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Celebrate National Newspaper Week with us!

By Shannon Peace
Shootin' the Breeze

While times are tough in most industries right now, our team tries to keep our chins up as we face new, and unique, challenges in the newspaper business.

Celebrating what *Shootin' the Breeze* does well is something I enjoy. It's not meant in a vain way but as a matter of shining a bright spotlight on the people who work very hard to ensure there is a newspaper in your hands every Wednesday morning.

A few weeks back, Brenda Shenton and I spent a weekend in Edmonton at the annual general meeting and convention of the Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association. We'd talked about going together for a number of years, and now that she's retired she finally had time!

If you ask, Brenda will tell you that she came away with much deeper insight into what happens beyond our local media outlet. She knows that, despite the potholes and bumps on the newspaper highway, I come back from this annual event rejuvenated and motivated.

The turnout was grim and, as convention chairwoman, it's something I've been trying to address over the past two years. Many say they simply can't afford the cost of the trip or the cost of being away from their office for even two days.

On the bright side, those in attendance, both in person and virtually, are committed to keeping Alberta's newspapers strong.

Hardships were acknowledged and solutions were sought. There's no better place to do this than among a group of your peers.

Once ideas get flowing, things quickly get productive. I'm sure each publisher in attendance went home with something new to implement.

Sometimes conversation leads to more questions than answers. This is just as important.

Brenda made a point of speaking with all of



Brenda Shenton, left, and Shannon Peace

the younger members in attendance. She heard positive hopes for the future and concerns that their older co-workers or employers often aren't open to trying new ideas.

An age-old story that is not limited to the press.

The AGM always ends with the swearing in of the AWNA board of directors. A number of us are in our fourth year serving together, giving the board stability and strength.

This year, Lisa Sygutek of the *Pass Herald* has moved to the role of board president and I will work alongside her as vice-president.

Amanda Zimmer of the *Claresholm Local Press* is back on the board, giving southwestern Alberta the benefit of three female independent newspaper owners having a voice.

I mention female because back when my parents and Lisa's parents were involved, these

positions were generally held by men.

Joining us are Daria Zmijewsky of Black Press, Craig Barnard of Postmedia, Evan Jamison of the *St. Albert Gazette* and Jeff Burgar of the *High Prairie South Peace News*.

Lisa has been heavily involved in the government affairs of the association, something she excels in. Lisa is feisty and blunt, and fights for what she believes in.

Lisa believes in the value of community newspapers, as do I.

We're looking forward to a strong year supporting Alberta's community news sources.

Along with a new title, I returned home with a number of awards for our publication.

The BNC Awards of Excellence and Photographic Awards are open to all Alberta newspapers, from the smallest to the largest.

Best Ad Campaign Award – third place: Jaiden Panchyshyn for Blackburn Jewellers 2022 Shop Local for Christmas campaign.

Best Agricultural Section – third place: *Shootin' the Breeze*.

Sue Gawlak Best Local Editorial – honourable mention to Shannon Peace for My Little Corner.

Sports Writing Award – honourable mention to Mia Parket for Local Women Excel in 1,000-Mile Survival Race on the Yukon River.

Wildlife Photo – honourable mention to Jenaya Launstein.

The BNC General Excellence Awards are classed according to circulation. *Shootin' the Breeze* is in a group of 13 newspapers and the awards reflect the work of our entire team.

Best Editorial Page – second place

Best Overall Score – third place

Best Front Page – third place

I tip my hat to my co-workers at the *Breeze* and to my fellow board members of the Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association. Work well done is worthy of celebration as we move forward.

We tell the stories that matter to you

By Paul MacNeill
Publisher, Island Press

Main Street has changed. There was a time when you could find just about everything needed at a locally owned shop. If it didn't have exactly what you were looking for, an employee would help you source it.

Customer service and loyalty to community: These are ideals diminished in an era of big box stores and one-click shopping, business dominated by the largest corporations in the world. Today, there are far fewer decision-makers on Main Street. It means fewer businesses to sponsor a local team, or help fundraise for a new fire truck, equipment for the local hospital or school trip.

Through all this turbulence, we are still here with a single powerful focus. We tell the stories that matter to you. It is what makes this community newspaper unique. Some media have a global focus. Some are national or provincial. We only care about you.

There are more than 865 of us across this country. You might be surprised there are so many community papers still publishing, in many cases thriving, in predominantly small, rural communities. We are the voice you may not all always agree with, but you know we share a love of this place. It is home and it matters.

You trust us to be your eyes and ears. Sometimes we are the only member of the public at the local council meeting, reading documents and financial statements and asking questions on your behalf.

Democracy flows uphill. When a community paper is closed or stripped of its assets, oversight of public institutions is diminished. We are proud to be there for you.

As we celebrate National Newspaper Week, take a moment to think about what this paper means to you and this community. We're the glue that bonds our community together, because your stories matter.

Paul MacNeill is a community newspaper publisher at Island Press Ltd. in Montague, P.E.I. Paul is also an award-winning investigative journalist, a frequent CBC contributor, and a board member of the Canadian Journalism Foundation and the Michener Awards Foundation.

Slow truth and strong communities

By Tim Shoults
Publisher, St. Albert Gazette

You may have heard the famous saying by Sir Winston Churchill: "A lie gets halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes."

The only problem is that Churchill didn't say that. Neither did Mark Twain or Thomas Jefferson, who are among the other famous figures tied to it.

If you're curious, the phrase is believed to have been adapted from an early use by Jonathan Swift in 1710: "Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it."

It's ironic how both that phrase and its bastardized history sum up some of the issues facing media today.

Human nature being what it is, attractive falsehood has always had an advantage over homely truth. But the light-speed advances of information technology through the internet, and specifically social media, have made that advantage unbeatable. To update the saying, a lie gets around the world twice before the truth has even heard there's a race.

Readers used to be able to judge the reliability of a message from the medium they received it. Seeing something printed in a newspaper or shown on a TV screen implied a level of professionalism

compared to something shoddily copied and left in a public restroom.

But the digital world — particularly the mobile world and social media — erases many of those cues. Today, the most blatant conspiracy theory shows up on your phone, looking much like the most respected journal.

So now, the onus is on you, the reader, more than ever, to make yourself aware of the source of what you're reading. "I read it on the internet" means nothing.

One source you can count on in this scary new world is your community newspaper. We employ professional journalists with deep experience and connections to the communities that we serve. Just as importantly, we're visible in our communities, which makes us accountable and accessible to you, the reader.

But we're only as good as you make us — community support is essential to what we do. Your print subscription, voluntary contribution, signing up for email newsletters and alerts, or just picking up your print copy or bookmarking our sites are all ways to show that support.

Strong community journalism makes for stronger communities — and that's a saying you can believe in.

Time to support local journalism

By Paul Deegan
President and CEO
News Media Canada

Every week about 30 million newspapers are delivered across Canada. More than four out of five people in Canada read newspaper content each week. Why do they read print and digital news sources? The answer is simple: trust.

Canadians value and trust fact-based, fact-checked journalism. Journalists hold the powerful to account. They cover city hall, the courts and the police. They also keep communities connected by

reporting on everything from the high school football team to 100th birthdays.

But real journalism, created by real journalists — rather than by artificial intelligence — costs real money. If we want to sustain it, we must support it. One of the best ways for the local community to support local journalism is to take out an ad. When you buy a newspaper ad, whether print or digital, those dollars stay in the community and allow the publisher to employ journalists. Conversely, when you buy an ad from a web

giant, those dollars flow south to California to companies that don't employ a single journalist.

One thing government can do to keep scarce advertising dollars in Canada is establish tax measures to incent businesses to advertise with private-sector Canadian news outlets and bring fairness to the different tax treatment of advertising purchased from foreign websites.

See TIME TO SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM, continued on page 10

TIME TO SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM,

continued from page 9

Governments — municipal, provincial and federal — also have a role to play when it comes to their own advertising spend. It makes no sense that the federal government was spending almost twice as much on Facebook/Instagram — which are now blocking news in Canada — as they were on all print publications combined. Governments, at all levels, should earmark 25 per cent of their advertising spend toward trusted Canadian news sources. And the federal government should end the “double dip” by eliminating commercial advertising associated with CBC News, the public broadcaster.

National Newspaper Week is a time to reflect on the Champions who report the news without fear or favour, and it's a time to remember that local news needs to be supported by the community.

Shootin' the Breeze



For the want of a journalist

**By Gordon Cameron
President and Interim
Executive Director,
Ontario Community
Newspapers Association**

I was recently chatting with a former journalistic colleague when she brought up a conversation she overheard during a fall fair. Someone who identified herself as being a friend of a local councillor was saying that the council was going to raise property taxes by 14 percent and that she had been told by the councillor that it was a completely done deal.

It was a pretty strange claim to make, considering the council had only started its budget deliberations and has a long history of beginning with a high estimated tax increase only to finish with one that comes in at the low single digits.

My colleague knew it was bunk because she knew the history. She understood that, in spite of this

person's claim to having the inside scoop, she clearly didn't. However, as my friend was busy with other things, she was unable to correct the misinformation that was being passed around in the moment. All she could do was hope that the rumour didn't spread, and be prepared to fight a rearguard action to correct it if it did.

Welcome to journalism in 2023.

Not so long ago, newspaper staffs were large enough to cover their communities like a blanket. If it happened, we wrote about it. If people were talking about it, we joined the fray. We offered plaudits to the best of us and exposed the misdeeds of the worst of us. We left no stone unturned in our quest to present the good, the bad and the ugly of the places we covered.

Then, things changed.

Newsrooms started getting smaller. At first, the changes were hardly noticeable. An event missed

here, a brief instead of an article there. Sadly, that was just the beginning. Soon, newsrooms were having to make difficult decisions about how to use their shrinking resources. Many journalists tried to compensate by putting in longer hours and working seven days a week for months on end. However, no matter how committed a journalist is to his or her community, that can only last for so long.

As the number of journalists goes down, it gets harder for those who remain to write all the stories that need to be written. Fewer stories mean more news items that go unexplained. It means fewer misunderstandings get corrected. It means that those who wish to spin a situation to their own ends will go unchallenged. A lack of journalists and journalism can do irreparable harm to both society at large and to the places we call home.

All for the want of a journalist ...

Local newspapers keep it real

**By Dave Adset
News Media Canada Chairman
Publisher of Wellington Advertiser
and North Wellington Community News**

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 multinational 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.

Jaunty Journo Jargon

By Mia Parker



Personal accounts and reflections
from your local journalism student, Mia Parker

When I read over the application cover letter I submitted to *Shootin' the Breeze* in 2020, there are many things I wish I had said better, but one line, “I enjoy putting my words into paper,” doesn't change.

Coming in as a marketing and editorial assistant at 15, I knew I loved writing, but I had no idea how significant it would become to me. I started writing my own articles and pitching my own stories, and somewhere along the line, I got it in my brain that I was going to go to Ottawa and be a Carleton journalism student.

I fell in love with journalism at *Shootin' the Breeze* and quickly realized it was the combination of everything I love — learning, exploring, conversing, writing and much more. The interviews I had in my community, the issues and initiatives I covered, and the people I learned from in my office all shaped my desire to pursue it seriously.

Now, I'm studying at Carleton University, the country's oldest journalism school, constantly finding opportunities to bring up my start in journalism at my local paper.

