**Keep it real**

After an incredibly difficult Friday, I made a point of getting some fresh air and physical exercise. Saturday was consumed with chores around the farm, not generally a day of leisure nor what one might suspect an executive (of sorts) to do in off-hours.

A day on the farm is a respite from a world that is becoming more difficult to recognize, let alone understand. A few hours in, stressors melt away and the mind gets a reprieve from the circus of contradictions Canadians face every working day. In those hours of solitude, there is the chance to think freely and, on a good day, develop clarity on a subject.

Chiefly on my mind were column ideas for an important message from ‘the chair’ celebrating National Newspaper Week. Other colleagues had already submitted the perfunctory columns about supporting local media and the importance of journalism. If it hadn’t been for Friday the 15th, I would have felt compelled to offer up the same.

Unfortunately, the celebrations of an industry thousands of people strong and hundreds of titles deep will be muted this year. Centuries of combined community service in Ontario collapsed with the stroke of a pen.

Missing from the fold this year are over 71 community newspaper titles and over 600 employees who were let go when Metroland shuttered its print products. On top of that, there were hundreds of unmentioned drivers and carriers who, without fail, delivered the newspaper to the doors of their community. They were family too.

Those hundreds of workers were neighbours, friends and contributing members of the communities they served. They were people and it would be a shame if their impact over the years was left unrecognized.

The demise of that operation offers a jolt to the system, begging reflection on what is happening or will happen to journalism in this country. Clarity is needed on whether this is the beginning or the end.

One can point to the changing advertising market and the monopoly that multi-national corporations like Google and Facebook bring to bear. Left unregulated for two decades, they have done what cartels do: vacuum up revenue and profit immensely from unsuspecting consumers who have had their privacy subjugated by stealth.

Fingers can also point to governments who handed advertising budgets to agencies without instruction to support Canadian firms. In the rush to be hip and with it, local media saw ad dollars – desperately needed to keep journalism alive – evaporate and flow to online monopolies. Efforts to stabilize the industry were too long coming, held up by politics.

The newspaper industry itself has points of divergent contention between online disruptors, legacy operators and various hybrid operations.

Prognosticators, often from the halls of academe without a nickel on the line, have plenty of opinions but offer little in the way of concrete solutions to funding journalism. The callous commentary from some reacting to the closure was unwarranted, but hey, that seems to be the way now when someone is down. One more kick for good measure.

Even CBC, the national broadcaster, subsidized to the hilt, a full-on competitor in the advertising market offering its news for “free”, has impacted the media landscape’s ability to find a sustainable path forward.

The blame game can be fun, but it’s not constructive.

Canadian publishers are nowhere near the end of their story, but shades of a new era are beginning to show. Innovation and service to readers must be our singular focus. Providing objective news and holding institutions to account ensures democracy persists, not wilts. Our mission to inform and entertain has never been more critical.

Support local news – we keep it real.

*Dave Adsett is the Chair of News Media Canada and is a second-generation newspaper publisher from Fergus, Ontario. He runs the Wellington Advertiser as well as the North Wellington Community News.*