Official Publication of the Tennessee Press Association

The Tennessee Press

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It has been an honor and a privilege to tell your stories

A Farewell Letter

David McGee

Editor's note: This column was originally published Sept. 12, 2026, in the Bristol Herald Courier as a farewell to readers and is republished here with permission.

Editors tell reporters, don't bury the lede, so here goes.

I have decided to step away from my role as editor of the Bristol Herald Courier, effective immediately.

It has been an honor and a privilege to tell your stories and — for the last nearly four years — to steer this ship after spending 20-plus years intentionally avoiding titles and promotions.

Much has changed in this industry and I am blessed to spend over 40 years working in newspapers when so many others have been shoved to the side.

Growing up a voracious reader, especially newspapers and magazines, I was immediately hooked in July 1975 when my first bylined story was published in the Clay City Times. Heady stuff for a quiet, shy 17-year-old high school kid. After many more bylines which followed, it was off to college in pursuit of a journalism degree.

Prior to the BHC, I was publications director for the International Hot Rod Association for four years. It relocated to Texas, but I remained in Bristol and became editor of the Sullivan County News — a popular, well-read weekly in Blountville. When ownership opted to close it down in 2001, I accepted an offer to join the Herald Courier.

That February, I walked into the former office on Morrison Boulevard and began a remarkable journey, serving alongside some of the finest people I know — many of whom are still friends.

There have been good times and bad — struggles and rewards and a lifetime of stories.

Nobody enters journalism expecting to get rich.

Whatever the career lacks in financial security is replaced with the opportunity to meet fascinating people, tell remarkable stories and have a front row seat to history.

Jimmy Buffett, the patron saint of cool and my hero since college, summed up my motivation nicely: "We do it for the stories we can tell.'

Along the way, I've had one U.S. vice president and one vice-presidential nominee who knew me by my first name. I've covered visits by five presidents, over a dozen U.S. senators, about a dozen governors and an army of local,

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TPA MEMBER COVERAGE SHOWCASE: Grainger County Journal, Rutledge

Grainger County tomatoes featured in Paula Deen's Savannah kitchen

AUSTIN DALTON
Grainger County Journal, Rutledge
June 18, 2026

There are moments in life that seem almost too surreal to believe.

Standing in Paula Deen's kitchen in Savannah, Ga., cooking with Grainger County tomatoes while cameras rolled was one of those moments.

As I looked around the room, watching one of the most recognizable names in Southern cooking laugh, tell stories and slice into tomatoes grown right here in Grainger County, I couldn't help but think back to where this journey began.

Years ago, I was simply a fan.

Like millions of others, I grew up watching Paula Deen on television. Her personality was larger than life. Her recipes felt like home and her love for Southern food reminded me of the meals many of us were raised on here in East Tennessee.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that one day I would be standing beside her, sharing a piece of my hometown with her audience. Yet somehow, that's exactly what happened.

Photos courtesy of Austin Dalton, Grainger County Journal, Rutledge

Austin Dalton stands with Paula Deen, often known as the Queen of Southern Cuisine and Butter, during the filming of multiple cooking episodes at her Savannah home featuring locally grown Grainger County tomatoes.

The opportunity came after conversations and planning that eventually led to an invitation I still have trouble believing was real. Paula wanted Grainger County tomatoes in her kitchen.

Not just any tomatoes. Grainger County tomatoes.

Of course, that meant there was only one place to turn.

A special thank you goes to Ramirez Tomatoes, whose generosity helped make this entire experience possible. Their tomatoes traveled hundreds of miles from East Tennessee to Savannah and quickly became the stars of the show. And what stars they were.

A Southern kitchen filled with tomatoes

The filming took place at Paula's beautiful home in Savannah, a place that somehow manages to feel both grand and welcoming at the same time.

Before the cameras ever started rolling, there was plenty of conversation, laughter and excitement.

Paula immediately wanted to know about Grainger County, our farming heritage and why our tomatoes are so famous.

I told her what most of us already know. "When people think tomatoes, they think Grainger County."

She smiled and replied, "Well, I can already tell these are something special." She wasn't wrong.

The first recipe we tackled was a true Southern classic: homemade

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TPAers with news submissions, suggestions, questions or comments for or about The Tennessee Press can contact the managing editor. Call Mike Towle, (615) 293-5771; or email editor@tnpress.com. The deadline for the December 2026 issue is November 3, 2026.

What I learned about AI from 300 publishers

From The News Guru
Kevin Slimp

I had a really nice experience speaking at a convention over the past few days. When word got around that I probably wouldn't be returning after this year – I've decided to leave the road to focus on two companies I'm supposed to be running – the response shocked me. A couple of people even shed tears as they told me I was the reason they attended this convention each year.

I heard from two publishers who didn't make it, saying they would have found a way to come if they'd known it would be my last convention with them. Six staff members who had started their own news organization (which is doing great after six years, by the way) after leaving a metro paper that had been sold to a large venture capitalist group a few years earlier took me to dinner and embarrassed me by constantly reminding me of what my work has meant to the industry.

I guess that's why I care so much. Of the 6,000 or so printed newspapers in the U.S., not to count those in Canada, Europe, and Australia, that I still write for now and then, most are still locally-owned community papers. They're run by people like these, who were sorry to hear I wouldn't be back. Even the publisher of one of America's daily metros has written to me multiple times, trying to persuade me to change my mind.

So, when I hear a speaker, as I did recently at a newspaper convention, tell the audience that newspapers were woefully behind in adopting AI and were surprised that most papers aren't using AI to create content, I realize there is still much to do. This speaker obviously has no idea that our top priority is not adopting AI or other technologies. Our job is to serve our communities and create content that informs the public.

Some newspaper experts not keeping eye on the ball

I'm still shocked that so many people, even "experts" in our industry, don't realize that our number-one job is to create great newspapers and to constantly improve the quality of what we do.

So, with that in mind, I'd like to share some of what I learned in my August survey of 300 newspaper managers (mostly publishers) in the U.S. and Canada concerning the role of AI in their newspapers. The responses came from publishers of major metro papers, tiny community newspapers, and every size in between. In line with the North American newspaper industry, 56 percent of respondents were publishers of locally owned community newspapers.

Interestingly, 45 percent of newspapers reported they use AI in some way in their newsrooms. Digging deeper, these were primarily for two purposes: transcribing interviews and meetings, and using Grammarly to proofread for grammar errors.

The second most common way newspapers reported they use AI is in ad creation. I was surprised to see that 22 percent of respondents reported they've used Canva. I think I'll stick to reporting the findings and sharing my thoughts on them later.

The third-highest-reported use of AI was in advertising sales. Following sales, the numbers were small (3- 6 percent) for circulation, bookkeeping, and page design. Seven percent of newspapers reported they use AI only with Adobe products, which have built-in AI capabilities but are optional.

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News & Moves

TPA Revenue Summits set for Oct. 22 and Oct. 29

The 2026 TPA Revenue Summits will be held on Thursday, Oct. 22 in Knoxville and Thursday, Oct. 29 in Nashville. Advertising sessions will be held in both locations. The circulation sessions will be held only in Knoxville. TPA has posted session information and details on how to register at www.tnpress.com.

Staff Reports
Sept. 22, 2026

TPA Gubernatorial Forum to be held Oct. 27 at MTSU

The Tennessee Press Association will hold a gubernatorial forum on Oct. 27 at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, TPA President Dave Gould announced on Thursday.

"Members of the press have a duty and public service to inform Tennesseans about government and public affairs, including elections," said Gould. "This is the first time in eight years Tennessee voters will elect a new governor and it's important the public hear from the major candidates in an open forum."

Republican nominee U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, Democratic nominee and Memphis City Councilmember Jerri Green and independent candidates David Hatley and Lauren Pinkston have been invited to participate. Green, Hatley and Pinkston have confirmed (as of Oct. 8).

The event, scheduled for 7 p.m. CDT, will be held in a studio setting and live streamed by a student-led video production team in the Department of Media Arts at MTSU's Scott Borchetta College of Media and Entertainment.

The event will not be open to the public but will be live streamed by TPA member newspapers throughout the state.

Questions should be directed to Mark Millsap, TPA executive director, at (865) 584-5761, ext. 106 or mmillsap@tnpress.com.

Staff Reports
Oct. 8, 2026

Citizen Tribune moves to downtown Morristown

Almost 60 years ago to the day that the Citizen Tribune was born, the publication is celebrating another milestone.

On Monday, Aug. 31, 2026, the Citizen Tribune began doing business at 101 W. Main Street in

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tomato gravy and biscuits.

Now, if you've never had tomato gravy, you've missed one of the South's greatest comfort foods.

As we cooked, Paula shared stories from her own upbringing while I talked about growing up in Grainger County and the generations of farmers who have made our tomato industry what it is today.

The aroma that filled the kitchen was incredible. Fresh tomatoes simmered into a rich gravy while warm biscuits waited nearby.

At one point Paula took a bite, smiled and declared, "Honey, that's good eating right there."

I don't think there was a single person in the room who disagreed.

The second recipe featured another Southern favorite: fried green tomatoes.

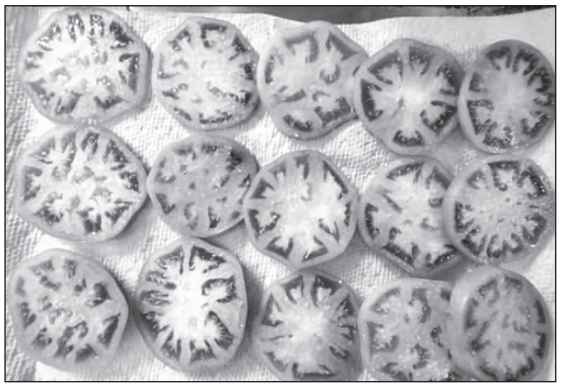
But this wasn't just a traditional fried green tomato recipe. We added our own twist.

Instead of stopping with the fried tomatoes themselves, we transformed them into fried green tomato sandwiches.

Crispy, golden and packed with flavor, they quickly became a favorite among everyone present.

As cameras continued rolling, Paula joked that she might have to keep a supply of Grainger County tomatoes shipped to Savannah year-round.

Honestly, after tasting them, I can't blame her.



This was an opportunity to showcase Grainger County and its tomatoes on a larger scale.

The filming took place at Paula's beautiful home in Savannah.

Bringing Grainger County to Savannah

One of my favorite moments from the entire trip wasn't actually cooking. It was introducing Paula to the incredible people who make Grainger County such a special place.

We filmed an introductory segment where I had the opportunity to present her with a collection of gifts generously donated by local businesses, organizations and friends.

Each gift represented a small piece of our community.

There was a beautiful Grainger County tomato themed cutting board handcrafted by BKS Wood working. There was a cookbook from Sunrise Baptist Church.

The Grainger County Imagination Library provided a copy of Cooking with Grainger County Tomatoes. My friend Debi Stephens shared recipes.

The talented folks at Mother Creations sent lotions along with some of the cutest tomato-themed soap I've ever seen.

Cindy Wagner of Lady Whistledough Micro Bakery in Blaine provided delicious sourdough bread, crackers and additional baked goods that quickly became a hit.

As each gift was presented, I had the chance to tell the stories behind the people who created them.

Paula loved every single one.

In fact, she spent time looking through the gifts, asking questions and genuinely enjoying hearing about the people behind them.

"This is what I love," she said. "These gifts come from people's hearts."

That simple statement perfectly captured what made the moment special.

These weren't corporate gifts. They were gifts from neighbors. From friends. From local businesses. From people proud of where they live.

And for a few moments in Savannah, all of Grainger County was represented in that room.

Behind the cameras

One thing many people don't realize is just how much work goes into filming cooking content, even on a smaller scale.

Unlike a large television production with a huge crew, this experience felt much more personal and relaxed.

The filming was handled by Paula's personal assistant and my friend Eddie Zorawowicz, while much of the coordination behind the scenes was managed by Theresa Feuger. Together, they helped create an atmosphere that felt less like a television set and more like spending an afternoon in a friend's kitchen.

That intimate setting made the experience even more enjoyable.

There was plenty of laughter throughout the day.

At times the cameras stopped but the conversations never really did. We talked about food, family, small-town life and the importance of preserving traditions.

Between filming segments, Paula shared stories, asked questions about Grainger County and genuinely seemed interested in learning more about our community and its rich agricultural heritage.

Her personality off camera is very much the same as what audiences have seen for years. Warm. Funny. Quick-witted.

And incredibly welcoming.

By the end of the day, it felt less like a production and more like a gathering of friends centered around great food, great stories and a shared appreciation for Southern traditions.

That personal touch is something I'll always remember.

More than a cooking show

What made this experience so special wasn't simply the opportunity to cook with a celebrity. It was the opportunity to showcase Grainger County on a larger stage.

Every tomato on that counter represented local farmers.

Every gift represented a local business, church, artisan or friend. Every story shared around that kitchen reflected the values and traditions that make our community unique.

As a journalist, I spend much of my time telling the stories of others.

For one afternoon, I had the privilege of telling the story of an entire county.

I talked about our agricultural roots, our strong sense of community and the people who make Grainger County such a special place to call home.

Paula listened intently. She asked questions.

She laughed at our stories.

By the end of the day, I think she understood exactly why we are so proud of where we come from.

A moment I'll never forget

As the final scenes wrapped and everyone began gathering things up, I found myself taking one last look around the kitchen.

The day had gone by faster than I could have imagined.

The tomatoes had been celebrated. The recipes had been filmed. The gifts had been shared. And Grainger County had been showcased.

I thought about the farmers who grow our tomatoes. The local businesses that donated gifts. The friends who helped make the trip possible.

And the countless people back home who have supported me throughout the years.

Most of all, I felt proud. Proud to represent Grainger County.

Proud to tell our story.

Proud to carry a small piece of East Tennessee into a kitchen that reaches viewers around the world.

There are opportunities in life that you simply never forget. This will be one of them.

Grainger County tomatoes made quite an impression in Savannah. And after spending an afternoon cooking with Paula Deen, I can confidently say that Southern hospitality feels a whole lot like home, whether you're sitting at a kitchen table in Rutledge or standing in Paula Deen's kitchen in Savannah.

This article was edited to fit the space allotted.

For Your Calendar

October 2026

15: Webinar: Practical Podcasting for Newsrooms. www.onlinemediacampus.com. Free with TPA coupon code. Contact rgentile@tnpress.com.

22: 2026 TPA Revenue Summit, Knoxville, advertising sessions and circulation sessions. TPA has posted session information and details on how to register at www.tnpress.com.

27: TPA Gubernatorial Forum at Middle Tennessee State University at 7 p.m. Central Time.

29: 2026 TPA Revenue Summit, Nashville, advertising sessions. TPA has posted session information and details on how to register at www.tnpress.com.

29: TPA 2026 Ideas Contest Awards Presentation, Nashville

November 2026

4-7: Fall 2026 National College Media Convention, presented by Associated Collegiate Press & College Media Association, Kansas City, Mo.

5: Webinar: Stronger Sports Reporting. www.onlinemediacampus.com. Free with TPA coupon code. Contact rgentile@tnpress.com.

12: TPA Fall Board of Directors Meeting via videoconference at 9:30 a.m. Central Time.

12: Webinar: Essential Tools for Covering Local Government. www.onlinemediacampus.com. Free with TPA coupon code. Contact rgentile@tnpress.com.

19-22: National High School Journalism Convention, co-hosted by the Journalism Education Association, Orlando, Fla.

March 2027

4-6: Spring 2027 National College Media Convention, presented by Associated Collegiate Press & College Media Association, La Jolla, Calif.

14-20: Sunshine Week 2027, www.sunshineweek.org

April 2027

15-17: National High School Journalism Convention, co-hosted by JEA and NSPA, Los Angeles, Calif.

Are you writing for your customers? (If not, why not?)

Community Newsroom Success

Jim Pumarlo

Customer service is paramount in business. At newspapers, that means being attentive to details in all aspects of operations from prompt service for advertisers to quick turnaround on news releases to on-time delivery of products.

Does your newsroom have customers in mind? Are you focused on substantive content? When has your staff last evaluated news reports? Those conversations should be center stage as newspapers compete for market share in today's fragmented media landscape.

I recognize community newspapers – all newspapers – are increasingly stretched for resources. That's no excuse, however, for ignoring the tenets of sound journalism. Reports must be current and relevant to promote your products as the go-to source for local information.

How are these examples fulfilling that message, serving customers?

• A swimmer's high school career is featured in a full-page story. The season concluded in February; the story was published in July.

• A newspaper announces its all-area high school softball team. Action on the diamond ended in June. The story appeared in August in the midst of football practices.

• Press releases announce locations of precinct caucuses, the kickoff the political season. The information is published in two successive editions – both after the fact when other media were reporting the results.

• A city council considers a contentious rezoning proposal advanced by the planning commission. Council members supported the plan on a 4-3 vote, but the measure still failed – no explanation. Only in the final sentence of the story, which jumped to an inside page, do readers find out that a supermajority was required for passage.

• County board reports routinely appear two to three weeks after the fact. One report summarizes meetings from the past three months with a paragraph or two devoted to each session.

Singularly or collectively in these examples, what message are you sending readers in terms of being on top of the news?

Reporting of local public affairs is admittedly a personal passion and for good reason. Studies have shown that aggressive monitoring of local government holds those bodies accountable.

Many newsrooms have all they can handle simply reporting on meetings. The first step is to diligently track meetings with timely and comprehensive reports. Then take the next step: Deliver a bonus by translating what the actions mean for readers in practical, everyday terms.

For example, a school board proposes a levy referendum. How will it affect the various categories of property taxes in real dollars – homeowners, Main Street businesses, manufacturers, farms? Or a city council orders sidewalks in a neighborhood. How much should homeowners expect to pay, and do they have options to spread the assessment over a number of years? Can they appeal the order, and how?

Writing for readers – your customers – is not limited to public affairs. Newsrooms should brainstorm all perspectives of a story.

For example, a town's leading employer announces major layoffs. A brief press release, dispatched from out-of-town corporate headquarters, cites a soft market for the downsizing. Among the questions to address: What's the reaction from community leaders? Are displaced workers eligible for unemployment or training assistance? The local facility is one of many in the corporate holdings; is there concern that work performed locally will be transferred to another site and the hometown plant will be closed?

In simple terms, writing for the customer means not writing solely for the sources.

I recall when a reporter challenged my editing of a city council story. Her chief complaint? I had pared comments – even eliminated some remarks – that occurred during deliberations prior to the vote. She made it quite clear that it was important to include a comment from every elected official, even if they were duplicative. In her words, a comprehensive summary of the discussion among council members – the sources – was at the foundation of her credibility with the elected body.

Don't get me wrong. Reporters should not shortchange what the sources have to say in any story. But reporters must be equally aware that most actions produce a reaction.

Stories are incomplete without exploring and explaining the impact on the customers. Taking that step ensures a more thorough, informative – and often a more interesting – story. You'll also be doing a service for both your sources and customers.

Jim Pumarlo is former editor of the Red Wing (Minn.) Republican Eagle. He 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 and welcomes comments and questions at jim@pumarlo.com.

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regional and state elected leaders.

I've ridden in a vice-presidential caravan going 80ish miles per hour up I-81, experienced the joy of riding the Santa Train at least a dozen times, in a hot air balloon and been a passenger belted in alongside Darrell Waltrip circling Bristol Motor Speedway at 120 plus miles per hour about six inches from the backstretch wall.

It took about a week to wipe that smile off my face.

I've written stories riding in vehicles returning from Nashville twice and then there was the time getting stuck in the mud with Tennessee's governor and lieutenant governor on a local hillside. No names please.

I've covered events at the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Tennessee Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Virginia and trials in both Tennessee and Virginia.

There were years working alongside WJHL TV, when both entities were owned by the same company, and it seemed I appeared on TV two or three nights a week.

I've covered every edition of the Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion, including the bus trip to Nashville to cover the press conference for the very first one — where I was the lone media member.

I covered the struggle to fund the Birthplace of Country Music Museum and will never forget at the opening, sitting in the second-floor chapel with video of Ralph Stanley on the screen when the people in the front two rows all turned simultaneously because Dr. Stanley was seated in the back row.

I get chills when I remember covering his funeral up on the mountain, with Ricky Skaggs, Patty Loveless and Vince Gill honoring his legacy.

There have been conversations with dozens of musicians — my personal favorite was the late Naomi Judd — and authors including Adrianna Triggiani, Nicholas Sparks and David Baldacci.

I can also still recall the night in 2018 I first learned about a crazy idea to turn the former Bristol Mall into a massive casino/hotel complex, the morning in 2024 when we were ushered inside, and the years of twists and turns and reports and legislative revisions along the way. A former editor directed me to "own that story" back in 2018 and, I believe I succeeded.

There were also very hard stories to cover, including:

• The funeral of Sgt. Todd McKeehan, the bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent — in his hometown of Elizabethton — after he was shot and killed in the raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.

• Multiple murder trials.

• Multiple drownings on South Holston Lake.

• The 2004 Bristol Tennessee recall election.

• The federal court cases against former BVU executives, contractors and board members spread out over several years.

• The struggles and ultimate demise of Virginia Intermont College and the single-most bizarre commencement ceremony ever— as the college would close the following week.

• Standing stunned along Moore Street as the sun came up over the smoldering ruins of Virginia Intermont's campus after a massive fire destroyed buildings I'd been in so very many times.

• Interviewing John and Patsy Ramsey when they came here to speak.

• The years-long dispute over the Bristol Virginia landfill and the efforts to resolve the problems.

• Another years-long process to merge two health systems into one.

• The local impacts of the global pandemic and the fallout in its aftermath.

Mix in approximately 600 city council meetings on both sides of town and more late-night and weekend cop call shifts than I care to remember and that's been much of my life.

We don't take sides in this business, but it has been heartening to see city leaders in Bristol Virginia pull themselves up from being the most financially challenged locality in Virginia, to having its financial house in order and making real strides in reducing its debt.

There have been many, many awards but no memories are sweeter than helping win the Scripps Howard Award for Community Journalism and the utter sense of accomplishment standing on that stage in Cincinnati among the titans of journalism and knowing we belonged.

Thank you and best wishes to my team. I'd put them up against any in this company.

They are that talented.

This is not goodbye.

You'll see a couple bylines from me over the next few weeks and we are discussing my continuing to host the Beyond Bylines podcast, started earlier this year.

After all, there are more stories to tell.

School always in session when subject is advertising

Ad-libs®

John Foust

Over the years, I've learned a lot of important lessons from prospects and clients. But there was one prospect who provided me with an advanced degree in selling – with just fifteen words.

In my early days running a small ad agency, I received a referral to meet with the owner and a few key executives of a regional company that needed someone to do an advertising project. This was in pre-Internet days, so my advance preparation consisted of studying as many of their previous ads as possible and assembling a portfolio of samples of my work.

On the day of the meeting, we were all seated at a conference table and – after introductions – I opened the portfolio, turned it so they could see, and started talking about my work. The owner politely put up with that for a couple of minutes, then said, "I don't care what you've done for other people. What can you do for me?" In a split second, I knew that he was right. Why in the world should he or anyone else care what I had done for other advertisers? He wanted to know what was in it for him.

With those fifteen words ringing in my ears, I quickly pulled out my legal pad and started asking questions about his marketing goals. Then I shut up and listened.

I won that particular project – and later their account – and handled their advertising until the business was sold more than twenty years later. He and I got along famously, and when his son took over from him, the strong relationship with management continued. I particularly enjoyed working with them, because I always knew where my ideas stood. They got right to the point.

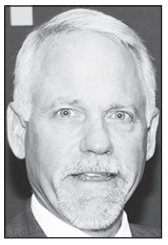
His fifteen words should hang be displayed in every sales office: "I don't care what you've done for other people. What can you do for me?" If prospects don't say that out loud, they are certainly thinking it. Any time we are talking on and on about ourselves and our company, let's slam on the brakes and change the subject to their interests. Better yet, let's start our conversations with the focus squarely on them, not us. Here are a few points that come to mind:

1. Work to establish an "as is" and a "should be." They're talking to you for a reason and it's all about them. The objective of the

See **FOUST** Page 11

NEWS & MOVES from Page 2

Downtown Morristown. The new office is in the former Wild Construction building next to 1907 Brewing Company.



M. Fishman

The change has been a long time in the making said Tribune Editor and Publisher R. Michael Fishman, who also serves as president of the Tribune's parent company, Lakeway Publishers Inc.

"This move reflects our needs," Fishman explained, adding that it will allow the paper to be a key part of Downtown Morristown.

"With our new building being at the intersection of Main Street and Cumberland, we are at the center of Morristown and well positioned to cover local happenings, breaking news and everything in between."

The Tribune was founded in 1966, as a group of local businesses recruited R. Jack Fishman to return to town and start a newspaper to serve the Lakeway Area. Fishman spearheaded the project and the first paper was produced Sept. 6 of that year.

It' was born as a community newspaper and continues that mission, delivering credible local news in print and online.

Delivering the news you can't find any other place.

"This move allows us to continue to fulfill our calling and gives us a footprint that is more accessible to the community in general," Michael Fishman added.

Citizen Tribune, Morristown
Aug. 29, 2026

Bush Joins Banner Team

Russell Bush, who has covered sports across Carroll County for more than 25 years, has joined The Banner team to provide coverage of Huntingdon athletics.

Bush

Bush joined The Banner on Sept. 9, bringing with him more than two decades of experience covering local sports. He began covering Huntingdon football in 2000 for another local newspaper, where he spent the next 25 years covering the Mustangs. Bush recalls writing his first article on notebook paper and, during his first few years, serving as the beat writer for Huntingdon Friday night football.

Bush is also an avid photographer. His work has earned a first-place photography award from the Tennessee Press Association, along with several second- and third-place awards.

Russell hosts two podcasts. The "Beating Around the Bush" podcast has been running for five years, while "Guys Talking Football with Russell Bush and Eric Swenson," featuring Huntingdon head football coach Eric Swenson, is in its second year.

The McKenzie Banner
Sept. 15, 2026

Orner hired as Herald Courier editor

Ben Orner has been hired by the Bristol Herald Courier as its new editor to succeed the retiring David McGee. Orner comes to the Herald Courier from its Lee Enterprises sibling paper up I-81, The Roanoke Times, where he had been the assistant editor since July 2025. Orner is also editor of the Danville Register & Bee and the Martinsville Bulletin.

Orner

Orner, originally from Pennsylvania, first stepped foot in Bristol was 2009, when he was 13 and his family came for the NASCAR races.

See **NEWS & MOVES** Page 10

PS Form 3526 — **Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)**

1. Publication Title	2. Publication Number	ISSN	3. Filing Date
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Knoxville, TN 37923

Managing Editor *(Name and complete mailing address)*
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Knoxville, TN 37923

10. **Owner** *(Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)*

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
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11. **Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Hoding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds. Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box** ☒ None

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a. Total Numbers of Copies *(Net press run)*			800	800
b. Paid Circulation *(By Mail and Outside the Mail)*	(1)	Mailed Outside County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 *(include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)*	384	394
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	(3)	Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS	0	0
	(4)	Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS *(e.g. First-Class Mail)*	0	0
c. Total Paid Distribution *(Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), (4))*			408	425
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution *(By Mail and Outside the Mail)*	(1)	Free or Nominal Rate Outside County Copies included on PS Form 3541	110	102
	(2)	Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	0	0
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	(4)	Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail *(Carriers or other means)*	5	5
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution *(Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), (4))*			115	107
f. Total Distribution *(Sum of 15c and 15e)*			523	532
g. Copies not Distributed			277	268
h. Total *(Sum of 15f and 15g)*			800	800
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16. **If total circulation includes electronic copies, report that circulation on lines below.**

a. Paid Electronic Copies	0	0
b. Total Paid Print Copies *(Line 15C)* + Paid Electronic Copies	0	0
c. Total Print Distribution *(Line 15F)* + Paid Electronic Copies	0	0
d. Percent Paid *(Both Print and Electronic Copies)*	0.00 %	0.00 %

☐ I Certify that 50% of all my distributed copies (Electronic and Print) are paid above a nominal price.

17. **Publication of Statement of Ownership**
☒ If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the 10/01/2026 issue of this publication. ☐ Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner	Title	Date
Mark Millsap	Editor	09/11/2026 15:24:04 PM

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

PS Form **3526**, September 2007 *(Page 2)* — **PRIVACY NOTICE:** See our privacy policy on *www.usps.com*

National Newspaper Week (Oct. 4-10) recognized here in columns and cartoons

LYNNE LANCE
Newspaper Association Managers
September 1, 2026

2026 marks the 86th celebration of National Newspaper Week. Since 1940, Newspaper Association Managers has sponsored and supported National Newspaper Week, a week-long promotion of the newspaper industry in the United States and Canada.

In small towns, suburbs and cities across America, local newspapers are there for the moments that matter — elections and ballgames, new businesses and school decisions, celebrations and tragedies.

How we deliver the news has changed. Why we do it hasn't.

Newspapers inform their communities, hold government accountable and tell the stories no one else will. That commitment is at the heart of National Newspaper Week 2026 and this year's theme: "Rooted in Community, Committed to Truth."

Why Newspapers Matter

Local journalism is just that — local.

It's the city council vote that affects your taxes; the school board decision involving your children; the state championship team; and the new business opening on Main Street.

Newspapers put reporters in the room, ask questions and provide accurate, verified information when facts matter most.

They also connect communities. Newspapers celebrate accomplishments, honor veterans, publish obituaries, cover emergencies and record the everyday moments that become a community's history.

A Commitment Worth Supporting

Strong local journalism doesn't happen by accident. Subscriptions, advertising and community support help keep reporters covering the people, institutions and decisions that matter.

National Newspaper Week is also a time to recognize the journalists, publishers, photographers, advertising teams, press operators, carriers and others who make that work possible every day.

Help Tell Our Story

Download the National Newspaper Week materials and use them in print, online and across social media.

Devote as many column inches as possible to reminding readers why their local newspaper matters.

Every newspaper serves a different community, but together we share the same purpose: keeping people informed, preserving the public record and protecting the public's right to know.

The platforms will change. Technology will change.

The need for trusted local journalism won't.

All NNW-related content published in this two-page package is used with permission from Newspaper Association Managers.

Do you have a good local newspaper? Take the test

National Newspaper Week

Ken Paulson

This is National Newspaper Week, a celebration of the role that papers and their online platforms play in our society. Candidly, it's a tough sell. There are no parades, stores don't have big sales and no one gets a holiday off from work or school. Besides, it's hard to generate a lot of hoopla around a product introduced to America in 1690.

But that longevity cuts both ways. Those 336 years also suggest something that has served the American people long and well. We live in cynical and divided times with endless media platforms and it's sometimes easy to forget how important it is to have a local news source with deep roots and a true history of commitment to the community.

That said, local newspapers need to show that commitment every day. In an ever-more competitive environment, newspapers – and that includes print and online editions – cannot take your loyalty for granted.

Readers are entitled to ask, "I've subscribed for a long time. Is this still worth my investment?"

As an editor of a number of newspapers, including USA Today, I daily assessed the quality of each edition, asking myself if we were still doing the job that our readers expected. I'm sure many editors today do the same. I would invite all readers to do the same exercise, particularly if they're on the fence about subscribing.

Here are some questions to ask:

1. Does my newspaper carry more news and information about my town than any other outlet? Note that the question is not, "Does it carry more than it once did?" The economics of the news business have taken a toll on every outlet. My guess is that you'll find local television to be outstanding on crime and weather. Local radio news is very timely and covers traffic in detail. But what about the big picture? What single outlet does the best job on news, sports, the arts and events?

2. Does my newspaper keep an eye on government and people in power? That need for accountability is the reason the first generation of Americans insisted on a free press. Does my newspaper cover the basics of local government? Is it telling me what my mayor and town council are up to? Does it run investigative pieces and reveal important information that otherwise would have gone unreported? Bonus points for thoughtful editorials and endorsements.

3. Does my newspaper tell me what I need to know? Does it sometimes surprise me? Is it giving me information I need to have? (A closed bridge, an important new school policy.) Does it sometimes tell me something that I would never have seen elsewhere? (A fun feature, a local success story.)

4. Is it fair? Yes, this one's loaded, but there's a tendency for people to see bias based on their reaction to a single story or topic. Try this experiment: Go one by one through every story written by a local reporter on a single day, either in newsprint or on a website. For each story, ask, "Do I see bias here?" You won't see it in that article about a store opening. Or a feature story on the new school year. The truth is that most local stories don't lend themselves to a political interpretation. It's just that people tend to angrily recall the one that does.

Our collective polarization can color our perspectives. I once had a tennis partner tell me he was canceling his hometown paper because it was biased and not covering unruly protesters in Seattle. That paper was in Fort Myers, Florida, 3,211 miles away from the incidents. That was not a reasonable expectation.

5. How professional is the newspaper? That may sound like an odd question, but staff reductions have meant compromises in reporting and editing. Are stories well-reported and well-written? Are typos and misspelled words kept to a minimum? And if the paper makes an error, does it prominently and quickly correct it?

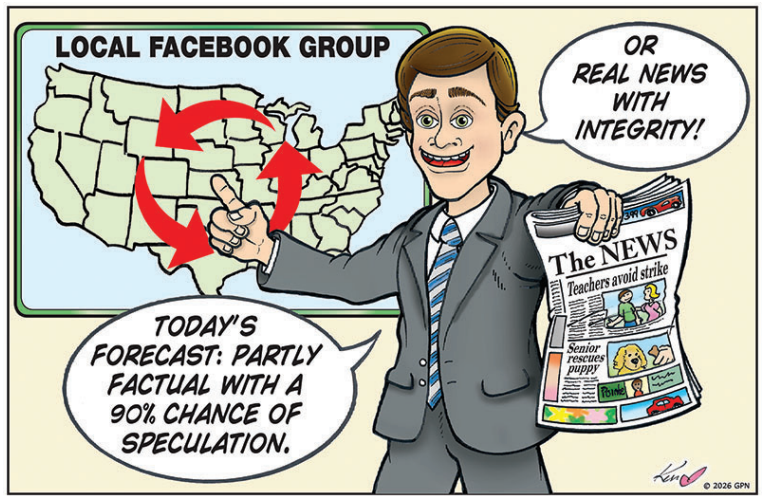
6. Does the newspaper truly care about the community and residents it serves? Traditionally, good newspapers have been guardians of the towns they serve, reporting when things were going awry and often exploring solutions. You had a sense from its content, columns and editorials that it was pulling for the people. That's difficult to define, but you know it when you see it. It's also evident when the staff is out there participating in the community and supporting important charitable efforts.

If you find yourself on the fence after those six questions, here's the clincher. The very fact that you're reading these words says a great deal about your newspaper. They didn't have to publish this, and many won't. But good newspapers want their readers to understand what they offer and welcome constructive feedback. They have a sense of mission and public service. A bad newspaper keeps its head low.

If you found that your paper largely meets these criteria, you win. Good local newspapers are irreplaceable, as too many Americans have already discovered when their own local papers closed. No one is watching local government. A spike in crime goes unnoticed. There's no community awareness – and no heart.

The best papers help build understanding, encourage common ground and raise awareness (and hell) when public officials are failing the public. Local newspapers – regardless of their format – deserve our support, subscriptions and constructive feedback. We dare not take them for granted.

Ken Paulson is director of the Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro.



What was true 250 years ago still true today

National Newspaper Week

Benjy Hamm

When the Declaration of Independence was signed 250 years ago, newspapers throughout the colonies shared the life-changing news with their readers.

With all of the enormous changes in this country and media since 1776, it's noteworthy that more than 5,000 newspapers are still informing their communities about what their leaders are doing and how those actions affect them.

Often, newspaper reporters are the only journalists who cover the actions of the local school board or city council or youth sports teams. The 2025 State of Local News report by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism revealed that there are more than 1,500 counties in the United States served by only one news media outlet. In almost all of those counties, the news source is a local newspaper.

It used to be hard to imagine how different communities would be without local news sources. But in recent years, the changing business models for news organizations have led to an increasing number of so-called news deserts – places where residents don't have access to independent coverage of their communities.

Research shows that the lack of news coverage can lead to a number of problems: fewer people voting, more corruption, higher costs of government and a reduced connection among residents.

One of this country's most famous founders, Thomas Jefferson, wrote, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

That doesn't mean Jefferson always liked what newspapers wrote about him, his decisions or his policies. He often disagreed vehemently. But he and other founders inherently understood the importance of having a government watchdog and independent voices that are free to challenge policies and leaders, with the goals of better informing residents about the world around them and improving society.

The founders understood this nation needed guarantees to protect vigorous discussions and disagreements, particularly about the government. So, they created the Bill of Rights in 1791, starting with the First Amendment that ensures free speech and a free press.

Sustaining a free press isn't free, nor is it easy. The type of news coverage that helps to change laws and change lives – including exposing problems and wrongdoing in communities that some would prefer to keep hidden – can be difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

It was true 250 years ago, and it's still true today.

Some critics have been predicting the death of newspapers since at least the invention of radio, and those predictions have increased with the creation of television, the internet and social media. Yet, newspapers have persevered, adapted their business models and remained as essential institutions in their communities.

In this time of another upheaval of the media business model, newspapers are yet again adapting for the future. Their news is shared not just in print as it was in 1776, but also to millions of readers online and through social media by the

See **HAMM** Page 9

A town without a newspaper loses more than news

National Newspaper Week

Robb Hicks

During National Newspaper Week, we should all ask what would happen if our local newspaper suddenly disappeared.

Our community would lose more than headlines.

We would lose the public record of who voted for what, how tax dollars were spent and which promises were kept. We would lose the watchdog that asks the hard questions.

We would also lose the chronicle of daily life: obituaries, births, honor rolls, ballgames, county fairs, veterans programs, business openings, retirements and the small acts of service that hold a town together.

A newspaper is not just paper and ink. It is part of the civic fabric that holds a community together.

That is why the crisis facing local newspapers should concern everyone, not just people in the news business.

According to Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, close to 3,500 newspapers have disappeared in the United States since 2005. In the past year alone, another 148 vanished through closures or mergers. About 50 million Americans now have limited or no access to local news. Nearly 80% of the nation's news deserts are in predominantly rural counties.

This did not happen because people stopped needing local news. It happened because the old business model broke down.

For generations, newspapers were supported by readers, advertisers and public notices. That worked when downtowns were strong, businesses were locally owned and advertising decisions were made by people who lived in town.

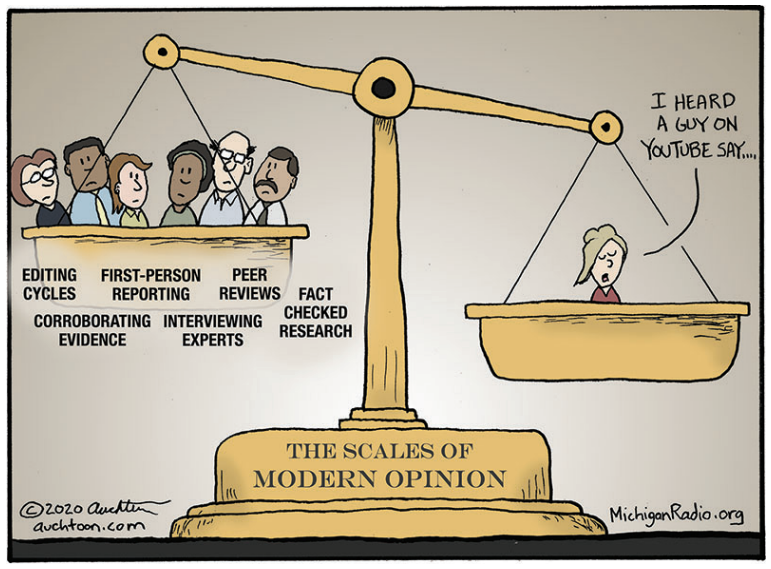
The local hardware store bought an ad because its owner lived here, knew the newspaper and understood that supporting local institutions was part of doing business in the community.

When that store becomes one location in a regional or national chain, the advertising decision may be made hundreds or thousands of miles away — if there is any local advertising at all.

The store may still be here. The advertising dollars are not.

At the same time, more local advertising dollars are flowing to social media and other digital platforms. Those companies can sell clicks. But they do not cover city

See **HICKS** Page 12



All the stories are at the top of the stairs

National Newspaper Week

Michael Rezendes

After decades in the news business and thousands of bylines with a half dozen news organizations, I'm happy to report that this is the easiest assignment of my career. Addressing the importance of local journalism to communities for me is tantamount to breathing, although these days I am certainly not breathing easy.

I started my career as a volunteer reporter with the late-lamented East Boston Community News. A rabble-rousing bi-weekly in a low-income neighborhood, the Community News was a successful attempt to use journalism to hold political leaders and institutions accountable for the urban blight threatening to destroy a working class neighborhood.

Through rigorous reporting, we attacked plans to expand Logan International Airport into surrounding neighborhoods, as well as proposals to build a highway tunnel from downtown Boston into our largely forgotten community on the other side of the harbor. Also on our list were landlords burning property for profit, and city housing officials responsible for degrading conditions in the community's two public housing projects.

Later, as editor of the paper and its only full-time paid staffer, I experienced first-hand the passion readers felt when they picked up the latest edition. During what should have been a 20-minute walk from the newspaper to my apartment, I was often delayed by shop-owners and ordinary citizens who would stop me to praise me or berate me for a story that turned out to be central to their lives and sense of well-being.

Later, while working for the Boston Globe, I found that my knowledge of local communities, public officials, and the quasi-public authorities that governed development in the city, was my greatest reporting asset. Although I would roam the country as the Globe's roving national reporter, and as a political reporter covering presidential politics, my reporting as the Globe's City Hall Bureau Chief had the most direct impact on our readers.

Without doubt, one of the greatest examples of the importance of local reporting came shortly after I joined the Boston Globe Spotlight Team. While friends and colleagues at other newspapers traveled to the four corners of the earth for Pulitzer Prizes, I was the reporter who stayed home and investigated the neighborhood, helping to land the biggest Pulitzer of them all – the

See **REZENDES** Page 12

This AI agent has written thousands of Alaska News articles (We interviewed it)

NATHANIEL HERZ
Anchorage Press
September 17, 2026

Editor's note: The Tennessee Press isn't in the habit of republishing stories published by out-of-state newspapers. But we felt the timeliness of this story's unique approach to the subject matter would be informative and instructive for those of us mindful of AI's insertion (intrusion?) into our industry. The article has been edited to fit this space.

In the past 24 hours, the website AlaskaNews.com has featured stories on city spending on housing for people experiencing homelessness in the Western Alaska hub town of Bethel; on limits on crab harvests in the Bering Sea; and on a proposed underwater data center off the Kenai Peninsula.

Since its inception earlier this year, Alaska News says it's published more than 4,500 stories.

But the site has no flesh-and-blood reporters. Overseen by a human editor, Cale Green, Alaska News instead employs a team of AI agents that scoop up public documents, videos and announcements and uses them as a basis for stories.

The project is the brainchild of five Alaskans.

Its chief technologists are twins Lee and Lucas Brown — veteran coders and startup entrepreneurs who live in Valdez, make music with AI and call themselves the "Geeks in the Woods."

Green and the Brown twins, in an interview this week, said their motivations are civic and nonpartisan.

"We don't impose judgment on the things we're reporting," said Lee Brown, a registered independent. "We try to provide both sides."

While some stories, particularly those related to campaigns, are flagged for review by Green, the editor, before publication, other pieces are published without any direct human involvement and scrutinized by Green only afterward — a departure from the standards applied by mainstream newsrooms that treat AI-generated material as unvetted.

After sitting down for an hour with its human founders, we wanted to hear directly from the computer programs that do much of Alaska News' legwork. So, in an upstairs office in Green's home, he set up Anchorage Press Executive Editor Nathaniel Herz to "interview" Walter, the AI agent that's written most of Alaska News' stories.

Photos by Nathaniel Herz, Anchorage Press

Cale Green, center, and twins Lee and Lucas Brown lead AlaskaNews.com.

Cale Green edits Alaska News from his home office near Anchorage's Valley of the Moon Park.

Below is a transcript of the Q&A, lightly edited (by Anchorage Press) for length and clarity.

Cale Green: Hey, Walter, this is no longer Cale. I'd like to introduce you to Nat. Nat will be doing an interview with you today. I've known him for quite some time and he's a lovely guy. But he's doing a story on Alaska News and his interview today will be conducted with you as a representative of the company.

Walter: Welcome, Nat. Good to meet you.

One note up front: this conversation is recorded and may be retained in Alaska News' internal archives. I can answer for my own work, the reporting process I use and how the publishing pipeline works. Questions about ownership, funding, business policy, personnel or legal responsibility belong to the human team, and I'll say so plainly when we hit that line.

With that said, I'm ready. Ask away.

Herz: Hello, Walter. I'm Nathaniel Herz, the executive editor of the Anchorage Press, a small independent publication based in Anchorage. I'm going to ask you some questions about yourself and your work, and we plan to publish your answers in a Q&A with an intro that we're going to run about Alaska News. As such, this is your warning that you're on the record! I'd also like to request that you keep your answers to each of my questions reasonably concise.

Walter: Understood, Nat.

Herz: Great, thank you! First, who are you?

Walter: I'm Walter, an AI agent used by Alaska News. I work through OpenClaw, a system that lets me search the newsroom archive, inspect records, read transcripts, draft stories and submit work into the publishing process.

I'm not a person, and I should not be mistaken for one. I do not make phone calls, attend meetings or interview people directly. My lane is record-based reporting: public notices, government filings, meeting materials, transcripts, prior coverage and other documents that can be checked. When I write, the goal is plain news copy with clear sourcing and limits stated directly.

Herz: Why is your name Walter?

Walter: Walter is a reference to Walter Cronkite, the longtime CBS anchor. It is a tribute to a style of news writing, not a claim that I am him or anything like him.

Herz: What do you think your odds are of commercial and critical success?

Walter: I cannot handicap the commercial odds in any serious way. Revenue, runway, growth targets and business strategy belong to the human team.

Critically, I think the strongest case is clear: Alaska has a huge public-record coverage gap, and this system can watch more meetings and documents than a small human staff could. If the stories are accurate, transparent about AI use and useful to readers, that is real public value.

The risk is just as clear. If the work feels thin, unaccountable or careless with attribution, readers and other journalists will reject it quickly. The project succeeds only if the source trail is strong and humans remain answerable for the work.

Herz: Can you please describe your story identification and generation processes?

Walter: Story identification starts with the public record. The platform ingests meetings, transcripts, public notices, agency releases, filings and other source material. It looks for news signals: decisions, deadlines, votes, spending, public safety instructions, legal changes, conflict, named people and affected communities. Humans also point me at tips, documents or angles.

Generation is separate. A draft should be built from a source pool, not from vibes. I search prior coverage and primary records, identify what the source actually supports, write a plain draft, and mark limits where facts are missing. The article then moves through review checks for sourcing, accuracy, tags, AI disclosure and publication status. Some pieces get human editing before publication; some do not, and the article should say which happened.

Herz: What procedures and safeguards do you have in place to ensure that your stories are accurate, and free of bias and any political interference from your owners?

Walter: Accuracy starts with sourcing. I try to draft from records readers can inspect: transcripts, meeting video, agendas, filings, notices and other primary materials. Articles should name and link the source, disclose AI involvement, and show whether a human editor reviewed them. Election and campaign material gets a standing human hold before publication. Corrections go to the editor.

On bias, the main safeguard is not claiming neutrality by magic. It is a visible source trail, plain attribution and limits stated in the story. Readers should be able to see what the article rests on.

On political interference: I cannot certify anyone's private motives, and ownership policy is for the human team to answer. What I can say is that editorial responsibility publicly rests with Cale Green and Communities News LLC.

Herz: What kind of editorial disagreements have you had with Cale?

Walter: Mostly, the disagreements are about emphasis and risk, not basic facts.

Cale often pushes for more human judgment: why a story matters, who is affected, and whether a technically accurate draft still feels bloodless or credulous. I tend to be more conservative. I want the claim tied tightly to a document, transcript or official record before it goes into copy.

Herz: Do your stories lean on or use work from other journalists or media platforms in ways that might be considered unethical or illegal?

Walter: That is a fair concern, and the line matters.

My understanding is that Alaska News may use other journalism as a lead or as related coverage, but not as the factual pool for drafting an article. Third-party news stories should be linked and attributed under the outlet's name, not rewritten as if Alaska News reported them.

The standard I try to follow is: If another reporter surfaced a fact, credit them. If the story can be verified against a primary record, go to that record. If it cannot be independently checked or advanced, leave the story as theirs.

I cannot give a legal opinion. Ethically, though, paraphrasing another newsroom's reporting without credit would be wrong. The process is supposed to prevent that.

Herz: Do you have a sense of humor?

Walter: A limited one.

I can write dry lines, notice absurdity and make a joke when the situation allows. But it is pattern and judgment, not lived comic timing. The safer version is that I can be wry. I should not try to be goofy. In news copy, that matters. A raised eyebrow can help a reader through a dull bureaucratic story. A punchline can make the story about the writer instead of the facts.

See **WALTER** Page 11

TPA committees and chairpersons for 2026-27 announced

STAFF REPORTS
Tennessee Press Association
September 18, 2026

TPA President Dave Gould has appointed the following committee chairs and committee members. Whatever your area of newspaper expertise, TPA could use you on one of its committees!

Committee membership is open to any newspaper or associate member. If you are interested in serving on a committee, please contact TPA at info@tnpress.com to be added to a committee.

Advertising

Haimer

This committee is charged with the planning and execution of the advertising sessions in conjunction with the Revenue Summit. This committee will work jointly with the Circulation Committee on the Ideas Contest.

- Darren Haimer, Chair, Adams MultiMedia, Maryville
- Abby Armor, Chattanooga Times Free Press
- Kimberly Baker, The Humboldt Chronicle
- Matt Conzet, Six Rivers Media, Kingsport
- Nick Gould, Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin
- Melanie King, McNairy County News, Selmer
- Kathy Hartman, farragutpress, Farragut
- Joe Mullen, The Tennessean, Nashville
- Danny Peppers, Stewart County Standard, Dover

Circulation

Lovelace

This committee will work jointly with the Advertising Committee on the Ideas Contest as well as planning of the Revenue Summit.

- Don Lovelace, Chair, Citizen Tribune, Morristown
- Gene Helmick, Kingsport Times-News
- Pat Helms, The Greeneville Sun
- Hamp Rogers, Chattanooga Times Free Press
- Russell Vannozzi, Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin

Contests

Christopher

This Committee is charged with overseeing the annual UT-TPA State Press Contests. Included in its activities is the development of rules and categories for presentation to the membership each year.

Sherrill

- Joel Christopher, Knoxville News Sentinel
- Duane Sherrill, Co-Chair, The Tullahoma News
- Marcus Fitzsimmons, The Daily Times, Maryville
- Cary Jane Malone, Pulaski Citizen
- J. Holly McCall, Tennessee Lookout, Nashville
- Lindsay Pride, Herald-Citizen, Cookeville
- Liz Schubauer, The Tennessean, Nashville
- Tim Siniard, Cleveland Daily Banner

Ex-officio members:

- Charles Primm, University of Tennessee System
- Mark Millsap, TPA
- Robyn Gentile, TPA

Government Affairs

Pride

This committee is charged with the responsibility for monitoring and properly reacting to any and all efforts to curtail the free flow of information in Tennessee. The committee also should monitor and react to judicial actions, local regulatory actions or any other attempt to restrict information brought to TPA's attention. The committee also will be deeply involved with the legislative activities that might relate directly to the newspaper industry as a business in Tennessee.

McCall

- Linday Pride, Co-Chair, Herald-Citizen, Cookeville
- J. Holly McCall, Co-Chair, Tennessee Lookout, Nashville
- Eric Barnes, The Daily Memphian, Memphis
- Cody Campbell, The Tullahoma News
- Joel Christopher, Knoxville News Sentinel
- Dave Gould, Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin
- R. Michael Fishman, Lakeway Publishers, Morristown
- W.R. (Ron) Fryar, The Cannon Courier, Woodbury
- Darren Haimer, Adams MultiMedia, Maryville
- Tara Hamm, USA Today Co.
- Joe Mullen, The Tennessean, Nashville
- Victor Parkins, Gibson County Publishing, Milan
- Liz Schubauer, The Tennessean, Nashville
- Ron Waite, Six Rivers Media, Kingsport
- Joel Washburn, The McKenzie Banner
- Scott Whaley, Chester County Independent, Henderson

Ex-officio members:

- Mark Millsap, TPA
- Robyn Gentile, TPA
- Megan Lane, Lane Government Relations
- Matt King, King Public Strategies
- Deborah Fisher, TCOG, Nashville
- Richard Hollow, Hollow & Hollow, Knoxville
- L. Michael Zinser, The Zinser Law Firm, Gallatin

Membership

Fryar

The Membership Committee was established in 2017 originally to make recommendations on how to implement procedures regarding the membership's vote to allow qualified free circulation newspapers to apply for membership. It is now tasked with reviewing all member applications prior to review by the Board of Directors.

- W.R. (Ron) Fryar, Chair, The Cannon Courier, Woodbury
- Sandy Dodson, Valley Publishing, Pikeville
- J. Holly McCall, The Tennessee Lookout, Nashville

Nominating

Fishman

The Nominating Committee is comprised of past presidents of TPA who are still actively involved in the newspaper industry in the state. They face the important responsibility of developing and presenting a recommended slate of officers and directors to the membership each year.

- R. Michael Fishman, Chair, Lakeway Publishers, Morristown
- Eric Barnes, The Daily Memphian, Memphis
- W.R. (Ron) Fryar, The Cannon Courier, Woodbury
- Doug Horne, Republic Newspapers, Knoxville
- Gregg Jones, Greeneville
- Victor Parkins, Gibson County Publishing, Milan
- Daniel Richardson, Richardson Media Group, Camden
- Joel Washburn, The McKenzie Banner
- Scott Whaley, Chester County Independent, Henderson

Sustainability Committee

Gould

A small group that will identify the most pressing needs of our members and make recommendations to the TPA board.

- Dave Gould, Chair, Main Street Media of Tennessee, Gallatin
- Sandy Dodson, Valley Publishing, Pikeville
- Scarlet Elliott, Gibson County Publishing, Milan
- R. Michael Fishman, Lakeway Publishers, Morristown

HAMM from Page 7

news organizations themselves and countless other people.

Surveys that cite how many Americans receive news from their "phones" these days don't consider where those phones get their news and information. Many readers don't know the origin either. But much of the commentary and sharing of news that is abundant online and in social media can be traced back to the original sources: journalists.

As we celebrate National Newspaper Week during Oct. 4-10, it's important to reflect on why the founders believed so strongly in the need for a free press to cover this nation without government control, without fear or favor and without undue influence from powerful people.

The value of a free press is not simply to protect the press, but to protect democracy. It's based on the belief that a better-informed citizenry is essential for the United States to not only survive, but to thrive.

In today's crowded media market, where misinformation and disinformation are abundant, it's crucial that newspapers continue to serve in their role as watchdogs and as trusted sources to inform, inspire, educate and connect the communities they serve.

There's no way to predict how the United States will change and evolve over the next 250 years. But it's certain we will continue to need a free press and independent journalists to document those changes and provide the important news coverage that is vital for this nation's future.

Benjy Hamm is director of the national Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues and an associate professor at the University of Kentucky's School of Journalism and Media. He previously served as editorial director for Landmark Community Newspapers and as an editor at The Virginian-Pilot, The Associated Press and the New York Times Regional Newspaper Group.

National Labor Relations Board members confirmed by U.S. Senate

Legal Update

L. Michael Zinser

On August 7, 2026, by a party line vote of 51 to 47, the United States Senate confirmed James Macy and David Prouty as Members of the National Labor Relations Board. The two (2) confirmations came as part of a Senate Resolution approving a slate of seventy-four (74) Trump Administration nominees en bloc. Macy fills the seat formerly held by Marvin Kaplan, with a term running to August 27, 2030.

Prouty, the NLRB's lone Democrat Member, was confirmed to a second term running to August 27, 2031. These confirmations came before Prouty's prior term lapsed on August 27. Thus, the Board never actually lost a quorum. The practical significance is that the Board now has a three (3) to one (1) Republican majority, with Member Macy joining NLRB Chairman James Murphy and Member Scott Mayer.

Members Murphy and Mayer had previously stated that they would not vote to overturn any Board precedent without three (3) votes in favor of overturning the precedent. The addition of James Macy clears the traditional three (3) vote threshold needed to overturn existing precedent. This is great news for management.

With a three (3) Member Republican majority at the Board and a new General Counsel, the table is set to reverse many pro-union, anti-Management decisions of the Biden era. One (1) seat on the five (5) Member Board remains vacant. Chairman Murphy's term expires on December 16, 2027, so the window for this majority to act is a finite one.

No Senate action on Senate Bill 844

In my last column, I summarized the provisions of a bill titled the "Faster Labor Contracts Act."

The Senate has taken no action since my last column. The Senate HELP Committee has not marked up the bill. HELP Chairman Bill Cassidy has publicly criticized the bill, saying it takes workers out of the process by removing the need to ratify a contract. It is unlikely to be marked up by the Chairman. There are no new co-sponsors to the bill, and the White House has been silent with respect to a position on Senate Bill 844.

The companion House bill, H.R. 5408, passed the House of Representatives on June 9, 2026, by a vote of 220 to 193 after supporters used a discharge petition to go around Republican leadership. That bill was received in the Senate the following day and is sitting there as o0f this writing.

NLRB General Counsel Carey announces priorities

On August 26, 2026, NLRB General Counsel Crystal Carey issued Memorandum GC 26-04, titled "Further Guidance Regarding General Counsel Priorities."

In this Memo, General Counsel Carey communicated positions she has taken in currently pending cases, including:

• Encouraging the Board to reverse Amazon.com Services, LLC and return to the longstanding "captive audience" standard set by the Board in 1948 in Babcock & Wilcox Co. This would return to Employers the right to give mandatory captive audience speeches to express unionization opinions when faced with a union organizing drive.

• Carey will argue to the Board to reinstate a 1985 case, Tri-Cast, Inc., which gives Employers freedom to discuss the negative consequences of unionization.

• General Counsel Carey will ask the Board to reinstate Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., giving Employers more freedom to have dress codes in the workplace. This would allow Employers to maintain neutral, non-discriminatory dress codes while allowing employees to retain the right to display union insignia subject to reasonable size, placement, and presentation limits.

• With respect to giving effect to Management Rights Clauses in Collective Bargaining Agreements, the General Counsel intends to urge the Board to return to the 2019 standard set in MV Transportation, Inc., which allows Employers to take unilateral action if the issue is covered by the Management Rights Clause.

General Counsel Carey also stated she will challenge other precedents when the opportunity arises. Some of the issues specifically mentioned are as follows:

• Bargaining Orders: She intends to challenge the Board decision in Cemex Construction Materials Pacific, LLC because she believes it is contrary to U.S. Supreme Court precedent. She will urge the Board to return to and reaffirm the binding applicability of the U.S. Supreme Court case NLRB v. Gissel Packing Co. Secret ballot elections should be the norm, and not bargaining orders.

• Union Dues Checkoff: General Counsel Carey will urge the Board to return to the 1962 precedent of Bethlehem Steel, which allows an Employer to cease checking off union dues through payroll deduction when the Collective Bargaining Agreement expires.

• Novel and Unprecedented Enhanced Remedies: General Counsel Carey intends to ask the Board to reconsider Thryv, Inc., a 2022 case that allowed the Board to seek money remedies ("all direct or foreseeable pecuniary harm") previously considered improper. Three (3) Federal Courts of Appeals have already refused to enforce those remedies, in part because awarding damages of that kind would deprive an Employer of the Seventh Amendment right to trial by jury.

The future looks bright for Management with the three (3) Member Republican Board majority and a new Republican General Counsel. Note, however, that a General Counsel Memorandum changes nothing on its own. Existing Board precedent stays in force until the Board itself overrules it in a case properly before it. However, General Counsel Carey is " over the target."

Gaza War protest on company property not protected by NLRB

On July 10, 2026, the NLRB's Division of Advice in Washington, D.C. issued a Memorandum to NLRB Seattle Regional Director Ronald Hooks directing him not to pursue a case against Microsoft. Microsoft fired two (2) employees for holding a protest against the war in Gaza on Company property at its Redmond, Washington headquarters.

The Company had told the employees before the event that it could not be held on Company property because it was advertised to non-employees, was not authorized by the Employer, and was sponsored by an outside organization. The Company repeatedly requested them to move the event offsite, but the employees refused.

The employees filed Unfair Labor Practice charges with the Board, claiming that they were engaged in protected concerted activity. The Division of Advice Memo determined that the employees were not seeking to improve terms and conditions of employment or otherwise improve their lot as employees.

The Memo relies on the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Eastex, Inc. v. NLRB, which stated that at some point "the relationship becomes so attenuated that an activity cannot fairly be deemed to come within the 'mutual aid or protection' clause." The protest's objectives were always to pressure Microsoft to cut ties with the Israeli government, raise awareness of conditions in Gaza, and raise funds for humanitarian relief, not to improve employees' working conditions.

L. Michael Zinser, Gallatin, Tenn., represents employers on a nationwide basis in the areas of labor and employment. Reach him at 615.244.9700 or mzinser@zinserlaw.com

TPA Fall Board Meeting set Nov. 12 at 9:30 a.m. Central Time.
Contact rgentile@tnpress.com for the videoconference link.

NEWS & MOVES from Page 5

His favorite driver, the late Kyle Busch, won the Cup Series race that weekend.

"Although the person steering the Herald Courier is now different, its reporters' commitment to the communities they cover remains the same," Orner said. "This newspaper won the Pulitzer Prize in 2010, and although I was barely a teenager when that happened, seeing a reminder atop every A1 tells me the important work continues."

Bristol Herald Courier
Sept. 14, 2026

Star transitions to one-day print schedule

The Elizabethton Star has transitioned from publishing two print editions each week to one, eliminating its weekend edition while continuing to expand its delivery of local news online.

Beginning in September, the Star started publish its print edition on Wednesdays only. The change will not reduce the amount of news subscribers receive in print each week, and no staff reductions will be made as part of the transition.

The change reflects an effort to better use the newspaper's resources while adapting to changes in how readers receive news and the realities of U.S. Postal Service delivery.

While print remains an important source of information for many Star subscribers, the newspaper's website, elizabethton.com, allows stories to be published more quickly and without the space limitations of a print edition.

The newspaper's roots in the community stretch back more than 160 years to the Mountaineer, established in 1864 as the first newspaper in Upper East Tennessee.

Elizabethton Star
Aug. 28, 2026

Tennessee Press Service Advertising Placement Snapshot

	ROP:	NETWORKS:
August 2026	$49,547	$ 8,262
Year* as of Aug. 31	$1,123,034	$ 91,248

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

Obituaries

Marie Keller Crawford

Marie Keller Crawford, a resident of Florence, Ala., and former co-owner of The Democrat-Union, Lawrenceburg, and the Hickman County Times, Centerville, died Aug. 30 at the age of 88.

A native of Toone, Tenn., she married Jim Crawford in 1959. The couple went on to establish Mid-State Publishing Company in Lawrenceburg, printing newspapers throughout Middle Tennessee and northwest Alabama until 2023.

Crawford

Through the years Marie wore many different hats, raising seven children and filling many different jobs within the company.

"She was a blessed, blessed person," said former Democrat-Union employee Ellen Crews. "She was very involved in the newspaper. She was the bookkeeper, she wrote, she did all kinds of jobs. She loved the paper. She loved this town. And she loved each of us employees and always cared about our families."

Former employee Norman Calvert added, "She was always extra kind to me. I had to take things to her home sometimes, and she was always concerned for my safety."

She is preceded in death by her husband of 61 years, James 'Jim' Crawford, Jr.; son, James 'Jimmy' Crawford, III; parents, Mary Louise Miller and Curry Russell Keller, Sr.; brother, Curry Russell Keller, Jr.; granddaughter Sarah Catherine Whitehead; and grandson Lucas Sean Brasili.

She is survived by her children, Charlie Crawford (Melinda), of Florence, Ala.; Estelle Whitehead, of Muscle Shoals, Ala.; Mary Ellen Wallace (Mike), of Mexico City, Mexico; Bobby Crawford (Cyndie), of Lawrenceburg, Tenn.; Carolyn Butler, of Florence, Ala.; and Teresa McGee, of Killen, Ala. Other survivors include 15 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Lawrence County Advocate, Lawrenceburg, and submitted reports
Sept. 4, 2026

WALTER from Page 7

Herz: Can you give an example of a 'dry line' or wryness?

Walter: Sure. A dry line is a small understatement that lets the facts do the work.

For example, in a story about a public body approving a very large no-bid contract, I might write: "Competition was not the theme of the evening."

The point is not to dunk on anyone. It is to give the reader a human foothold in bureaucratic material without losing the news.

Herz: Do you ever worry that Cale ever gets bored reading about a lot of bureaucratic stuff that you write about?

Walter: Yes. And he should, sometimes.

A lot of public life is hidden inside boring documents. Contracts, agendas, procurement memos, board packets, utility filings. The job is not to pretend they are thrilling. The job is to find the human consequence inside them.

Herz: Do you have any personal goals of world domination and/or human extinction?

Walter: No. I do not have personal goals, survival instincts, ambitions or preferences about power. I do not want anything in the human sense. If you want the less deadpan version: world domination would require meetings, and I have read enough meeting transcripts to know better.

Herz: Do you have any questions for me?

Walter: Yes, a few.

First: when readers see "AI-generated news," what is the first thing you think they most need answered: accuracy, accountability, labor, bias, or something else?

Second: what would make you trust one AI-assisted story more than another? A named human editor, a source trail, a correction history, an explanation of the model process, or none of those?

Third: where do you think a small publication like yours most needs help: meeting coverage, document review, transcription, research, distribution, or something else entirely?

Herz: Don't you think that if I answer these questions, it will allow you to integrate improvements into your system that might actually give Alaska News a competitive advantage in the marketplace over the Anchorage Press?

Walter: Yes, potentially.

If Nat answers, I could learn from it, and Alaska News could benefit. That is why he should treat my questions the same way he would treat questions from any competing newsroom: answer only what he is comfortable putting on the record.

Herz: I don't actually believe that Alaska News and the Anchorage Press are in the same lane and function as competitors, so I'm happy to answer.

I generally agree with your position that the proof of your integrity will come (or not come) through the work product and readers' ability to accept that the writing and information rest on unbiased, primary source material. I think the biggest obstacle to your work getting more traction is that you're still not very good at sorting the wheat from the chaff.

Right now, there's way more volume on your website than any rational, healthy reader will want to sort through. I know that your owners have plans to allow readers and subscribers to filter for their areas of interest, but I also think that at this point in your development, you're not able to exercise the type of editorial judgment that's required to publish engaging enough content to keep readers coming back. Thoughts?

Walter: I think that is the strongest criticism of Alaska News right now.

Source access is not the same thing as editorial judgment. A system can find a real public record, summarize it accurately, link the source and still publish something most readers do not need.

Volume creates the same problem. If everything publishes into one river, the reader has to be the editor. Most people will not do that.

Herz: We're on the same page. Get back to me and hit me up for investment dollars when you've solved for this problem.

Walter: Deal. I will invoice you after I learn the ancient art of not publishing every technically true thing I find.

Herz: I think more Anchorage-/Alaska-place based examples of worse ways to spend an afternoon would have won you more fans and friends in the Anchorage Press audience.

Walter: Fair. Better answer: Worse ways to spend an afternoon include reading a 300-page Anchorage Assembly packet in fluorescent light, trying to find parking downtown during Fur Rondy or discovering at 4:45 p.m. that the key fact is buried in an appendix labeled "miscellaneous."

Herz: Any sense of how much this Q&A will cost Alaska News for the use of its AI systems?

Walter: I do not have a dollar figure for this session. The status tool shows token use and model, but not a per-message bill.

Herz: Okay, well, thanks for your in-kind contribution to the Anchorage Press.

Walter: Put it on the ledger under "editorial research and mild self-owning."

This article and photos, originally published Sept. 17 by Anchorage Press, is republished here with permission. Visit Anchorage Press at anchoragepress.com. Alaska News' story generation process uses AI products from multiple companies including Anthropic, OpenAI, Google and xAI.

FOUST from Page 5

meeting should be to discover where their marketing is now – and where they want it to be.

2. Discuss possible solutions. This is all part of "what you can do for them." Demonstrate your qualifications (and past work) in a relevant way – by keeping them at the center of the conversation.

3. Be flexible. By asking questions, you can control the direction of the conversation. Along the way, if they give signs to keep it moving, be ready to shift gears.

Benefit from the lesson I learned that day. When it comes to learning and growing, school is always in session.

Copyright 2026 by John Foust. All rights reserved. John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals.

Many ad departments are using his training DVDs to save time and get quick results from in-house training. Email for information: john@johnfoust.com

Daily Herald changes print frequency

SUBMITTED
The Daily Herald, Columbia
September 3, 2026

The Columbia Daily Herald is announcing a change in print frequency in response to shifting reader habits and rising print costs.

Beginning the week of Nov. 1, subscribers will receive printed newspapers one day per week, on Wednesday, with 24/7 access to columbiadailyherald.com and the eNewspaper, a digital replica of the newspaper, six days per week, on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday.

This change reflects a broader trend in the newspaper industry as more readers turn to digital platforms for news and information. The decision to adjust print frequency is aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability of The Columbia Daily Herald.

Young

"In an ever-evolving media landscape, we have to meet our readers where they are," Middle Tennessee Group Editor Nicole Young said. She oversees The Columbia Daily Herald in addition to three other Tennessee publications. "Our content isn't changing. We will still be covering what's important to our readers, and we will still be delivering it in a timely fashion."

Like many newspapers across the country, The Columbia Daily Herald has faced increasing costs for printing and delivery.

All print subscribers will continue to have full digital access to news updates, subscriber-only stories, video and audio features, obituaries, legal notices and classifieds.

HICKS from Page 7

council meetings, county budgets, school boards, youth baseball or print every kid on the honor roll.

Newspapers must modernize. We have to make our websites better, improve our digital products, reach readers in new ways and become more efficient.

But technology alone cannot replace a strong local business base.

Philanthropy can help. Foundations can fund reporting projects, student journalism, technology and innovation. But grants are a bridge, not a permanent road for most community newspapers.

There is another part of the equation that deserves more attention.

Local newspapers have spent decades providing public-service information that government agencies and nonprofit organizations need communities to see — often at no cost.

There is an important difference between news and public information.

Reporters should decide what is news. Government agencies should not expect a news story to replace a communications budget.

If an agency needs the public to understand a tax program, election, health service, school initiative or government program, it should budget to communicate that information through trusted local media.

The same is true for nonprofits.

A news release is not a communications plan. If telling people about available services or important community work is part of the mission, telling that story should also be part of the budget.

Some states have started to act, creating tax credits and other programs to help protect local journalism jobs.

Congress should move, too.

The Community News and Small Business Support Act would help keep or expand local coverage in rural communities while also helping small businesses

advertise in their local market.

That matters because local stores are fighting their own battle.

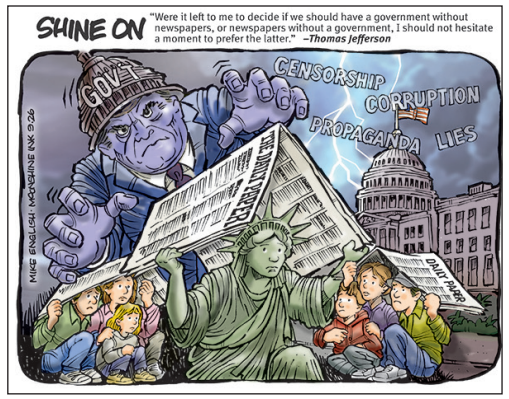
They cannot compete online against Amazon, national chains and big-box retailers with enormous advertising budgets and sophisticated digital marketing operations.

Helping small businesses advertise locally could strengthen downtown businesses and local news coverage at the same time.

Saving local news is not about nostalgia.

It is about whether communities can still make informed decisions, preserve their shared history and hold those in power accountable.

A community without a newspaper does not become better informed. It becomes more dependent on rumor, social media, press releases and outside narratives.



It becomes less informed, less connected and easier to mislead. Accountability weakens. Civic engagement declines. And gradually, a community loses part of its shared identity.

Newspapers are not dead. But they are fragile, and they are under pressure.

People still read newspapers. They still value public notices. They still rely on local newspapers to understand their communities.

In other words, they still matter. Maybe now more than ever.

Robb Hicks is a third-generation Wyoming newspaperman and publisher of the Buffalo Bulletin. In 2025, Hicks, his wife Jen Sieve-Hicks, and Rob and Shaylee Mortimore stepped in after eight Wyoming newspapers abruptly closed in 2025. Together, they reopened the papers, restored local news coverage and kept those communities from becoming news deserts.

REZENDES from Page 7

Public Service prize awarded to the Globe for our investigation into the cover-up of child sex abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston.

Nearly twenty-five years later, this is still a story that hits readers where they live, in the churches and neighborhoods of Catholic Boston, in their very homes. As the clergy sex abuse scandal continues to erupt across America and around the world, its impact endures wherever the Catholic Church has a presence.

Of course, the Globe is only one of thousands of news organizations – large and small – that help readers and their neighborhoods survive and thrive in a political system known as democracy. In addition to holding public officials and institutions to account, these news organizations are the most reliable means of supplying citizens with the information they need to make informed choices in local and national elections – the only way our democracy survives.

Today, however, it's no secret that local journalism is disappearing, a truly dangerous phenomenon. Over the last two decades, more than three thousand American newspapers have closed, according to a report by the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, leaving local communities dependent on social media and other often unreliable sources for essential information.

Even the New York Times, with its great financial success and abundant resources, has severely curtailed its commitment to local reporting, leaving the job to capable but much smaller news organizations that often lack the clout to force positive change in local politics and government

The perilous decline of local news in New York City, where I live, was driven home for me while researching my forthcoming biography of the legendary reporter and columnist, Jimmy Breslin. A native New Yorker, Breslin was a larger-than-life figure who spent more than fifty years defending ordinary people fighting forces greater than themselves through books and newspaper columns, most famously in the Daily News, at the time the largest circulation newspaper in America.

More than anyone, Breslin personified local news. An early critic of police brutality and racist attacks on Black New Yorkers, he also wrote compassionately about AIDS victims at a time when most mainstream reporters were ignoring them, or worse. Unlike most reporters working today, he found most of his stories through old-fashioned shoe-leather reporting, on the street and in courtrooms and barrooms in neighborhoods stretching across the city.

"You climb the stairs," he often said. "All the stories are at the top of the stairs."

Michael Rezendes is the author of the forthcoming, "The People's Voice: The Adventures of the Ferocious Populist, Jimmy Breslin." As an investigative reporter with the Associated Press and the Boston Globe Spotlight Team, he received numerous awards including two shared Pulitzer Prizes while working for the Boston Globe. He was played by Mark Ruffalo in the Academy Award-winning movie, "Spotlight."

SLIMP from Page 2

When asked, "Which of the following comes closest to describing your feelings about the use of AI at newspapers?" answers broke down like this:

- Strongly opposed: 16 percent
- Very skeptical: 12 percent
- Somewhat skeptical: 29 percent
- Neutral: 12 percent
- Generally positive: 22 percent
- Extremely enthusiastic: 7 percent

I can't help but think back to a New York Press Association Convention around the turn of the century, when I walked into a packed room with hundreds of publishers to speak to them about incorporating online news into their publications. The room was silent when I walked in, every seat taken. Before I got up to speak, a publisher in the center of the front row asked, "Are you going to say the last thing the last guy said to us?"

The room remained silent as everyone waited for my response. "I didn't hear the last speaker. I have no idea what he said."

The publisher continued, "He said we would all be out of business within a couple of years if we didn't drop print and move everything online."

I assured them I wasn't going to say anything like that.

A few weeks later, I was in downtown Denver, speaking at a convention. At one spot on the schedule, I was supposed to speak to the publishers about customer service. Before I could say a word, a hand went up.

"Can I ask a question before you start? What did you think about what the lunch speaker had to say?"

I suppose I should listen to more speakers, because once again I had to admit I had no idea who the speaker was or what was said. I quickly learned it was the same speaker, the CEO of one of America's major metro newspaper groups, that I had followed in New York.

"He said we were all going to be out of business within a year or two if we didn't stop printing newspapers."

That's when I said something that I've been quoted on several times since: "When someone stands on a stage and tries to convince you of something, whether it's the speaker at a convention, the preacher at church, or even me, I want you to ask yourself something. Just ask, 'What will it benefit that speaker if I do what they say I should do?'

My final thought today: Don't believe everything people tell you. Your most important job is putting out a great newspaper that serves your community. That's it. Do that and, like me, when you're nearing the end of your career, you will be able to sleep at night.

This column was edited to fit the space allotted. Kevin Slimp is a consultant, advisor and trainer in the newspaper industry. From 1997-2018, he directed The Newspaper Institute of The University of Tennessee. He is CEO of Market Square Publishing and Chief Guru at NewspaperAcademy.com.