

grassroots editor

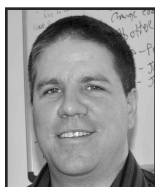


A journal for
newspeople

 **ISWNE**

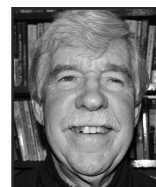
Published by the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors

2018 Golden Quill & Golden Dozen Awards



Editorial skills and courage exemplified by winners
of the ISWNE contest and

**The 43rd Annual
Eugene Cervi Award**



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President Steve Ranson
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Executive Director:
Dr. Chad Stebbins, Director, Institute of International Studies, Missouri Southern State University, 3950 E. Newman Road, Joplin, MO 64801-1595
Phone: (417) 625-9736
Fax: (417) 659-4445
E-Mail: stebbins-c@mssu.edu

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2018 Golden Quill contest and Eugene Cervi Award

This year's Golden Quill recipient had a lengthy career as a daily city editor and editorial page editor before moving to a weekly, *The North Scott Press*, in Eldridge, Iowa, in 2016. Mark Ridolfi has extensive experience with database reporting, leading investigative teams, managing newsrooms, and building websites, but believes writing is at the heart of it all.

"What a thrill to be recognized for writing by a group of excellent writers," he said. "We report on tough stuff. It takes work to make town councils and school boards accessible to our readers. That work pays off when our communities feel connected to governance. It also pays off when I'm surprised with a trip to Portland for this terrific honor."

Ridolfi, 59, received a B.A. in journalism from Northern Illinois University in 1980 and an M.A. in journalism from Indiana University in Indianapolis in 1995, where he did database analysis work under Pulitzer Prize winner Andrew Schneider.

ISWNE received 106 Golden Quill entries from 60 individuals this year. The 12 best are gathered together as the Golden Dozen. The summer issue of *Grassroots Editor* traditionally contains these editorials along with comments from the judge. It is an opportunity to see the quality of commentary in the weekly press.

Ross Connelly, the longtime editor and publisher of *The Hardwick Gazette* in Vermont, is the recipient of the 2018 Eugene Cervi Award. Connelly is a New England journalistic icon: He was the founding chair of the Vermont Coalition for Open Government and a champion of diversity.

It is fitting that one of the letters of nomination for Connelly came from Jack Authelet, the 1998 Cervi recipient. And Gene Cervi himself would have endorsed Connelly's selection, for Ross is often regarded as the "journalism conscience" of ISWNE.

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GOLDEN QUILL WINNERS (1961-2018)

- | | | | |
|-------------|--|-------------|--|
| 1961 | Hal DeCell
<i>Deer Creek Pilot</i> , Rolling Fork, Mississippi | 1990 | Bill Lueders
<i>Isthmus</i> , Madison, Wisconsin |
| 1962 | Don Pease
<i>Oberlin</i> (Ohio) <i>News Tribune</i> | 1991 | Stuart Taylor Jr.
<i>Legal Times</i> , Washington, D.C. |
| 1963 | Hazel Brannon Smith
<i>Lexington</i> (Mississippi) <i>Advertiser</i> | 1992 | Hope Aldrich
<i>The Santa Fe</i> (New Mexico) <i>Reporter</i> |
| 1964 | Mrs. R.M.B. Hicks
<i>Dallas</i> (Pennsylvania) <i>Post</i> | 1993 | Michael D. Myers
<i>Granite City</i> (Illinois) <i>Press-Record</i> |
| 1965 | Robert E. Fisher
<i>Crossett</i> (Arkansas) <i>News Observer</i> | 1994 | Jim MacNeill
<i>The Eastern Graphic</i> , Montague, Prince Edward Island |
| 1966 | Owen J. McNamara
<i>Brookline</i> (Massachusetts) <i>Chronicle-Citizen</i> | 1995 | Brian J. Hunhoff
<i>The Missouri Valley Observer</i> , Yankton, South Dakota |
| 1967 | Alvin J. Remmenga
<i>Cloverdale</i> (California) <i>Reveille</i> | 1996 | Patricia Calhoun
<i>Denver Westword</i> , Denver, Colorado |
| 1968 | Henry H. Null IV
<i>The Abington Journal</i> , Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania | 1997 | Tim Giago
<i>Indian Country Today</i> , Rapid City, South Dakota |
| 1969 | Dan Hicks Jr.
<i>Monroe County Democrat</i> , Madisonville, Tennessee | 1998 | Gary Sosniecki
<i>Webster County Citizen</i> , Seymour, Missouri |
| 1970 | Richard Taylor
<i>Kennett News & Advertiser</i> , Kennett Square, Pennsylvania | 1999 | Jeff McMahon
<i>New Times</i> , San Luis Obispo, California |
| 1971 | Edward DeCourcy
<i>Newport</i> (New Hampshire) <i>Argus Champion</i> | 2000 | Jeff McMahon
<i>New Times</i> , San Luis Obispo, California |
| 1972 | C. Peter Jorgenson
<i>The Advocate</i> , Arlington, Massachusetts | 2001 | William F. Schanen III
<i>Ozaukee Press</i> , Port Washington, Wisconsin |
| 1973 | Robert Estabrook
<i>Lakeville</i> (Connecticut) <i>Journal</i> | 2002 | Paul MacNeill
<i>The Eastern Graphic</i> , Montague, Prince Edward Island |
| 1974 | Phil McLaughlin
<i>The Miami Republican</i> , Paola, Kansas | 2003 | Jeremy Waltner
<i>Freeman Courier</i> , Freeman, South Dakota |
| 1975 | Betsy Cox
<i>The Madison County Newsweek</i> , Richmond, Kentucky | 2004 | Charles Gay
<i>Shelton-Mason County Journal</i> , Shelton, Washington |
| 1976 | Peter Bodley
<i>Coon Rapids Herald</i> , Anoka, Minnesota | 2005 | Bill Lueders
<i>Isthmus</i> , Madison, Wisconsin |
| 1977 | Rodney A. Smith
<i>Gretna</i> (Virginia) <i>Gazette</i> | 2006 | Gary Sosniecki
<i>The Vandalia Leader</i> , Vandalia, Missouri |
| 1978 | Robert Estabrook
<i>Lakeville</i> (Connecticut) <i>Journal</i> | 2007 | Lori Evans
<i>Homer News</i> , Homer, Alaska |
| 1979 | R. W. van de Velde
<i>The Valley Voice</i> , Middlebury, Vermont | 2008 | Melissa Hale-Spencer
<i>The Altamont Enterprise</i> , Altamont, New York |
| 1980 | Garrett Ray
<i>Independent Newspapers</i> , Littleton, Colorado | 2009 | David Martin
<i>The Pitch</i> , Kansas City, Missouri |
| 1981 | Janelou Buck
<i>Sebring</i> (Florida) <i>News</i> | 2010 | Mo Mehlsak
<i>The Forecaster</i> , Falmouth, Maine |
| 1982 | Albert Scardino
<i>The Georgia Gazette</i> , Savannah, Georgia | 2011 | Peter Weinschenk
<i>The Record-Review</i> , Abbotsford, Wisconsin |
| 1983 | Francis C. Zanger
<i>Bellows Falls</i> (Vermont) <i>News-Review</i> | 2012 | Vernon Oickle
<i>The Lunenburg County Progress Bulletin</i> , Bridgewater, Nova Scotia |
| 1984 | John McCall
<i>The SandPaper</i> , Ocean City, New Jersey | 2013 | Peter Weinschenk
<i>The Record-Review</i> , Abbotsford, Wisconsin |
| 1985 | William F. Schanen III
<i>Ozaukee Press</i> , Port Washington, Wisconsin | 2014 | Brian J. Hunhoff
<i>Yankton County Observer</i> , Yankton, South Dakota |
| 1986 | Henry G. Gay
<i>Shelton-Mason County Journal</i> , Shelton, Washington | 2015 | Roger Harnack
<i>Omak-Okanogan County Chronicle</i> , Omak, Washington |
| 1987 | Ellen L. Albanese
<i>The Country Gazette</i> , Franklin, Massachusetts | 2016 | Mike Buffington
<i>The Jackson Herald</i> , Jefferson, Georgia |
| 1988 | Michael G. Lacey
<i>The New Times</i> , Phoenix, Arizona | 2017 | Peter Weinschenk
<i>The Record-Review</i> , Abbotsford, Wisconsin |
| 1989 | Tim Redmond
<i>Bay Guardian</i> , San Francisco, California | 2018 | Mark Ridolfi
<i>The North Scott Press</i> , Eldridge, Iowa |

The judge's comments

By Jackie Risley

Before I lived in one of the most densely populated cities in the U.S., I grew up reading a weekly paper in a rural town that still has fewer than 1,500 residents. As I read this year's Golden Quill submissions, what struck me was that, despite what partisan politics would have us believe, the things that are important to people in towns like the one I grew up in aren't much different from those of my urban neighbors. In a time when it feels like so much of the media exploits differences and leaves people feeling powerless, these weekly newspapers and their editors are uniting, empowering, and mobilizing their communities.

This year's submissions gave eloquent voice to the local impact of national problems like substance abuse, law enforcement abuses, women's health issues, government overreach, and intolerance. They rally leaders and the community to take action and ownership in providing good schools for their children, safe neighborhoods, and fair treatment under the law.

As the Golden Quill submissions underscore, the difference is that smaller municipalities are dealing with these global issues at a local level with far fewer resources and the danger of losing even more. The authors put a human face on the direct local impact of measures such as cuts in federal healthcare funding and arts education on students in small school districts. By helping readers recognize the underlying issues and provide a call to action, community newspapers are fighting the apathy and sense of helplessness that threaten the common ideals we value.

Simultaneously, these editorials perfectly reflected the unique role of community newspapers in informing the public about local decisions that impact them. They ensure that school board meetings and municipal meetings, which are poorly attended and overlooked by television news and internet outlets, are given public accountability. Whether they want it or not.

As a former community journalist, I know that, despite its importance, this is often one of the most thankless assignments. In exchange for tedious hours fulfilling their obligation to inform the

public, these editors often receive anger and criticism. And unlike internet comments that can be ignored, when you're a community news editor, this feedback is provided at the local grocery store, while you wait for your coffee, or at your child's sporting event.

Most importantly, these weekly papers and their editors are doing more than just bringing attention to important issues. Rather than increasing divisions, they inspire their communities by reminding them that, in a democracy, citizens aren't powerless and can accomplish great things when they work together to protect the people and ideals they care about.

In fact, many of the Golden Quill submissions are a celebration of their communities and community life. They stand as champions for schools and local businesses and the individuals who make a lasting impact on others. As I read through the tear sheets that covered pecan festivals, public celebrations for beloved coaches who taught generations of children about fair play, and fundraising events to help neighbors in need, I found myself nostalgic for some of the aspects of community life that can't be replicated in a large city.

At the same time, it's clear that community newspapers and the areas they serve are struggling with uncertainty about the future. How will community reporting adapt to increasing use of digital and social media by readers, advertisers, and government? How can communities protect the things that make small-town and rural life so rewarding while ensuring enough development to maintain a standard of living and avoiding becoming exclusionary?

It will take courage and creativity to preserve their core ideals as technology, the economy, and social change force them to adapt and innovate. I have empathy for these publications and their communities as they face the challenges that lie ahead. As they face the potential need to reinvent themselves, the best I can offer is the advice my grandfather gave me: Don't forget where you come from.

About the judge

Jackie Risley is currently using the writing skills she developed as a community journalist as the senior director of marketing at a Silicon Valley software company. For several years, she was on the staff of *The Albion* (Pennsylvania) *News*, where she covered municipal meetings, community events, and other local happenings. That experience taught her to extract stories from interviews with diverse people, write for multiple audiences and tough copy editors, and strive for clarity with brevity. All of which are useful skills in marketing.

In addition to various marketing positions, Jackie was an editor at *Business Solutions Magazine* and taught writing at the high school and college levels. Jackie holds an M.A. in English from Gannon University and recently completed her M.B.A. at San Jose State University with a concentration in global leadership. Her interests include reading, traveling, and cooking.



Golden Quill Winner



Mark Ridolfi

Assistant Editor,
The North Scott Press

214 N. 2nd St.
Eldridge, Iowa
52745

April 19, 2017

How do you petition a grievance without access to records?

Those of us blessed with a career made possible by the First Amendment are duty bound to honor the Constitution's other 26. Our Constitution is an evolving document that has been oh-so-slowly amended to reflect our nation's changing attitudes to race, gender, voting and presidential term limits. That evolution created the ballot-ing system that allows popular vote losers to be presidential winners.

It also banned and restored alcohol sales within 16 years, one of the quickest attitudinal evolutions in the document.

Iowa legislators this year flexed two of their constitutionally amended rights. They expanded Second Amendment personal gun freedoms by invoking the 10th's affirmation of state's rights. As a result Iowans permitted to carry firearms can now bring them into the statehouse.

They can also challenge local governments that attempt to ban firearms in courthouses and other public buildings.

Iowa's new gun law affirms a new right for gun owners to "stand their ground," a phrase that authorizes firing upon those threatening property, not just life. It also allows parents to arm children under 14.

Those changes are a departure from Iowa tradition, but long practiced in other states without fanfare or catastrophe.

I flinch at the part of the new state gun law that dictates what local governments can do. Every police chief and sheriff I've spoken with does not want guns carried into courthouses or schools. But this Iowa law invites gun proponents to file suits challenging local preferences publicly approved by locally elected city, county and school board leaders.

That seems an overreach.

New secrecy

But the provision that really gets me is the new requirement that Iowa gun carry permits are now secret.

The First Amendment has made me a student of public records for my entire career. My good-government radar starts beeping whenever public things become private.

Most property records, including ownership, sale price, mortgage commitments and liens, are public.

All government salaries are public. So are any government payments, though you often have to dig to track down public checks cut for lawsuit settlements.

Government property and wage benefit negotiations may remain private, though any final settlement must be public, and ultimately published so interested taxpayers can find out.

Almost every regulated occupation is subject to public release of disciplinary proceedings, although the restrictions get tighter higher up the pay scale. You can read public complaints against your licensed hairdresser. Specific allegations against lawyers remain secret until affirmed by a Supreme Court attorney disciplinary board.

Exercising the regulated right to bear and carry firearms, in my view, seems neither an embarrassment to be covered up, nor a benefit to be automatically pushed into print or online. It simply creates a publicly managed record.

And publicly managed records, in my view, should be public.

Those wanting secrecy say public gun records can be a road map for thieves. But the state's new stand-your-ground law pretty much assures a grim end to crooks who use that map.

Second Amendment

My First Amendment career generates plenty of interest in Second Amendment records.

I've visited the Scott County Sheriff's office and inspected the hand-written permit and carry permits. In the 1980s and '90s, the records I researched sometimes included handwritten notations to expedite, or forbid a permit. That occurred under an Iowa law, in which each of Iowa's 99 county sheriffs could have his own standard for carry permits. Sheriffs Forrest Ashcraft and Mike Bladel provided instant access to those public records.

When legislators established a statewide standard carry permit standard in 2010, I returned to take another look. Sheriff Dennis Conard personally showed me the records.

In 2016, I requested Scott County's carry permit

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FROM THE JUDGE

Defense of First Amendment rights is a common editorial theme, but what sets this submission apart is that it illustrates the need for access to information by linking it directly to critical issues around Second Amendment rights.

An Iowa law that allows for broad expansion of Second Amendment personal gun freedoms also limits access to public records. Without getting sidetracked with an evaluation of the gun legislation, Mark shares how access to these records has been used in his reporting related to gun ownership and allows for public oversight of whether the law is being implemented fairly.

In addition to standing up for the right of the public to access government records, this editorial proposes a reasonable recommendation for an accessible database.

An explanation from the winner

By Mark Ridolfi

C'mon along. That's the invitation I try to extend in columns. Readers seem to love some of the same things about journalism that I do: Tracking down data and getting to the bottom of something.

While many flip out about the "media" or the "press," our readers seem to still value knowing someone who will rummage through courthouse records, read an entire council resolution or legislative bill, and – especially in our growing community – make sure newly platted subdivisions don't dump storm water in others' backyards.

So I try to share that part of the job and take readers to places they don't usually go.

The column recognized by ISWNE addressed access to public records, something very few readers have personally experienced. Many still believe public records are only for snooping reporters, even though the vast majority of FOI requests come from private businesses seeking mailing lists or vendor information.

This column addressed gun ownership and carry permit records, something I assumed many readers wouldn't want nosy newsies near. Republicans in the state legislature wanted to – and ultimately did – make those records secret.

I figured our readers would dismiss another journalist's plea for open records.

But they might pay attention to their popularly elected sheriffs.

"I've visited the Scott County Sheriff's office and inspected the hand-written permit and carry permits. ... Sheriffs Forrest Ashcraft and Mike Bladel provided instant access to those public records. ... Sheriff Dennis Conard personally showed me the records."

Rather than peg my argument on laws and court rulings unknown to readers, I anchored it to two decades of popular sheriffs, Democrat and Republican, whom most of our readers had supported. None of those lawmen showed any hesitation to disclose records.

The column also shared experiences researching

state regulators' disciplinary records, another example of government's wildly inconsistent standards for disclosure.

"Almost every regulated occupation is subject to public release of disciplinary proceedings, although the restrictions get tighter higher up the pay scale. You can read public complaints against your licensed hairdresser. Specific allegations against lawyers remain secret until affirmed by a Supreme Court attorney disciplinary board."

My call for reader advice got no bites. No one followed up with a scathing, or supportive letter. But everywhere I went, readers bent my ear on the subject. Some acknowledged the value of transparency, even as they flinched about having their own carry permits disclosed.

I hope more of my commentary starts discussions, not ends them.

I hope it shows our newspaper cognizant not only of press rights prescribed by the First Amendment, but also of press responsibilities, which most readers know little about.

The journalists of ISWNE certainly know them. Our businesses may have been enabled by the First Amendment, but they are sustained by our community conscientiousness and connectedness. At our weekly papers, readers know the journalists opining on openness are the same ones publicizing their workplace expansions, church bake sales, and kids' achievements.

We need to remind them over and over that one business in town has their backs.

By including details about our reporting activities, we affirm that local news isn't a collection of thoughts, feelings, philosophies and impressions. It's about legwork. It's about triple checking. It's about afternoons in a courthouse basement plugging through boxes of index cards that reveal who gets guns and who doesn't.

Our news businesses fail when we aim to appeal only to customers who agree with us.

We're unstoppable when supported by readers who respect us.

Mark Ridolfi can be contacted at mridolfi@northscottpress.com.



Melissa Hale-Spencer

Editor,
The Altamont Enterprise

120 Maple Avenue
Altamont, New York
12009

March 2, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

This submission proves that powerful editorials don't have to be critical, maintaining a positive tone even in the face of what was likely a controversial issue.

Melissa praises the school district's empathetic support for transgender students even after federal protections were rescinded. From the individual community heroes to the school policies, this editorial shows how a community can fulfill their duty to protect vulnerable students.

Melissa Hale-Spencer also won the Golden Quill award in 2008 and Golden Dozen awards in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2016, and 2017.

We stand as one with transgender students

On Feb 16, Clifford Nooney was honored with a Friends of Education award, presented by the Capital Area School Development Association. Nooney manages the physical plant for the Guilderland schools. He wasn't honored, though, for overseeing 52 staff members, caring for 33 acres and over a million square feet of building space.

No, he was honored for an act of human compassion. In December, he had hung the sign for the school district's first all-gender bathroom.

"Students celebrated and even wept with joy at the sight of this beacon of acceptance, respect, and belonging," wrote the district in announcing the award.

A bathroom as a beacon?

Yes, indeed. In our times, it has become a symbol of accepting people for who they are, for who they choose to be.

The Enterprise covered the unfolding story at Guilderland – starting when two courageous transgender students, Julia Crooks and Ryka Sweeny, first addressed the school board in January 2016. Both of them are members of the school's Alliance, a club that offers them a place they don't feel judged and aren't called names. Nooney went to Alliance meetings to understand the students' concerns and goals.

The stories we told of the transgender students ran along with the progress the state of New York was making. The day after Julia and Ryka spoke to the school board in Guilderland, statewide regulations were coincidentally announced by the governor to protect transgender New Yorkers. The regulations, effective on Jan. 20, 2016, affirm that transgender people are protected under New York's Human Rights Law. That law – the first of its kind in the nation, enacted in 1945 – affords every citizen "an equal opportunity to enjoy a full and productive life."

In June, we profiled Riley Gohlke-Schermer, a Guilderland transgender student who uses the pronoun "they" and describes themselves as "gender fluid." Riley, who said their lesbian parents had always accepted and supported them, told us of the terrible time Riley had in middle school. "People in science class yelled, 'You're gay.' They threw pens at me. They threw garbage in my locker. They threw my stuff on the floor. They wrote about me on the bathroom wall ... Nobody speaks up. Everybody's a bystander."

The year before, in July 2015, the New York

State Education Department released guidelines for districts across the state to follow on obligations to protect students' privacy; the use of student names and pronouns; access to bathrooms and locker rooms; and when and how to involve family members in talking about a student's gender identity.

In August 2016, we looked at the report on how schools across the state were doing in following the Dignity for All Students Act – there were some problems in schools accurately self-reporting instances of harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

Although we prodded the districts we cover to not just follow the letter of the law but to follow its spirit, understanding and accepting those who might be different than ourselves, we were pleased and proud, too, to report their progress.

Berne-Knox-Westerlo adopted a new policy and identified a "unisex" bathroom – "It allows everybody, no matter how they identify, to make the choice for themselves," said Superintendent Timothy Mundell. He also said, "It's important to listen to kids and work with them as much as we can, teaching tolerance for all perspectives and accommodating the people we serve – our students and their families."

Voorheesville, too, had adopted new policy, labeled single-room bathrooms with symbols for male and female, and put privacy screens in changing areas. "You don't have to be transgender to want privacy," said Superintendent Brian Hunt.

Leaders in the schools we cover are taking good care of our students.

So why were we so disheartened when, on Feb. 22, President Donald Trump rescinded protections for transgender students that, among other things, had let them use bathrooms corresponding to their gender identity? We should not have been surprised that Trump made good on yet another of his campaign promises to social conservatives.

We were surprised, and pleased, that his newly appointed secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, raised some objections before agreeing to Attorney General Jeff Sessions's move to roll back the previous administration's directives before two pending court cases could uphold the protections. DeVos issued a strong call for the moral obligation for every school in America to protect

Continued on page 18

Opponents flunk Medicaid math

IT'S MULTIPLE CHOICE TIME and this is an easy one. Lawmakers who oppose Medicaid expansion in South Dakota are:

- 1.) Bad at math.
- 2.) Putting partisan politics ahead of what's best for our state.
- 3.) Ignoring health needs of 50,000 uninsured South Dakotans.
- 4.) All of the above.

There are no wrong answers in this quiz, but the best answer is No. 4. A fourth-grader can look at the arithmetic and see Medicaid expansion is win-win for South Dakota. Along with saving hundreds of lives, it would be a big shot in the arm for our state's economy. Consider the following three numbers (underlined in bold type).

181: The number of South Dakota lives that would be saved each year by Medicaid expansion, according to a New England Journal of Medicine study.

50,000: The number of uninsured South Dakotans who would benefit (50K is a lot of people in a rural state with 865,454 population).

\$2 billion: The amount of federal dollars that would come into S.D. over the next five years to provide medical coverage for those 50,000 uninsured South Dakotans. Thousands of new jobs in the medical field would be created. Ripple effects would multiply the economic impact of that \$2 billion many times over.

Critics say South Dakotans who would benefit are able-bodied people who won't work. In fact, 73 percent are "the working poor" employed in seasonal construction, farm labor, food service, and retail in one of the lowest-wage states in the nation. Think of a single mother of three who cannot work enough hours to afford insurance.

Opponents also say we can't trust the federal government and the feds need to curb spending. Two points in response:

- 1.) They rarely raise such concerns when it comes to accepting federal highway funding, airport funding, crop insurance, etc.
- 2.) South Dakotans' federal income tax dollars are going to Washington, D.C., anyway, so doesn't it make sense to get a slice of the pie? Our state is funding health care for poor people in other states, while our low income relatives,

friends and neighbors go without.

States expanding Medicaid have reduced spending on the uninsured, corrections, and behavioral health. S.D. expansion would also save millions in county spending for indigent care. It would free tax dollars we could redirect at county roads, bridges, and other infrastructure needs.

This could have happened in 2013. By kicking the can down the road, our elected leaders have bypassed a \$1 billion infusion into our state's economy. More importantly, we've lost 900 South Dakota lives (and counting) from not expanding Medicaid back in 2013.

Most South Dakota legislators claim to be pro-life. Why can't they apply that philosophy to single parents and our working poor?

It was supposed to be a nail-biter, but Maine voters recently approved Medicaid expansion by a 60-40 margin. Logic and facts won the day over partisan politics.

Unscientific polls hint the same result would happen here if/when the issue makes a statewide ballot. Most South Dakotans are Republicans, but — unlike politicians — they know and take a good deal when offered. It's called common sense. (Voltaire called it "homespun genius.")

South Dakota's 2018 legislative session presents an opportunity for lawmakers to let voters decide. The Legislature can present a constitutional amendment on Medicaid expansion, which would put the question on the November 2018 ballot.

Please contact your legislators. Tell them you support Medicaid expansion and want to vote on it. The most effective messages are short and to the point, such as:

Dear South Dakota Lawmaker: We know you're smarter than a fourth-grader, so please help us expand Medicaid for our greater good. Allow us to vote on it. Do your part to create thousands of new healthcare jobs in this state. Make life better for our working poor. Help thousands of sick South Dakotans get well.

If none of that matters to you, do the math. This sweet deal is a no-brainer.

Sincerely, your boss

Brian J. Hunhoff can be contacted at brian@co.yankton.sd.us.



Brian J. Hunhoff

Contributing editor,
Yankton County Observer

308 Douglas Ave.
Yankton, South Dakota
57078

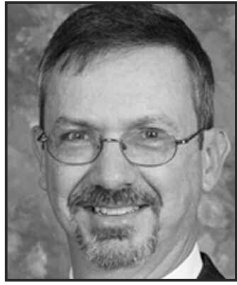
December 8, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

This well-researched support for Medicaid expansion in South Dakota concludes with a clear call to action, including the contact information for all of the state representatives who are voting on the measure.

By debunking many of the myths about Medicaid recipients, pointing out how failing to support the measure contradicts other legislative actions, and ultimately costs the state more through indigent care, Brian provides compelling motivation for readers to contact their legislators.

Brian J. Hunhoff also won the Golden Quill Award in 1995 and 2014, and Golden Dozen awards in 2015, 2016, and 2017.



Mike Buffington

Co-publisher and editor,
The Jackson Herald

33 Lee Street
Jefferson, Georgia
30549

October 11, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

With xenophobia in the national spotlight, this submission shows the local impact of isolationism resulting from irrational fear. From ugly memes on social media to accusations that a proposed yoga retreat is really an ISIS training ground, Mike calls on the community to examine their distrust of “outsiders” and urges the council to reconsider the double standard applied to a permit that conforms in every other way to the county’s land use policies.

Mike Buffington also won the Golden Quill Award in 2016 and Golden Dozen awards in 1991, 1998, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2014, and 2015.

Why is Barrow anti-yoga?

America is splintering into an ugly brand of tribalism. At one time, we were the great “melting pot” of ethnic backgrounds, religions and races. No more. Instead, we’ve begun to fracture along the fault lines of culture, race and religion.

Xenophobia – the irrational fear of people from other nations or cultures – has become epidemic, especially in rural areas where “outsiders” have long been suspect.

That much was evident in Barrow County recently when the county’s planning board turned down a request for a special use permit for a rural 30-acre yoga retreat.

The board shot down the request not because of any legal, non-conforming use – in fact, the county’s planning staff, the professionals, said it did conform to the county’s land use.

But the board denied the request as it cowered in fear before a room of citizens who opposed the yoga center. That crowd had been ramped up by rumors and innuendo posted to a local social media page which alleged the yoga center might become some kind of terrorist training camp.

One guy even alleged during the hearing that Al-Qaeda had a training compound in nearby Commerce, suggesting that the Barrow yoga center might be some kind of sinister conspiracy as well (death by stretching?).

Well there is not an Al-Qaeda or ISIS training compound in Commerce, although there is an Islamic center that has existed there peacefully for many, many years. And the proposed yoga center in Barrow isn’t a terrorist training camp – what terrorist goes to a county government for a rezoning variance?

Let’s call what happened in Barrow County for what it really is – ethnic prejudice fueled by an irrational fear.

The names of the owners of the property who requested the yoga center are Lalitha Gowda and Satyanarayana Karnati. If their names had been Smith, or Jones, or Maddox, would they have faced such a backlash? If a “Joe Smith” had requested a variance for a retreat center for wounded veterans, would those upset Barrow citizens have been opposed to it? Would they have spread stupid rumors about a terrorist camp?

If the First Baptist Church of Winder wanted to build a Christian retreat center on that same property, would the ugly comments about it have been said?

We all know the answer: Heck no.

The opposition came because two brown-skinned people with funny-sounding names requested it. To a small group of Barrow

Countians, that was too foreign and exotic to comprehend.

The odd thing is, Barrow County does have local yoga classes. The YMCA is offering “candle light yoga” and “flow yoga” this month. And a private company in Winder, owned by a Barrow native, offers yoga classes of various kinds.

So what’s wrong with that proposed yoga retreat out in the countryside? What kind of harm could a bunch of people meditating and stretching on thin mats possibly do to neighbors or the county?

Barrow County isn’t the only place in the nation where this kind of silly prejudice exists. The irrational fear of “others” got a lot of stoking during the 2016 election. Muslims and Mexicans were the target of a lot of political hate speech and ugly social media memes (a lot of it from Russia we now know) during the election. That fear, unfortunately, has become part and parcel to the national character today. The anti-immigration, anti-refugee voices from the far right created a lot of fear that traditional American values were being undermined by insidious outsiders.

While some of that was about illegal immigrants from Mexico, it took on a broader tone and became anti-immigrant in general. That has played out in Washington with a proposal now to sharply cut the number of refugees and legal immigration allowed into the country.

Even more hatred has been aimed at Muslims, especially refugees from largely Muslim nations like Syria. This hatred has become so ingrained that even elected leaders like Rep. Jody Hice, who represents Barrow County, have called for Muslim Americans to be denied their First Amendment rights of free speech and freedom of religion.

I suspect some of the anti-yoga sentiment at that Barrow County public hearing was rooted in this anti-Muslim fever. But yoga’s roots aren’t Muslim, they’re Hindu. In the U.S., yoga has taken on a largely secular tone apart from its Hindu roots. People of all religions here practice yoga as meditation and exercise rather than for its historical religious role. That’s no different than a Jewish family deciding to have a secular Christmas tree.

Americans have traditionally prided themselves on being open and outward looking. We have prided ourselves on being accepting of people with different backgrounds and ethnic histories.

No longer. A significant part of the American population has turned inward and isolationist.

Continued on page 18

Syringe exchange is imperative to local public health

Beyond politics and opinions, there is an ever-constant duty of local officials to maintain the public health and safety of the community and the local health board, Stanford City Council and Lincoln County Fiscal Court have recently taken steps to do just that by supporting the implementation of a syringe exchange.

Last summer, the Center for Disease Control ranked Lincoln County 97 out of 220 counties across the U.S. deemed vulnerable to the outbreak of diseases commonly caused by the exchange and use of dirty needles. Since the report was released, the heroin epidemic and rate of drug abuse has not waned – it has only increased.

It is only logical to infer that a syringe exchange that was recommended last summer is just as necessary now, if not more, as the drug epidemic continues to ravage through Kentucky communities including this one.

While many will say the exchange is simply enabling drug use by giving addicts clean needles, that opinion overlooks the true intention and purpose of the exchange – to prevent the spread of infectious disease through dirty needles.

During the Stanford City Council meeting, City Attorney Chris Reed described two instances in which he encountered dirty, bloody needles – once in the parking lot of a courthouse and again in the parking lot of a restaurant.

“There was a Ziploc bag full of needles that were full of blood,” Reed said. “Two days after that, I went to a restaurant in Danville and got out of my car in flip-flops and almost stepped on a needle that had blood in it.”

Those were experiences worth sharing because they point exactly to the purpose of the exchange, which is to prevent others, especially children, from encountering the same. Reed also pointed to the high cost of treatment for infectious diseases like hepatitis C, which costs about \$86,000 annually, and HIV, which costs about \$380,000 per year.

In 2014, Kentucky’s Medicaid program spent

more than \$50 million to treat 800 of those infected in the state – a cost that the public helps pay. Perhaps if we can get these high costs down, we can allocate more funding toward affordable treatment options.

These addicts need our help, not our judgment. It is too easy to sit at home and condemn them for a disease that has taken complete control of their lives. Does that mean they are not responsible for their actions? No. But it does mean that in order to find their way out of the downward spiral, they are going to need some help.

It is time for us to be neighbors again. Without the community coming together, this problem will not go away.

We know it is hard to overlook criminal activity caused by drug addiction and we by no means endorse the idea of letting any criminal act off the hook. But history has shown that putting an addict in jail rarely does more than get them clean for a short period of time before they are released and return to the same lifestyle as before – with no alternative treatment or housing to run to in the immediate area.

As for drug-traffickers, we have and always will support the full enforcement of the law for perpetuating a problem that continues to spiral out of control and take the lives of local residents.

This newspaper is tired of printing the obituaries of our youth and pretending that there is nothing this community can do – we all have a part to play.

We applaud our local government officials for seeing beyond the surface and realizing that a syringe exchange is a proactive attempt to not only keep this community safe, but save taxpayers money by getting dirty needles off the streets, getting more people tested for infectious disease and putting addicts closer to treatment.

Abigail Whitehouse can be contacted at abigail.whitehouse@centralkynews.com.



Abigail Whitehouse

Editor,
The Interior Journal

301 W. Main Street
Stanford, Kentucky
40484

February 9, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

This empathetic response to the health risks of addiction skillfully balances logical and ethical arguments for the community to support the establishment of a syringe exchange. By pointing out the risks and costs to non-addicts, Abigail combats the tendency of those who aren't directly affected to view addiction as someone else's problem.



Brian Wilson

News editor,
The Star News

3116 S. Wisconsin Ave.
Medford, Wisconsin
54451

May 25, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

This editorial brings attention to the public costs of Wisconsin's Unborn Child Protection Act, which ironically puts unborn children whose mothers are substance abusers at greater risk. Tough penalties discourage women from seeking help and overlook their inherent human rights.

Brian urges readers not only to demonstrate greater compassion for women in potentially dangerous situations, but also urges them to oppose the attorney general's expensive ongoing legal battle at the public's expense.

Brian Wilson also won Golden Dozen awards in 2008, 2009, 2013, and 2015.

Wisconsin needs to let a bad law die

Wisconsin needs to take away Attorney General Brad Schimel's access to the state credit card. Schimel has announced yet another costly federal appeal. It must be nice to have unlimited taxpayer funds at your disposal to fight political battles in the courts.

This time Schimel has turned his attention to defending Wisconsin's flawed "Unborn Child Protection Act." The law was recently overturned in a decision by Federal Court Judge James Peterson in his ruling on a lawsuit filed by Tamara Loertscher, formerly of Medford, against Schimel, Wisconsin Secretary of Children and Families Eloise Anderson and Taylor County.

Loertscher had been held in Taylor County jail in 2014 because she refused to comply with a court order to go to inpatient drug rehab and was held in contempt. She had initially gone to the county's human services department concerned that she was pregnant and was depressed. They referred her to an inpatient behavioral health unit in Eau Claire where she tested positive for using meth. According to court records, she turned to meth because it was a more easily available alternative to the expensive thyroid medication she needed, but didn't have the insurance to cover.

The Unborn Child Protection Act allowed the state to lock up pregnant women who the state felt could be a danger to their unborn children. At the time it was passed, it was a knee-jerk reaction to concerns that so-called crack babies would cost taxpayers millions of dollars in long term medical and mental health costs caused by their mothers' drug use. The law was heavily resisted by those in social services and medical fields when it was passed and it has taken 19 years to get it overturned, largely because the cases are handled in juvenile court outside of the public's eye. The

crack-baby concerns ended up being largely blown out of proportion, yet the law remained on the books.

Schimel repeats the tired party line that punishing pregnant women who use or have in the past used a vague and undefined amount of drugs or alcohol is somehow getting them "treatment." Schimel's argument is nonsense. The law has served as a deterrent to women in bad situations from getting the help they needed because, as with Loertscher, they knew even their doctors could turn against them. Instead of a safety net, the state of Wisconsin set a trap.

Rather than wasting taxpayer resources to try to keep a bad law alive, it should be allowed to die. Wisconsin legislators should instead craft a new law that actually provides treatment in place of punishment. Legislators need to pass a law that recognizes and protects the inherent human rights of pregnant women as being at least equal to the unborn children they carry in their wombs.

Rather than bolstering a law that relegates pregnant women to some type of subhuman walking incubator status, Wisconsin's legislature should stand up for the rights of women to have control of their own bodies. If the state wants to help pregnant women get treatment for drug or alcohol addiction, the legislature should do so and at the same time address the high cost of healthcare that causes people to self-medicate in place of receiving needed medical care.

It is time for Schimel to stop throwing good taxpayer money after bad just because he can't accept that Wisconsin's law is wrong and deserves to be taken out with the trash.

*Brian Wilson can be contacted at
starnews@centralwinews.com.*

‘Mohawk Girls’ permit issue exposes gap

The latest Mohawk Council of Kahnawake gaffe cost the community a good chunk of money, and it demonstrates the need for proper procedure for things that just don’t concern the council chiefs.

Complaints were received about “Mohawk Girls” filming a fifth and final season here, and it shows the hole that needs to be filled so it doesn’t happen again.

The Eastern Door wrote about it last week, of how the series, set in Kahnawake, had to choose locations outside of the territory because the MCK was going to decide whether or not it even should be filmed here, due to its controversial content.

They ended up deciding it wasn’t their issue to decide, and it was approved, but the delay was costly to Kahnawake.

It is called artistic license, men and women of the council, and no matter what you think of the show’s racy content, you have no right (as you finally agreed) to stick your collective noses into the equation – now or in the future.

The show has its own take on town, and if you disagree with what it portrays, or have issues with the show’s creator, Tracey Deer, that still does not give you the right to stop her from filming in her own community, at people’s private homes, hiring locals as actors on set, in training, spending money in local restaurants and shops, among other economic offshoots.

No one should be able to dictate what is and isn’t acceptable in a show that does not libel or spread hate speech; a show that has a large following behind it, that promotes the community on screen, that has been one of the most successful creations ever to come out of Kahnawake.

Don’t like it? That’s fine. But putting in a complaint in hopes of stopping it from being filmed here?

That’s going too far.

Imagine if you were in that situation and someone told you you couldn’t do this or that because they didn’t like you or what you were doing.

Something has to be put in place so frivolous complaints are dealt with swiftly.

That \$500 per day per location is money that is now lost because the last season of “Mohawk Girls” has to film roughly half of its show elsewhere.

Why did someone on the council think they had a right to debate an issue like this?

To be fair, not all of the council agreed with discussing the issue of Mohawk Girls permits, but they held it back long enough to delay location scouting – and that’s the problem.

A mechanism has to be put in place to keep things like this out of the council’s hands, to decide swiftly on issues that require simple verification, but what does that look like?

The Eastern Door brings these types of issues up because it’s important for our elected officials so neck-deep into politics to stop for a second and think rationally – should we be “ruling” on this? Or is it simply none of our business?

And if you answer as a leader and not as an individual, it’s clear.

If proper procedure was put into place, the guesswork is taken out of the equation.

Just make sure it’s fair and works for all, regardless of political leanings.

Because what you certainly don’t want is another show or exhibit, or other form of freedom of speech or expression, being controlled once again by council.

Steve Bonspiel can be contacted at steveb@easterndoor.com.



Steve Bonspiel

Editor and publisher,
The Eastern Door

1170 River Road
Kahnawake, Quebec
J0L 1B0

June 9, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

When leaders’ personal judgments interfere with legal decisions, it can be the community that pays, as this editorial points out. Steve explains how a delay in providing a permit to film a show some find personally offensive in the territory costs the community financially and threatens freedom of expression.

Steve Bonspiel also won a Golden Dozen award in 2014 and 2017.



Donald Dodd

Publisher,
The Salem News

500 N. Washington
Salem, Missouri
65560

March 21, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

Linking previous coverage of the inhumane conditions in the county jail, this editorial reminds readers that they can do something about the deplorable conditions: vote. Whether moved by conscience or the potential legal liability of overcrowded, unhealthy conditions, Donald makes a non-nonsense argument to readers to take responsible action.

Yes to a clear conscience

WE NEED TO BUILD A NEW JAIL, LOCK THE OLD ONE AND THROW AWAY THE KEY

Sometimes you need to vote your pocketbook, and sometimes you need to vote your conscience. April 4 is one of those times you need to vote your conscience.

I can't remember a time that I have been more embarrassed and regretful for our community than the week of Feb. 28, when a story, photos and video on the Dent County Jail appeared in the *Salem News* and on the thesalemnews.com.

Months ago during a news meeting, we decided that staff writer Andrew Sheeley would spend a night in the jail to see how much overcrowding is a problem. We planned to publish the story a little over a month before Salem and Dent County voters go to the poll to decide on a sales tax increase that would fund construction and operating costs of a proposed new jail.

We got a lot more than we bargained for, and it was painful to watch. A black mold problem makes the jail unhealthy. When it's overcrowded, prisoners are handcuffed to chairs in the booking room or placed in other deputy work areas and sleep on thin mats on concrete floors. Fights are commonplace. It's a dangerous situation for prisoners and deputies.

I could go on, but by now you have heard the myriad of jail problems. If not, I urge you to go to thesalemnews.com and see for yourself. Over a million people have viewed the video on YouTube, so our situation has drawn the attention of more than Dent County. The jail is a nightmare for those incarcerated, as well as those who work there. Everyone in his or her right mind who read the story, or watched the video, knows something needs to be done.

The best and most sensible solution is to build a new jail, and Dent County commissioners Darrell Skiles, Gary Larson and Dennis Purcell and a committee of citizens have come up with a reasonable and prudent plan to build that new jail. We elected them to make good decisions, and all things considered, this is a tough but good decision, and for a lot of reasons.

No. 1, we must have a new jail to replace the inhumane one we have. A running, not-so-funny joke making it around town goes like

this: "Let's move the prisoners to the relatively new Dent County Animal Shelter and move the dogs and cats to the jail... No, won't work. The good folks who run the animal shelter would never agree to their dogs and cats living in those conditions."

I take my pocketbook very seriously. A lot of us do, given the way the economy has been over the past decade or so. A couple of half-cent sales taxes to pay for the jail and its operation aren't chicken feed, as they say. But it would likely be a lot cheaper than the alternative, which any day now will be lawsuits galore and a court-ordered new jail that would be paid for with tax money found somewhere, or bankrupt the county. You know where tax money comes from.

Those aren't scenarios dreamed up by me or others to get residents to vote for the new jail. They are real threats to the financial well-being of our county.

In some ways I feel somewhat responsible for what has happened with the jail's deterioration and the resulting squalor. We, as a newspaper staff, are supposed to be the watchdogs of the community. This watchdog apparently slept through this one. And we woke up on Feb. 28 when Sheeley's story was there for the world to see. Every elected official deserves a little discredit on this one, too. We didn't know, but we should have known.

The jail situation never should have gotten this bad, and no excuse, claim of ignorance, finger pointing or kicking of the can down the road is good enough. Something needs to be done, and it needs to be done on April 4.

I doubt there is a person in Dent County who doesn't know someone who has been subject to a night in our jail. Our community should apologize to each and every person, guilty or not, who ever spent a night in those conditions.

I didn't know it was that bad, and April 4 I will vote yes so we can build a common-sense facility and slam the doors closed on the filthy, unsafe, embarrassment of a jail we have now. It's our best option.

Donald Dodd can be contacted at donald@thesalemnews.com.

Hospital merits sales tax vote

Marshall County is fortunate to have a first-rate hospital. The staff and administration are well trained and professional. They offer our rural communities a level of care that matches and often exceeds urban areas, where one often doesn't know the medical staff who serve them.

Community Memorial Healthcare's request to the Marshall County Board of Commissioners to place a county sales tax on the ballot was based upon the standard of care we have come to expect here. The hospital simply wants to continue providing good, critical services.

CMH faces financial challenges pressing hospitals nationwide. The facility is now receiving less reimbursement from Medicare than a few years ago. Federal cuts mean hospitals such as CMH are paid 99 percent of costs for Medicare patients, leaving CMH to somehow make up the rest.

Medicare is critical to this county. It is the only way our hospital can afford to care for the elderly. Without full reimbursement for it, where does our hospital turn to cover the costs?

At the same time, the hospital faces about \$1.5 million annually in uncompensated care. CMH has no choice in whether to treat the ill or injured who are uninsured.

As a non-profit charitable organization, CMH has benefited from generous donations from county residents for decades while also relying upon regular fees for service and federal reimbursements from the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

But medical costs are growing, technology is expensive and federal support is waning.

This is where the request to the county comes in for the first time in CMH's history.

Facing growing financial stress, the hospital board took a wise step and proposed that the public share the cost with a half-cent county-wide sales tax that will raise about \$450,000 per year.

Unfortunately, two of the three county commissioners on Monday turned down CMH's request to simply place this question on the ballot in November's election.

The hospital board pledged to go out and educate voters, that all commissioners needed to do was let the public decide.

Instead, commissioners Dave Baier and Bob Connell said no because they thought the hospital should release its latest audit. But they never once raised this concern with the hospital board. They easily could have requested more discussion.

Connell also said that if he allowed this election for the hospital, then how could he turn down the next business that came along and requested a sales tax vote.

CMH is not a business. It is a non-profit, life-saving service for the community.

And state law specifically allows counties to pass a sales tax for health-care facilities. That's because so many counties are turning to local taxes to bolster their hospitals in an age when many are on the brink of closure.

Connell and Baier should reconsider. There is long-term value in supporting one of the county's largest employers, which plays a critical role in our quality of life.

The hospital board should not give up, but continue to educate the public and continue to call for a vote.

Sarah Kessinger can be contacted at skessinger@marysvilleonline.net.



Sarah Kessinger

Editor and publisher,
The Marysville Advocate

107 S. Ninth St.
Marysville, Kansas
66508

June 23, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

When county commissioners shot down the financially embattled local hospital's attempts to place a proposed sales tax on the ballot, this editor came to the defense of rural healthcare.

Sarah's overview of the challenges facing the hospital and its importance to the community manages to encapsulate the historical facts and associated issues with clarity and brevity and makes a strong argument for the responsibility of the county government to allow citizens to vote to protect the hospital they rely on for both employment and access to care.



Paul Fletcher

Editor-in-chief,
Virginia Lawyers Weekly

411 E. Franklin Street
Richmond, Virginia
23219

December 18, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

Attacks and incomplete information slung during campaign seasons make it difficult for voters to make informed decision. Paul challenges attorneys to stop contributing to the uncertainty by using a candidate's clients to project a negative image of the person who is running for office.

This editorial holds attorneys accountable for exploiting distinctions that are unclear to average voters to undermine the integrity of opponents.

Put an end to client-shaming

Election season is stupid season, here and elsewhere. Be glad it ended last month. Here's a plea to politicians and political types as they get ready for the next inevitable cycle: When a political candidate is a lawyer, he or she should not be subject to client-shaming, especially from another lawyer running for office.

Client-shaming is a cheap tactic that attempts to project the candidate's clients, or those of his or her firm, onto the candidate. All their weaknesses, problems, imperfections and perceived negative characteristics become those of the candidate.

It is at bottom a cynical practice. Those who use it oversimplify the lawyer-candidate's work. They conclude, essentially, that the general public is too dumb to know the difference.

Candidates from both parties are guilty of this cheesy maneuver. Republican Jerry Kilgore, in the 2005 race for governor, lambasted "liberal Tim Kaine," the Democrat, for having represented violent criminals.

When Kaine was Hillary Clinton's running mate in 2016, he was subjected to more of the same, as GOP oppo research darkly intoned that Kaine had "spent his career defending rapists and murderers." Gee, we wouldn't want a guy like that in high office, would we?

That's an example of trying to tie a candidate to unsavory low-life criminals. How about unsavory fat-cat, pig-dog corporate interests?

Attorney General Mark Herring, a Democrat, went after the clients of his Republican opponent, John Adams, when the two men met for their first debate in June.

Herring said Adams "has been part of a powerful Richmond law firm for the last seven years, and he and his team brag about how they specialize in shielding people who are involved in kickbacks, pyramid schemes, embezzlement, money laundering, tax fraud, bribery, obstruction of justice."

Adams, a former federal prosecutor, handles white-collar crime cases at McGuireWoods, where he is a partner.

The Herring campaign doubled down on this approach with an attack ad in August, saying, "John Adams is trying to hide the fact that he has personally profited by working to get big businesses, banks, and mortgage companies off the hook when they are accused of breaking the law and taking advantage of Virginians."

The Herring campaign seemed keen to keep

pounding this message until someone realized that, um, Herring's Democratic ticket-mate, Justin Fairfax, worked at one of those firms, too.

Indeed, Fairfax, the candidate for lieutenant governor, was counsel at the Tysons Corner and DC offices of Venable LLP, a big firm which has a client roster full of big businesses, powerful people and what Herring might call "wealthy special interests."

The Herring client-shaming effort quietly disappeared.

Every lawyer in this commonwealth is subject to the Rules of Professional Conduct. Those ethics rules require the lawyer to represent his or her clients zealously. Failure to do so gets the lawyer in trouble with the Virginia State Bar.

And the Constitution, in the Sixth Amendment, guarantees that a criminal defendant is entitled to a lawyer.

Candidates seeking the office of Attorney General sometimes mischaracterize the post they seek – the AG isn't really Virginia's "top cop," for example. The AG basically is the managing partner of a large law firm that has one client – the commonwealth.

That's hard to explain in a quick sound bite. But that doesn't justify the resort to client-shaming or worse. Credit (or blame) an unsuccessful AG candidate for one of the dumbest ads ever, aired in the heat of a fall campaign some years back. The radio spot menacingly whispered that the man's opponent "wasn't even a member of the Virginia Bar Association!"

No doubt his campaign thought the gullible electorate wouldn't know the difference between the VBA, which is a voluntary group, and the VSB, which is a mandatory state agency. The distinction likely was lost on the public, but the implication that the opponent wasn't a licensed lawyer was clear.

Is it too much to ask lawyer-candidates to refrain from pandering attacks on other lawyer-candidates, and to stop oversimplifying the legal profession during a campaign?

Del. Greg Habeeb, R-Salem and a practicing trial lawyer in Roanoke, put it best in a tweet responding to Herring's attack ad: "Lawyers are supposed to know better."

*Paul Fletcher can be contacted at
pfletcher@valawyersmedia.com.*

The Blues Factory referendums

Voters of Port Washington made their choices yesterday, and as a result, our Common Council will have new members. We will miss our departing colleagues, who have served their city with dedication and diligence, but we respect the will of the people and look forward to working with the new aldermen in the best interests of our community. We congratulate them on their election to the council.

That is what was **not** said at the council meeting on the night after last week's election.

Instead of an appropriate and gracious acknowledgement of their election victories, the two newly elected aldermen who defeated incumbents were subjected to an insulting, demeaning lecture by Ald. Dave Larson.

"I think this was a situation where you took advantage of a low-turnout election," Larson said, addressing John Sigwart and Mike Gasper from the council dais. He went on, admonishing them that it was "important to understand" that they do not represent only those who voted and attributing their election to a "vocal minority."

"This was a vocal minority that took advantage of a low-turnout election," Larson said. "I think that the silent majority is going to become very vocal soon."

He told the new aldermen: "You're not one of us."

It was a low, embarrassing moment for Port Washington's elected city government.

Elections, as grade-school pupils know from their introduction to civics, are determined by the majority of voters. In Sigwart's case, the majority was overwhelming – 260 votes for him, 98 for the incumbent, Dan Becker.

More than just a landslide, the victory by a 73% to 27% margin was a repudiation of the council's unrelenting campaign to sell public land overlooking the harbor as a site for the Blues Factory music attraction in spite of broad public opposition.

The impact of the lopsided vote was heightened by the fact that the incumbent, Becker, was not only the president of the council, but was a respected and capable alderman who had served on the council since 2009 with evident public support until he alienated voters with a push for harbor land sale.

The council ignored petitions to hold a referendum on the issue, so the voters gave it not one but two referendums of their own on the land sale – in the 3rd District, where the incumbent and outspoken Blues Factory supporter Bill Driscoll was eliminated in the primary election and will be replaced by Gasper, and in the 7th-District Sigwart-Becker race. The dominant issue in both races was the Blues Factory land sale. The challengers opposed it.

The referendum results: rejection of the Blues Factory.

As for the Blues Factory itself, it slipped closer to full fiasco status last week when the council approved the latest of numerous extensions of the deadline for purchase of the land by the developer.

The stated reason was to give the city time to repair underground tiebacks supporting the harbor wall in preparation for constructing the two-story brick Blues Factory building on the north slip parking lot.

The delay also serves to keep the Blues Factory proposal on life support by giving the hesitant developer more time – until February – to find the will and the financing to buy the land.

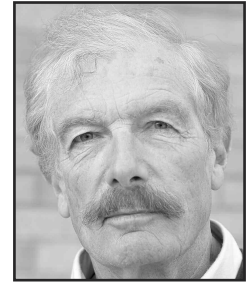
Larson's bitter response to the election, which suggests that he and perhaps other aldermen will continue to push the land sale regardless of the unmistakable messages from voters, can be taken as a measure of the corrosive effect the issue has had on the community. There was a time when it would have been unthinkable for a city official to use the privileged perch of his office to publicly belittle city election winners and the citizens who voted for them.

Citizens have expressed their opposition to using public lakefront land for the Blues Factory in every way available to them, including the ballot box. But they do not have the power to stop it.

That power resides with the Common Council.

Dissolving the agreement to sell the harbor land would go a long way toward restoring respect between the citizens of Port Washington and their elected officials.

William F. Schanen III can be contacted at bschanen3@ozaukeeexpress.com.



William F. Schanen III

**Publisher,
Ozaukee Press**

125 E. Main St.
Port Washington, Wisconsin
53074

April 13, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

After ignoring petitions from constituents on a land use issue, members of the Common Council lost their seats in the election. This editorial calls the incumbent aldermen to account for their unethical behavior in attacking the aldermen-elect and declaring them "not one of us," while simultaneously moving forward with a controversial land use measure without public input.

Bill Schanen manages to separate the land use issue itself from the behavior and avoid personal attacks, resulting in a well-reasoned criticism of abuse of power.

William F. Schanen III also won the Golden Quill award in 1985 and 2001 and Golden Dozen awards in 1984, 1987, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2014, 2015, and 2016.



Brenda P. Schimke

Columnist,
East Central Alberta Review

4921 - Victoria Ave.
Coronation, Alberta
T0C 1C0

October 12, 2017

FROM THE JUDGE

By pointing out that the violence committed by white attackers is as much terrorism as similar acts committed by Muslims and other minorities, this editorial challenges readers to think about their underlying assumptions about race.

Brenda contends that anyone who turns to hate because of their fear of losing their way of life is vulnerable to radicalization and encourages readers to be mindful of the impact of hate on their own behavior and attitudes.

Terrorism is not colour coded

The water cooler discussion a week ago Monday was predictable, the Las Vegas massacre of concert goers and a vehicle assault on a police officer and Jasper Avenue pedestrians in Edmonton.

As would be expected, there was much grief expressed for those gunned down like animals in Vegas, and fear about what happened in Edmonton. But the comment that continues to haunt me was when the kindest person on staff said, "the one good thing, at least the Vegas shooting wasn't a terrorist attack."

Now the only possible rationale for such a comment would be an inner belief that the shooter in Vegas was not a terrorist because he was white with a traditional American name. Whereas the perpetrator in Edmonton was a terrorist because he was brown with an Arab-sounding name.

Even though the white guy had an arsenal of modified assault weapons to maximize carnage in Vegas, why would anyone consider him less of a terrorist than the individual in Edmonton with an ISIS flag?

This year in Canada there have been more innocent Muslims gunned down by a white extremist than the other way around.

On January 29, Alexandre Bissonnette opened fire in a Quebec City mosque as prayers were ending, killing six and injuring 19.

Iman Hassan Guillet, during the funeral for the six, said, "Alexandre Bissonnette, before being a killer, was a victim himself. Before he planted bullets in the heads of his victims, somebody planted ideas more dangerous than bullets in this head."

Terrorism is any act against citizens by an individual or group that subscribes to an uncompromising ideology that can justify and rationalize violence on innocents.

Writer Jason Burke, in *The Myth of the Lone Wolf*, reminds us that during the 1960s and 70s many home-grown groups and lone wolves, on the right and left, were terrorizing Europe and America.

I remember Timothy McVeigh killing 168 innocent children and adults when he bombed a government building in Oklahoma City in 1995 and, in the same era, religious zealots bombing abortion clinics, killing adults to save babies. And there are many more terrorist examples prior to and post 9/11 perpetrated by whites on the left and right. Ironically, the Islamic extremists, who are fighting the infidels – democratic governments led by the United States – have much in common with white national extremists in the United States who are also fighting their democratically elected federal government. Whether it's 20 dead six-year-old students and six teachers in Sandy Hook or 59 dead music fans in Vegas, mass shootings are wrapped up in American liberty and fear of their federal government.

In Canada, we need to stop Americanizing ourselves with a steady diet of CNN, FOX News and The Rebel. We are better educated, more travelled and have a far superior governance and judicial system than our neighbours to the south. (P.S. don't tell them, they think they're the greatest!)

Terrorism is simply getting wrapped up in an uncompromising ideology that leads to the justification for violence. Most important, we must always be mindful of our hate and the intensity of that hate because each one of us can be radicalized.

Terrorism is not colour coded.

Brenda P. Schimke can be contacted at journalist@ECAreview.com.

How do you

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data without the names, for a story that documented the surge of gun ownership. Again, Conard immediately complied, providing it in a handy Excel spreadsheet. We broke it down by professional versus civilian permits, gender and community. The story disclosed 12,824 carry permits then, and identified Scott County towns, including McCausland, where one in five adults hold a carry permit.

The story also included police and sheriff's deputies' assessments of all these new gun carriers. They concluded it has neither helped nor hindered law enforcement. None told stories of reckless permit holders. None knew of any crime thwarted or solved by a private resident with a gun. All told stories of encountering armed permit holders during traffic stops who dutifully divulged the permit and weapon location in the vehicle without incident.

If the reporting would have found abuse and mayhem, we would have published that. But we published the story supported by factual reporting based on public records.

Public records

Now the public records are inaccessible. No one but law enforcement professionals can look to determine if permits are being issued in accordance with the statewide standard.

No one can discern why individuals have been turned down.

No one will know if a thrice-denied applicant gets his or her fourth request granted.

Before the Iowa legislature made these public records secret, North Scott Press publisher Bill Tubbs formally requested the full database, names and all. Newly elected Sheriff Tim Lane instantly complied, supplying the names, town of residence and application dates for 12,662 carry permit holders this year.

That database will be helpful when we report on crime. We can check the 2016 records, at least, to see if armed criminal suspects were lawfully permitted, or were illegally holding guns.

I can think of many more useful stories.

Which teachers hold carry permits? Might they be useful in improving school safety? How many private security guards have been denied carry permit requests because of prior offenses? Who has been wrongly denied a carry permit? Who might have been recklessly granted a permit? Are there Iowa permit holders with undisclosed Illinois offenses that should prohibit their use of guns? Or vice versa? Are women denied more frequently than men? Blacks more than whites?

Now, only those managing the permits will know.

That awkwardly worded Second Amendment gives a "well regulated militia" as the only stated reason for not infringing "the right of the people to keep and bear arms." We might infer other reasons. But they're not included in the Second Amendment.

First Amendment

So gun ownership remains regulated and subject to registration, just like voting or driving. Those records are public. We don't publish them in a long list. But the press and the public can inspect them.

Should the regulated right to bear a firearm capable of depriving liberty and life remain public as well? My journalist's heart says yes. The founders wrote the First Amendment to give every American, and by name, "the press," the right to ask these questions and offer these opinions. Unlike the Second Amendment, the founders saw no need to offer a reason to regulate the first.

The First empowers the public and press to "petition the government for a redress of grievances." How does the public discern a grievance without access to public records? The North Scott Press has the last full, public record. I've shared a few reporting ideas for that database.

How would you like to see that record used? Should it be used? Or should the public's First Amendment rights necessarily defer to its Second?

*Mark Ridolfi can be contacted at
mridolfi@northscottpress.com.*

Mark Ridolfi

Assistant Editor,
The North Scott Press

214 N. 2nd St.
Eldridge, Iowa
52745

Melissa Hale-Spencer

Editor,
The Altamont Enterprise

120 Maple Avenue
Altamont, New York
12009

We stand as

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its students against discrimination and harassment.

But, without the force of federal government withholding aid, some states and school districts will continue to deny these civil rights. The federal directive from the Obama administration, which was very similar to what New York State already had in place, cited Title IX of the Education Amendments, which took effect in 1972, as requiring schools “to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students, including transgender students.”

Our state’s commissioner of education, Mary Ellen Elia, was quick to respond to the Trump directive, stating, “Our most sacred duty as parents, educators and leaders of state agencies is to protect all of the children in our care. Transgender youth are valued members of our schools and communities across New York State, yet statistics show that more than half of them will attempt suicide at least once by their 20th birthday.”

That’s a sobering statistic. And there are more.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students victimized because of their gender expression were more than three times as likely to have missed school than their less victimized counterparts, according to the 2013 National School Climate Survey. They also had lower grades than students who reported being harassed less often; they were twice as likely not to plan education after high school; and they had higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem.

The sort of derision that transgender students described on our pages – and, mind you, these were in districts with policies in place to protect them – should give us all pause. And should

make us redouble our efforts to accept them for who they are and treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve.

The great danger in having a president and a federal directive that chips away at the civil rights of any of us – even in states like New York with its own protections – is it weakens all of us. Under the current administration and the rhetoric of hate it has ushered in, hate crimes have spiked, particularly against minority groups and immigrants, against anyone who isn’t white and Christian.

We urge our schools to stand proud and stand strong.

Ryka Sweeney told us of helping Cliff Nooney put the sign on the transgender bathroom at Guilderland High School. “I am thrilled about it. I don’t think I’ve ever been more excited in my life than the day we hung up that sign.”

Symbols matter. And that sign on a school bathroom door is as much a beacon as the torch carried by our Statue of Liberty – the statue that cries with silent lips, “Give me your tired, your poor,/ Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free/ The wretched refuse of your teeming shore./ Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,/ I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

We would like to tell Ryka and Julia and Riley – and any transgender person reading this: Don’t let a federal directive let you think less of yourself. You have worked hard, harder than most of us, to discover and assert your identity. We are grateful to have you in our midst. We stand as one with you.

Melissa Hale-Spencer can be contacted at mhale-spencer@altamontenterprise.com.

Mike Buffington

Co-publisher and editor,
The Jackson Herald

33 Lee Street
Jefferson, Georgia 30549

Why is Barrow

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The fear of “others” has become pervasive and oppressive, especially in rural areas where a mix of ethnic groups is less common than in urban areas. Out here in the hinterland, people with funny sounding names and brown skin are suspect.

If Barrow wants to succeed as a place for new businesses, it will have to shed itself of this isolationist, tribalism tone. What decent industry wants to locate in a community where people openly express this kind of xenophobic views?

Barrow is better than the ugly memes ex-

pressed on social media and the inane comments made at that planning board hearing. It was nothing more than chest-beating tribalism on display.

And anyway, who in their right mind is against yoga?

The county government should take a deep breath, then go back and do the right thing.

Mike Buffington can be contacted at mike@mainstreetnews.com.



The 43rd annual Eugene Cervi Award

The Eugene Cervi Award was established by ISWNE in 1976 to honor the memory of Eugene Cervi of the *Rocky Mountain Journal* in Denver by recognizing a newspaper editor who has consistently acted in the conviction that “good journalism begets good government.”

The award is presented not for a single brave accomplishment, however deserving, but for a career of outstanding public service through community journalism and for adhering to the

highest standards of the craft with the deep reverence for the English language that was the hallmark of Gene Cervi’s writing. The award also recognizes consistently aggressive reporting of government at the grassroots level and interpretation of local affairs.

Following his death at age 64 in 1970, *The New York Times* described Cervi as “one of the most outspoken voices in American journalism.” Today, several ISWNE members still regard him as their “journalism conscience.”

This Year’s Winner Is...

Ross Connelly

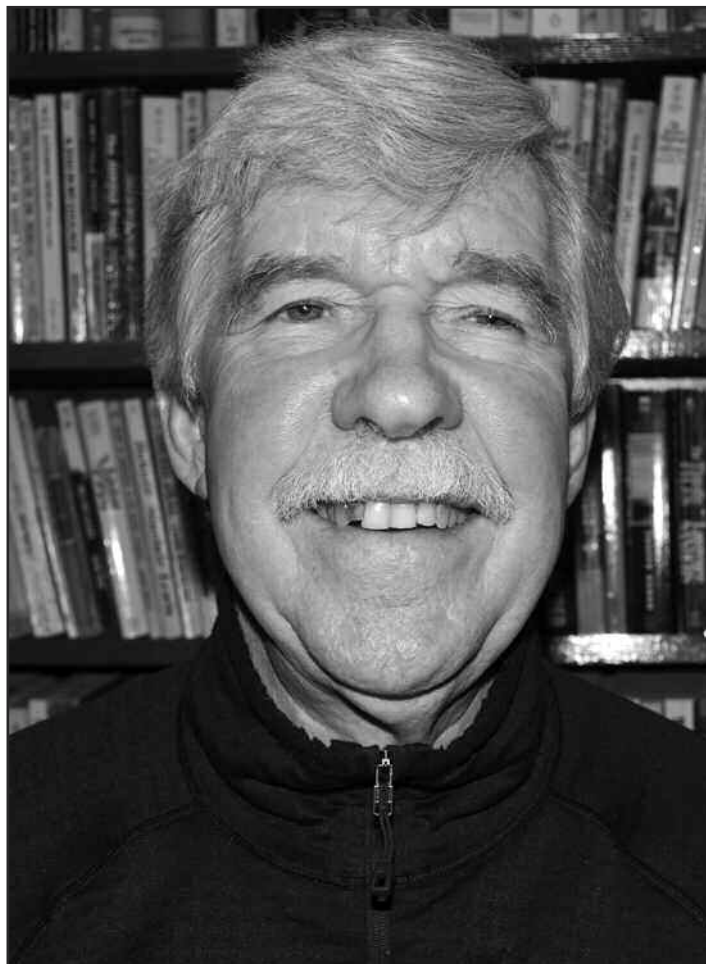
Perhaps, the *Concord Kiddette* and *The Washington Post* were stepping stones, unknown at the time, that led Ross Connelly to a career as a journalist. The former was a community newspaper started and staffed by a group of junior high students, in 1955, with the editor’s 10-year-old kid brother – the subject of this essay – serving as the publication’s copy boy. The latter is, well, *The Post*.

Connelly’s early thoughts – perhaps in junior high – focused on architecture and then medicine as careers of interest. As the classes progressed through high school, the reality of being “numerically challenged” (not uncommon among journalists, he learned years later) and then hitting the wall in college freshman chemistry brought home the reality that something else as a calling was needed. What that would be remained a mystery, although the unseen shadows mentioned above were there.

High school and college also brought exposure to history, sociology, philosophy and political science. A classmate in a public administration course often talked of his work as a reporter at *The Post*, while they sat in the back row bearing the tediousness of the professor’s lectures. A roommate worked his way through law school at that same newspaper each Saturday night, stuffing inserts, a far cry – economically and sociologically – from the newsroom. But that offered Connelly his first paid newspaper job, even if only once. How many journalists can claim their first job in a newspaper was at *The Washington Post*?

Connelly worked in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and received an undergraduate degree in political science. After college, he had an admission letter but decided not to pursue a graduate degree in filmmaking. He continued his search for what was over the next hill.

Graduate work in political science in the 1970s (he stumbled through a statistics course, which proved valuable years later as a journalist) came after finding work in the basement of a Boston



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Ross Connelly

Ross a perfect match for Eugene Cervi Award

By **Mike Donoghue**
Executive Director
Vermont Press Association

It is my distinct pleasure to nominate Ross Connelly for the Eugene Cervi Award. He has had a broad positive influence on journalism in Vermont, throughout New England and across the United States.

Ross is the longtime (and recently retired) co-publisher and editor of *The Hardwick Gazette* in Hardwick, Vermont. He has had an extraordinary journalism career and is certainly a worthy nominee for the Cervi Award for all his efforts and contributions to the profession.

Ross, among other things, also has served as president of both the Vermont Press Association (VPA) and the New England Press Association (NEPA). He was also the founding chair of the Vermont Coalition for Open Government (VT-COG).

I have seen his work and efforts in several of my capacities: as a now-retired *Burlington Free Press* newsroom employee for over 45 years; as an adjunct journalism professor at St. Michael's College for over 30 years; as an officer and executive director of the VPA for over 37 years; a former board member of NEPA; and a founding member of VT-COG; and as the current vice president of the New England First Amendment Coalition. I will share some of those observations.

Newspaper career

For over 36 years, Ross Connelly has done it all, including writing news, sports, features, editorials, while also directing one of the top weeklies in New England. Ross received numerous awards throughout his career from the Associated Press, the VPA, NEPA, the NNA, and ISWNE. He was also inducted into the New England Newspaper Hall of Fame in 2012. The awards were for news and sports writing, for photography and his editorial commentary. He is also a five-time winner of the Golden Dozen editorial writing award presented each year by the ISWNE.

Ross began his journalism career writ-

ing for *The Patriots' Report* for the New England Patriots. (Please don't take offense. I don't as a lifelong New York Giants fan.) He soon joined the *Daily Times Chronicle* in Reading, Mass., as a sports-writer.

He later served as a columnist for the *Transcript-Telegram* in Holyoke, Mass. (1982-85) and later was editor at the *Cape Cod Chronicle* in Chatham, Mass., in 1985.

I was excited when Ross and his wife, the late Susan Jarzyna, moved from Massachusetts to Vermont in 1986 when they bought *The Hardwick Gazette*.

Susan, who was co-publisher and advertising director, worked side-by-side and long hours with Ross until her death from cancer in 2011. During that time, *The Hardwick Gazette* served as a key vehicle of news, information exchange, commentary and more. The newspaper covers 10 diverse Vermont towns that fall in between three dailies in no man's land. *The Gazette* is the go-to point for news and information in the area. It is the oldest weekly newspaper covering the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Ross and *The Gazette* have been recognized with countless awards over the past three-plus decades. These honors were given by the New England Associated Press Managing Editors Association, the Vermont Press Association, the New England Press Association, the National Newspaper Association and the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors.

Ross and *The Gazette* have taken hard stands and sometimes unpopular stands, but the people in the circulation area know he does not play favorites. His dedicated staff and a group of veteran correspondents know they will be backed when they object to secret meetings, withholding public documents, or reporting on improper procedures. Sometimes, select boards or town officials may not like *The Gazette* for reporting a story that may show the warts of their community.

Ross and *The Gazette* have drawn the ire of the Hardwick Select Board in the past. I remember at one point, the chair of the select board started her own commu-

nity newspaper because *The Gazette* was not a cheerleader and refused to look the other way on certain stories. When the Select Board decided to have a "retreat" at her home to discuss town business, Ross insisted the reporter attend because it fell under the definition of a public meeting in Vermont. The board was miffed and so was a representative of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns when *The Gazette* reporter showed up, but knew the reporter needed to be admitted.

Later, after the board said it was "adjourned," but said they were sticking around to have lunch, the reporter insisted on staying just to ensure no town business was discussed. The chair of the board later complained the lasagna she cooked was burned because of the time it took to debate whether the reporter had to leave. When the Vermont Secretary of State, who had worked for the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, said she thought Ross and *The Gazette* owed the chair an apology for the burnt lasagna, Ross stood firm. He wrote an editorial that noted how the town board was trying to do business outside the public eye.

(Apparently, the news reporting and commentary over the years generated respect that overcame the ire. This year, the Town of Hardwick dedicated its annual *Town Report* to *The Gazette*.)

Thus, it is safe to say *The Gazette* is not all bad news some town officials would just as soon be left unreported. Besides the local news, *The Gazette* has a lively editorial and letters page, it covers the arts and has a sports section most editors would die for in a weekly newspaper. (The sports editor for 20 years was a former daily sports editor who loved to beat the dailies with scoops on state and local stories. For his reporting of local sports over the years, a senior class at the local high school dedicated its yearbook to him and the town also dedicated the *Town Report* to him after he died.)

Ross has given many young journalists a chance to break into the business. He knows that he cannot keep them forever, but he has mentored and provided the

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Ross spoke for the people at every turn

By **Jack Authelet**

Eugene Cervi Award, 1998
Horace Greely Award, 2000
Yankee Quill Award, 2011

As I look across the room at the Cervi Award that I am most proud to display and see a *Foxboro Reporter* in the hand and under the arm of the newsboy in the statue, I think of the number of papers needed to highlight the career of Ross Connelly. I wonder how much more journalism could have been worked into his life, but it would be great to cap it off with the presentation of the Eugene Cervi Award and to that end, I would consider it a privilege if I could second his nomination.

Ross frequently found himself on the cutting edge, be it ethic changes in population, family income in failing cities, and communities without a voice far beyond

the metro areas. In response to other challenges, Ross became the cutting edge, challenging governments that did not want the basic freedoms of the press which were the only way taxpayers could gain sufficient information about their government to make good decisions in running it.

In my years as SPJ Sunshine Chairman for Massachusetts, I was also working with Sunshine efforts in the other New England states via the *NEPA Bulletin*. I spent considerable time with Ross on his challenges in Vermont, where everything was sealed unless there as a specific clause opening it up.

What struck me most about Ross is that it didn't matter how high the barrier was or how strongly it was supported by opponents of transparency. The people were being denied their constitutional rights. That wasn't acceptable, and he was going to do something about it.

He paid a price for his commitment. Op-

position was fierce, but he never backed down and spoke for the people at every turn. In due time, Vermont went from what many considered the worst public record access to one of the best and Ross Connelly was a key member in the dedicated Vermont group that would settle for nothing less on behalf of the people they were pledged to serve.

When I look down the list of Cervi recipients, I see many giants of the industry from some of the largest papers from whom we all learned so much. That makes me think of others who were a bit removed from the mainstream, out in the suburban areas fighting the same fights for and against friends and neighbors for what they believed to be right. I think the battle Ross Connelly fought throughout his entire career is worthy of recognition by the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors.

Ross Connelly stands tall in the news industry

By **Alberta Saffell Bell**

President/publisher
The Gardner News
Gardner, Massachusetts

It is my special honor to offer Ross Connelly's name as recipient of the Eugene Cervi Award. As a mentor, friend and colleague over many years, his support, his professionalism and his dedication to service has been exemplified throughout his career.

Beginning with our initial meeting at a NENA convention, a casual conversation grew into a mentoring relationship that truly helped me grow in my knowledge of the newspaper industry. Showing that true knowledge is to be shared, Ross generously allowed me, a novice in the field, to benefit from his professional training as well as his practical experience.

His wealth of knowledge went far beyond his earned credentials – the bachelor's degree, cum laude from Howard in 1968; the M.A. from Michigan in 1972, the Ph.D. pursuit at Michigan in 1973; and the M.S. from Boston University in 1982. He regularly shared news clippings and

links to radio broadcasts that kept me updated and informed about whirling news on the local, state, national and world levels. Our "Wednesday Chats" garnered a reservoir of invaluable insight and goodwill as we exchanged points of view and dissected the underpinnings of good journalism.

The numerous awards he has received attest to excellence in his craft. The first award he received was from the New England Press Association. It recognized his excellence in feature writing. From his employment with the *Transcript-Telegram* in Holyoke, many other awards followed.

The International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors awarded Ross five Golden Dozen awards for editorial writing. He received eight awards from the Vermont Press Association. These included six for editorial writing (judging combined daily and non-daily entries); one for sports photography and one for news photography. From the New England Press Association, this outstanding journalist received three awards for editorial writing. One of these was for First Amendment Reporting. Through the years, Ross and his company have received over 50 awards from the

New England Press Association, the Vermont Press Association and the National Newspaper Association.

Ross Connelly stands tall in the news industry. The many awards and recognition by his colleagues and the broader community attest to his achievement. In 2012, he was named to the New England Newspaper Hall of Fame. Subsequently, the Vermont legislature passed a resolution recognizing him for his work and accomplishments. His commitment to serving the community is also evidenced by the leadership positions he has held. Serving as president of the New England Press Association in 1996 and later as president of the Vermont Press Association from 2001-2003, Ross served on both boards for close to 10 years.

On a personal note, Ross' love for newspapers and his influence in the industry is obvious. Producing a quality product, presenting balanced information with ethical standards has characterized his organization and his service. It is with a deep sense of pride and admiration that I commend my friend, my mentor, my colleague, Ross Connelly for the Eugene Cervi Award.

Ross always wanted to do the right thing

By John S. McCright
News editor
Addison Independent
Middlebury, Vermont

I am happy to recommend Ross Connelly for the ISWNE's Eugene Cervi Award. He is highly deserving of the honor for his years of service to his community, and to the many, many communities he touched through his reporting and editorializing, his lobbying on behalf of open government, his training of a generation of journalists, his promotion of best practices in newsrooms around the region and the example he set for acting with the highest integrity and common decency.

I came to know Ross as a reporter for his newspaper, *The Hardwick Gazette*. It was my first professional job in the business. I may have been a little naïve thinking that since I was coming from Boston to “just” a weekly in Northern Vermont, I wouldn't have to work that hard and would get lots of time to work on my book and other side projects. Truth be told, I didn't know that much about the news – clearly. Ross Connelly changed all that.

Ross treated me as a professional from Day One, just as he treated everything the newspaper did in a professional manner. He treated everyone he came in contact with respect – from a governor and U.S. senator to a school board member and auto mechanic. And having shown his respect and treated others as professionals, he expected those with whom he dealt and those whom the newspaper covered to act professionally. That included the president of the bank, the leader of the Boy Scout troop, and particularly those men and women who served in public office.

Gosh, did we keep an eye on those in public office. Thankfully, for my career in journalism, Ross set a very high bar for coverage of public officials. It started with the select boards and school boards in the 10 towns that *The Gazette* covered; but also roped in our state reps and senators; and, of course, there was the governor and certainly our U.S. senators and congressional candidates had to be kept watch over. Before I knew it,

I was calling people to dig up a story on a U.S. Supreme Court justice who may or may not have known about a racist covenant on a piece of property he purchased in our neck of the woods. It was never about “gotcha”; it was about serving the public good.

So setting the tone was something Ross did. And it wasn't just for me and the other reporters and correspondents who came through *The Gazette*, but for the community as a whole. I didn't just cover these towns, I lived in them. And I would hear people talking about the newspaper – sometimes with delight, sometimes with disgust at the depths to which Ross would have his reporters dig into stories, and sometimes with consternation that Ross just wouldn't let an issue go. But they were always talking. It was important for Ross to make *The Gazette* a must-read every Wednesday. When he sold the newspaper last year, he was touched to hear from so many people that they were glad *The Gazette* would continue since they had come to rely on it so much.

Northern Vermont can be a hard-scrabble place, and there isn't a big advertising base so there isn't a lot of margin for spending resources foolishly. Nevertheless, Ross always had his reporters dig into big stories; he would give a little extra time, spend a little extra money for gas and copies, and dish out a ton of encouragement and good advice. During my time there, were a couple of big stories that Ross had me chase. The most notable was a scandal involving auctioneers of dairy cows who also happened to be presidents of three local banks and, as it turns out, first-class crooks. While these weren't elected officials, Ross knew they were just as important in their roles as keepers of the public trust; and he and I reported the story well beyond the borders of the newspaper's coverage area up until the disgraced bankers went to jail ... and beyond. Some sleepy weekly; this was the first time I got to interview federal banking officials and talked with the FBI.

I moved on but Ross continued to ride herd on other important stories that are the heart of what the Eugene Cervi Award recognizes: consistently aggres-

sive reporting of government at the grassroots level and interpretation of local affairs. One of those stories is a classic of good reporting – the case of the million-dollar embezzlement from the local electric department. It is the type of story that far too often wouldn't come to light without a committed editor.

Ross required that I go to almost every electric department board meeting, and every reporter before me also sat in on the meetings, and every reporter after. Not only did we get a lot of stories on a public service agency that touch people's lives every day –electricity! and the funds that pay for it – but when the embezzlement surfaced he and *The Gazette* were completely plugged in and ready to cover it. Ross made sure that his newspaper kept tabs on the things that change people's lives: the rise of cell phone towers, the rebuilding of downtown – for years – after a major fire, the selling of the 80-year-old dairy cooperative to an out-of-state interest, and the recurring machinations, intrigues and all-too-often shoddy work of the local select boards.

People like it. Some don't, but the newspaper is still in business. And the letters section is the envy of probably every newspaper in Vermont (and would be in most places); it consistently has 10 or more letters each week, and maybe four times that number as Town Meeting Day approaches.

Ross also made a place in his paper for stories that touched people's lives in ways that made them uncomfortable because these stories touched their conscience. He and *The Gazette* did some very good reporting on a transgender cop in town. And Ross has the strongest commitment to coverage of African Americans and to the treatment of all minorities. This surfaced not just in the local paper, but Ross made coverage of African Americans and other minorities an important issue at newspapers around the region during his time on the board and as president of the New England Press Association. And, naturally, he also made hiring of minorities part of that issue, as well.

And that gives me an opening to men-

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Ross was so much more than a country editor

By **Link McKie**

Former reporter, editor and publisher
Publication manager of the New England
Newspaper & Press Association

Ross would be proud to be thought of as a country editor, because he was one for many years before his retirement, and a superb and respected one. But it would be shortchanging Ross' legacy as a journalist to think of him only in that role. He was so much more.

I met Ross when he was a member of the then-New England Press Association's board of directors and chairman of its diversity committee. Ross was an advocate for diversity, and pushed hard for more of it in our field, well before diver-

sity became the more popular and politically correct stand it is now. Ross made diversity a centerpiece of his efforts for the association, because he had worked for a newspaper in the demographically diverse community of Holyoke, Mass., earlier in his career and, more importantly, because it was the right and human thing to do.

Ross did more than talk about diversity. He acted on it. As a board member and later president of the New England Press Association, Ross succeeded in having four board seats dedicated to representation from each of four minority press organizations. He continually pressed for inclusion of minorities among the many speakers and workshop presenters at press association conventions.

As editor and co-publisher of *The*

Hardwick (Vt.) Gazette, Ross evidenced the same forward-thinking outlook. He brought big thinking to his small-town market in remote and rural Vermont. He also brought courage to take editorial positions he deemed important and proper for the public welfare, even when they were not popular. He took the time, despite his intensive long hours leading his newspaper, to join fights on behalf of the First Amendment, locally and beyond.

Ross treated his readers with respect, and, with each edition, gave them more than their money's worth, and all the news and information that are the lifeblood newspapers supply to their communities.

For these and so many more reasons, Ross is a most worthy candidate for the Eugene Cervi Award.

He covered his community without fear or favor

By **Tyrone Shaw**

Associate Professor of Journalism
Johnson State College
Johnson, Vermont

I can think of no one more worthy of the Eugene Cervi Award than Ross Connelly, whose influence locally, statewide, and regionally cannot be overstated. Simply put, Ross is the exemplar of the ideal journalist, combining the unwavering advocacy of the watchdog, with a deep, compassionate understanding of the communities he served. As he frequently noted, his consistently excellent newspaper was an essential part of Hardwick's social, economic, and political fabric, and he took the stewardship of that paper very seriously.

Ross's successful efforts to bring transparency to the formerly opaque nature of local governance, an opacity that unfortunately at one time defined the relationship between press and local politics in Vermont, are well documented. His determination, while perhaps felt most keenly locally, went way beyond the towns served by *The Gazette*.

He was a dynamic and effective president of the Vermont Press Association (VPA) as well as the New England Press

Association (NEPA). On top of the grueling demands of editing and publishing *The Hardwick Gazette*, he also founded the Vermont Coalition for Open Government.

I direct Johnson State College's Communications and Community Media program, the focus of which is community journalism and the network of often excellent small-market dailies and weeklies that grace much of rural America. Ross was a great help over the past 25 years I have been lucky enough to teach at Johnson, regularly volunteering to serve on panels during our annual Community Journalism Day at the college, when journalists from around the state would discuss topics such as ethics, economics, media framing of important social issues, and the changing demands of technology. In this, he was unstinting in his generosity.

Even more important, he helped us to create the college's Community Journalism Project, which has deployed our students to six or eight annual town meetings the first Tuesday of March to cover communities for *The Gazette*. Students covered the meetings and filed stories within hours to meet the Tuesday 6 p.m. deadline. That tradition continues today at *The Gazette* under the new publisher's leadership, yet another important legacy inherited from Ross.

Over the years, Ross was able to benefit from our program, hiring some of our students to work full-time in his newsroom, often serving with great distinction. He also provided internships, deploying our students to cover towns unused to press scrutiny. Upon returning from his first select board meeting in a town near Hardwick, one of my students said this: "They were shocked and upset to see a reporter attending, as if they resented my being there. I didn't get a warm reception."

Ross covered his community as part of it, rather than from the outside looking in. And he did so fairly, eloquently, without fear or favor. One of the blessings and curses of community journalism is that response is immediate and often personal. In his quest for open, honest governance, Ross never backed down when select boards, school boards, zoning boards, or police departments – members of which were sometimes friends and neighbors – howled. It was, as he was quick to point out, the price of being right.

As a former reporter and editor of a small weekly and longtime resident of Vermont, I hold Ross and the paper he so brilliantly nurtured for so long, in the highest esteem. If anyone deserves this award, it is Ross Connelly.

This Year's Winner

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department store over the holiday season. He also worked construction, waited tables in a Georgetown bar, did community organizing, taught in a prison, hit the road on an aborted trip to Alaska in a yellow VW camper...

There was more community organizing, office work and, finally, perhaps the ghosts of the *Concord Kiddette* and *The Washington Post*, led to graduate courses in journalism (a course in research methodology also proved useful) and another degree, which led to writing sports for a small daily north of Boston. That also opened the door to writing for a

team newspaper of the New England Patriots, both of which led to a full-time job writing human interest columns for a daily in western Massachusetts. That led Connelly to becoming the editor of a weekly on Cape Cod, which, after being shown the door by the publisher, led to a couple of months of part-time editing for an international news service, which gave way to buying *The Hardwick Gazette* in northern Vermont in 1986.

The varied experiences and the academic work added up, from the mimeographed pages full of local news gathered by prepubescent youngsters, to the

sweaty, ink-smudged work of a staffer at *The Post*, to figuring out what to do next after the engine gave out 500 miles up the Alaska Highway. Perhaps, all were the seeds that blossomed into the three-plus decades of work at *The Gazette*, which became a calling.

Journalism – community journalism – was the right career. Connelly says the work is the democracy business. He also says the work remains – and is necessary – for those willing to shoulder it. He's glad he did, and encourages others to do the same.

Ross always wanted

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tion Ross' work beyond his newspaper – and he did plenty of work. One thing he talked to me about a lot during the decade I was away from Vermont was his work to get the law changed so that public officials would be forced to pay court costs of plaintiffs who successfully sued to get them to comply with open records laws. This was a big victory for small newspapers, in particular, because they would have the fewest resources to fight for transparency.

Ross didn't just testify to a legislative committee or two; he lobbied hard and rallied supporters. And that certainly wasn't the only time he's been in the capitol. He's played roles in defeating bills that would introduce taxes on

newspaper sales, bills around hospital advertising, and bills that could make it harder for the public to find public notices and municipal legals. He worked with other newspapers owners, editors and reporters as the head of the Vermont and the New England newspaper trade groups, he worked with lawmakers, he worked with private groups – Ross worked with everyone.

I'm sure others will go into greater detail on how he worked tirelessly to make government more transparent, but I see my recommendation as an opportunity for you to hear from someone who Ross Connelly inspired. I can't completely sum up a career in a few hundred words – particularly a career as committed

and, in many essential ways, successful as the career Ross has led. But I'll tell you this: From what I can see, Ross always wanted to do the right thing; and he wanted others do the right thing – reporters he trained, public servants he covered, people who read his newspaper.

Help your neighbor, serve your community, stand up for what you believe in, make the world a better place. Ross Connelly stood up, and served his community by reflecting it back on itself – the good and the bad – always with an eye toward making it a better place. And, as much as any of us, he truly has changed the world.

Ross a perfect match

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tools, the assignments and the chances to do great work and to move on. Two previous *Gazette* reporters are now editors at respected Vermont weeklies and a former reporter founded an online news service offering some State House coverage.

The Gazette has a reputation of community service and excellence in journalism due to Ross' dedication to the highest ideals of the profession. He has instilled a strong sense of ethics and dedication for those that have worked for and with him.

Association work

Ross was an active president for both the VPA and NEPA. Some of his most far-reaching efforts came in the way of bringing diversity to the board of NEPA. As a board member in the early 1990s, he worked to establish dedicated seats on the board for four minority journalism associations. It was under the efforts by Ross that the New England Press Association began to include workshops at its annual convention that focused on the importance of reporting about race and the need for diversity in newsrooms.

As a person serving on the NEPA board at the time, I can say the representatives for the African-American, the Native American, the Asian-American and the Hispanic-American press associations all provided new and needed insight into our profession. Ross, who became NEPA president in 1996, understood early on the importance of having diverse backgrounds and opinions in newspapers. Many of those friendships he made remain today.

Ross was also a leader with the Vermont Press Association, serving as president for two terms, but also returning to the board (and serving until 2016). Ross has been a major figure when it comes to legislative issues and taking time to go to Montpelier. He has personally provided crucial testimony about a wide range of topics and also helped line up others to testify. Some of the major accomplishments that Ross has played a key role are:

A five-year fight to get mandatory legal fees when public records are improperly withheld and a newspaper successfully sues. This is now part of a major overhaul

in the state's public records law.

Successfully helping defeat legislation that would have eliminated advertising by Vermont hospitals. (This was seen as an alleged way to cut health care costs).

Successfully helping defeat a proposal to put a tax on the sale of newspapers.

Although now retired, Ross presented testimony before the Vermont Senate this March advocating that public/municipal legal advertising continue to be published in newspapers, pointing out that newspapers provide citizens unfettered access to public information through newsstand sales, subscriptions and public libraries. There is an effort to take them away from newspapers.

While there are also some lesser fights, the last two provide fuel to stop other states from trying to pass similar legislation.

The mandatory fees for legal costs in public records cases has certainly helped influence the attitude of state and local government officials in Vermont in responding to requests for information. They now know they may have to pay and are less likely to withhold public records. I noticed that our neighbor, New York, has now moved in that direction recently.

Ross was a key figure as the Vermont Press Association rallied several groups, including Common Cause, ACLU, the state private detectives, the Vermont Association of Broadcasters and others to come to form VT-COG to fight for open government and other issues. (These groups and others always seemed to be battling various bills over time and the thought was to help each other out with the basic thought that "Good Government Begins with Open Government.") While the group has struggled, we are able to rally when the First Amendment/Open Government is attacked in Vermont.

Other activities

Ross served as a teaching fellow at Boston University (1981) while getting his master's degree in mass communication, and at the University of Michigan (1972-75) while a graduate student in the department of political science.

He served on the editorial board for the Northfield Mount Hermon magazine (2006-09). He served on numerous panels at conferences and workshops over the years, including the New England and Vermont Press Associations and at Johnson State, Saint Michael's and Dartmouth Colleges. He was an invited panelist at the 2014 annual conference of the AEJMC held in Montreal.

For the past 25-plus years, Ross was an invited guest each Thursday morning on WDEV-AM/FM in Waterbury to talk about the top issues and stories from *The Gazette*. (He has also appeared as a guest on National Public Radio.)

Readers have been able to see his work in trade publications such as *Grassroots Editor* and *Editor & Publisher*, while also having his work reprinted in at least six Vermont dailies: the *Burlington Free Press*, *Rutland Herald*, *The Times Argus*, *Caledonian Record* (which is the closest competing daily), *Bennington Banner*, and *Brattleboro Reformer*. His work also has appeared in *Yankee* magazine, *The Gardner* (Mass.) *News* and the *Lynn* (Mass.) *Item*, among others.

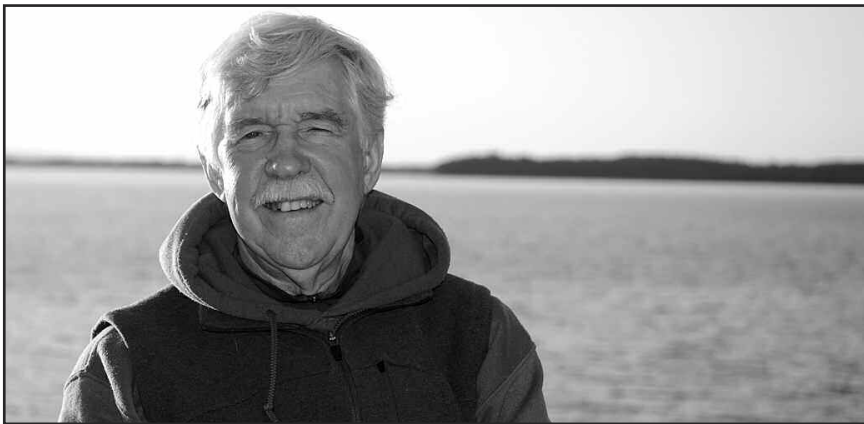
In his efforts to sell *The Hardwick Gazette*, Ross was committed to finding a new owner who recognized the importance of community journalism. He was committed to finding a person who would maintain the newspaper as the important 128-year-old institution it is rather than viewing it as a commodity to be exploited for a return on investment. The essay contest he held in 2016 to find a new owner generated worldwide media interest and brought attention to the reality that weekly newspapers are and remain a critical part of democracy.

While the contest did not draw enough entries, it did attract a New England couple interested in carrying on the tradition that Ross and his wife did for several decades.

Based on all that I have heard and read about Eugene Cervi, Ross Connelly is a perfect match for this award. For these and many more reasons, Ross Connelly would be a welcomed and positive nominee for the Eugene Cervi Award.



The Concord Kiddette and The Washington Post were the first newspapers to pay Ross Connelly for his work. He did not become a journalist, however, until many years passed after his association with them.



The sunset over Lake Champlain on an April day takes the chill out of the air for Ross Connelly. (Photo by Lane M. Dunn)



The editor's desk at The Hardwick Gazette was probably similar to others around the country.



The Concord Kiddette and its staff were profiled in the Chester (Pennsylvania) Times in 1955. Ross Connelly was the newspaper's copyboy.



Ross Connelly (right) presents Dave Morse, the sports editor of The Hardwick Gazette from 1995-2015, a plaque in honor of his induction into the New England Press Association Hall of Fame in 2006. (Photo courtesy of the New England Press Association)



Articles by Ross Connelly appeared in a variety of magazine publications during his career as a journalist.



Ross Connelly and his late wife, Susan M. Jarzyna, welcomed fellow journalists and long-time ISWNE members Guy and Marcia Wood to Hardwick after the two couples met at the organization's 1996 conference in Boston. (Photo courtesy of Guy and Marcia Wood)



After changing careers into journalism, Ross Connelly took the skills he developed as a sportswriter for the Daily Times and Chronicle in Wakefield, Mass., to become a feature columnist for the daily Transcript-Telegram in Holyoke, Mass.

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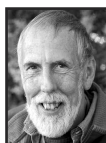
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Eugene Cervi Award Winners

- 2018** **Ross Connelly**, *The Hardwick Gazette*, Hardwick, Vermont
- 2017** **Bill Miller Sr.**, *Washington Missourian*, Washington, Missouri
- 2016** **David Sommerlad**, County Press NSW and County Press Australia, New South Wales, Australia
- 2015** **Mike Buffington**, *The Jackson Herald*, Jefferson, Georgia
- 2014** **Dave Mitchell**, *Point Reyes Light*, Point Reyes Station, California
- 2013** **William F. Schanen**, *Ozaukee Press*, Port Washington, Wisconsin
- 2012** **Tim L. Waltner**, *Feeman Courier*, Freeman, South Dakota
- 2011** **Jack Sigvaldason**, *Northern News Services*, Northwest Territories
- 2010** **Tom, Pat & Ben Gish**, *The Mountain Eagle*, Whitesburg, Kentucky
- 2009** **Garrett Ray**, Fort Collins, Colorado
- 2008** **Burt & Ursula Freireich**, Litchfield Park, Arizona
- 2007** **Guy & Marcia Wood**, Angel Fire, New Mexico
- 2006** **No award given**
- 2005** **Frank Wood**, De Pere, Wisconsin
- 2004** **Frank Garred**, *The Port Townsend Leader*, Port Townsend, Washington
- 2003** **Gary & Helen Sosniecki**, *The Lebanon Daily Record*, Lebanon, Missouri
- 2002** **Bill Meyer**, *Marion County Record*, Marion County, Kansas
- 2001** **Marg Hennigar**, Lighthouse Publishing, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia
- 2000** **Allan A. Seiler**, *The Pike Press*, Pittsfield, Illinois
- 1999** **No award given**
- 1998** **Jack Authelet**, *Foxboro* (Massachusetts) Reporter
- 1997** **Carol Wilcox & Cary Stiff**, *Clear Creek Courant*, Idaho Springs, Colorado



M. Buffington



D. Mitchell



T. Waltner



J. Sigvaldason



G. Wood



M. Wood



F. Wood



F. Garred

- 1996** **Charlotte & Marvin Schexnayder**, *Dumas* (Arkansas) *Clarion*

- 1995** **No award given**

- 1994** **Jim MacNeill**, *The Eastern Graphic*, Montague, Prince Edward Island

- 1993** **Bob Bliss**, *The Montgomery County News*, Hillsboro, Illinois

- 1992** **Robert Trapp**, *Rio Grande Sun*, Espanola, New Mexico

- 1991** **Henry Gay**, *Shelton-Mason County Journal*, Shelton, Washington

- 1990** **Karl Monroe**, *Collinsville* (Illinois) *Herald*

- 1989** **William Rotch**, *Milford* (New Hampshire) *Cabinet*

- 1988** **Bruce Brugmann**, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*

- 1987** **James Russell Wiggins**, *Ellsworth* (Maine) *American*

- 1986** **Rollin McCommons**, *Athens* (Georgia) *Observer*

- 1985** **McDill (Huck) Boyd**, *Phillips County Review*, Phillipsburg, Kansas

- 1984** **Richard McCord**, *Santa Fe* (New Mexico) *Reporter*

- 1983** **Homer Marcum**, *The Martin Countian*, Inez, Kentucky

- 1982** **Kieth Howard**, *Yellow Springs* (Ohio) *News*

- 1981** **Edward DeCourcy**, *Newport* (New Hampshire) *Argus Champion*

- 1980** **Robert Estabrook**, *Lakeville* (Connecticut) *Journal*

- 1979** **Houstoun Waring**, *Littleton* (Colorado) *Independent*

- 1978** **Tom Leathers**, *The Squire*, Kansas City, Missouri

- 1977** **Charles & Virginia Russell**, *Dewitt County Observer*, Clinton, Illinois

- 1976** **Blair Macy**, *Keene Valley Sun*, Kennesburg, Colorado



B. Meyer



M. Hennigar



A. Seiler



R. Trapp



R. McCord



R. Estabrook



T. Leathers



H. Waring

grassroots editor



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