

Remarks, more or less as delivered, by Robert M. Williams upon his induction as president of the National Newspaper Association at its 127th annual convention in Phoenix, Ariz., Sept. 15, 2013

First... Thank you. Thank you for probably missing dinner two nights this week because you were attending a meeting of your county commission or school board. You were there so you could inform thousands of readers who didn't want to be bothered by going themselves or showing up to keep local government officials accountable.

You did. And you do. Week after week. Thank you.

Or maybe you were at a Relay for Life meeting where, in addition to reporting on all those volunteers, you were probably also coordinating your own volunteer team.

Thank you for contributing to the fabric of your community.

Thank you for making THREE telephone calls over the course of several hours just to be sure the little girl who won a blue ribbon at the horse show spells "Christie" with a "c" and an "i.e." instead of a "k" and two e's -- or any other about 20 different variations for how the name Christie can be spelled.

Accuracy matters.

It matters to Christie's mama and daddy. It matters to all our readers And it matters to you. Thank you.

Thank you for offering space to the friends of a cancer victim who are washing cars or selling barbecue just to raise money to buy gas to get that lady to her chemotherapy treatments. Your coverage makes the difference between raising \$1500 instead of only \$150. Thank you.

Thank you for being the greatest link -- and the strongest protection -- between your readers and those with the power to tax and regulate and govern -- and the few who choose to abuse that power. Thank you for speaking truth to power without fear or favor. Newspapers are often the only ones in a community willing to do that.

Thank you for being the first transcribers of the only history your communities will likely ever record. The words and photos we preserve today are the priceless artifacts of lives treasured for generations to come.

Thank you for providing a low-cost, effective and reliable connection between hundreds of sometimes struggling small town businesses and the buying public. You are a vital link between buyer and seller and, most important, you are an invested partner in the success of your friends and neighbors. Thank you for working hard to help them succeed.

The late Robert Woodruff, longtime CEO of Coca Cola said: "You can have anything you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want." This is what great community newspapers do. Thank you for that commitment.

Thank you for being veterans in the war against secrecy and lies and greed. It takes little courage to write about a stranger among thousands or millions in a metropolitan city ... but it takes tremendous dignity, daring and

fortitude to write about the woman who sits in the next pew with you at church...or the man who sits across from you at Rotary.

You do it week after week with sensitivity and caring and fairness and accuracy. Thank you for that.

Thank you for not blindly following the lemmings over the cliff... Those doomsayers who love to shout that newspapers' best days are behind them. But what do they NOT say??? Television viewership is being splintered into hundreds of channels -- with far more of them focused on promoting sex and silliness than vital information that makes our families stronger, our values deeper ... our home lives happier. When was the last time television covered good news in your community?

We are the ONLY true mass medium in thousands of markets nationwide!

I tell folks that CNN is NOT coming to Blackshear, Georgia to tell anyone what is happening in our town. And if they ever do come, you can bet we will not be happy about what they will tell us.

In Blackshear, Georgia and thousands of small communities just like it across America, community newspapers are embracing the use of digital media as one more tool in an effective arsenal for information that reaches more people in the markets we serve than anyone else.

And -- social media?? We were "social media" before social media was cool! We have been connecting friends and neighbors and telling about who ate with who and what they ate as far back as when our country correspondents wrote about how Mr. and Mrs. Jones "motored" over to the next town last Sunday to have dinner with her sister, Evelyne.

There's really not much new under the sun but we have told people about it ALL -- for decades.

I started my career nearly 50 years ago. I became a publisher almost 43 years ago and the ONLY way I have made it is through the generous help of many publishers and editors just like many of you. In fact, it IS many of you. I came to my first NNA convention exactly 40 years ago — in the fall of 1973 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I have attended 40 of the last 42 Georgia Press Association conventions and more ad seminars, editorial workshops and other such gatherings than I can count. And EVERY time, I've come away a better newspaper person.

I came to my first NNA Convention 40 years ago this fall at Hot Springs, Arkansas. I was, by far, the youngest in a sizable Georgia delegation. One of our state's finest publishers, Mr. Jim Thomasson of Newnan, Georgia, was being pushed in a wheel chair when we arrived at the hotel. After enjoying those hot baths a few days, Mr. Jim was able to start walking by the time we got ready to leave! I asked him about the miracle results. He told me it wasn't the baths! "I get my batteries re-charged talking with my fellow newspaper friends from around the country!," he told me. "They understand what we do and why we do it. Coming to NNA makes me feel revitalized for the work we do!"

The work of our National Newspaper Association has paid countless dividends to our newspapers for decades. Many are unaware of the significant discounts and privileges NNA has won with the Postal Service that we now take for granted. We cannot count the dollars we've saved through rate increases delayed or avoided entirely.

Newspaper readers and the public at large have benefitted from our advocacy on Capitol Hill in ways that have strengthened our country's Democratic principles.

This work is hard. And it is costly. Our numbers, while stable and even growing some, still include too few of our brethren. Too many newspaper companies wish to ride on YOUR shoulders. Every member needs to be an advocate for protecting and promoting the work of newspapers in general and NNA specifically. Too many want YOU to pay the cost for them.

I ask you simply: Go home and be an advocate for your industry ... Be an advocate for community newspapers. Be an advocate for NNA. Newspapers are notorious for being slow to publicize ourselves. Now is the time, however, for us to pull together... to unite for the good of our industry... Why NNA? Let me quote from the back of President Merle's business card... Because America's community newspapers need a leader and advocate, a trusted, respected voice with a passion for the news and for democracy; because NNA promotes a connected, responsible and accountable press, journalism that is fair, accurate, objective, timely and complete; because NNA is a proponent of innovation, a force for change turning today's challenges into tomorrow's opportunities; because NNA member rewards include financial insight, networking support, travel and friendship among peers and supporters.

In my town, if you want a Big Mac, there's only one place to get it. That's McDonald's. They have the franchise. You want a Whopper? There's only one place to get it: Burger King. They have the franchise. If you're in Blackshear, Georgia and you want local news...? There's only one place to get it. The Blackshear Times. WE have the franchise. It's ours to lose. And we're not giving it up. It's the same way in your town and thousands of other bedrock towns and cities all over our nation. I know you are not giving up your franchise as THE best place to find local news and information, either. You are going to be there for your community!

The Internet is a tremendous innovation. A powerful tool. But it is not a source. It is a tool. It cannot adequately replace a well-edited, well-designed community newspaper. Gleaning your news from the Internet can be as satisfying as getting a drink of water from a firehose.

If newspapers operated like the Internet, every resident in your town would be writing the stories and the headlines. There would be NO editors and NO fact-checkers. News from the Internet is bedlam in bits and bytes. And, as is all too obvious, too many cannot — or don't care — to sort out the facts from the fiction. That is the job of editors.

I cannot tell you an exact date, but I can tell you a benchmark when the public's view of newspapers' began to change... It was when newspapering quit being a profession and became an investment. Newspapers have become profitable businesses and have lasted to become the oldest business in most communities, not because we are such great business minds.... not because we make so many friends — we don't. Newspapers are successful because of journalism! Every newspaper depends on good business management and great ad sales but NONE OF IT would ever happen without good journalism. Names and faces. Names and faces. Names and faces. And facts. It's a simple recipe for success if we don't get distracted by the latest whiz-bang trend.

Warren Buffet said: "In towns and cities where there is a strong sense of community, there is no more important institution than the local paper."

Welcome to our world, Mr. Buffett. It is reassuring to have you here.

Have newspapers suffered in recent years? Yes! Of course we have. Community newspapers are a direct reflection — a mirror — of the economy of the towns and cities we serve. The economic crash that sent stocks plummeting and development downward affected every business we serve and our newspapers reflect that. Our communities are hurting and when our towns are injured, newspapers bleed. There is nothing wrong with America's community newspapers that an overall improvement in our nation's economy will not fix.

We are a mirror of our communities... but you can't see a reflection in the dark. Newspapers have to provide the light. It is HARD for a community to rise above the quality and commitment of its local newspaper. Good newspapers build strong communities!

People say newspapers are dying... To quote the great writer Charles Dickens... "Bah, Humbug!"

Are people going to stop loving their high school football down in Texas? No! ... Are people going to stop caring about whether their taxes go up or down in Minnesota? No! ... Are people going to stop wanting to see their children's' names on the honor roll in Missouri? No! Are people going to stop wondering who is going bankrupt or buying building permits in New Jersey? No!

In America we talk about the value and dignity of every individual. Nowhere in our society are those ideals better displayed than in America's community newspapers. It starts at birth! We believe EVERY child born should have their announcement PLUS a photo in the newspaper. That child's first and succeeding birthdays are often marked with a photo in our newspaper. We love to publish pictures of children marking their first day of school. On through the years we document reading achievement, math competitions, steer shows, ball game victories and countless other milestones of life as we know it. Graduation is a big deal in each of our communities. Our documentation of the value of each individual life goes on and on...through engagement, marriage, more births... anniversaries, job promotions.... you name it and we travel life's path right with the people who surround us.... all the way to the grave....-- and even beyond -- with Memorials!

Who cares more about the success and prosperity and happiness of people in your community than you?
NOBODY!

We believe people will always want to read about local sports.

We believe people will always want to know about their taxes and what their governments are doing.

We believe people will always want to see the triumphs and tributes relating to their children's names and faces publicized.

We believe will always have a need for accountability from their government!

We believe in the critical need for accuracy and fairness as demonstrated by professional journalists.

We believe in newspapers! Thank you for being a part of this great and valuable industry.