before I went there.

“They streamed his funeral because of the COVID stuff. I’m not going to watch it by myself. I don’t want to reopen wounds. I’ll eventually see it but I don’t want to ask Von (his brother) to watch it either. I’m so thankful that I survived.”

**The spiritual side**

This year has been a difficult year for many, but some like Dotson

have endured so much more.

“It hasn’t been good, but what Guy Jr. and his wife (Nicole) did do is reintroduce me to Jesus on his survival and recovery. “They introduced my daughter to Him and I’ve always got that.

“He took me Bible shopping and we got in the car after and prayed. I’m a better person because of big Guy and little Guy. Guy Jr. had a knack of knowing what was needed to help and fix people.

“I asked my minister and have talked at Bible study about things. I don’t know how my family would have done losing two. I didn’t know why I survived.”

Every day is still a challenge for Dotson, but every day presents another reason to be thankful.

At first, Dotson wondered at times why he survived the horrific accident back on June 19, but he eventually came up with the reason.

“God wasn’t done with me,” Dotson said. “I know he has a plan for me.”

**CROSS** from Page 4

Philanthropists often want to help students, and that includes student journalists. When many University of Missouri journalism students’ internships fell through, faculty members Kathy Kiely and Damon Kiesow created a pop-up newsroom to produce stories for news outlets across the state, with students paid with funds from the school, the Knight Foundation and alumnus Walt Potter. As paid internships have become less common, students are accepting unpaid internships at community papers, and the relationship is mutually beneficial.

Universities can help in other ways. There is scant published research about community newspapers, and state press associations or newspaper groups should get researchers to examine the relationships of community papers and their audiences – including why they are losing readers and how they might get them back.

Another potential source of help is government – not the direct subsidies that are anathema to most journalists, but public-service

advertising during the pandemic. In Kentucky, local governments have financed sample-copy editions of weeklies loaded with information about the coronavirus and preventing covid-19, and there is even more reason to do that now, as we need to take care to prevent a resurgence.

Now also might be a good time for a makeover, to spur single-copy sales. Think about a magazine format like The Canadian Record in Texas, which runs a compelling color photo on the front with blurbs about major features. It goes for \$1.50 a copy, and folks in Hemphill County snap it up, because they know it’s good journalism.

Many other ideas are out there, in Pub Aux, state press groups and the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors’ online discussion board and monthly newsletter. The May edition had ideas on advertising, covering covid-19, on-line journalism, dealing with social media and helping communities get through the crisis.

Ideas are what we need. Not all will work, but our industry is at a juncture much like the bottom of the Great Depression, when

presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt called for “bold, persistent experimentation.”

That’s not something for which newspapers are known, especially community papers, but they’d do well to follow it. After all, FDR’s line was written by a newspaper reporter, Ernest K. Lindley of the strongly Republican New York Herald Tribune. When Lindley and other reporters chided him about the lack of zing in his pre-convention remarks, FDR challenged them to draft a speech. “Lindley took the bait,” wrote presidential historian James MacGregor Burns, and bold, persistent experimentation helped save the country. It might save newspapers, too.

*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 the extension professor of journalism at the University of Kentucky and director of its Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, which publishes the Rural Blog at <http://irjci.blogspot.com>.*


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**THE PRESENTER...**

**Russell Viers**

Russell Viers is an Adobe Certified Instructor in InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator. He specializes in print production and started his career in 1981 as a reporter/photographer for a small daily newspaper. Through the years, he has been involved in most aspects of publishing. Since 1997, Viers has presented in 23 countries for publishing events including AdobeMAX, where he was honored as an AdobeMAX Master. In addition to speaking, he has helped many major publications and designers learn techniques to work faster and improve quality including Better Homes and Gardens, Ladies Home Journal, American Greetings and many others!

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## OBITUARIES

### Nash Armstrong

The WVLT newsroom is mourning the death of Nash Armstrong, the station's assistant news director, after a single-car crash Sunday morning, April 18, in West Knoxville.

Armstrong, 33, worked with the station since 2013 and reported for news outlets across East Tennessee his entire career. Jasmine Hardin, the station's general manager, told Knox News that Armstrong's love for East Tennessee and knack for making others feel at home here will be remembered by colleagues.

Hardin said Armstrong always volunteered to work holidays so employees could visit home, and if they couldn't travel home, Armstrong would insist on cooking them a meal and giving them good company. Despite being offered multiple promotions in other markets, Armstrong "made it clear this was his home and this is where he wanted to stay."

Armstrong's passion for journalism started while he attended Greeneville High School and wrote for the school newspaper. Arm-

strong also studied at Tusculum College and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, where he served as editor-in-chief of The Daily Beacon.

He continued reporting in his community after graduation. Known as "the Swiss Army knife of the newsroom," Armstrong settled at WVLT after stints at The Greeneville Sun, the Knoxville News Sentinel and WATE. Armstrong was revered by his coworkers, allowing him to rise through the ranks quickly. He was promoted from executive producer to managing editor before becoming the assistant news director in 2018.

In 2020, Armstrong was recognized again for his work and was named Employee of the Year.

"He could do everything," Hardin said. "It's going to take us weeks or months to figure out what he knew that no one else knew how to do because he was the guy who would



Armstrong

catch all the errors and do the work that no one else would raise their hand for." Create Account

Armstrong's colleagues at WVLT describe him as an avid golfer who "volunteered to work every holiday but always took vacation to watch the Masters Golf Tournament." He also enjoyed watching professional wrestling, working alongside his rescue dog Brady, grilling for the WVLT team at company cookouts and cheering on the Tennessee Volunteers.

Armstrong's family is making funeral arrangements, and WVLT employees will plan a memorial for Armstrong in the coming days.

"When you work in news, we have to run to the incident and report it with facts quickly and accurately. But then when it's one of your own, it's a very different process," Hardin said. "For some of our employees, this is the first time that they've been through that, but even for those of us who've been around a long time, it's definitely the most substantial loss."

*Knoxville News Sentinel*  
April 19, 2021

### Gail Grammer Atkins

Gail Grammer Atkins passed away on April 10, 2021.

She was born on November 9, 1941 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to F.A. Grammer and Bettye Dyke Grammer. A graduate of Chattanooga High School, she attended Austin Peay State University and University of Tennessee. She was a retired registered nurse.

She is preceded in death by her parents and daughter, Jennifer Gail Atkins. She is survived by her husband of nearly 60 years, Bob Atkins; daughters Tracey (Sterling) van der Spuy and Jill (Stephen) Anderson; grandchildren Zachary Peck, Jansen van der Spuy, Ally Anderson, Connor Peck, and Jenna Anderson; sister Judi Grammer Sartain.

Her husband Bob's many leadership and innovative roles in the newspaper industry include publisher and group president of Middle Tennessee Publishing Company and vice president of the Leaf-Chronicle Company. He has also served in various leader-



Atkins

ship and board capacities with the Tennessee Press Association, Tennessee Press Service and TPA Foundation. Mrs. Atkins often accompanied her husband to TPA conventions and

was well-known throughout the statewide newspaper community in her own right.

A Celebration of life for Mrs. Atkins was to be held on the afternoon of Thursday, April 15, 2021 at Hendersonville Funeral Home with Pastor Bruce Chesser officiating. Pallbearers were her sons-in-law, grandsons and dear friend Otis Hackney. A visitation was held prior to the service.

In lieu of flowers the family has requested that donations be made to Habilitation and Training Services (H.A.T.S) 545 Airport Rd, Gallatin, TN 37066. (615) 451-0974.

*Hendersonville Standard*  
April 14, 2021

## Phillips to retire after 41 years of service with The News-Democrat

Magic Valley Publishing Company (MVP), publishers of The News-Democrat and The Shopper's Guide, announces the retirement of Publisher and General Manager Ward Phillips.

Although an exact departure date had not been determined as of this publication's deadline, MVP officials are weighing options for filling the vacancy soon. Phillips said, "After much thought and consideration in coming to this decision, I wanted to give Magic Valley Publishing the time they need to assure a smooth transition here, and so I will remain flexible with my personal timetable. I have every faith and confidence that MVP will make the best decision for our readers, advertisers and, above all, our staff as they determine who will assume the reins here."

In reference to Phillips' retirement, MVP President Dennis Richardson said, "Ward is one of a kind. I remember the day that he started work with the News-Democrat and the Shopper's News. I am sure he will be missed by the



Phillips

staff and the community and I wish him well in his well-deserved retirement."

Phillips has been associated with these publications since 1980, when he returned to his hometown of Waverly, following a 3-year employment with Newspaper Printing Corporation (NPC) in Nashville.

Phillips said, "Over the 44 years of my newspaper career much has changed in the day-to-day operation of producing a weekly community newspaper, as well as the Shopper. So many technological advancements, production procedure transitions and communication avenues have occurred, and I'm sure will continue to evolve. But the thing that has remained consistent for me are the countless relationships built with the good people of Humphreys County.

"I have enjoyed, more than I can express, working alongside

of so many great people as we all stressed to meet our deadlines, seeing my advertising clients regularly, hearing subscriber/reader feedback, good or bad, and connecting with the public at so many events, as we have tried to let our readers see themselves through our pages each week. This career has been a wonderful experience, but I do look forward to a slower schedule and more time at home with Marilyn and our family."

Phillips graduated from Middle Tennessee State University in 1976 with a B.S degree in mass communications and public relations. He began his professional newspaper career at NPC, which served, at that time, as the business agent for The Tennessean and The Nashville Banner daily newspapers in 1976. He was later added to the display advertising sales staff and was ultimately promoted to Sales Supervisor over the automotive advertising group.

Bill Ridings, who was the Publisher of The News-Democrat at that time, hired Phillips in 1980, as an advertising salesman and

production assistant. The paper was owned by Multi-Media Corporation at that time. The Shopper's Guide, owned by Bill and Betty Haxton of Waverly, was the competing publication. Ultimately the Haxtons would purchase The News-Democrat from Multi-Media in 1982 and Ridings and Phillips joined them in producing both publications.

The Haxtons sold both publications to Sam and Betty Kennedy, owners of Kennedy Newspapers Company, Inc. a Columbia, Tenn. based company, with Ridings also buying shares in the ownership. Ridings sold his shares back to Kennedy and retired in 2012 and recommended Phillips as his replacement as Publisher and General Manager; a recommendation Sam Kennedy agreed with, and he immediately promoted Phillips to that position.

Following the passing of Sam Kennedy, his wife Betty Kennedy and the Kennedy family sold the publications in 2018 to its present owners, Magic Valley Publishing Company (MVP), headquartered

in Camden. MVP President Dennis Richardson retained Phillips in the same position, where he has directed the weekly operation until now.

*Magic Valley Publishing*  
April 26, 2021



The Tennessee Press Association Foundation gratefully acknowledges a contribution

In memory of

Gail Atkins

given in fond remembrance by

Michael Williams and  
The Williams Family  
The Paris Post-Intelligencer

# Local news outlets can help communities navigate vaccination process

My mother was frustrated. At 78, she was next in line for the COVID-19 vaccine under state guidance in Illinois, but like so many seniors, she was having difficulty navigating the various websites and phone lines to secure an appointment. When she finally got on a waiting list at the local hospital, she found out there were at least 1,000 people in front of her.

After posting about it on social media, friends responded with stories about their own struggles to help their parents get a coveted vaccination slot. High school and grade school friends from my hometown in Central Illinois reached out with tips about waiting lists and pharmacies with the vaccine. She finally got an appointment in another town about an hour away, but then that was abruptly cancelled when the pharmacy ran out of supply.

In the end, it was a phone call from my 85-year-old aunt that enabled her to find an appointment at a local pharmacy and get her



## LOCAL MATTERS

JACKIE SPINNER

first shot.

Throughout her scramble to find an appointment, which included being turned away at a county vaccination site after erroneously thinking she had made one, I kept wondering what role local news could have played in helping her and others navigate the process.

While her local newspaper and TV stations did a good job reporting on who was eligible and also the problems with those people getting vaccinated, I couldn't find a single interactive map or tool that might have helped her see all of the places distributing vaccines. I couldn't find step-by-step video instructions for navigating the sign-up at local pharmacies or the

county health department. (The CDC only recently released its updated vaccine finder tool to help.)

While I don't expect the skeleton local news outlets to produce an interactive tool like the one NPR created that helps people in every state find appointments, the pandemic provides an opportunity for us to collaborate to do more than simply report on the state of affairs.

Since 2018, more people in our communities have been getting their news from social media than from print newspapers, according to the Pew Research Center. Many people I know got vaccine appointments after following tips from neighborhood list-serves and Facebook groups. My mom's relationship with "the news" has deteriorated as it became politicized. But she still watches local TV news and expressed frustration that it wasn't more helpful.

Last year I wrote about the unique opportunity the pandemic has given local news outlets to recruit journalism students to

bridge gaps in our coverage and to leverage their unique social media and digital storytelling skills. We are now more than a year into the pandemic, and many of our hometown college students are still at home and in need of professional experience and who would relish the opportunity to help a local media outlet build an interactive chart or graphic that might help their grandparents find a vaccine appointment.

We don't need web development experts on our staff to pull this off. There are free and low-cost publishing tools like ZeeMaps and StoryMap JS that we can use to produce interactives that help people find vaccine appointments. Journalism schools like mine are teaching these tools to our students. This is the kind of virtual project that publishers could do in collaboration with journalism students at a nearby institution.

The vaccine distribution, varying state guidance and eligibility requirements have created a Survi-

vor Island scramble for shots. Local media outlets are covering that story well but need to do more. We can consolidate information in one place on our websites. We can provide maps.

We also need to help our communities tackle the problem of distributions by looking at places that have succeeded and by examining and understanding data evidence. Most of all, we can do it void of the politicization that has gripped so much of the discourse in our country around the coronavirus and the COVID vaccine. We can give it to our readers straight.

*This story first appeared in the March 2021 edition of Publisher's Auxiliary, and is republished here with the permission of its author, Jackie Spinner. A former staff writer for The Washington Post, Spinner is the editor of Gateway Journalism Review and an associate professor at Columbia College Chicago. Follow her on Twitter @jackiespinner.*

# Finding the story in the legals can sometimes be a winner

**SUBMITTED**  
Public Notice Resource Center  
September 1, 2020

Small towns are different. Take Crosby, North Dakota, population 1,300, for instance. It's located in the upper northwest corner of the state, approximately 35 miles east of Montana and six miles south of the Canadian border. Many folks there have an extraordinary interest in the public notices published in the local paper, the Journal.

"Sometimes we get calls from people aware of something happening in town and wondering why a notice about it wasn't published in the paper," says Cecile Wehrman, the Journal's editor and publisher.

With a readership so attuned to official notice, perhaps it's fitting the Journal won the 2020 PNRC Public Notice Journalism Contest. Honorary public-notice reporting Hall-of-Famer Jim Lockwood, of the Times-Tribune in Scranton, Pa., and the Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald, were awarded second- and third-place, respectively. The winners were announced by the National Newspaper Association, which administers the competition.

The Journal won the award for a story by veteran reporter Brad Nygaard — Wehrman's husband — based on what was ostensibly a run-of-the-mill notice about a Nov. 21, 2019, meeting of the Divide County Commission. Crosby is the county seat.

The notice informed citizens that the purpose of the meeting was to seek public input to determine if the county should abolish electoral districts, which might change who is eligible to run for a seat on the commission. Nygaard's front-page story questioned whether the county had the authority to change its election procedures by resolution, the mechanism recommended by County Attorney Seymour Jordan. "My suggestion is to have a public meeting and see what happens," said Jordan, shrugging off concerns about his legal analysis. "You can always put it to a vote if people don't like the resolution."

Following the Journal's front-page alert, about 20 people attended the meeting — a huge turnout for this county of 2,300 people, according to Nygaard and Wehrman. "Folks drove in from all over the county," Nygaard says.

Turns out the residents of Divide County aren't as relaxed as their county attorney about changing election procedures. "We heard a lot of, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,' at the meeting," says Nygaard. When the commission chairman asked, "How many here are in favor of not having districts?," not one of the attendees said a word. And that was the end of Divide County's casual flirtation with new election procedures.

The Journal's award-winning story about the meeting notice wasn't an outlier. The paper writes frequently about information contained in the notices within its pages. An article by Nygaard published

earlier this summer is one of the most unusual public-notice stories we've ever read. It focused squarely on the deficiency of a notice for a public hearing on zoning changes relating to the potential construction of a Dollar General store in Crosby.

"The notice does not inform the public the hearing relates to a proposed change from agricultural to commercial zoning, or that it will involve approval of a plat, or subdivision, of the property," wrote Nygaard. The notice also failed to "indicate the scope or size of the project" or "advise citizens they have the right to view the application or request copies of it," he reported. And it mistakenly

listed Dollar General as the applicant, instead of the company that planned to develop the property

See **LEGALS** Page 11

## Opportunity: Newspaper Leadership Role

Seeking an energetic, motivated leader for a role in beautiful Middle Tennessee. The successful candidate will have responsibilities for revenue production (newspaper, digital, event and niche) as well as significant community relations and community leadership role. Ensuring delivery of financial goals, both revenue and expense, is integral to the position. Candidates must have related managerial and revenue production experience. This market leader will work to ensure that this county-seat operation remains the primary and most relevant source for information in the market and supports the community we serve. Position is salaried with full benefits and is part of a great team of media professionals providing you with financial, HR, production and distribution support. Please send resume and salary requirements to resumes@lcs.net.



## Tennessee Press Service Advertising Placement Snapshot

	ROP:	Networks:
March 2021	\$62,925	\$19,423
Year* as of March 31	\$366,451	\$72,551

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

# 2021 showing itself as year of reckoning for newspaper publishers

The “good old days,” when the hometown newspaper was often the only game in town, are gone forever. New digital platforms are arriving, and sometimes disappearing, quicker than an editor can shout “stop the press.”

But digital competition isn’t just upsetting the newspaper and shopper industry. Small town and major market radio stations, metro television stations and even the local cable services are also discovering this to be a time of significant financial crisis.

Who would have thought, 10 years ago, that America’s host or popular radios stations would lose many of their once loyal listeners to SiriusXM, Pandora, Amazon Music, Apple Music and Spotify? Or that traditional network programming and local television affiliates would lose a huge percentage of their viewers to direct streaming competition like Netflix, Hulu, Sling, Virgo, Disney Plus, YouTube and Crackle?

And most surprising, who would have suspected that Google and Facebook would take so many dollars away from all earlier forms of advertising in big and small markets?

The truth is newspaper and shopper publishers have some difficult challenges ahead of them. Small markets have lost many of their larger advertisers. Younger audiences appear to have no interest in reading news in a printed form. The hawkers of the internet have convinced many advertisers that “print is dead.” The investment groups controlling the nation’s largest newspaper chains have no



**GET REAL**

PETER W. WAGNER

interest in operating a paper for the reason it was established but only for what profit it can return.

But here is the truth. The naysayers declared radio was dead when television blossomed into existence. However, according to FCC records, there are still 30,367 FM and AM radio stations in the United States today. And in many regions a single metro television operation now broadcasts as many as four networks — including one that is nothing but decades-old shows — with about the same size staff as when they were home to only one. It’s called reducing cost and maximizing revenue.

Newspapers and shoppers have one exceptional advantage over Google, Facebook, streaming channels and commercial television operations: a variety and abundance of important and valuable local news.

Still, there are some key considerations that publishers, editors and investors need to consider to stay vital and profitable this year and the years ahead.

**GREATER UNIFICATION:** Fifty years ago, the newspaper industry was energized by the establishment of central printing plants. Many were cooperatives, but almost all reached out to print smaller publications, relieving those publishers

of stressful financial and employment issues.

In the future, the same approach to multi-paper centralization could be applied to other essential services: accounting, billing, ad design, editing, page design, circulation management and postal paper work, for example. The time could come when smaller publication editors and publishers choose to outsource areas difficult for them and concentrate on reporting, writing, sales or other disciplines they enjoy most. As with the introduction of central printing, these additional centralized services could result in reduced expenses and greater efficiency for all size publications.

**IMPROVED CONTENT:** Being an excellent source of “all that’s local” will no longer be enough. Readers are going to demand, more top-quality content. Newspapers and shoppers will never “save themselves into success.” Content alone will drive change and growth.

But change takes talent and fresh ideas. Thankfully, for community papers, there are many excellent reporters and editors looking to move from some corporate daily to a weekly where they can feel secure and can excel.

Finally, paid and free distribution publications will need to be more nimble in 2021 if they are going to survive. From expanding their news coverage to responding to an advertising sales opportunity, publishers will need to learn to innovate faster.

**APPROACH TO ADVERTISING SALES:** The COVID-19 lockdown has changed the mindset of many Americans. We have become ac-

customed to staying close to home and buying, when possible, locally. There has been an increased focus on family, health and home.

But buyers have also learned to be more selective and restrained. Advertising will have to be more educational and persuasive. Local businesses are going to need more help in designing attractive layouts as well as writing detailed copy that will to an actual sale.

Additionally, community papers are going to find themselves creating and managing more actual, virtual and hybrid events to drive advertising sales as well as drive buyers to their community. The future for print is all about service. Sales teams and creative departments are going to have to overdeliver to succeed. That means providing even more original promotions and ad ideas and investing the time to make every ad the best it can possibly be.

**DIVERSIFICATION:** Wise publishers are going to need to diversify their strategies, business model and marketing. That might be something as simple as turning open floor space into a paperback book store or digital print center. Or it might mean offering local businesses regular material for their Facebook page or even professional design for their websites. I know of one paper that turned their old press area into a coffee shop. It created exceptional new traffic and provided a great opportunity for their news team to mix and mingle with the paper’s readers.

**READER SATISFACTION:** Too many papers have forgotten that they exist primarily to report the

news, support the community, lift the afflicted and afflict the self-serving. Gone are the opinion pages, heartwarming stories of social interaction, under-the-microscope investigations of local government, coverage of non-scholastic sports and in-depth reporting on health, business and education. In their place are far too many canned news releases.

Readers grew up expecting their hometown paper would always have all the details about all that is happening in their community. They can get headlines, rumors and tidbits from the internet and broadcast media; but they expect to get the details and the facts from their local paper.

There are many more ways hometown papers can reestablish themselves with community. Newspaper websites are going to have to expand the variety of what they offer while actually going live, for example. Shoppers are going to find new opportunities in areas where the local newspaper ceases publication. They’ll supplement their weekly advertising paper by producing, with freelance writers, lucrative bonus sections honoring that year’s graduates or promoting the community’s annual celebration.

Yes, there will be many changes in 2021. Some will seem disastrous, but many will be create exciting new revenue opportunities and lead to new heights of community involvement.

*Peter W. Wagner is founder and publisher of the award winning Sheldon, IA, N'West Iowa REVIEW and 13 additional publications.*

## LEGALS from Page 10

and lease it to the retailer.

The story also noted the property at issue had been annexed by the city last year during a previous council meeting, but the annexation had not yet been recorded.

“The Journal contacted city attorney Seymour Jordan by email last week making him aware of the apparent deficiencies in the hearing notice, but no further corrections or additions had been received as of press time,” wrote Nygaard. (Jordan is the attorney for both the city and county.)

You may not be surprised to

learn that local government officials are not always happy with Nygaard and Wehrman despite their helpful advice.

“This isn’t our first rodeo,” notes Wehrman, who has been at the Journal for 20 years and also owns the Tioga Tribune, published about 50 miles southeast of Crosby. “When we see a notice, we may already have prior experience with it. I was here when they did it before.”

And when they see something wrong with a notice they let their clients know. But public officials often ignore their concerns. “This type of disregard is becoming more apparent in recent months,”

says Wehrman. “In my mind, it ties back to the lack of accountability on the federal level. We’ve always had a somewhat adversarial relationship with some public officials, but these days it seems the national attacks on the press have come home to roost in a local attitude among elected officials that they don’t have to answer to the press. They forget that’s the same as saying what the public thinks doesn’t matter.”

Our second-place winner, Jim Lockwood, won the award in 2015 and has come in second place in every PNR contest since then. He has also won the public notice

category in the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association’s annual journalism contest every year since it was first included in the competition in 2014. This year’s package of articles included in Lockwood’s entry was even larger than usual, with 26 separate stories covering topics ranging from the disposal of landfill “garbage juice” to city employee gas-card usage and the potential building of a homeless shelter.

Third place went to the Grand Forks Herald for its coverage of a reporter from a different paper who faced threats and abuse from city officials after questioning

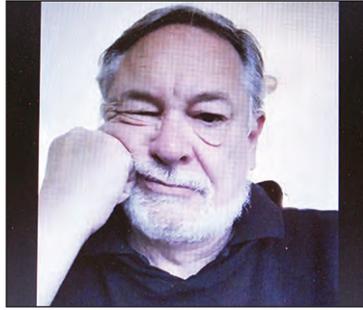
whether the Roosevelt (Minn.) City Council had properly noticed a special meeting. The incident itself and the Herald’s ensuing coverage led to the resignations of the city administrator and a councilman. And all but one of the remaining council members were defeated in the following election by candidates who stressed the issue of transparency.

*The Public Notice Resource Center is a nonprofit, charitable organization that provides research and education about effective public notice.*

# Images from April 16 TPA spring coffee break via Zoom



All photos by Mike Towle  
Alison Gerber, Chattanooga Times Free Press



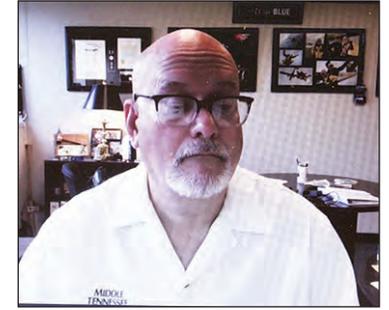
Clint Confehr, The Tennessee Tribune, Nashville



Krista Etter, Grainger Today, Bean Station



Jana Thomasson, The Mountain Press, Sevierville



Andrew Oppman, Middle Tennessee State University.



Marcus Fitzsimmons, APG Design Center/The Daily Times, Maryville



Chris Vass, Chattanooga Times Free Press



Carol Daniels, executive director, Tennessee Press Association.



Jimmy Hart, Middle Tennessee State University



Daniel Richardson, TPA president, Carroll County News Leader, Huntingdon



Sara Jane Locke, The Herald News, Dayton



Charles Primm, University of Tennessee, Knoxville



Mary Ella Hazelwood, Tennessee Press Service



Darrell Richardson, The Daily Times, Maryville



Rebecca Moats, Tennessee Press Service



Paul Mauney, The Greenville Sun, Adams Publishing



Alison Gerber, again, this time with a feline friend



Hail, hail, the gang's all here . . . well, most of it anyway, as things got ready to wrap up on the April 16 TPA morning coffee.

TPA thanks everyone who participated in the Spring Coffee Break on April 16. And, congratulations to Marcus Fitzsimmons of the APG Design Center and Paul Mauney of The Greenville Sun. They were the winners of the prize drawings from among the participants. Each winner received a \$25 gas gift card.