

I've been working at *The Lebanon Enterprise* for 16 years. And in those 16 years, things have changed drastically in the newspaper business.

But, there is one thing that hasn't changed.

Newspapers still matter.

Don't believe me?

Come hang out with me at my office during a week when I make a mistake in the land transfers. Believe it or not, people read those things in our public record. And, when there is a mistake, you can bet someone is going to call me out on it. And, I'm glad they do. Because, unlike other types of media, newspapers correct their mistakes in black and white.

Yes, newspapers still matter.

Newspapers tell people's stories. And newspapers don't let us forget.

Just ask the family of Kara Tingle who has depended on my newspaper to get the word out about Kara and the fact that she's still missing after eight years. She has two children who miss her terribly. "If somebody had my mommy, I'd ask them to give her back," Kara's son, Austin, told me during an interview about his mother.

Do newspapers still matter? Austin certainly thinks so.

For families who have lost loved ones, newspapers matter a great deal.

The newspaper is the only place where they can have a lasting memory of their loved one. Families take great care in having obituaries published in the local newspaper. Obituaries are often the first thing many people read in the news each day and may be the last word written about a person's life.

Indeed, newspapers still matter.

Just ask hometown soldiers stationed overseas that still keep up with hometown news on our web site. "I just wanted to impart my thanks on to you and your staff for maintaining the *Enterprise* website," a soldier wrote to me. "It keeps all of us displaced Marion Countians informed on what is going on back home."

And, believe it or not, young people still read the newspaper. Or, they at least look at the pictures. Children are still overjoyed when they see their photos in the newspaper. And, those students' parents still proudly display the newspaper clipping of their child's photo on the refrigerator for all to see.

Ask them if they think the newspaper is important. I bet they do.

Ask any school superintendent if newspapers are important. Often times, we are the only media reporting on local schools, test scores, etc.

Ask local athletes - who become overnight celebrities when their photo appears on the front page of the sports section. That's more than just scrapbook material.

Yes, newspapers matter.

The newspaper helps people open their minds. I think it's what I love the most about my job. At my small community newspaper, I have written stories about the first gay couple to legally adopt in our community ... the first gay couple to legally marry in our county ... and this year Reporter Emily LaForme wrote about an amazingly brave transgender teenager – a story that will undoubtedly win awards. But, it's not about the awards. That's not why we do what we do. (*Although, I admit, the award money and recognition is pretty nice.*) We write these stories to educate people -- to help them understand - - to open their eyes - - their minds - - and their hearts.

And, often times, newspapers have to take a stand on their opinion pages and state the obvious ... something many people are afraid to do for one reason or another. And, in small towns, that can cost the newspaper staff a friend or two. But, at the end of the day, newspapers have a responsibility to be the watchdogs for their communities - for their country. It's not always the most popular thing to do, but it needs to be done nonetheless.

And newspapers do it. Newspapers matter.

While there are people out there who claim the newspaper industry is dying, the staff at The Lebanon Enterprise and many other community newspapers throughout the state and country couldn't feel more alive. And we continue to do what's most important - report the news - good and bad - in our communities.

That's something that has never, nor will ever, change.