

IS THIS A NEWS STORY OR A COLUMN? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

WE MUST DRAW A CLEAR LINE BETWEEN NEWS AND OPINION, WRITES LEE ANN WATERMAN



LEE ANN WATERMAN
Column

It's about trust. Our relationship with our readers is built on transparency, honesty and integrity. As such, we have launched a trust initiative to tell you who we are and how and why we do what we do. This article is part of that project.

This is a column. If you look at the top left-hand corner of this page, above the headline, you'll see the word OPINION. That's your first clue. The article also includes my headshot and a line at the bottom explaining who I am and why I am qualified to write this piece - elements you wouldn't see in a news article.

I think of these as signposts; they let you, the reader, know where we're going. For this piece, our destination is a common understanding of the types of content you'll find in our newspapers and online at yorkregion.com.

They also reinforce our mandate to be transparent and honest in how we present our content, whether online or in the newspaper - in this case drawing a clear line between news and opinion.

Our Torstar Journalistic Standards, which you can read in full at yorkregion.com, describes news as "verified information based on the impartial reporting of facts, either observed by reporters or reported and verified from knowledgeable sources. News reports do not include the opinion of the author."

News also includes ANALYSIS, which our standards define as "crit-

ical or contextual examination of an important and topical issue based on factual reporting. It provides an explanation of the impact or meaning of news events and draws on the authority and expertise of the writer. Analysis articles do not contain the author's opinions."

A story labeled CONTRIBUTED was not written by one of our journalists, but submitted by a member of our community.

OPINION articles can include columns based on the author's interpretation and judgments of facts, data and events. Recent examples in our newspapers and yorkregion.com include the opinion piece entitled Balance in life important even if it's not easy to come by written by Jordyn Preston on behalf of the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region and the column 'PSWs important, but struggle to get respect' penned by personal support worker Debbie Jensen.

We must also draw a clear line between journalism and advertisement.

There should be no confusion that the boxed ads promoting products and services at local businesses or giving information about goings on at town (city) halls that appear online and in the paper are purchased space. But any paid content that could be confused with a story is labelled as SPONSORED or ADVERTISEMENT.

Labelling content by its type or providing a signpost is just one way we aim to be as transparent as possible with our readers.

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We welcome your questions and value your comments. Email our trust committee at trust@metroland.com.