Who says no one wants to own a weekly newspaper?

Essay contest draws 140 would-be buyers for *Hardwick Gazette* in Vermont; 25 of the submissions presented here for the first time.
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Hardwick Gazette contest drew entries from all walks of life – even an Uber driver

When Ross Connelly announced his plans in May 2016 to run an essay contest to find the next owner of his Hardwick Gazette in Vermont, I was intrigued. Would it really work? Would 700 people actually plunk down $175 each to have a shot at winning the newspaper? What types of people would enter the contest?

As it turned out, people from all walks of life entered. There were journalists, entrepreneurs, teachers, doctors, lawyers, retired couples, students, and even a foreign correspondent and an Uber driver. Some entrants originally hailed from foreign nations. Many wrote passionately about the lofty heights of journalistic endeavor, as though it were a holy calling. Some were more pragmatic, discussing methods of leveraging digital media and advertising revenue. A few even noted that they had no experience in journalism whatsoever, but simply thought it would be “fun to run a newspaper.”

Ross was kind enough to turn over the 140 anonymous entries to me. Because this type of contest with a newspaper as the prize had never been run before, I thought it was important to preserve some of the essays for historical reasons. I even envisioned a few university journalism professors using them as an assignment, having each student select the best one.

In the end, I decided to publish only 25 of them in Grassroots Editor. Brian Palmer, my administrative assistant who is also my former journalism student, and I selected the ones that were the most interesting and insightful. We did only minimal editing, as we wanted the entries to speak for themselves.

It was difficult, but there were some that stood out for various reasons. Some attempted humor, and others submitted poetry. Many read like a résumé, with little detail about what the entrant’s plans would be for the future. Several said, “Don’t pick me; I just want the paper to survive.” One entrant had already assembled a team that would travel with him. Some were students, still working for their university’s campus newspaper. One entry even came from a dog.

There were a few entries from people who had traveled across the country just to visit the area and its residents. Though Ross refused to visit with them directly (to avoid bias), the entrants came away with respect and admiration for the Hardwick area and its people.

Some of the entries were quite similar in scope and tone; most of these were of the “résumé-type” mentioned. Others were more personal, recounting a moment in the entrant’s past where the story became more than just a job and journalism itself revealed its holistic nature. Some of those entries were particularly emotional, both for the author and the reader.

One of the entries came from the former editor-in-chief of the student newspaper I advised for 15 years. Even though his name was not attached to his essay, I recognized him immediately.

Even though Ross had a 100-point scale to judge the entries (based on structure, creativity, thought and the conveyance of capability, and the desire to operate a weekly newspaper), I’m not sure that his team could have easily selected a winner.

Perhaps you will have a personal favorite among these 25. It makes for fascinating reading, to see the various approaches all these people took and their passion for wanting to own the Hardwick Gazette.

–Chad Stebbins
A quest into the unknown

By Ross Connelly

What to do?
That was the question that weighed on my mind in 2015 as I saw my 70th birthday come and go.

My late wife and I bought The Hardwick Gazette almost three decades earlier. She died when I was in my just-passed mid-60s. I carried on, week to week, year to year. But, yes, BUT, that was the question: but, what to do?

A few years before my wife died, we contacted a broker. That was not a good experience.

I talked to a few people I felt could take over the Gazette. Not interested.

My son was on another career path.

A few weeks after my wife died, I stopped into our post office on a Saturday morning and ran into a person who works for the town. She offered condolences and asked what I was going to do, implying she wondered if I planned to stick around or would leave.

I responded, not knowing what else to say, I planned to get out next week’s paper. She was appreciative: “The town needs you. We need you.”

Getting out next week’s issue was my focus. With the help of some long-time staff members, a topnotch reporter, experienced correspondents and a lot of community support and encouragement, one week gave way to the next and the next and the next, and soon one year to the next.

I knew my energy was not what it was when I was 40 and we set out on our venture as newspaper publishers in a new town, in a new state. Although I tried to discount it, I had to admit that I was older than I was previously. Running the newspaper by myself was harder and not as much fun as it had been when Susan was there to share the load in the office and at home.

I still had the passion, but practical realities of continuing to run a small weekly without a key player grew each month. I recognized I needed to find a way to transition out of ownership while assuring the newspaper would continue.

So, what to do?
As I cast about for an answer, my mind focused on the next week’s issue. I also thought back to stories that always stood out, which brought in the FDIC, a bank closure and several felony convictions, including a seven-year federal prison sentence for the bank’s president, who was a Hardwick resident. Patrick Leahy, the state’s senior U.S. senator, convinced the FCC commissioners to hold a hearing in Hardwick in the mid-1990s that focused on cell tower siting. Another series focused on the town’s electric department, the victim of the state’s largest public embezzlement – $1.6 million – which led to a two-year federal prison sentence for the utility’s office manager, a Hardwick resident.

We had a transgendered police officer who filed a discrimination complaint with the state and federal governments. The town was told to settle by the state and feds, or face a lengthy trial about him being forced out of his job. The town agreed, while not admitting fault. The issue of where wind towers are sited drew extensive coverage, and included the arrest of the editor of a nearby weekly on charges of trespassing.

And, one I’ll never forget, was the time I received a call from Vermont’s then secretary of state telling me I needed to apologize to the Hardwick Select Board because our reporter refused to leave a public board training session at the board chair’s home. The chair told the secretary of state the Gazette’s reporter’s refusal to leave caused the burning of a frozen lasagna the board chair was preparing for the board’s lunch. I declined.

There were state championship games for local high school soccer, basketball and baseball teams. A local resident was a two-time member of the men’s U.S. Nordic Olympic Ski Team. Four members of the women’s U.S. Nordic Olympic Ski Team that competed in Sochi, Russia, trained at the nearby Craftsbury Outdoor Center. The center also hosts world-class rowers, and is in an ongoing spat with summer lake dwellers as to whether the shells should give more time on the long, narrow water body to water skiers.

The conversation in the post office stayed with me: “The town needs you. We need you.”

Citizens have a right to know. They can’t know the news if it isn’t reported.

So, what to do?
I put ads in Editor & Publisher, such as it was by then, and told the staff of my plans. They took it well, offered support, and continued their good work to make sure the newspaper fulfilled its responsibilities to the local/faithful readers. I hoped another young couple, mirroring Susan and me from years before, would surface. Didn’t happen.

I explored the idea of a community supported newspaper, with half of the newspaper’s ownership owned by the community and half by an actual owner. A well-respected CPA, with an expertise on not-for-profit organization, gave me tips on the legalities and intricacies of such a plan. I explored the idea with people in the community who found business success with a community supported restaurant, and farmers who use community supported agriculture. The community prospects looked good, but finding an owner to run the newspaper proved to be the rub.

What to do? The question remained.

Out of the blue, a longtime friend emailed me a link to an article in the Boston Globe about a woman in Maine who transitioned from owning her B&B by holding an essay contest. The prize for the winning essayist was her business, from soup to nuts, to sheets and beds, to the old whaling captain’s house in which it was located. She had several thousand contestants, at somewhere between $200-$300 a pop, if I remember correctly.

“You should try this,” my friend wrote.

My friend, my son, Sawyer, and I met for lunch overlooking the dock at Woods Hole.

“I’m not sure there are 100 journalists in the U.S., who would put up a couple of hundred dollars to take a chance on winning a newspaper,” I reasoned.

“Dad,” my son said, “you won’t need 100 journalists. You just need a few. You’ll get your money from the hipsters. They will be the entrants. I can see them sitting there saying, ‘Hey, Dude, look at this – we can win a newspaper for a couple hundred dollars. That would be cool. We can move to Hardwick and run a newspa-

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per. That would be cool.”"

My friend, a former journalist who started her own public relations business and who suggested the idea of a contest, was not in total agreement with my son. She was optimistic there would be many people interested in the contest and who would be willing to take a chance, along with the completely unqualified hipsters. She also offered to handle the PR, and only charge me if the contest worked.

We kicked around ideas. I found a lawyer in Montpelier who thought the idea sounded like a lot of fun. He offered to work pro bono, and would only charge for the closing work, if it came to that. He determined the contest was legal so long as it was not a lottery or game of chance. The essays, to be judged on specific criteria by a panel, solved that problem. We worked on rules, figured out what the entry fee would be, based on the number of entries I’d need to bring me a fair “selling price,” and other details.

My son put together a website, (for which he was paid), my friend drafted a press release announcing the contest, worked up a press contact list, and we held our breath.

That was unnecessary. She gave the *Boston Globe* first dibs, only after the Gazette published an article announcing the contest. (I wasn’t going to get scooped on my own story.) Whether a slow news day, or the fact journalists are always interested in what other journalists are up to, the phone started ringing: the *Boston Globe*, the *AP*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Daily News*, *Poynter*, the *New York Times*, Al Jazeera, *NPR*, CBC, BBC, *Editor & Publisher*, Vermont newspapers, radio and television stations, more newspapers from around the country, bloggers, radio hosts from the New England states and beyond.

Being interviewed is different than interviewing. I always told reporters to remember they were news gatherers, not news makers. I was surprised at 5:45 a.m., on a work day, when my clock radio clicked on, to hear my own voice speaking to a BBC anchor. He had interviewed me several days before. That was strange.

The publicity wouldn’t stop and the phone continued to ring, as my brain tried to stay focused on the looming deadline for the upcoming issue, and the one after that, and the one after that ... *The New York Times* sent a bureau chief to write a second article, along with a photographer. *The Boston Globe* also returned for another helping; this time, a columnist appeared unannounced one day. Turns out, he was a person I had worked with years before when we were both employed at a small daily in western Massachusetts.

A couple of college professors called and asked me to speak to their journalism students, via Skype. A high school journalism teacher wanted me to read and react to his students’ essays, a class exercise but not for submission.

I shook my head thinking what the publicity would have cost if I manufactured widgets and had to put together a marketing campaign to launch a new product. Wouldn’t happen.

I set a minimum of 700 entries for the essays, and a maximum of 1,889.

I enlisted a panel of judges, including a couple of former Gazette reporters, a journalism professor, local community members, businesspeople, a college student and myself. I never announced who they were as I didn’t want them to be lobbied or pressured in any way.

The subject of each 400-word essay was: “Why I would like to own and operate a paid weekly newspaper, founded in 1889.”

The lawyer had fun with the rules. He included a section entitled: “DEADLINE: All entries must be postmarked or physically in the hands of the Editor of the *Hardwick Gazette* by no later than Monday, August 15, 2016 at 5:30 p.m. EST. This is a newspaper: no exceptions or extensions shall be granted.”

I was not surprised at the number of entries that arrived the day before the deadline, sent by FedEx or Priority Mail Express. Obviously, those entries were from journalists.

The essays were to be judged by: structure of essay (introduction, body and conclusion), (15 points); creativity, (35 points); thought and the conveyance of capability, (30 points); and desire to operate a weekly newspaper (20 points).

A few essays trickled in. The entrants, who were guaranteed the return of their fee if the total number failed to reach the 700 threshold, varied. There were veteran journalists wanting to bail from shrinking newsrooms, to young couples early on in their newspaper careers. There were academics, businesspeople, and a woman serving prison time who asked me to cover her entry fee with the promise she would pay me back when she got out. There were several attorneys and others who thought the idea of running a weekly newspaper would be a good way to ease back a bit. (I was tempted to contact them to let them know a tweed sports jacket, with leather patches on the elbows, and a pipe were not part of the deal, although an old caned swivel chair they could rock back in was included. I didn’t. I didn’t want to disabuse them of their fantasy.)

The entries came from California, Florida, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Jersey, South Dakota, Montana, Michigan, Georgia ... Submissions also came from a variety of countries, including in the Caribbean, from Greece, Italy, Poland, Venezuela, Australia, Japan, Canada...

The comments were fascinating, and heartening. Submission number one began: “Publishing the *Hardwick Gazette* represents the culmination of my career as a reporter, writer, editor and publisher. In 2004, I faced retirement at 60. ... I would like to prove to that company and to the world you are only as old as you feel.”

A couple of essayists wrote about parents keeping binders of newspaper clippings. One submission told of an article that included a picture of the essayist in a high school baseball game, arms split, primed to throw a pitch. The headline read: “(the essayist’s name) is Mr. No-No.”

Years later, working as a journalist, he recounted covering a football game and interviewing one of the players, a wide receiver. “The headline hit me on my drive home,” he wrote. “(The player’s name) is Mr. Deep Threat.”

He concluded: “I began wondering if his parents kept newspaper clippings. I sure hoped so.”

Another entrant recounted his career in business: “I have a verifiable reputation for hiring the right people for the right job, implementing ‘bar-raising’ expectations ... 

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“As potentially the new owner of your Newspaper, I am confident that I could bring my experience to the forefront and with your employee’s (sic) produce results that will exceed your expectations. In fact, I guarantee it!”

An editor from New York City recounted her early career in Alaska.

“Alaskan media succeeded because they continued to produce stories of utmost importance to their audiences. Now, as an editor in New York City, after earning my masters (sic) in journalism, I’m privileged to contribute to the national conversation. But I miss the perspective I once had into a true community.”

Within her essay, another New Yorker opined, “Small, community newspapers have the power to turn back the tide. They can be the Davids in this Goliath-media world.”

A number of the entrants traveled to Hardwick to assess the area and newspaper, although I refused to meet or talk with any interested parties at the risk of them or me being swayed.

Wrote one hopeful entrant: “I toured all 10 communities in the paper’s circulation area to learn about each of them and find out what kind of relationship they had with the Gazette. The results were encouraging.”

Another person sent an essay on behalf of seven people who learned their skills at their college newspaper in Montreal and wanted to continue that work.

“The focus always has been and always must be, the ‘nitty gritty’ of community journalism,” the person wrote. “We want to be the newspaper that a mother cuts out and hangs on the fridge for a decade, the newsprint yellowing.”

The Deep South and Northern New England are not frequently associated, but an essayist wrote: “I grew up in rural Mississippi in the ’60s, the daughter of a truck-crop farmer with acres of tomatoes, cabbages, watermelons and sweet corn. ... I feel a kinship with Hardwick.”

There were essays from people who worked for the New York Times, CNN and other mainstream media outlets. Around a dozen local residents also sent in entries, but made clear in their several sentence essays they didn’t want to win. Their intent was to support the effort to keep the Gazette printing each week. (Kinda like a public radio pledge drive.)

I read each entry and scanned them into the computer. Alas, I was far from 700 essays as the closing date of the contest approached. Extending the deadline once, and then a final time, with a simultaneous crowd funding appeal to raise enough money to allow a winner to be chosen from among the 140 entrants, did not bring in a rush of hipsters, nor anyone else. The effort raised about $20,000 in pledges but that and the entry fees were returned.

All was not lost, however. The publicity the contest generated was priceless. And now as I look back, almost two years since selling the newspaper, I was amused and gratified when a friend and former colleague at the Gazette shared a story about a person she calls, “The Entitled Millennial.” On learning that my friend had worked years ago at the Gazette, the person responded with awe and a sense of viewing her with a bit of a rock-star cred. The millennial told her he and his friends in Washington, D.C., where he worked for a newsletter, learned of the Gazette’s essay contest and talked of it over lunch. They all said they were excited about the thought of entering.

I don’t know if that person or any of his friends ever did craft essays, but their interest suggests to me that my son was not far off the mark when he said the young hipsters would be captivated by the thought of winning the newspaper in a contest.

My friend said that young person moved to Vermont not too long after the contest concluded. She wondered if the essay contest gave a cachet to Vermont, Hardwick and weekly newspapers, and might have been a motivation.

I do know the interest of at least five or six entrants led them to contact me after the contest ended to express interest in buying the newspaper. I found a buyer from among that group.

During the contest, I was approached by a number of people in town who expressed their good wishes that I’d find a winner. They wanted me to have the chance for retirement, and they also wanted the Gazette to continue. I’ve been the recipient of similar sentiments since stepping away from the newspaper. They are glad I was able to sell, and they are glad the Gazette continues to report the local news each week.

One essayist said a local newspaper is glue that helps hold a community together. Local newspapers have that in common, whether in Hardwick, in a small town on the Great Plains or elsewhere in the Midwest, a neighborhood in a city on the West Coast, or a suburb in the South.

My 31 years at the helm of the Gazette tells me the glue is true, even as my long-ago education as a social scientist might find skepticism at the validity of such a broad brush statement in the absence of extensive empirical research.

I like that a newspaper is a mirror to hold up so the town’s residents can see themselves. So they can see themselves, even in scenes they might just as soon be left in the dark. So they can see themselves and, perhaps, reflect on what they do and whom they are in a way that did not pop to mind on first glance. Perhaps, a weekly newspaper is also a diary of the towns it covers, in that a diary’s pages hold truths.

There is truth to be told in each issue of a weekly newspaper. That is the glue of democracy to share. That is not futile. That is not academic. That is necessary. That is a responsibility and a privilege. That requires commitment.

There is repetition, there is frustration, but there is never a shortage of news, even in the area I live of sparse population, farms, woods, streams and lakes, rolling hills and mountains, mom and pop businesses, a population of multi-generational natives and imports. There is never boredom. I like that.

I always thought of community newspapers as the grassroots of the journalism community. Community newspapers are the two-lane byways and back roads that run between the state highways and the interstates. Those back roads, which go through the hills and fields and from town to town and along the streets in those villages and burgs, reveal a lot that is missed by those who race to get from one place to another.

Democracy needs its citizens to take time to see whom they are, to listen to their concerns, to tell their stories. That’s a role, a critical role, community newspapers play. The newspaper is a win-
dow to what is being done in the name of the people.

The community editor knows potholes and tax rates and bored kids who can’t wait to get out of town are not unique to her or his town. Editors of community newspapers know their communities are newsworthy.

Community editors are in a position to show, explain and connect the dots so their readers see similarities to their lives with the lives of others in other communities. That helps to make readers citizens. That’s a huge responsibility for any journalist and that’s a terrific privilege.

Newspapers should not lose sight of what they are. They should not lose sight of the written word, of the well-told story accompanied by a quality photograph and graphic, of the editing process, of the newsprint that can be picked up and read at the citizen’s convenience, left on the kitchen table or living room couch, to be reread by someone else, an article’s words – its insights – saved for discussion over supper, at the water cooler, for the ballot box, or wherever; saved for the refrigerator door, the scrapbook or historical archive.

I feel fortunate The Hardwick Gazette offered me that opportunity. The many contest entries I read indicated to me there are a lot of people near and far who also recognize there is both responsibility and privilege in owning a newspaper. That is gratifying.

I think back on this past fall’s brutal killings in Pittsburgh and in Louisville and before that to the horrific shootings in Annapolis, and reflect on back to Parkland, to Las Vegas, to Orlando, to Columbine, and back and back to the violence of Jim Crow, western expansion, and slavery. My mind toils on back to the violence and terror that was part of the Plimoth Colony and colonialism. I turn and think of the unnamed shootings to come.

We can despair or we can work to be better.

A weekly newspaper is more than a commodity. Community newspapers that are fulfilling their responsibilities, work for the betterment of community. Democracy and a free press are intertwined. The subtlety of that relationship would be more evident in the absence of a local newspaper than its presence.

That’s why I’m gratified my friend suggested I hold an essay contest to find a new owner for The Hardwick Gazette and why I am glad the contest brought forth solid essays, and I found a buyer. The Gazette lives on each week as the mirror for the citizens of the towns it covers.

Holding the essay contest was the right thing to do.

A past president of the New England and the Vermont press associations, Ross Connelly is a member of the New England Newspaper Hall of Fame, a recipient of the Eugene Cervi Award from the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors, and won numerous Golden Dozen editorial writing awards from that organization, as well as many other journalism awards. He can be contacted at trconnelly@pshift.com.
Who saves Internet posts in a binder?

On Route 113, in Thetford, Vermont, there is a white cape with green trim. From the right angle, the roof appears to be caving in. Upstairs, in my childhood bedroom, there is a binder full of newspaper clippings. My parents gave it to me as a graduation gift, and the clippings depict a teenage boy growing up. Toward the end, there is a picture of me, arms split, primed to throw a pitch. The headline: "[redacted] is Mr. No-No."

I threw a no-hitter against Concord my junior year. It was not much of an accomplishment – the now-defunct NEK school had eighth-graders in the lineup – but it was made into something iconic by a writer for the Connecticut Valley Spectator, an upstart weekly publication that died too soon. I later showed the clipping to friends in college, and we joked about making t-shirts: [redacted] is Mr. No-No.

I brought up the Mr. No-No anecdote during a job interview at a weekly newspaper in North Carolina. It was the first time I had walked into an interview actually believing I was the perfect person for the job. The publisher concurred – I am now the editor for two weekly community newspapers. I have proven the publisher prescient through dozens of features, interviews, tweets, Facebook posts, PDFs, Tuesday night deadlines, Saturday morning 5k races, city council and school board meetings, and late-night rides home.

The twenty-first century newspaper industry looks different than it did in 1889, or 1986. There are other places to get breaking news, other ways to stay informed. But who saves Internet posts in a binder? Weekly newspapers still have the uncanny ability to make a moment last forever – they reflect the essence of what makes a small community special.

Last fall I was covering a local football game. Having conducted postgame interviews with the coaches and quarterback, I walked back toward my car. I noticed a player walking beside me, a wide receiver whose name I knew from countless recaps, but someone with whom I'd never spoken. I asked for an interview, and he mumbled through some answers, visibly nervous at what might have been his first ever experience with the media. I thanked him and walked on.

The headline hit me on the drive home.
"Kendrell Ruffin Is Mr. Deep Threat."

I began wondering if his parents kept newspaper clippings. I sure hoped so.

Community in my heart

It was a crazy, busy, day, just like any other. I looked away from my laptop to clear my mind, scanning my desk for what I needed to work on next, and there, under a pile of papers, I saw it. The headline of the top story on the front of Publishers’ Auxiliary’s July issue – “VT newspaper is having an essay contest to win the whole business.”


You see, I’ve been the editor of a 133-year-old, six-day-a-week, rural community newspaper for the past seven years, so the idea of my OWN newspaper caused my heart to skip a beat as I held my breath. This would be a tremendous opportunity for my family and myself to own, grow and serve a community doing something I know, love and live every day.

I’m no stranger to today’s small newspaper business challenges. In the past 10 years, three companies have owned the newspaper where I work after going through a brutal bankruptcy. Our staff size has been cut in half and corporate policies dictated many changes. I’ve watched our newspaper rise to the top as a leader in our area and then hit rock bottom.

Throughout this all, my philosophy was, and still is, that no matter what happens at the corporate level, it doesn’t change what our readers expect from us.

We kept telling the stories, anyway we could. I’ve put in a lot of hard work, hours and dedication to running my community newspaper. I’ve never felt like it was just a job, but always saw it as a responsibility to my fellow neighbors to keep them informed of important issues on the national, state and local levels and tell their stories of success, challenges or hardships. I know firsthand that it’s a 24/7 commitment.

I take my position as editor, and as a community citizen, seriously. I want to contribute, and if possible, make a difference in the community that I live. I serve on local organizations in leadership positions. I believe in supporting local businesses by partnering and patronizing them. I’m not sure if I have “ink in my veins” as the saying goes, but I know for sure I have community in my heart.

My vision for the Hardwick Gazette is to continue serving its readers providing them with top-notch reporting. After all, we do this for them.
I struggled when I first sat down to write this essay. I was straining. I knew the message, but was much too aware of the prose. I had to remember something. The goal for both the contest and journalism is the same: don’t self-consciously try for greatness. That’s intrinsically self-serving, and it goes against the purpose of reporting.

So I thought about what it is I want to do and say, and that is I simply want to run a newspaper in New England, and tell New England stories.

I am a New Englander, and have been an editor and journalist here for almost 30 years. I am deeply connected to this place. I feel it’s a responsibility to tell stories about the people who live here because the only institutions interested in telling New England stories are local newspapers.

So the continued publication of The Hardwick Gazette is vital.

The Gazette will remain an essential member of the community by staying honest and true, accommodating yet unafraid, and by embracing technologies and platforms that magnify, not replace, the traditions we hold close. We can do all these things at once.

The only thing left to say is that when I looked at the photo of the street-front offices of The Hardwick Gazette, I pictured myself sitting inside having a conversation with a member of the Hardwick community. We were talking about what is important, and about the things we’d like to get done.

I’d love to see that – and make that – happen.

A decade ago I was hitchhiking across New England, an unemployed reporter seeking my next newspaper job. I’d left the weekly Point Reyes Light near my hometown, where the owner/editor had taken a sabbatical, so that after a few months, I was doing every job except sell ads.

In rural Vermont, I recall a lift from a 70-year-old third-generation dairy farmer whose family-owned sawmill was struggling since NAFTA opened up competition from Quebec.

Another lift was from a woman whose husband, a National Guardsman, had been in Iraq for two years, one of thousands of reservists caught up in Rumsfeld’s stop-loss policy. She said protesters had called her husband “baby killer” and Phelps’ religious fanatics picketed a local soldier’s funeral perversely claiming the young man’s death was “God’s wrath” over same sex marriage.

I didn’t want to write about these people so much as write for them. They were trying to make sense of an increasingly irrational world where survival is difficult. Solid journalism provides answers by offering a platform for questions.

I crossed Lake Champlain to report for the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, Plattsburgh Press Republican and North Country Public Radio. It was in the Northeast that I came to appreciate the Yankee townhall tradition that we lack out west. Direct democracy is exciting but futile without the hyper-local coverage to inform; I wouldn’t consider running a weekly anywhere else.

I turned 30 and cut the cord from the security of a weekly paycheck to freelance abroad. As exciting as international reporting is, it never compares with the gratification of good community journalism: the impact of a well-placed article on village police arresting a domestic violence victim or uncovering hard evidence of a nonprofit director’s malfeasance outweighs a colorful dispatch with an exotic dateline.

I met my wife-to-be three years ago and we were married this spring at her father’s farmhouse in Wisconsin. Her background is academic writing and she works as a copyeditor for an international news outlet. As ad director, she’d use her keen eye for typos and apply her Midwestern work ethic to hold up the business-end from her side of the Gazette’s impregnable firewall separating editorial and advertising.

Now in our late 30s with our daughter due Labor Day, the Gazette would also function as a nursery. We hope to instill our children with the responsibility, importance and excitement that come with operating a community’s free press.
Nostalgia, skill and a flood of ideas all in one package

Each week, my great-grandmother, a yellow notepad and pen in hand, sat at her kitchen table to weave together a narrative of the happenings of our rural Ozark Mountains community. Her homespun country correspondent column offered me a first glimpse of the power of local media. For everyone looked forward to it, and eagerly shared with her the news of their lives, from visiting friends and recent vacations to new tractors and remodeled kitchens.

My own entry into journalism came on whim, a result of filling out my course schedule as an undeclared college sophomore, but blossomed into a defining point. It led to editorship of the college newspaper and then, upon graduation, a position as a reporter at a weekly. But with student loans eager to be paid, I begrudgingly exited the Fourth Estate.

Instead, I’ve spent 14 years soaking up a variety of communications experiences, editing publications for nonprofits, serving as a communications director for a member of Congress and working in public relations, driving strategies and creating content, from op-eds and social media to graphics and videos.

But the love of community journalism needles at me. Especially as I recently turned 40 and increasingly yearn to leave behind the bloat of the city and return to the type of community where one’s contributions feel so much more evident.

If I described the type of newspaper I have dreamed of owning, the Hardwick Gazette comes as close as any. A dedicated and principled community institution strongly tied to its origins and history. For while the Washington Post ceded its historic Watergate-era headquarters to bulldozers this year, the Gazette remains firmly entrenched behind its quintessential New England façade.

I offer not just skills and ideas shaped by a love of journalism and knowledge of AP Style, but also an understanding of the nuances of an age molded by modern technology. For while the printed pages of the Gazette should remain its soul, my goal would be to build on that, infusing its website and social media with videos, graphics and teasing tidbits. Not to detract, but to enthuse and engage both readers and advertisers.

I represent nostalgia, skill and a flood of ideas all in one package. And much like Ross and Susan did when taking hold of the Gazette’s reins 30 years ago, I too promise the gifts of gumption, goodwill and unbridled enthusiasm.

Missing a weekly’s closer connection to its readers

My earliest memory is of playing in my father’s weekly newspaper office while he pecked at a cantankerous old Linotype.

I guess I didn’t outgrow the experience: I’ve spent every year since in small and large newspaper offices as a paperboy, press boy, photographer, reporter, copy editor, an editor – even sold some ads.

I’ve gone overseas and to wars, reported human triumphs and tragedies, interviewed or photographed fascinating people, places and moments. I’ve enabled readers to understand or to share everyday stories of communities, and enabled good journalists to learn or to perform that essential task.

For 16 years I’ve worked in a metro newsroom, building a gifted, dedicated team recognized for its investigative reporting and photojournalism; some of those reporters and editors followed me from other papers where we once worked together. We beat much larger national papers in prestigious contests, winning 200 or more awards annually; I like to think I turned some of those stories into award-winners.

Last year I created “Our Stories,” a weekly column by a talented writer, about people who might never make it into print – but who should, because their stories are heart-rending and heart-warming, uplifting and sobering. These very intimate accounts of everyday lives instantly became our most popular feature.

Perhaps that’s why I miss a weekly newspaper’s closer connection to its readers, the opportunities to hear firsthand what people want to read – and, sometimes, to decide they need to read something else because it’s important. To build a trust with, a responsibility to, those readers to inform them about their communities, their connections to the wider world – but, most of all, to share their stories.

Yes, newspapering has transformed; social media, websites, video story-telling are all the rage today, an immediate connection to and for people – a tremendous tool for journalists, too. But they aren’t a newspaper, which remains a unique trust, a responsibility which, done well, is indispensable to readers and communities who value balance, depth, honesty, perspective – and a good editor’s sense of what’s important, whatever the form in which we deliver it.

I’d love to be another of those Hardwick editors who report and record the life of their community, who respect the past yet offer a newcomer’s fresh insight, and who keep alive a trust dating to 1889 ... a little before I played in my father’s wood-floored, ink-reeking, lead-filled, key-clacking office.
There once was a weekly Gazette Whose publisher joined the jet set Off to far-out locales
With his buddies and pals -
Les bons temps avec vin et baguettes.

First, a successor he sought to choose With a classified ad in the news:

If Someone Shall Make Me a
Limerick I’ll Stake Thee The Hardwick
(Plus All of its Dues).

Sincerely,
Nelson Crosly.

He received:
The beezer was Burlington Bernie
Caesar on a junket, a journey. He got in a fight
On a hill to the right
And came down with Power of Attorney.

A columnist quoted in Danville:
“A woman cannot what a man will.”
The distaff side said
Of the op-ed, “Drop dead!”
Twitter followers flopped like an anvil.

The sister of Edward R. Murrow Married Mr. Greenbeans of Greensboro.
He could furrow his brow
Or a row with a plough;
But he won’t’cuz he don’t have a burro.

The Selectboard elected in Calais A Collector of Delinquent Taxes. The money he gets
Is applied to Town debts.
You know he knows just exactly what the facts is.

A little Lit prof late of Hardwick
Doth measure her students by yardstick.
The rod is ne’er spared
On the odd bird who errs.
She swears, “Don’t play card tricks wi’ the .Baaard!” [sic]

The abbot of Cabot, Jack Babbitt,
In marsh, field, and fen tracks jackrabbit. When rabbits are scarce
The abbot says prayers...
And a blue nun appears in black habit.

He from Craftsbury, she from Woodbury,
One day in Shaftsbury vowed they would marry. The pair bought a plot
That they sought in Wolcott
And eloped on the Lake Champlain Ferry.

Appellee’s attorney, Schlemiel, Appeared in Mont-peel on appeal  But a slip in the hall
And before he could fall
The appellant said, ‘Let’s make a deal. •

And two haiku:
Gen’ral George Stannard’s Ghost echoes in harness bells
O’er snow white landscapes
Walden leaves take wing
Children sleeping in their beds Twilight in Vermont

This one won:
The newspaper bunch tends to be rather clubbish.
The editors edit, the publishers publish.
The newsmen report
And the ad men consort.
Now, if only somebody would take out the rubbish!

And so...
Nelson News ignited the ignition.
The pressman’s Muse required his ambition.
The paper’s a wit snappier,
Subscribers a bit scrappier.
Read about it all in Saturday’s
Special Edition.
**Telling the story of a town**

It rained. Torrentially, loudly, manically.

And yet, out they came. Out they came with umbrellas and rain boots, children splashing madly in puddles, getting their mothers wet with a giggle. Out they came, holding soggy handfuls of kettle corn, free samples from a vendor who'd written off making a sale.

Out the townspeople of Hardwick came, in the midst of a downpour, in the midst of a shifting Vermont, to enjoy First Friday festivities.

That's Hardwick. Vermont has been our home since we were children. We've seen Hardwick bloom into a hub for people passionate about land, food and the Vermont way of making not just a living, but a life.

Even if we hadn't watched Hardwick reinvent itself, we would have read about it in the *Hardwick Gazette*. Today, you can find the Gazette open at the Galaxy Bookshop to a piece about Green Up Day or a local business. It's for sale at the Greensboro Garage, where Joanne will let you put your feet up in her new office while you wait for George to replace your fuel pump.

My partner owns a mobile DJ company that has served northern Vermont for 20 years and a second business renting vacation houses to tourists by the weekend. He loves figuring out how to produce a quality product efficiently and effectively and getting it to turn a profit. Employing a small but talented staff and meeting friendly people along the way are the bonuses of running a local business that make it fun.

And me? I’m a small-town reporter at a weekly newspaper.

To me, community news is the hush, hush, murmur, clatter of a town keeping up with itself. Sad stories, festivals, parades and disasters are just a reporter saying “We were all here together. It happened, and we were here.” Community reporters become the voices interwoven through the first draft of a town’s history. There’s romance and responsibility in equal measure in small-town Vermont reporting. I love working at a weekly paper because it gives me the time to tell the story of a town, rather than just a town’s stories.

The *Hardwick Gazette* brings with it a cherished legacy that was nourished by its current owners. We are another couple with the resources, the know-how and the passion to carry on a vibrant small-town newspaper business.

**Being Davids in this Goliath-media world**

Mr. Pulda wanted to be left alone to feed his cows, to tend his soybeans and corn. He lived on a 67-acre farm all his life, largely ignoring the suburb that grew up around him in central New Jersey. He had six siblings but they weren’t interested in carrying on a way of life his parents and grandparents knew. He lived alone in the 1920s farmhouse his father built because he never married or had children. He was 72, sturdy enough to ride a tractor and nudge a stubborn cow.

When I knocked on his door and told him town officials were trying to swipe his farm out from under him through eminent domain, he was shocked. He felt helpless. I told him a newspaper story about a farmer unwillingly losing the town’s last farm would lead to a shit-storm, and it did. The David-and-Goliath tale grew legs, a conservation group stepped in to save his farm, and town officials got a metaphorical black eye.

Through relentless coverage of Mr. Pulda’s story in *The News Tribune*, a 50,000-circulation daily newspaper during the early 1990s, I learned the power and intoxication of local journalism. That feeling has never eluded me. Over the next 30 years, I moved on to report for the Bergen Record for a decade, then freelanced for *The New York Post*, *The New York Times*, the *Daily Beast* and scores of newspapers and magazines, wrote an award-winning memoir in 2014, and I am now making documentaries.

At the heart of what I do is tell the stories.

Mr. Pulda’s tale pulled in readers because his way of life was nostalgic and fleeting. Something bigger was at stake. Readers recognized injustice.

The business of journalism is at stake, too. It is an imperiled profession, with a growing emphasis on clicks and sloppy videos and non-substantive stories. Young journalists have no idea what it’s like to snoop around town hall and sniff out a story before it’s a done deal. Coverage today is reactionary because reporters are not embedded in the community.

The continuity of a daily newspaper such as *The Hardwick Gazette* is a counterweight to the trend undermining the need for authentic reporting. Without being watchdogs, we abdicate our basic duty to keep government on their toes, to engage citizens, to maintain democracy. Small, community newspapers have the power to turn back the tide. They can be the Davids in this Goliath-media world.
Investing the sum of my years of service into this new challenge

A community newspaper is like a deep taproot of a tree. It feeds the community with vital information, producing a shared living history which binds the entire community together. This organism, which we call the “community,” would surely wither without a nurturing newspaper. The historical importance of the Hardwick Gazette and its service to the community cannot be overstated.

All of the varied and unique positions that I have held throughout my life have one thing in common with the responsibilities held by the Hardwick Gazette; they all involved service to our nation and our community. I have spent my life in service either informing, performing, or teaching. Currently, I am master’s-prepared, teaching college graduate students, and coordinating a nationwide “Schools-to-Space” program for secondary school students. I also own an education consulting company, and I am a published author.

In the past, I have worked as a technician on the Space Shuttle Program preparing the now-retired fleet of orbiters for return to flight after the Columbia accident in 2003. I have written nearly one hundred articles for aerospace technicians and I have also worked as a journalist for an international space news organization. I have also served as a firefighter and paramedic.

During my years of service, I have shared responsibility for everything from three $2 billion crew-rated spacecraft, educating children and adults, and caring for the sick and injured.

I have lived half my life in metropolitan areas and wish to return to small town living; bringing my varied experiences and new outlooks to draw upon and add to the deep roots represented by the Hardwick Gazette. I want to add these qualities to the proud history of the newspaper and strengthen its abilities to face the many challenges of the 21st century. I am certain this new career and community will occupy me for the next 20 years as I work to expand its proud legacy.

I will invest the sum of my years of service into this new challenge. I have been a part of history while working in the space program, and I look forward to being a part of the history of this newspaper and community. Therefore, I would like to serve as the next owner of the Hardwick Gazette.

Bringing the tradition of Herman Husband to the Gazette

Journalism is the backbone upon which our democracy shoulders its greatest burden: integrity. A free, modern, and mobilized media is responsible for keeping our country honest.

As the longest-running family owned newspaper in the United States, the Hardwick Gazette has played an integral role in this great journalistic tradition.

From the time of Herman Husband to the Modem Era, the Gazette has endured as a bastion of humble republicanism. As leaders and revitalizers within our community, we are uniquely positioned to bring the Gazette into this new millennium. The Gazette will spearhead a grassroots effort to cultivate appreciation for journalistic principles in our youth. Our diverse array of domestic and foreign contacts further enhances our ability to tell stories of great importance.

In this era of sensationalism and private interest, down-to-earth press is a necessity. Similar to Husband in his travels as an itinerant preacher and proselytizer of the truth, the Millennial Generation hungers for honesty. The Hardwick Gazette provides the opportunity to bridge a time-tested principle with new media.

As globalization brings disparate peoples together, it also provides the opportunity for new voices to be heard. We possess connections in Morocco, India, marketing firms, non-profit organizations, various political groups, the arts, and a multitude of businesses. In addition, we represent a diverse group of writers and educators yearning for the opportunity to claim their voice in print and reestablish moral reporting.

Just like the Hardwick Gazette, our makeshift family has a legacy storied in literature. My mother, a partner in our endeavors, works at the local library and passed down an appreciation for the written word. Raised on the ink of novels and newspapers, I grew up with a deep appreciation for captivating storytelling and journalistic integrity. As a result, Herman Husband’s exploits mesmerized me. His pacifistic leadership role in the Regulator Rebellion against government corruption and his publications alongside Benjamin Franklin are demonstrable of a single quality: the peaceful role of print in advocating for the people.

Fleeing persecution after the Rebellion, Husband adopted the pseudonym “Tuscape Death.” Much like Husband, the Gazette will escape the encroaching death of the newspaper by presenting a fresh, honest perspective. We will maintain the nobility of the tangible news through plain-spoken publication. A forgotten Founding Father, Husband is in many ways the progenitor of American journalistic ideals. We hope to bring this tradition to a new generation with the Hardwick Gazette.
The tide will turn for newspapers

“Who’d want to run a newspaper nowadays?” I was recently asked. This was annoying but not surprising – the decline of the American newspaper has been so widely trumpeted that even non-readers have heard about it. By way of an answer, I tried to explain to my interlocutor that there’s ink as well as blood in my veins.

I told her how my childhood ran by the rhythms of the printing press. About how my father got up at dinnertime to eat breakfast, left at bedtime to make sure trucks filled with *The Philadelphia Inquirer* went out on schedule, and came home smelling of ink just as we were stumbling out of bed. How that rhythm would be broken by the phone, buzzing with news – the death of a princess, the murder-trial verdict, the outbreak of war – that demanded immediate action, perhaps a special edition. I explained that my father grew up the same way in Albany, where his father worked for the *Times Union*, that my grandfather had been raised by uncles who worked for the Hartford Courant. That even my mother’s great-uncle worked in the trade, as a night editor for Hearst in Chicago.

But I left out what happened when I grew up and wanted to work for the Inquirer: my father said a flat no, because by then the paper was hemorrhaging money and readers and the Pulitzer glory-days were gone. So for years I wrote for *Philadelphia’s Irish Edition*, a small paper that survived the shock waves that engulfed many bigger papers because it was easier to maneuver, and because it told stories that other papers didn’t. I interviewed local publicans and authors, reviewed books, plays, and concerts, wrote about archaeological finds in Europe. This paid poorly, so I worked in bookstores, offices, wherever I could cadge some time to write. I lived in the hills of Schoharie County, N.Y., then moved back to Philadelphia to find work.

Still, I told my acquaintance, people need news. It’s human nature: we make sense of our lives through stories, through glimpses of the world we know and of worlds we never imagined. This immutable fact means that the tide will turn for newspapers, and for newspaper-people. Rock bottom will finally be hit, and the darkest hour will reach its end. For myself, I said, I may already see a streak of light – in the north.

No catty gossip would be allowed

Right up front, I must inform you that I am a dog (although I prefer to think of myself as a fourlegged canine-variant human). I believe the contest rules require only that entrants be eighteen years of age or older and do not explicitly prohibit canine entries. I am seven years old, which my vet says is equivalent to about forty human years; I am eligible to enter the contest.

My humans are neither interested in nor qualified to own and operate the paper, but they have encouraged me to enter the contest in order to support the *Gazette* financially through the entry fee. They are helping with technical aspects such as typing because my anatomy makes such work very difficult – imagine typing while wearing boxing gloves to get a feel for this. Aside from such technical help, this essay is entirely mine; my humans claim no authorship rights whatsoever.

I want to own and operate the *Gazette* in order to make its content more representative of the local area. It used to be said that Vermont has more cows than people. This may no longer be true, but certainly Vermont has more canine, bovine, feline, ovine, and caprine residents than people. These are the residents I would bring into the fold, so to speak. I would do this on two fronts: first by carefully editing copy for offensive references (no mention of catty gossip would be allowed) and second by creating regular columns of interest to the various species. One example would be the “Ovine News” column which would not be sheepish about reporting on lamb births, new cheeses being made, and ram-ewe society. Each of these new columns would be written in a way to appeal to all animals, human and non-human. Think about the “Feline News” column; it would be avidly read by the many cat-loving humans in the area and beyond.

In conclusion, I believe my ownership of the *Gazette* would be the start of a new day for the paper and would create interest in newspaper journalism in general. Today the *Gazette*, tomorrow the *New York Times*. Onward!
Keeping local journalism viable

“What compelled you to cover that story?” a subscriber asked. “I'm thrilled you did, but not even the Boston Globe would touch it.”

The story concerned a Berkshire County man jailed more than two decades for alleged sexual improprieties. At the time, I served as editor in chief of In Newsweekly, a Massachusetts-based alternative weekly. Something about the case seemed like a modern-day Salem witch trial to me and the journalists with whom I worked. We turned out to be right. Not long after our article ran, the Massachusetts Appeals Court re-opened the case. A few months later, the man was free. We can’t take credit for his release, but I know our story made a difference.

My few years reporting for, editing, and later managing that 20,000-print-run newspaper afforded me life’s most satisfying rewards. People ask me what it’s like to write for a newspaper. I tell them that working in local journalism is not about writing. It’s about building community. It’s about giving people a voice, sharing victories, and investigating injustices. It’s about changing lives for the better.

In Newsweekly was eventually sold to a national media company, which, soon after, stopped the paper’s presses for good. National didn’t understand local.

Today, I maintain my local community-building chops by providing services to local businesses as an official small business consultant with the City of Boston and as the part-time editor in chief of Boston Spirit, a bi-monthly magazine serving New England’s LGBT population. I’m hard pressed to think of any work more worthwhile than applying my consulting experience to keeping local journalism viable.

But hold the presses! It gets better! Hardwick, Vermont, it turns out, is about 30 minutes from the idyllic Vermont guesthouse owned by a dear friend that I frequent! That makes the prospect of owning and operating The Hardwick Gazette seem truly like a match made in heavenly Vermont!

In fact, few people know better than I what is stated in this essay’s contest rules: “Newspaper work is not easy ... but apart from the money (or lack thereof), it is rewarding as hell.”

So how about it? There’s more community events to cover. More nuptials to celebrate! More innocents to set free! I’m ready! Let’s keep those presses rolling!

Newspapers are our only certainty of freedom

During the Red Scare, my father, a poet, was blacklisted. Family lore has it that he was the original author of Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? But that Edward Albee had to publish the play because of my father’s blacklist status.

I am the youngest of seven daughters and was raised to hold the First Amendment as the absolute foundation of what is necessary for Democracy to survive.

Therefore, one can imagine my surprise when I became involved, as a plaintiff, in a sexual harassment case against one of the most important law firms in the world and the Court placed me under a Gag Order.

It appears pissing off authority to the point of not being able to write or speak freely runs in my veins.

Though born in New York and educated at Barnard and Columbia Law, I have lived and worked, as a lawyer and a writer, all around the world.

Now, I live in a small town quite like Hardwick. On occasion, I might miss reading the New York Times but I never miss an issue of the Sag Harbor Express. After living in large cities, I have been surprised how much I enjoy living in a town where everyone knows each other. I have been surprised that a small town is not only a community, but a family.

I believe I am qualified to run the Hardwick Gazette not only because I am very used to working 90 hour weeks, but because I have a track record of writing a column (in Russia) and editing a newspaper (the Moscow News) and a law journal. Owning a newspaper involves not only a close connection with the townspeople themselves, but also an ability to sell not only the paper but advertising.

I discovered I was a good salesperson when I put myself through both Barnard and Columbia by selling the Weekly Reader over the telephone.

I can sell simply because I am fascinated by other people: their struggles, their stories, their goals.

My desire to operate an independently run newspaper is motivated by my conviction that newspapers are our only certainty of freedom.

That matters at the local level even more than at the national level, similar to voting. I can keep the Gazette thriving. I’m confident and I’m tenacious.

All qualities that annoy the heck out of my family, but have served me well in life.
‘Read local’ says energetic essay contest entrant

HARDWICK – Joshua B. Taylor could barely contain his excitement last week when he learned about the Hardwick Gazette’s essay contest. Taylor (not his real name, as per contest rules), immediately began drafting an essay that outlined his knowledge and experience. That essay, though, never made it to print.

“I wanted to focus more on creativity and vision,” explained Taylor, age 33. That didn’t leave much space to explain his experience with college and graduate school newspa - pers, time spent messaging and communicating for the National Park Service, or professional leadership and management. “They’re certainly important, but they aren’t the reason I’m writing the essay.”

Taylor sums up his vision in two words: read local. By utilizing the immense talent of seasoned, local reporters and bringing in the skill and fresh perspective of young, aspiring journalists, The Gazette can expand its focus on a broad range of local issues, events, opinions, and intrigue.

“There’s a strong sense of tradition at The Gazette,” Taylor notes. “Graceful growth can respect tradition while expanding readership.” While most people are pessimistic about the future of print journalism, Taylor sees a future full of possibilities.

“High quality journalism has always been, and will always be the driving force in news,” says Taylor. “From international to hyper-local, the best newspapers are the ones that report facts and hold public officials to account.”

Amid declining sales that have seen the number of newspapers nationwide shrink from 2,700 to under 2,000 in the last decade, weekly publications have been far more successful than daily newspapers. Across the board, majority revenue continues to come from print editions.

But the key question remains, why The Hardwick Gazette?

“This is where I want to be,” Taylor says. “I want to be woven into the fabric of a close-knit community. To be able to do that in the Northeast Kingdom would be a dream come true.” Being a resident of western New England, Taylor has fallen in love with the small towns of Vermont and the Berkshires.

The idea received the full endorsement of Taylor’s wife, Kathleen. “That’s fantastic! It would be perfect for you,” she said, upon hearing of the contest.

Though it isn’t Taylor’s experience or his vision that he considers his best qualification for owning and managing a weekly newspaper in the Northeast Kingdom. “Both literally and metaphorically, my greatest asset is four-wheel drive.”

Gazette is the oxygen of democracy

I do not fancy myself the next Scotty Reston, lunching with Kennedys while his hobby-paper reports on the doings of rustic locals.

Rather, this contest has me laying awake nights wondering how I would make payroll, preserve the Gazette’s independence and cheat the Reaper laying waste to American newsrooms.

I sweat those details because I grew up in Vermont and yours is not a legacy I’d shoulder on a whim. I have spent most of my life as a newsman in obscure burgs. I know a newspaper that celebrates and challenges the community is indispensable, especially to those who complain about it, so I dare not fail.

I attended grades K-12 in Vermont, washing dishes, baling hay and working construction until I graduated college. My daughter is in college in Poulney and my son works summers in North Hero. At their age, I had to leave Vermont to work as a reporter, then editor, author, journalism professor and even “media executive.”

I know the importance of obituaries, stories about high school consolidation, non-point-source pollution and Act 250’s legacy. I have answered literally thousands of calls from readers on topics from embarrassing photos to sports rivalries to religious prejudice. I have thrown paper routes after a press break-down and pasted up waxed flats for the page camera. I have no illusions.

In each job, from running a rural daily and a Farm & Ranch weekly to teaching journalism and then directing content at a public broadcast company, I learned that to the community you serve, no detail is too small and every customer matters. The smallest story can also be monumentally important.

From darkest Idaho, I was selected for Harvard’s Nieman Fellowship after PBS did a two-part documentary about my work. I had co-written and directed coverage of Boy Scouting’s mishandling of a pedophilic local staffer. Scouting’s billionaire apologist attacked us, labelling me public enemy #1 and outing a gay reporter to shift attention from missteps by scouting staff. We won national awards and changes to the law, but sweet- est of all was the new confidence of survivors and parents to whom we had given a voice.

Why would I run a country weekly? Because I know, as did William Allen White, that the Hardwick Gazette is the oxygen of democracy in Caledonia County, just as important as any New York Times and that duty has been my life’s work.
My faith in Vermont is unrelenting

I once knew a girl from Hardwick, who was tall, and beautiful, and young. We went dancing in old Grange halls on Saturday nights, and I would hold her close in my arms, rediscovering a Vermont I feared had vanished from the Earth. When she sang, her voice rang out strong, pure, and good.

But thought this girl – this young creature raised among Vermont’s green fields and shaded cedar groves – who was so incredible in my eyes, harbored deep self-doubt, instilled in her by a sinister force originating far away. It was this force that compelled her to leave Vermont, ultimately, for Manhattan, because it repeated to her – through many mediums over many years – the falsehood that Vermont had nothing to offer; that success and happiness could only be found elsewhere. At the Amtrak station in Montpelier, where I kissed her goodbye in the late-summer rain, I knew that I could never bear to see her again; the horrors of urban life would steal her innocence in a way I never could, changing her forever. Love affairs come and go, but my faith in Vermont is unrelenting.

When I was a student at Lyndon State, I ran the weekly student newspaper, The Critic. I used that time to learn as much as I could about “the trade,” and to speak the truth while doing it. As early as 2013, I predicted that the implementation of the EB-5 program in Vermont was a massively fraudulent operation perpetrated by two men who were agents of the same nefarious force that turned the girl from Hardwick against her homeland.

Better still, for the three years I was Editor-in-Chief, the nominally college-funded paper turned a profit through an aggressive advertisement policy, which shielded The Critic from budget cuts throughout the Vermont State Colleges.

I confess, I heard about this contest late in its existence, but once I did, I knew that I must enter it. The Hardwick Gazette is a treasure – a gift – representative of a tradition and a legacy far greater than any one person. Allow me to carry that mantel, to hold The Gazette high, and use it as a rallying cry for the idea that all Vermonters – young and old – can solve any problem, and surmount any obstacle so long as we remain united in our shared affection for the beautiful state of Vermont.

A glutton for punishment: Why I would like to own and operate a paid weekly newspaper, founded in 1889

No one in her right mind would like to own and operate a paid weekly newspaper: That’s the conclusion I came to five years ago when I left the one I was managing. Since then, I’ve also concluded that I’m not quite in my right mind – and newspapers are to blame.

Newspapering has ruined me for other work. I’ve tried other professions with better pay and pensions; some were mind-numbing, others surprisingly rewarding. The problem is, newspapering is the type of work – nay, calling – that changes one’s mind, one’s very DNA, so after it, nothing else quite makes sense. It perfectly balances mental with manual labor and brings out the best in the people who do it for a living: stamina and sharpness, empathy and eloquence, wit, grit and a strong ethical compass.

The other problem with newspapering is, it makes newspapermen and women – folks who pride themselves on being rational to the point of cynicism – go all starry-eyed over high-minded, distinctly un-cynical ideals, like the importance of public discourse and the necessity of a free press for a healthy democracy. This delusion forces them to do all sorts of menial things in the service of their beliefs and, remarkably, to enjoy and even take pride in such activities. As a result, I now actually miss being called out of bed because the delivery guy didn’t show, waiting up for election results, and packing an overnight bag for the office. I miss fiddling with jumps and putting one-point borders around photos.

Most of all, I miss the feeling of mattering – to one’s staff, to readers, to the community, to history – of belonging to a community and caring deeply about the people and stories in it. Newspapers are anchors for people in a particular place and time, and without them, I’ve found, you tend to just drift.

I think it’s admirable Mr. Connelly isn’t willing to let the greater Hardwick community go adrift for want of someone to helm its newspaper. If his readers will have me, I’ll bring to the job three years’ reporting, managing and editing experience at an award-winning New Jersey weekly, plus another four before that at my college paper, an independent publication wholly run by a dedicated corps of young journalists.

I’ll also bring that not-quite-right mind, the one that spent 25 minutes picking a font for this essay and that still has faith in a paper-and-ink product to anchor a community in the 21st century.
A desire to return home from Baghdad

Twenty years ago this summer I became a professional journalist. I grew up in Vermont, attended Saint Michael’s College, and after graduating I somehow managed to get myself hired to run my hometown newspaper, The Essex Reporter, as editor and publisher.

That was where I honed my craft of newswriting and came to see journalism as an act of public service, an essential activity in a vibrant community. I covered endless meetings of school boards, town councils, local sporting events. I read the police blotter every week. I advocated on the editorial pages for one side of the issues of the day, like school financing or investments by teachers’ pension funds in tobacco stocks, for which I won an award from the New England Press Association. Some days I was praised, other days criticized, but always I felt the work made a difference.

At the same time, I learned the business of running a community newspaper – selling advertising, conceiving special sections and managing the finances. It was exhilarating, exhausting, and deeply rewarding.

After two years I left to see more of the world, but always knew I would be back

First was Eastern Europe, where I wrote for an English-language newspaper in Budapest. Then was graduate school, at Brown University. After that, I moved to New York to resume my journalism career. There, I worked as a reporter in a succession of jobs, at The Street.com, The New York Post, Fortune magazine, before landing at the New York Times.

My first job at The Times was covering the media industry, something I had done for years at The Post and Fortune. On the media beat, I was covering the disruption that new technologies were inflicting on my own industry, a tale that was told in the documentary film, Page One, of which I was one of the characters. I developed a firm belief that even amidst so many changes in journalism, the fundamentals of the profession are still its bedrock: bearing witness and holding officials accountable.

For almost seven years now I have been the Baghdad Bureau Chief for The Times, and for the last four have also served as the Istanbul Bureau Chief, dividing my time between Iraq and Turkey.

For my next chapter I want nothing more than to return home, and again put my journalism skills to use in the service of my own community.

Uber driver dreams of a fresh start

Your Uber driver hates you.

She is driving your drunk carcass home from Dirty Nellie’s because she cannot get a real job despite a master’s from Northwestern and 25 years of experience. She smiles a false, sad smile, protecting the privilege of making a living. She thinks about the profession that’s more a calling, denied her because she has passed 50 and been out of work too long.

The woman photographing your kitchen hates you.

“Nobody should have this house when many are homeless,” she thinks, but really she thinks you don’t deserve to be so comfortable when she isn’t.

She has been a managing editor and published her own newsletter, covered everything from Congress to the 4H fair, built websites and a reputation. She’s supervised reporters, worked with freelancers and printers, laid out pages. Bad luck and bad timing have her photographing houses for $6 as her soul erodes.

The woman you are taking your anger and shame out on slipped and let you see her because she’s dreaming of a fresh start. Normally she photographs houses nearing foreclosure stealthily because she dislikes rancor – and makes too little to waste time explaining.

Now that her son is out of high school, she can sell her house and go somewhere less urban and cynical, where the proceeds might buy a business that employs both of them while he starts community college. Her dearest fantasy is a publishing business but a convenience store would do.

Your driver missed that turn because she’s dreaming of Vermont.

She heard about a newspaper that needs someone to bring it into the digital age without sacrificing what’s important, in a place where community means more than not parking in your neighbor’s space. She remembers she once loved mushing dogs in clean, New England air, but mostly she remembers the joy of writing a good story, of putting the issue to bed at deadline, of teaching a young reporter, of telling people what they need to know.

She dreams of renewing her passion for journalism; of putting her skills to work for something that matters, for a community that cares; of a newspaper she can save while it saves her in return. She would give all she has, all she is, for that and call it paradise.

But for now she needs this gig. Don’t give her a low rating, even though she hates you.
Don’t overlook me because I’m young

My dad’s best friend, Gary, suggested I become a pharmacist.
“People will always need medicine,” he told me. It didn’t matter what I liked or wanted – bottom line, I’d always have a job if I went to pharmaceutical school.

This soul-crushingly pragmatic advice did not sit well with me, and I decided to go into journalism. Following his own advice, at my age, Gary chose food science (“people will always need to eat!”). Now, he’s toiling away, engineering artificial cheeses that are more shelf-stable.

Although the job security of a journalist is perhaps more volatile than that of a medical professional or food engineer, journalism – like science – is information gathering and knowledge production. It gives people tools to make informed decisions, develop enlightened opinions, advocate for social change. Newspapers like the Hardwick Gazette have lasted for centuries because they are necessary to communities they serve.

From writing and editing a weekly newspaper, I’ve learned that breaking news and weeklies don’t always mix; some news is already stale the very next day. An online presence can carry breaking news. The print product, on the other hand, should be shelf-stable, showcasing analysis, in-depth features, community opinions that get people talking, and visual elements such as photos and infographics.

But unlike artificially engineered cheeses, tomorrow’s long-lasting print product must be organic. Honest, genuine, community-grown. In my first 50 days in Hardwick, I’d strive to meet 50 locals, hear their stories, and get a feel for what matters to people. Gary fills his cheeses with chemicals. When I fill the Gazette, I’ll fill it with meaning.

As the current editor-in-chief of The Maneater, the University of Missouri’s weekly campus publication, I plan out each week’s issue and oversee content production and strategy. During the protests and resignations at Mizzou last fall, I found a way to both cover breaking news for online and report on analytical questions for print so we could stay relevant on all platforms. I am doing now what I want to do for you.

Don’t overlook me because I’m young – that’s precisely what makes me unlike many other entrants. I have big ideas, and I’m willing to take smart risks to make them reality.

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I may not be battle-hardened, but I’m battle-ready. And next time Gary asks me why I’m a journalist entering an essay contest to win a newspaper, I’ll say, “People will always need journalism.”

*names have been changed to protect the innocent

Preserving moments for a time when no one now living is left to tell the tale

It’s said people in small towns don’t read their local newspaper to find out what happened, they read to see what it got wrong. Perhaps counter-intuitively, that’s why I’d like to own the Hardwick Gazette.

Having worked on weekly newspapers in Maine for 14 years – writing, editing, taking pictures, designing pages, managing social media, selling ads, and even, on occasion, fielding commentary about my parentage – I understand why finding mistakes can be such a passion for rural readers. For them, the newspaper is no mere compendium of current events – it’s the official record of their lives.

That the Gazette survives well into the digital age is a testament to this mission. That it does so as a print only publication is hardly surprising, because nobody tapes an iPad to the refrigerator door.

Servers crash, web stories get deleted, TV and radio reports escape into the ether, but there is a permanency to print. And, for as long as it takes paper to brown, brittle, and crumble to dust, its inky indictments remain, whether in whole form or clippings, on library shelves and historical society nooks, at the bottom of grandma’s hope chest and in aging scrapbooks, and, sometimes, even stuffed between studs to stave off Northern Kingdom winters. Across the great history of the human sea, newspapers alone speak for the lives chronicled within their column inches, to testify on their behalf that in this one small eddy of time, “We were here.”

That’s why Gazette readers, like those in the small hamlets I’ve called home, will let errors pass elsewhere they’d never tolerate in print. Because their newspaper matters.

That’s also why I favor a conversational, narrative form of reporting. I feel I’m not just generating datapoints for the modern reader, I imagine myself speaking to someone centuries from now, and I want that person to experience a genuine sense of presence, to really feel what it must have been like to live in this time, and in this place.

As Gazette owner, I’d change little. I’d simply continue its long tradition, to never fear the truth and to always get it right, and to act as responsible steward to the actions and passions of each passing day, preserving these moments for a time when no one now living is left to tell the tale.

Because, as its readers well know, if the Hardwick Gazette doesn’t do that, who will?
I’m not a journalist, but an observer, a writer and one who relishes an honest day’s work

“Print is dead,” they say, in text backlit with alien blue light and banner ads blinking on either side. Real-time news is edited on the fly. Everyone is a credible source; no one is vetted. Think it. Post it. Share it. Now it’s “real.”

As Vermonters, I think we know better. Maybe it’s the weather that keeps us honest or the reality of the landscape that reminds us to check our virtual identities at the door. We are gifted with starry skies, transcendental winters and wildflowers that dance across the Green Mountains’ geologic embrace. For every minute we spend in the digital world, we need only look outside to remember our true identities as human beings, family members and neighbors.

In contrast to the digital space, there is something necessary and brave about committing words to print. Producing a newspaper is the antithesis of instant gratification and requires courage to research, write, re-write and then immortalize information that will elicit opinions from all sides of an issue. How else can we encourage informed citizenship and logical debate, if our perspectives are formed solely from global news or social media rants?

Over a decade ago, I left California for Vermont and traded in perpetual sunshine and graduate school for the hard-won experience that comes with owning a business. I’ve come to know first-hand the overwhelming sense of obligation to an entity that is paradoxically running through your veins, yet also exists in spite of you. I know that authentic passion is the only fuel with staying power.

My college career was spent learning how to be an anthropologist, but the last 10 years forged an ironwoman in the fires of small business (and revealed a softer role as a mother and wife). I’m not a journalist, but I am an observer, a writer and one who relishes an honest day’s work. I live in constant fascination with the tools that enable us to be better humans, and a local, independent newspaper is one of those tools.

I imagine a life with the Hardwick Gazette as one requiring steadfast determination in an age of digitization and syndicated news. Succession alludes to the word “success” and in this case, success involves decidedly unglamorous pursuits like integrity and civic duty.

May the clear and steady voice that marks the passage of Hardwick time continue for decades to come!

Being a voice for the voiceless

The Hardwick Gazette, a paid weekly newspaper founded in 1889, crafted what might be its biggest, most important story in over a century; an essay contest to determine who will take the helm when its publisher, Mr. Connelly, retires.

Some must have thought this was a crazy idea; after all, how can a century-old community mainstay facing an ever-expanding competitive marketplace trust its future to just anyone who writes a 400-word essay? We wondered, was this for real or just a form of publicity? What caliber of entrants would change careers and pick up to move cross country? An outstanding group, we’re happy to report. One in particular grabbed our attention, and while we cannot tell you her name, per contest regulations, we can share her background and why she entered.

An award-winning, successful Fortune 300 and Non-Profit Executive (MBA Marketing/Entrepreneurship) in her forties, who coincidentally grew up in a mid-western newspaper-rich city, dedicated her entire career to developing talent, providing exceptional customer experiences, promoting and enhancing community programs, services and education, and coaching small businesses to reach their highest potential. Drawn to enter because she, “believes life is about ‘the story’ and what unites us. My successes have been from a commitment to best practices, discovering ‘the story behind the story’, and sharing lessons learned.”

“Yes, winning The Hardwick Gazette could seem like the makings of a Rodgers and Hammerstein script, but for me, it’s about the amazing opportunity to be part of a legacy I’d be proud to honor and grow. I believe running a newspaper is about being part of something greater than yourself; it’s about being a trusted member of your community, locally and to readership at large. I have no illusion it will be easy, but I am energized by challenges, learn from mistakes, and surround myself with good people. A village newspaper is not a replacement for mainstream media, but rather essential local sports, politics, business, community and school activities and events local families need and want. It’s about informing and inspiring, while creating a platform for differing opinions and being the voice for the voiceless.”

When not working this entrant is an avid home cook who loves writing, movies, board games, all things baseball, and decorating for the holidays. Did she win? We don’t know yet. But based on what we’ve learned, the future of the Hardwick Gazette is in good hands.
ISWNE internship the best way to spend a summer

By Kyra Haas

Editor’s note: Kyra Haas, a 2015 graduate of Free State High School in Lawrence, Kansas, is a convergence journalism major at the University of Missouri. She served an ISWNE Foundation summer internship in 2018.

At the beginning of my internship at the Washington Island Observer in Wisconsin, I got asked a lot of variations on the same question: “Why are you here?”

Most Washington Island residents are curious about that. They also want to know how you heard about their home off the tip of the Door County Peninsula and how long you plan to be there.

It’s a friendly community, but it’s close-knit. The roots are deep. There are “true” Islanders. There are married to an Islanders. There are seasonal Islanders. Then, there are visitors and tourists.

Building trust over the course of a summer with people who can sometimes trace their history on the Island back 100 years is no small feat. When I wasn’t covering events or writing articles, I spent my late evenings curled up with local library books about the Island, many authored by Islanders themselves. I also explored the well-kept Washington Island Archives, soaking in the rich, proud past of the 30 square miles I briefly got to call home.

Researching where I was reporting helped inform what I was reporting, and I was fortunate to be in a place that kept such good record.

One example of this came on my first day. Washington Island is one of the first Icelandic settlements in North America, and I got to see the Island’s celebration of that heritage firsthand on my very first assignment, covering a welcome dinner for Icelandic visitors. The room was full of descendants of the original settlers and subsequent early waves of immigrants. One of the visitors ended up being a distant relative of me under their wing. The Petries were instrumental in saving other families to help purchase the paper and revitalize it. They also helped me tackle one of the most pressing issues on the Island: wastewater treatment. The newspaper’s slogan is “It’s all about the Island!” and though it’s less glamorous than the beautiful beaches and quirky local shops, wastewater treatment was a big deal on the Island this summer.

When the Department of Natural Resources said the current treatment system wasn’t up to snuff last year, the Town Board had to start looking at numerous, expensive solutions. With the Petries’ help and Laurel’s guidance, we were able to present key facts, figures and explanations about what those options were, how they worked and the environmental and financial implications.

My time on Washington Island was the best way to spend a summer. I had never been to Wisconsin, much less an island there. Instead of seeing the world as human-made structures with nature accenting it, I very much got to live in nature, accented by people. Both were beautiful. I’m thankful to ISWNE for the opportunity, and I know I’ll be back there someday.

When the 20,000-foot-long submarine electric cable broke in June, I spoke with the electric co-op and those directly involved, sure, but I also got to speak with a 94-year-old who not only remembered the installation of the cable in 1981, but also the electrification of the Island in 1945.

I interviewed a down-to-earth candidate for the state senate who lived on the Island and was concerned about his campaign interfering with the upcoming Island Players performance. He didn’t win the primary, but I admired his passion for clean water and the environment.

I had a conversation with a retiring kindergarten teacher with a 34-year career, who spent much of that time on the Island, teaching Islanders, and, eventually, those Islanders’ children.

I met people at Town Board meetings, at children’s programs, at plays at the Trueblood Performing Art Center, at community events and in the dining room of Findlay’s Holiday Inn, where I spent my weekends waitressing.

I got to know my managing editor, Laurel Hauser, who is delightfully passionate about everything she does, and enormously helpful in improving my writing. In the mornings, I worked alongside DJ Kickbush, the office manager, who made me feel listened to and valued.

I spent time with the editorial board. They opened their homes and fed me dinner and told me about their lives on the Island and elsewhere. Lucia and Pete Petrie, especially, took me under their wing. The Petries were instrumental in saving the Observer from going under in 2012 by getting together 26 other families to help purchase the paper and revitalize it.

They also helped me tackle one of the most pressing issues on the Island: wastewater treatment. The newspaper’s slogan is “It’s all about the Island!” and though it’s less glamorous than the beautiful beaches and quirky local shops, wastewater treatment was a big deal on the Island this summer.

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The charter school movement: An exploratory study of education news coverage in community newspapers

By Melony A. Shemberger

The following article was one of the entries in ISWNE’s 2018 Huck Boyd “conversations in community journalism” competition. It has been reviewed by both academic and newsroom evaluators, and many of their suggestions were incorporated into this final version.

The top-rated article from that competition will be published in the Spring 2020 issue of Grassroots Editor, after it is presented at the 2019 ISWNE conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The academic peer review process is coordinated by Dr. Michael Clay Carey, an assistant professor in the Journalism and Mass Communication Department at Samford University. Gloria Freeland, director of the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at Kansas State University, coordinates the newsroom evaluations.

Abstract

The landscape of education has many layers, from public to private, from higher education to adult education. In recent years, education news has widened amid complicated and varied issues, such as evolving federal achievement standards and declining public funding sources. The expansion of homeschooling and charter schools in communities adds to this mix. By 2015, nearly 3 million U.S. students were enrolled in more than 6,700 charter schools, an educational phenomenon that has become one of the most influential reforms in recent memory (Hess, Hamilton, & Hatfield, 2016). According to the Center for Education Reform, 44 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws (Center for Education Reform, n.d.). Minnesota passed the first charter law in 1991. In 2017, Kentucky became the 44th state to join the movement. Six states that do not have charter school laws are Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia. News coverage of charter school initiatives has been mixed. Media criticism of charter schools could signal a shift in public opinion, but instances of a pro-charter school perspective also exist in local reporting (Pattison-Gordon, 2016).

Through a qualitative analysis of education news stories published by community newspapers with circulations of less than 50,000 subscribers, this exploratory study applies a reconceptualized social capital theory to examine the coverage of charter schools in local education news. The paucity of original education news reporting as it pertained to charter schools was evident in the community newspapers counted in the study. Therefore, community newspapers should consider adopting a mediated social capital model to build an investment in this area of reporting. This would place community newspapers in a position to connect people with each other on issues related to charter schools – and education in general – and be considered a voice of authority.

Introduction

Education is one of the few news topics that affect more people directly. Newspapers are challenged to provide information about education so that their audiences can make intelligent decisions, and rightfully so, as everyone has a stake in education – teachers, students, parents, community leaders and, of course, taxpayers.

The landscape of education has many layers, from public to private, from higher education to adult education. In recent years, education news has widened amid complicated and varied issues, such as evolving federal achievement standards and declining public funding sources. The expansion of homeschooling and charter schools in communities adds to this mix. By 2015, nearly 3 million U.S. students were enrolled in more than 6,700 charter schools, an educational phenomenon that has become one of the most influential reforms in recent memory (Hess, Hamilton, & Hatfield, 2016). Therefore, it is worthy to study this issue through the lens of community journalism. Recommendations are offered on what community newspapers could do to document the conversations ongoing in their school districts about charter schools and to diversify their education coverage.

Theoretical framework

For this study, a reconceptualized theory of social capital is a useful framework to discuss the role of community newspapers in reporting information about charter schools. Social capital is defined as those resources that facilitate collective action. These resources include trust, norms, and networks of association representing any group that gathers consistently for a common purpose. Social capital is regarded as the foundation of the developmental forces, including political and economic.

In the context of this paper, under the model reimagined by Hess (2014), social capital theory would argue that community newspapers are in a particularly powerful position to connect people with each other, across physical and digital spaces as well as public and private domains. It also argues the need to recog-
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nize and study the more subtle ways news outlets foster connections between everyday, ordinary people.

An argument could be made that community newspapers would have a significant privatizing impact that would reduce social capital in a society. However, this “mediated social capital” model by Hess repositions social capital theory to consider a community newspaper’s ability to connect people as a resource in building or maintaining its position of power. The concept provides scope to consider the role of local media to consciously and unconsciously connect people within its networks with one another, across digital and physical spaces, to control the information that connects people, and to benefit from that power. Importantly, mediated social capital extends beyond discussions about the democratic ideal of the press to acknowledge the role of the news media in shaping the everyday interactions and situations in which people might connect with one another (Hess, 2014). Therefore, community newspapers, through their news coverage of charter schools, build community social capital by addressing key issues surrounding charter schooling.

Literature review

This section about education news includes three subsections: 1.) the history of education news, 2.) education as an issue-oriented news beat, and 3.) problems in education news reporting. These areas serve as a survey to guide discussion of how education news and coverage on charter schools have evolved.

1. Brief history of education news

Literature about the history of education news is scant. An examination into the historical underpinnings of this beat traces the early beginnings of education news to columns and advertisements in 19th century newspapers. A column, written by an individual with the initials L.H.P. and reprinted in The Madisonian of Washington City (now Washington, D.C.) from the August 19, 1837, issue of Oswego (New York) Palladium questioned whether educational efforts should be invested in the same manner in women as it is in males.

Education received more prominence in advertising, with private institutions of all grade levels placing ads to announce enrollment or fundraising initiatives or promote their academic standards. Schools, though, were not the only organizations to promote education; newspapers did, too. In an advertising campaign that promoted subscriptions in the Bismarck (North Dakota) Evening Tribune from January 7, 1918, to January 28, 1918, the newspaper was touted as something that should be a part of a child’s education: “The best aid to the child’s education is reading the newspapers – and the Tribune is clean – a clean paper for your home. SUBSCRIBE NOW.” In 1920, the New York Sun and Herald newspapers positioned school news as part of ad campaigns for subscription rate increases. In the May 20 and 21 issues, the ads refer to education as a news beat: “The educational world – news of schools reported by Tristram Walker Metcalf and his assistants.”

School news – mostly student election results, club events and other school activities – was the primary education content reported on feature and society newspaper pages for decades in the mid-20th century. The defunct New York World-Telegram and Sun carried a daily education page in the mid-1960s (McQuaid, 1989). Albert Shanker, a former president of the American Federation of Teachers, described the significance of the education page: “Every school bought a copy, and I’d say at least a third of the teachers bought one. The page would be clipped and posted on school bulletin boards all across the city. It became a forum for schoolpeople” (McQuaid, 1989). During its short lifespan, the paper’s daily education page “created the standard that other papers had to compete with,” Shanker said (McQuaid, 1989).

2. Education as an issue-oriented news beat

This second section explores previously published scholarship that is plentiful in content analyses of education coverage in newspapers. However, the newspaper industry and its trade journals have devoted little attention to education coverage (McQuaid, 1989). Nevertheless, researchers have identified challenges as problem areas for education news, and those points will be discussed later in this section.

Between 1910 and 1960, an average of less than 4% of news hole space – defined as all editorial matter, excluding advertisements – was devoted to education (Gerbner, 1966). Several studies in the 1950s and 1960s and throughout the ‘70s used content analyses to determine the weight given to education news. Stempel III (1962) found that news hole space allocated to education varied from 5.5 to 14.5% in Michigan’s four smallest daily newspapers and from 9.2 to 11.7% in the state’s four largest dailies.

Ross (1983) examined the reporting of education in the Los Angeles Times, coding 2,496 articles from 240 sample issues. News hole percentage devoted to education varied from a low of 2% in 1964 to a high of 6.2% in 1969. The average was 3.49% over the 16-year period. Media attention appeared to fluctuate with historical events such as wars, student unrest and court decisions.

Education coverage boomed during the post-World War II decades, and the amount of space devoted to education increased. In his 1966 study of the educational beat on 52 newspapers in the United States, Duncan found a post-war increase in the number of designated education reporters and in the amount of higher education coverage, but many of them had no assistant to help handle the large workload. Duncan reported that 43 newspapers said that their higher education news coverage had “increased within the past 10 years. None said it had declined and only four reported little change either way in the decade.” Similarly, Gerbner (1964) said that media attention to education decreased during wartime and escalated in the immediate post-war period, with attention then reaching a stable level.

Langford (1969) – in a content analysis of one daily newspaper for one month, for a total of 463 articles, to determine the ratio of issue-oriented news stories to event-oriented stories – classified 6.2% of the articles as issue-oriented stories. She called them “idea” stories, which she defined as “… those that concerned plans and proposals for the future, alternative solutions to problems, suggested goals and novel adaptations to new situations.” In contrast, Ryan and Owen (1976) found that most stories about social issues were based on issues rather than events.

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In a study of the coverage of social issues during March 1975, Ryan and Owen (1976) found that education averaged 1.4% of the combined newshole in eight metropolitan newspapers. Individual newspaper percentages ranged from 0.4% in the Chicago Tribune to 2.8% in the Washington Post.

Quartararo (1978), in a content analysis, examined for a month the quantity and type of higher education articles in two Boston metropolitan daily newspapers. Articles were measured and assigned to eight major categories: sports, features, news, editorial pages, columns, news analysis, reviews, and photos with cutline. Results indicated that both newspapers had more spot news stories only a few inches in length rather than in-depth feature articles concerning the major issues and trends facing higher education.

Disparities among all of these studies could point to a common factor of how education news is defined. Ross' study, for example, did not include all of the sports coverage in newshole calculations. Other studies also might have framed newshole space differently. Regardless of the differences among the newshole percentages, studies indicate that the public wants education news. Finch (1969) found that readers are more interested in education news than editors believe. Several researchers have reported that the reader is more interested in curriculum and instruction and less so in finance and extracurricular activities than editors think (Farley, 1929; Fleming, 1960; Jelinek, 1955). Gallup (1969) found that readers want to learn more about education than what is provided in the news.

5. Problems in covering education

Researchers have identified four problems in education reporting: 1) severely limited coverage of education, 2) unbalanced education coverage areas, 3) a lack of "education expertise" in education reporting, 4) and a greater emphasis on events rather than issues. Each of the four problems is explained below in more detail. These four problems align with previously published complaints that school superintendents have about education reporting. Melvin Mencher, professor emeritus at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, wrote in his journalism textbook a chapter on education coverage and described several concerns that superintendents had about education news reporting (McQuaid, 1989). These concerns were that reporters emphasize events over trends, failing to give the public a full view of the system; that writers do not go to schools and classrooms often enough and that they give too much attention to the views of administrators and not enough to those of teachers; and that reporters overlook the impact on education of changes in children, such as their defiance of authority and frequent shifts in subject matter (McQuaid, 1989).

The four problems mentioned are examined more closely.

Problem 1: Limited coverage of education

In a national survey, 301 education writers shared their views on ways to improve education news coverage (Jacobson, 1973). They said priority needs are more staff members assigned to cover education and greater salaries for them. They also indicated that more educational programs for education writers and school administrators are needed. Respondents perceive news values of educators differ from the news values of those who write education news.

To add to this problem, lifetime education writers are rare (Jacobson, 1973). Gene Maeroff, former New York Times education writer and senior fellow with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, said at the New York Times, "being an education writer is not as valued a beat as, say, being a foreign correspondent or covering the White House or city hall" (McQuaid, 1989). At all newspapers, Maeroff said, "there is a tendency among the editors on the metro desk to place a greater value on politics than on curriculum and teaching issues" (McQuaid, 1989).

Problem 2: Unbalanced education coverage areas

McQuaid (1989) argued that little in-depth discussion of education issues in the news exists because of the scarce discussion of anything in the news. Areas receiving hardly any coverage were teacher education, crime on campus, drugs on campus, media and technology, and testing results (Ross, 1983). Complexities of education issues also make coverage a problem (Rhoades & G. Rhoades, 1991). This could be impacted by the medium on which education news coverage is reported. For instance, school superintendents attribute the changes in education reporting, with a greater emphasis on events and conflict, rather than trends and issues, to television (McQuaid, 1989). Television news reports often contain brief sound bites and dramatic visual elements that add little substance (Rhoades & G. Rhoades, 1991). Newspapers offer the best education coverage for readers, but coverage has slipped in recent years because of "fast-food" journalism, which ignores context and delivers only the highlights to readers (Rhoades & G. Rhoades, 1991).

Problem 3: Lack of 'education expertise'

In a survey of 186 American newspapers of various sizes, Hynds (1981) found that staff members in most cases are not assigned to cover education full time. Approximately 23% of the newspapers responded that they had one person assigned part time and 16% had two people assigned part time to education reporting (Hynds, 1981). Plus, most education reporters are under the jurisdiction of the city desk (McQuaid, 1989). In addition, Quartararo (1978) found that a majority of higher education articles with a byline in the two newspapers examined were not written by education reporters but by general staff reporters. Education reporters are criticized for their work. "The absolute worst problem for education coverage is that education writers don’t spend enough time in the schools,” said James Killacky, senior education reporter for the Oklahoma City Oklahoman and former president of the Education Writers Association. "The good education writers do that and do not allow themselves to be shackled to board meetings, regents’ meetings, or committee meetings" (McQuaid, 1989).

Problem 4: Emphasis on events over issues

Journalists who cover the education beat tend to focus on CONTINUED ON PAGE 24
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violence in the schools and teacher strikes or complaints, rather than an understanding of education issues (Rhoades & G. Rhoades, 1991). This places education news reporting in a shallow light (Rhoades & G. Rhoades, 1991). Moreover, this dilemma shapes the notion that journalism concentrates on the negative. Mencher, in his textbook, said, “By definition, journalism is the deviation from the norm – and norms in education, writers believe, are high SATs, hardworking students and teachers, respect for teachers. All this has changed, and thus, the news” (McQuaid, 1989).

Methodology

The literature review positions the need to examine coverage of charter schools in community newspapers. As the literature review indicated, education reporting during the 1950s, ’60s and early ’70s failed to focus on issues, and the stories broadcast or published during these decades of significant events (civil rights, desegregation, e.g.) provided little in-depth reporting or shallow and unbalanced coverage. In addition, the education beat was not recognized by news organizations with the same level of commitment needed for thorough coverage, like the city or government beats were. Along with a recontextualized social capital theory for community newspapers, this section discusses how the study’s exploration of charter school news coverage in community newspapers was conducted.

Charter schools have existed for decades, but this alternative approach to traditional public education gained renewed attention in early 2017 when Betsy DeVos, an American businesswoman, became the 11th U.S. secretary of education and advocated for an expansion of educational choices, including charter schools. This study, therefore, looks at community newspaper coverage of charter schools since January 2017.

An online search using the phrase “charter schools” for newspapers in the United States between January 1, 2017, and May 31, 2018, yielded 2,106 results – or news items – in the Nexis Uni database.1 The database does not offer search parameters based on circulation numbers. As such, this number includes large national and metropolitan newspapers such as The Philadelphia Inquirer, The New York Post, and The Daily News of Los Angeles, among others. To focus on community newspapers and eliminate papers with large circulations, the search results were reduced by 1,126 for a total of 980 search results. Of this number, 98 articles from the news section of 36 community newspapers were studied. These included small dailies and weeklies. Wire stories, briefs and announcements, editorials and op-eds, syndicated material, letters to the editor, and photo cutlines were excluded in the sample. News items in this study must have been locally produced content; in other words, a newspaper’s staff reporter must have written the article. For each news item, information such as newspaper’s name, headline of story, publication date, purpose of the story (planned coverage such as a meeting or an event, or original reporting, such an analytical, investigative or feature), story structure (inverted pyramid, feature or Wall Street Journal formula, etc.) and word count was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet.

The story’s purpose particularly is useful in assessing the extent of a newspaper’s social capital. Covering planned events such as school board meetings is a necessity in a newspaper’s watchdog function, but how much further is the newspaper creating a path for public discourse of an issue? If original reporting extends a topic or problem beyond the planned event through journalistic research, then this could be considered an approach of a newspaper’s effort to build social capital. Therefore, this study will record the purpose of the news story to observe whether key issues surrounding charter schooling are being addressed.

Community newspapers must be defined here. In her book, Saving Community Journalism, Penelope Muse Abernathy (2014) offers a definition for community newspapers that encompasses the digital age. According to the traditional definition, a community newspaper is a small daily or non-daily with less than 15,000 in circulation. But in the digital age, Abernathy argues that definition is outdated because readers increasingly are obtaining their news from digital sources. This means a community newspaper can have a circulation of a few thousand readers or more than 100,000.

In addition to circulation size, a newspaper’s mission is important. Abernathy (2014) qualifies a community newspaper as any news organization whose primary mission is to cover the important issues that affect a cohesive and well-defined geographic, ethnic or cultural community. This could include small and midsize dailies, weeklies, and ethnic newspapers. However, this still is a large number, comprising almost all of the country’s 11,000 papers (Abernathy, 2014). The focus of this study, therefore, is limited to community newspapers with a circulation of no more than 50,000 subscribers. The 36 community newspapers in this study are daily or weekly publications found in the database.

While this research explores charter school coverage in small community newspapers, this study has two limitations that would prevent observations and conclusions from becoming generalizable across all community newspapers. First, not all states have laws that permit the establishment of charter schools. Second, Nexis Uni returned results from only newspapers housed in this database.

Observations

To recognize the kind of coverage reported on charter schools in community newspapers, 98 news articles published between January 1, 2017, and May 31, 2018, in 36 community newspapers were reviewed. Each story was labeled as a planned news story or original reporting (e.g., analytical, investigative, or feature). Of the 98 news articles, 77 stories were coded as planned news coverage that was published from a meeting or event. The remaining 21 stories were identified as original reporting. The intracoder reliability was 83%, with half of the articles (N = 49) constituting the sample that was analyzed again by the researcher. Of the 49 news articles, 41 of these matched the original coding. The other eight stories were reviewed again and either recoded into the appropriate classification or left unchanged, with the final category counts reflecting the results.

Specifically, the 77 planned news stories about or affecting...
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charter schools were written on topics stemming from school board meetings such as charter funding issues, state reports about school grades and rankings, school events, state laws, and legal matters such as court cases. Basically, any story that resulted from a scheduled assignment not initiated by the newspaper was counted as planned coverage. The average word count was 654.

Meanwhile, the 21 stories that reflected original reporting were mostly analytical, investigative or feature news pieces with larger word counts, averaging 742 in this analysis. In some instances, the topic might have originated at a meeting or an event, but the article extended a particular focus in the days or weeks after the meeting or event. An example of original reporting in this study was a story printed on Feb. 17, 2017, in The Richmond Register, a small daily in Richmond, Kentucky, with a circulation of approximately 4,500 subscribers. The 1,382-word article, titled “Opinions differ on charter schools in Kentucky,” captured an enterprising look at two pieces of proposed legislation that would bring charter schools to the commonwealth. (Legislators eventually passed legislation that made Kentucky the 44th state to authorize the establishment of charter schools.) The bills were filed days apart and a week after charter school supporter Gov. Matt Bevin delivered his State of the Commonwealth speech, in which he proclaimed that charter schools were coming to Kentucky.

In another example of original news reporting, The Sentinel in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, used state data to show how public charter schools, which have existed in the state since 1997, targeted students classified as special education in order to make a profit. In the 1,854-word story, titled “Breaking down funding for charter schools in Midstate,” the analysis indicated that although charter schools received $294.8 million in special education funding in 2016, charter schools reported costs of $193.1 million. This story also had the greatest word count in the sample.

Meanwhile, another observation that emerged in the study deserves attention. Of the 13 newspapers in this study with at least two different charter school news stories reported by the same staff journalist, 11 had a reporter dedicated to the education beat. Four of these staffers filed at least one enterprising story that involved interpretation or analysis. A community newspaper’s commitment to resources – in this case, a journalist dedicated to the education beat – could demonstrate the extent of a community newspaper’s social capital effort.

Discussion and conclusion

Education across the nation today, from pre-school to higher education, is under intense scrutiny by lawmakers and administrators. Everyone – students, teachers, parents, taxpayers, community leaders, and others – is a stakeholder. With the growth of charter schools and increasing budgetary woes, community newspapers that have charter schools in their coverage areas should take stock in their social capital – surveying the sources and resources in their locales – by asking these questions: Is this newspaper’s education beat covering charter schools as much as they would for public schools or other forms of education? How would the education beat need to change so that time and space on issues surrounding charter schools are invested in news budgets?

Covering charter schools is part of the education beat for any size newspaper. However, a problem with education coverage of any kind is that it is episodic, incidental, and fixated on major events and school board meetings, especially at small community newspapers, as noticed in this study with approximately three-quarters of the news articles covering a planned event. Sometimes, as this analysis showed, these stories focus more on the local politics surrounding policy decisions than on education itself. This creates a news imbalance in the beat. The occasional, in-depth news story might not be enough to integrate responsibility of the coverage of charter schools into the education news beat. The paucity of original education news reporting as it pertained to charter schools was evident in the community newspapers counted in the study. This is crucial to note because this is an area where a community newspaper can foster discussion with its audience on an evolving topic.

Under the social capital theory model used in this study, community newspapers are in a particularly powerful position to connect people and foster those connections on an issue. Whether a charter school system is right for a community is a problem that a newspaper should introduce to its audience. This analysis is beneficial for community newspapers to observe and work toward long-term editorial modifications of the education coverage. Local publications could achieve this by planning dogged research and reporting projects, hosting frequent public forums, and opening their editorial pages to numerous voices on all sides of the charter school debate. Therefore, community newspapers should consider adopting a mediated social capital model to build an investment in this area of reporting and minimize the four problem areas identified in the literature review. This would place community newspapers in a position to connect people with each other on issues related to charter schools – and education in general, especially for newspapers whose communities they cover do not have charter schools – and be considered a voice of authority. Communities have various groups, associations and populations – any organization interested in education and educational reform – for newspapers to consult for insights, directions and voices on the charter school movement. The results of this study show much room for development of this opportunity. Community newspapers are in a particularly powerful position to connect people with each other.

Since education affects everyone, education news should be a primary beat for any community newspaper. For those publications where charter school operations are present or soon to form, efforts to scrutinize charter schools through interpretation and analysis must be balanced with the same kind of energy placed on public education. Strong education coverage is important to readers, and it should be a collective investment for newspapers – regardless of whether a charter school exists in the community. The growing emergence of charter schools has helped to
make education a major national issue, and community newspapers have an opportunity – a responsibility – to capture their impact in a local environment, in a way that relates to their audiences. The successes and failures of charter schools affect families, the economy, and the life of a community.

Notes

1 Nexis Uni is an online database that features more than 15,000 news, business and legal sources, including U.S. Supreme Court decisions dating back to 1790.

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A case study of a rural, Hispanic newspaper in the Midwest

By Rafael Garcia and Gloria Freeland

Abstract
As the Hispanic population of the American Midwest grows at an increasing rate, the Spanish-language media landscape has been largely unexplored by researchers. This case study of a Spanish-language newspaper in a town with a population of approximately 25,000 investigates the functions that such papers might have in rural communities as well as the reception of those papers by the communities.

Introduction
While the Spanish-speaking segment of the U.S. population continues to grow, those in the media industry have been left with the challenge of adapting their media products to reach this segment. In an industry where reports of dwindling newsrooms and decreasing revenues dominate the conversation, newspapers have the task of using limited resources to hone their coverage for an increasingly diverse population.

Specifically, many towns and cities in Kansas have seen sizable increases – as much as approximately 60 percent – in the percentage of Hispanic citizens in their communities in the last decade. Some media in the communities cover the population adequately, while some don’t. The surge in the Hispanic population has opened up new markets for publishers and broadcasters. Media owners should be able to efficiently and successfully integrate themselves into those markets and communities.

As a Spanish-language monthly publication that is a subset of the larger, English-language Emporia Gazette newspaper, La Voz Latina caters to a Hispanic population that itself is a subset of a larger, generally Caucasian community. In examining the need for two separate publications, two individual purposes are established which virtually all newspapers share. The first purpose is to serve the public interest and disseminate important information. Of course, newspapers are capitalistic enterprises and require revenue to continue operating, so the second purpose of a newspaper must be to earn money through avenues such as sale of advertisements and subscription revenues.

The ideal newspaper balances these two purposes, and this exploratory study will examine how La Voz Latina and other similar media organizations in the region serve Hispanic audiences with coverage that is specific to their needs.

Objectives
The purpose of this study was to investigate the news-consumption habits of Hispanic people living in a rural Midwestern town, as well as to investigate how the local newspaper publisher takes into consideration both that audience and its news consumption habits.

Methods
In conducting research into the climate of the Hispanic community, we chose to examine the population by conducting one-on-one interviews with select community leaders in business, religion and education, as well as by distributing surveys at targeted Hispanic locales, such as Hispanic goods stores or religious facilities with predominantly Spanish-speaking congregations. These research methods were approved by the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board.

Letters were sent to several churches and businesses in the community, customizing the purpose of the survey and seeking response, but no response was received. It is not known if these letters were simply ignored or not received, so in the summer of 2016, the primary investigators visited and called these churches and businesses. Some churches and businesses agreed to talk about the status of the Hispanic community as well as the Spanish-language newspaper’s performance. Anonymity was granted so as to protect the working relationships of these places and individuals within the community.

Researchers printed and distributed 1,000 of the surveys at businesses and churches around the town, instructing the owners and pastors of these locales to request that their patrons fill out the surveys and leave them so that researchers could return to pick them up a month later; however, very few were received, with an estimated response rate of 0.3 percent.

In response, during January 2017, one of the researchers did intercept-style surveying outside of a Hispanic store for two weekends. The researcher directly posed questions to respondents and filled out the surveys on the respondents’ behalf. This method received a much better response rate, with a response rate of about 30 percent.

The original survey had many more questions and went into more depth, but upon observing the low response rate, researchers retooled the survey to be shorter and more precise in its questioning. This likely was a factor in increasing the response rate.

Research questions and results:
With the goal of understanding the news habits of the Hispanic population of the community, the survey’s questions asked respondents about their readership and viewer preferences, focusing on their preferred sources and forms of media.

Q1. Cuáles temas cree usted que sean importante en un periódico? (e.g. Noticias nacionales, de clima, internacionales, de migración, deportes, de escuela, eventos de comunidad, editoriales, etc.)/Which news topics do you think are important to be covered in a newspaper? (e.g. national, climate, international, immigration, sports, school, community events, editorials, etc.)

Question 1 asked about respondents’ news interests. Given that the survey was conducted in the weeks before the inauguration of U.S. President Donald Trump, topics such as national, international, immigration news and Trump himself were fre-
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quently listed as topics of interest. This may be indicative of the general mood of the Hispanic population.

Q2. Con que frecuencia lee usted La Voz Latina o The Emporia Gazette?/How frequently do you read La Voz Latina or The Emporia Gazette (Daily, weekly, monthly, 2-6 times a year, never)

Question 2 asked about frequency of readership, by paper. Overall, Spanish-language readership was shown to be higher compared to English-language readership the less frequently the average respondent read the newspaper. This correlates with La Voz Latina’s monthly publishing schedule and could indicate that at a weekly rate of publishing, there would be as much interest in reading the Spanish-language paper.

Q3. Fuentes de noticias/Sources of news: (Friends, radio, television, newspapers, internet, social media)
   a. Marque todos los que use/Mark all you use
   b. Principal fuente de noticias locales/Primary source for local news
   c. Principal fuente de noticias de Kansas/Primary source of Kansas news
   d. Principal fuente de noticias nacionales/Primary source of national news

Question 3 asked respondents about their preferred media for different levels of news, as well as participant use by medium. For local news, respondents said they generally rely on friends, newspapers, the internet, and social media. For national news, respondents typically received news from television, the internet, and social media sources. With La Voz’s monthly publishing schedule and regional scope, it may be expected that more breaking and immediate news, especially of high importance at the national level, will be consumed from these national sources.

Q4. Acceso a la tecnologia e internet/Technology and internet access
   a. Tiene usted acceso al internet en su hogar, en el trabajo, o en algun lugar publico como una biblioteca o iglesia?/Do you have internet access in your home, at work, or some other public place, such as a library or church?
   b. Se siente competente/comodo en el uso del internet/?Do you feel comfortable using the internet?
   c. Usted o un miembro de su familia tiene una computadora portatil, de sobremesa o una tableta/?Do you or a family member own a laptop or desktop computer or a tablet?
   d. Usted o un miembro de su familia tiene un smartphone/?Do you or a family member own a smartphone?

Question 4 asked about ease of access and comfort using various technologies and the internet itself. Overall, more than 90% of respondents indicated they had access to and were comfortable using technological devices, such as smartphones, desktops, laptops, and tablets. More than 90% also indicated access to the internet at either home, work or other public settings, but only 73.8% felt comfortable using the internet. During intercept-surveying, some respondents were confused as to what the internet exactly was, as they did not consider using services such as Facebook to be using the internet. Nonetheless, the degree to which this question was answered demonstrates a general, basic proficiency with technology among the Hispanic community. As more people begin to access technology and technology becomes easier to use, the use of technology to access news will become more prevalent, even among older generations.

Q5. Idioma/Language
   a. En que idioma prefiere recibir noticias/? In what language do you prefer to receive news?
   b. En que idioma suele recibir noticias/? In what language do you actually receive news?
   c. Que idioma se habla en su hogar/? What language is spoken at home?
   d. Que idioma se habla en el trabajo/? What language do you speak at work?

Question 5 asked respondents about their preference and use of language at home and at work. A majority of respondents (67.8%) said they prefer to receive news in Spanish, while a slightly lower majority (62.7%) said that Spanish is the actual language they receive news in. This small difference indicates that most Hispanics are finding Spanish-language news sources if they prefer those, and they likely rely on national and regional news networks to obtain that news about regional, national and international issues. Spanish was the primary language at 64% of respondents’ homes and 53% of respondents’ workplaces.

Q6 & 7. Demographics (Q6 and 7 asked respondents’ gender and age.)

Given the location where surveys were most successfully collected, it may be explained that there was a slight majority of representation from middle-aged Hispanic community members, as well as a slight majority of females.

Highlights from interviews with community leaders about La Voz Latina:

School leader:
- Readily accessible, but monthly is not enough
- Gazette provides free copies of itself to teachers, but not known if La Voz is included
- Some may use La Voz Latina to teach Spanish

Two pastors:
- Read the newspaper from time to time
- Infrequent publication not enough
- Good content
- Monthly paper perhaps not absolutely necessary
- Change in content, not as much news content, more features
- Personal observation is that paper is not being read as much anymore
- Dislike of small font, decreasing paper size

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• Maybe switch to magazine style

Three business leaders
• Newspaper is a necessity, especially for older generation
• News is not timely though
• Most people look for the pictures
• Usually runs out of stock
• Some use the paper to learn Spanish
• Should be more often, news is too old
• Need for Spanish language paper because Hispanics identify with native tongue
• Does good job of local coverage
• Needs better translator
• Carried at location, typically runs out

Two community leaders
• Paper needs to do better job of advertising community events
• Wish it would publish more often
• Does good job of uniting community
• No comparison to Dos Mundos (a Spanish-language newspaper in Kansas City, Kansas), but La Voz has more local feel
• Maybe consider publishing in both languages
• La Voz needs to branch out and go to different parts of the community more often

Interview with editor and publisher of La Voz Latina

The researchers conducted an in-person interview with Chris Walker, publisher of the Emporia Gazette, and Regina Murphy, editor at the Gazette and La Voz Latina, on April 14, 2017. During the interview, Walker said he believes both he and the publishing company could do more to support the Spanish publication, especially in regard to staffing. Walker said there is the opportunity to grow La Voz, but besides staffing, he said he would like to see better cooperation from the Hispanic community. Murphy and Walker both emphasized the apparent popularity of the paper, but one aspect they said is different about La Voz is that its audience is not as willing to engage or provide feedback in the way that the Gazette’s audience does. Walker mentioned the paper has sponsored giveaways and surveys distributed through the paper in the past, but little, if any, responses are received. Additionally, La Voz has no direct online presence, and it is not readily available through any social media channels, although Walker and Murphy said it needs to be a priority for the Gazette to increase the online presence of La Voz.

Regarding interacting with the Hispanic community, Murphy said there are no Gazette staffers who have the ability to speak Spanish. Whenever a Gazette story requires a Spanish-speaking source, the Gazette relies on relationships within the community to build a corps of translators. The Gazette also relies on those connections for possible leads on stories and works with local organizations, such as the school district and local Hispanic churches, to source stories or find topics of interest and importance to the Hispanic community. At the same time though, Walker and Murphy said there is a need to reach out explicitly to the Hispanic community at-large, rather than just leaders in the community. The variety of subgroups within the Hispanic community (e.g. groups from different countries, migratory statuses, socioeconomic classes, cultures, linguistic groups, etc.) occasionally poses difficulty for the staff, as the different customs of each group make it difficult to connect culturally and linguistically to every segment of the Hispanic community, Murphy and Walker said. The translation of articles is done remotely from a previous staffer who now lives in Mexico City, and the translations from the perspective of a native Mexican Spanish speaker may not be entirely appropriate for Spanish speakers from different countries.

In terms of content and publication, Walker said as technology has progressed and the print industry has seen a general decline, one method of combating the decline is to specialize. In the Gazette and La Voz’s case, that has meant “hyperlocalizing” the copy. Rather than reporting on international, national, or even regional news, Walker said the focus of the publications is to report on what they and they only can do best – the local news. Walker said this model has allowed the Gazette to remain relatively healthy in terms of subscriptions. Online, the publication has seen modest success in the number of posts and page views. The biggest hit to publications, Walker said, is the increased globalization of the economy and the shuttering of local mom-and-pop stores that would have been more likely to advertise in the local paper. Walker said this has also affected community relations and said there is no longer as much pride in local communities as there used to be.

Murphy said one of the biggest challenges La Voz faces is the relevancy of the content published. Due to a deadline of two weeks before publication, news in the paper could be as old as five weeks before it reaches a Hispanic audience. To combat this, Murphy said she is highly selective and deliberate in choosing content for the publication. While timeliness is a factor, so are factors such as prominence of the news and significance. Occasionally, articles from the Gazette are re-edited to have a higher focus on Hispanic subjects or themes. In regard to deadlines, due to the monthly publication schedule, deadlines are largely flexible, Murphy said, although the flexibility of these deadlines is often tested by contributors. These contributors include editors from regional leaders, or other contributors who write on topics such as how to vote and cultural celebrations.

The paper has also faced opposition from the established non-Hispanic community. Occasionally, the paper will receive complaints about La Voz when it is inserted into the Gazette. These complaints involve the use of Spanish or the focus on Hispanic themes. Walker said a few advertisers had pulled their business from the Gazette as a result, but the loss of that business was inconsequential to the editorial decisions or the funding for the paper.

Currently, Walker said La Voz Latina is published mostly through the efforts of Murphy to edit and organize the paper. Occasionally, interns have come from places such as the high school program or from Emporia State University, but these interns have mostly worked on the business aspect of the Gazette, instead of working in the newsroom. Walker said not very many journalism school students intern at smaller publica-
tions, such as the *Gazette*, due to what he thought was a lack of prestige.

Walker said he would consider expanding the efforts of La Voz to other Hispanic communities around Kansas, but those markets have to be large enough to make the efforts feasible. Past efforts have included towns with sizable Hispanic populations in western Kansas, but the considerable distance made success with these publications difficult, Walker said.

**Interviews with publishers and managers of other Hispanic media in the region**

To obtain a sense of perspective and context of the newspaper in the case study, media leaders in similar cities and towns in the region were contacted and interviewed. These leaders were asked about the role of their news organizations in their communities, the status of the Hispanic populations in their communities and the organizations’ efforts to reach out to the Hispanic community. The interviews were condensed for relevance to the study.

Diana Reyes Raymer, general manager and sales manager for Reyes Media Group (*Dos Mundos* and LA X 1250 AM; La Grande 1340 AM; and ESPN Deportes Kansas City 1480 AM)

“The Kansas City community is built up of different communities, including immigrants from several countries, but the majority of our Kansas City community is of Mexican descent. Our listenership is Spanish-dominant, but the newspaper is more bilingual. The radio is more first-generation, while newspaper is more second-generation.

“The newspaper is a bit more challenged in its work. There’s so much information and it’s so spread out. Part of the challenge is having the staffing to be able to cover the community. So, to decide what gets covered, we ask ourselves, ‘How does this affect the Hispanic community?’ The staffing is largely dictated by our budget, which comes from advertising. Corporate sponsors don’t want to purchase as much in our smaller market when they can target way bigger areas, so the money and dollars aren’t being thrown our way. That makes us have to be picky and choosy in what we cover.

“The stations are more unique. Two of our stations are Mexican regional, which is Mexican country. These people (the listeners) are rural people. The type of DJ really matters. They have to have conocimiento (knowledge) of the music.

“The radio stations rely more on local advertising, but also increasingly, on non-traditional revenue, like a trunk-or-treat we hosted and had sponsors for this year.

“The challenge of the paper is the sales aspect, being that we are in a smaller market. We have to go out and educate potential clients about the media and the culture. The newspaper has been bilingual since day one, but even then, people still don’t want it. They say it’s in Spanish, so they can’t read that, so we have to really explain that to them.

“Another challenge is that there are a large portion of Hispanics who are too lazy to read. We’ve had to tweak with that a bit in the newspaper, by limiting the words in our articles.

Roughly around 300 is what we aim for. In trying to reach out to the community, we give a picture and a quick update. We give snippets so people can see what’s going on.

“The bottom line is, Hispanic media is different than mainstream media in that it understands the discrimination Hispanics face, and all of the hurdles that Hispanics have to go through. By reporting on our community, that is the best thing for the community. We’re out there connecting to our community, and only a newspaper can do that. A local newspaper has to focus on local. Our most popular stories, by far, are community stories. And anything with Trump.”

Sarah Kessinger, editor of the *Marysville Advocate*, started Garden City’s *La Semana*

“*La Semana* started as a bilingual paper; every article was done in both languages, with some original content for Spanish paper. The target audience was everyone, but especially newly arrived immigrants, and also the established community. The paper had some coverage of stories in Liberal and Dodge City as well.

“Initially, it was only one person, then a translator was added. Coverage of events relied on people in the community, and this was helpful in establishing a bridge to the Hispanic community. Eventually *La Semana* became a Spanish-language paper only.

“Personally, I don’t think I had the Spanish to completely report in southwest Kansas. However, both the established and immigrant communities were flexible and understanding.

“I have a degree in Spanish, but I had to get up to speed on the Spanish speakers’ backgrounds, especially with Spanish from northern and western Mexico. I think it went well; with no experience being a journalist in Spanish, the translator helped a lot and edited a lot, and they didn’t have a background in journalism, so it was a lot of back and forth.

“Garden City was really unique in that leaders really embraced immigrants, and still do to this day. It’s a little bit different than Liberal and Dodge City in that it was more welcoming. Now they are majority Hispanic places, so there is no longer an issue of welcoming new immigrants. They are very multicultural communities because of immigrants.

“The established white population has always been really comfortable with the Hispanic population there, as they saw immigrants as a benefit to the population, so no one was really against that. It was generally more progressive than you might think.

“The diversity within the Hispanic audience is probably the greatest challenge. The community isn’t homogenous; the Hispanic community itself is very diverse. In Dodge City, more and more of the population is from Central America. They don’t all necessarily have similar backgrounds. Generally, these communities are a good lesson for what would happen to the general United States; they both saw an increase of immigrants early in the ‘90s.

“The formula for success is hard work and good people, working hard to just get as much local news and relevant news to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31
the audience. It takes a bit of work, as you can’t just fill with wire copy or press releases, in any language, really; you need to pack the paper full of local news. You need to have good translation, and you need to cover issues that are relevant to the community. The only way to do so is to talk to those in the community and get to know them well.”

Dena Sattler, editor-in-chief and publisher of The Garden City Telegram (which also publishes La Semana)

“Garden City is a community of just under 30,000 people, majority minority, so there’s lots of diverse coverage. We try to cover all of the basic areas: governments, school boards, etc. Our first priority is our watchdog role but we also do lots of feature stories.

“Garden City is a lot like Emporia. There’s pretty significant minority groups. It’s important to note that we’re really rural. Agriculture is the real driver of economy. Garden City is very diverse, although some rural parts are not as diverse.

“Our readers know Hispanic issues are something that needs to be covered. Garden City is a model for those communities.

“We have the weekly Spanish newspaper called La Semana. We take some of our stories from that week’s Telegram and translate them. We cover everything we need to in the daily. Sometimes we have unique content for La Semana, but it’s mostly translated content.

“There’s always a language barrier. Which is why La Semana was launched decades ago as a literacy program to help people who hadn’t learned English. Not everyone in the community receives La Semana. We deliver it to places with high concentrations of immigrants. I always wonder if there is a disconnect, and maybe we could do more with digital. It’s always a bit of a struggle.

“We don’t have much online for La Semana. The Telegram itself has a huge audience.

“One of the things to understand is what desired content is. Peer groups indicate that certain events are really popular. We need to understand the audience and talk to them. It just depends. For us to just translate things, that probably does not work.”

Enrique Franz, general manager at Rocking M Media LLC (La Mexicana 101.5 & KMML 92.9 in western Kansas)

“The whole medium has to relate to what you do. Who we are as Latinos in the U.S. I know the struggles. I’ve been there. I’ve done that. (I’ve been) in a position of leadership. I think that we have plenty of entertainment.

“In Liberal and Dodge and Garden City, the census said we were about 65 percent Hispanic, mostly Mexican. I believe it’s more than that, because the census is different. A lot of people will not open the door to their personal lives to people that they don’t know. Lots of different demographics, lots of third generation people. A little bit behind Dodge and Garden, where lots of people still speak Spanish. That’s not a negative thing. In the schools, the student population is about 65 percent Hispanic.

“Radio is still popular source for news. I choose program-
Such a person would be better suited to engage with the Hispanic community and build a stronger relationship between the community and the Gazette.

Applicability of research and findings

The resulting data and analysis from this case study will allow us to assist other newspapers on how to apply the best practices and approaches we observed. It is our hope that we are able to network and present our information through organizations such as the Kansas Association of Broadcasters and the Kansas Press Association. Most of the region’s media companies are members of these organizations, and they stand to benefit by creating strategies to effectively reach out to their Hispanic audiences using the information we have gained as a result of this case study.

Literature Review


Appendix A

The case study utilized data from the U.S. Census Bureau for 2000 and 2010, and publication data to gauge the sizes of the Hispanic populations in communities across Kansas. This chart also lists newspapers and Hispanic newspapers (if applicable) in those towns.

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas City</td>
<td>11,963</td>
<td>12,415</td>
<td>3.78%</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>2,148</td>
<td>301.50%</td>
<td>Ark Valley News</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanute</td>
<td>9,411</td>
<td>11,109</td>
<td>-13.10%</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>34.43%</td>
<td>Chanute Tribune</td>
<td>2,727</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colby</td>
<td>5,450</td>
<td>5,387</td>
<td>-1.16%</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>108.74%</td>
<td>Colby Free Press</td>
<td>1,327</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodge City</td>
<td>24,176</td>
<td>27,340</td>
<td>13.09%</td>
<td>10372</td>
<td>15,792</td>
<td>51.57%</td>
<td>Dodge City Daily Globe</td>
<td>6,691</td>
<td>LA Estrella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emporia</td>
<td>26,760</td>
<td>24,916</td>
<td>-6.89%</td>
<td>5753</td>
<td>6329</td>
<td>10.01%</td>
<td>Emporia Gazette</td>
<td>4,591</td>
<td>LA Voxtel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden City</td>
<td>28,451</td>
<td>26,658</td>
<td>-6.30%</td>
<td>12,490</td>
<td>12,956</td>
<td>3.73%</td>
<td>Garden City Telegram</td>
<td>6,026</td>
<td>LA Semana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hays</td>
<td>20,013</td>
<td>20,510</td>
<td>2.48%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA Hays Daily News</td>
<td>6,048</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutchinson</td>
<td>40,787</td>
<td>42,080</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
<td>3,128</td>
<td>4,460</td>
<td>42.58%</td>
<td>Hutchinson News</td>
<td>24,197</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iola</td>
<td>6,302</td>
<td>5,704</td>
<td>-9.49%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>55.26%</td>
<td>Iola Register</td>
<td>1,994</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junction City</td>
<td>20,671</td>
<td>23,353</td>
<td>12.97%</td>
<td>1,718</td>
<td>3,036</td>
<td>76.72%</td>
<td>Junction City Daily Union</td>
<td>2,739</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>146,866</td>
<td>145,786</td>
<td>-0.74%</td>
<td>24,673</td>
<td>40,529</td>
<td>64.26%</td>
<td>Kansas City Star</td>
<td>147,463</td>
<td>Dos Mundos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>80,098</td>
<td>87,643</td>
<td>9.42%</td>
<td>9,294</td>
<td>4,996</td>
<td>70.86%</td>
<td>Lawrence Journal-World</td>
<td>14,898</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>19,666</td>
<td>20,525</td>
<td>4.37%</td>
<td>8,515</td>
<td>12,048</td>
<td>41.49%</td>
<td>Liberal Leader and Times</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>EL Lidar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>44,831</td>
<td>52,281</td>
<td>16.62%</td>
<td>15,655</td>
<td>30,322</td>
<td>93.74%</td>
<td>The Manhattan Mercury</td>
<td>10,229</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salina</td>
<td>45,679</td>
<td>47,707</td>
<td>4.44%</td>
<td>3,065</td>
<td>5,105</td>
<td>66.56%</td>
<td>Salina Journal</td>
<td>20,364</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>1,824</td>
<td>1,812</td>
<td>-0.66%</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>44.09%</td>
<td>Syracuse Journal</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topeka</td>
<td>122,377</td>
<td>127,473</td>
<td>4.16%</td>
<td>10,891</td>
<td>17,081</td>
<td>56.84%</td>
<td>Topeka Capital-Journal</td>
<td>28,345</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wichita</td>
<td>344,284</td>
<td>382,368</td>
<td>11.06%</td>
<td>33,051</td>
<td>58,502</td>
<td>77.01%</td>
<td>Wichita Eagle</td>
<td>72,761</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix A continued from page 31
Appendix B

The case study utilized the following survey to gather data from respondents in the Hispanic community in Emporia. Spanish and English versions were both used, and the survey-assisted respondents in filling out the survey, if needed. No personally identifiable information was collected.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

### Can you help?

Thank you for participating in our study through Kansas State University. This purpose of this study is to help the newspaper La Voz Latina better serve the Hispanic/Latino community in the Emporia area. Please read each question carefully and answer to the best of your ability. You may skip any question you don’t want to answer or that doesn’t apply. This survey will take about five minutes to complete. If you have questions, please contact Gloria Freeland, gfreela@ksu.edu or 785-532-6890.

| 1. What topics do you think are important for a newspaper to cover? (national news, weather, international news, immigration issues, sports, school news, community events, editorials, obituaries, birthdays, etc.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | 2-6 times a year | Never |
| A. La Voz Latina? (Check one) |  |  |  |  |  |
| B. Emporia Gazette? (Check one) |  |  |  |  |  |

| 2. How often do you read |
|---|---|---|---|---|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Check all you use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Main local news source (Check one)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Main Kansas news source (Check one)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Main world news source (Check one)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| 3. News sources |
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Do you have Internet access in your home at work or in a public location such as a library or church? (specify)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Are you proficient/comfortable in using the Internet?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Do you or does a family member have a desktop computer, a laptop or a tablet?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Do you or does a family member have a Smartphone?</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| 4. Internet and technology |
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Other (Specify)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. What language do you prefer to receive news in?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. What language do you typically receive news in?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. What language do you speak at home?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. What language do you speak at work?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| 5. Language - Check any that apply |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18 to 25</th>
<th>26 to 40</th>
<th>41 to 59</th>
<th>60 and over</th>
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<tr>
<td>6. Your Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Check one</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Your Gender</td>
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</table>
Appendix C

Appendix C includes a general list of questions for members of the Hispanic community. These questions were only guidelines and may or may not have been directly asked during each of the one-on-one interviews with community leaders.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35

A case study of a rural community continued from page 33

Questions for Emporia leaders:

General Questions:

1. Has there been a shift in the Hispanic population of the Emporia area and if so, how has your organization responded?

2. What differences are there when catering towards the Hispanic community as opposed to the non-Hispanic community?

3. What barriers have existed?

4. How is language taken into account when communicating with the Hispanic community? Are materials made available in Spanish? Are translation services made available?

5. In your opinion, what is the future of the Hispanic community in Emporia? Will it become more integrated into the community as a whole or will the Hispanic and non-Hispanic communities exist as separate groups?

Chamber of Commerce

1. How are Hispanic businesses and clients taken into account in the Chamber of Commerce?

2. Are Hispanic businesses considered as “attractions?”

3. What is the influence of the Hispanic community on the local economy?

Superintendent

1. As far as providing service to Hispanic families, what has been required of the school district and what has the school district done that perhaps wasn’t required?

2. What challenges exist in educating children from Spanish-speaking backgrounds?

3. How is culture considered when reaching out to Hispanic families?

Managers

1. What percentage of your workforce is Hispanic? How does this compare to the local population?

2. What languages are spoken within the workplace? Is language a barrier to productivity?

3. Do workers who aren’t fluent in English develop fluency with time as a result of work?
A case study of a rural

continued from page 34
Send Us

Your Best Editorial

Deadline: February 1, 2019

Enter the ISWNE’s 59th Annual Golden Quill Award Contest

Entries should reflect the purpose of the ISWNE: Encouraging the writing of editorials or staff-written opinion pieces that identify local issues that are or should be of concern to the community, offer an opinion, and support a course of action.

Eligibility:
All newspapers of less than daily frequency (published less than five days per week) are qualified to enter. Entries must have been published between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2018.

Cost: $20 per person (two entries allowed per person) for ISWNE members and $25 for non-members. Make checks payable to ISWNE.

How To Submit Entries:
Select up to four best editorials or signed opinion pieces from your newspaper. **Two is the maximum number of entries permitted from each individual.** Complete the PDF entry form at www.iswne.org (under Contests). Using a pen or marker, clearly indicate the Golden Quill entry on each tearsheet. Print two copies and mail along with two complete page tearsheets of each entry.

Entries must be postmarked by Feb. 1, 2019.
Please mark the envelope: GOLDEN QUILL ENTRY.

Send to: Dr. Chad Stebbins
Missouri Southern State University
3950 E. Newman Road
Joplin, MO 64801-1595

You may also nominate an editorial or signed opinion piece by sending the required information with a copy of the article in the format indicated. Please enclose a letter telling ISWNE that it is a nomination, and a check for $20.

Questions? stebbins-c@mssu.edu

Grassroots Editor, ISWNE’s quarterly journal, will reprint the 12 best editorials in the Summer 2019 issue.

The Golden Quill winner will be invited to attend ISWNE’s annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, June 19-23, 2019. The winner will receive a conference scholarship and travel expenses up to $500.