

Lee Public-Service Journalism Projects 2012-2013

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By May 2013, every Lee newsroom will produce at least one substantial, high-impact project that demonstrates its commitment to serving the public's interest and its unique ability to shine light on important local issues.

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**Lee Public-Service Journalism Projects 2012-2013
Full Descriptions**

Albany Democrat-Herald (Karen Petersen, Mike McInally)

[Urban Ledger](#)

A series of stories taking a closer look at issues related to two initiative measures on the March ballot in Albany. Both measures would put power in the hands of the voters that currently resides with the city council. Our goal is to explain the measures and their potential impacts; explore in-depth the two concepts they center around — urban renewal districts and city debt — using examples from around the mid-valley and Oregon; and discuss the fundamental question of who should be making big decisions on these types of issues: elected officials or the voters.

From Mike McInally: “The D-H staff, led by Karen, did a great job with this project -- and helped to set the stage for continued coverage of these matters when the ballot measures passed.”

Arizona Daily Star (Tucson) (Bobbie Jo Buel)

[Vaccines and Tucson’s children](#)

The low rate of vaccinated children in many Tucson schools was the topic of our 2012 project. We obtained records that showed dozens of schools fall below the 90 percent threshold that medical professionals say provides "herd immunity." At some schools fewer than 60 percent of children are vaccinated for highly contagious and potentially fatal diseases like measles and whooping cough. That means a single case could cause an outbreak. It would also endanger kids with underlying conditions like Down Syndrome that compromise their immune systems and make them vulnerable even if they've been vaccinated.

Arizona has a mandatory immunization law, but it permits an exemption for "personal beliefs." That could be a religious belief, but it also includes parents who hold the mistaken belief that vaccines cause things like autism. The immunization requirement is also weak because some children start the shots but fail to complete either the initial series or the boosters. Schools often lose tabs on the status of these students.

Over the years, school nurses were key to keeping immunization rates high. They tracked which children had their shots and they talked with parents about the importance of immunizations. The trouble is, many schools have eliminated nurses as part of budget cuts.

We also reported on the low number of health-care workers who have received appropriate booster shots to guard against whooping cough. These adults put patients at risk. In a follow-up in late 2012, we reported that Arizona's whooping cough rate again increased by double digits.

As part of our project, we used social media to find parents who had their children immunized and those who did not. We hosted a live chat on our web site in which parents and health-care providers thoughtfully discussed the topic. We also editorialized in favor of immunizations and published guest columns from community members. We also built two searchable databases — one with one or two years of data for Tucson-area schools and the second with statewide data for a single year.

We intend to circle back to the topic in 2013. We will obtain a new round of state records to determine if our work has helped increase immunization rates, and hence the safety of children's health in Tucson.

Arizona Daily Sun (Flagstaff) (Randy Wilson)

The Fire Next Time – Site under construction: www.e928.org

Academic researchers who studied communication channels before, during and after the 15,000-acre Schultz Fire outside Flagstaff in 2010 reached a troubling conclusion: The most commonly used information sources – the Daily Sun and KNAU public radio – by local residents were rated least useful and trustworthy. (There are no commercial TV or commercial radio news stations in our market.) Family, friends and neighbors, communicating through social media, provided better real-time information and next-day preparation, but even that was unsatisfactory because of its haphazard coordination.

The Daily Sun and KNAU have partnered with the Flagstaff Community Foundation to apply for a grant through the Knight Community Information Challenge to integrate their news resources and those of the community to create Flagstaff's definitive, multi-platform emergency information source during wildfires, floods, snow emergencies and hazmat incidents. Our initial application was accepted and it is now in the second round awaiting a determination for funding. The project involves redefining our roles as journalists during times of crisis. The new integrated platform will not only become a vital, real-time source of what is happening, but a communication lifeline for affected parties, an early warning beacon that prevents harm and a community forum that encourages citizens and organizations to come together during difficult times.

Major activities will include:

- Design an integrated information system and expand print and broadcast content for multi-media digital use that includes websites, mobile apps, mapping and audio and video streaming
- Build out digital infrastructure to address multi-platform media needs of the community, with a strong emphasis on mapping, user-generated content and crowd-source tools.
- Coordinate with government emergency service agencies
- Convene events to introduce the project to the community
- Test the system with a mock emergency.

Journalistically, we'll be dissecting what went wrong communication-wise during the Schultz fire and the subsequent flooding that killed a little girl. It will involve reconstructing on an hour-by-hour basis (and sometimes minute-by-minute) the course of the emergency and the disconnect between what people knew at the time and expected vs. what was really happening. The academic research has laid the groundwork, but there are compelling personal stories of evacuees, firefighters, fire managers and journalists that will flesh out the narrative. Propelling that narrative will be a separate, retold history of failed forest management policies that have placed the Flagstaff community at the brink of disaster each fire season -- but also inspired the most comprehensive (2 million acres), innovative approach to forest restoration in the entire country. The latter has the potential to not only "save" the forests but transform the dynamics of northern Arizona's resource-based economy in ways that few residents have yet grasped.

It's an ambitious agenda for two relatively small news organizations, and the grant will help us hire a digital media journalist to spearhead the project – or promote one of our own, then backfill his or her position. But even without the grant, we are prepared to move forward on the project, albeit less quickly but still aiming for most major elements to be in place by the start of next fire season: May 1, 2013.

Beatrice Daily Sun (Patrick Ethridge)

[Educated elected officials and readers about open meetings and FOIA](#)

We focused on educating our elected officials and readers about open meetings laws and how FOIA works. This was done through a series of FOIA requests, open meeting explanations, asking our Attorney General for opinions on questionable practices and writing about those, several front page stories and editorials. At the end of the day, our editorial page was named best in the state among daily newspapers for work we did on this project and we received the NPA's FOIA Award given each year to one newspaper in the state. The work also resulted in our news editor testifying in front of the state legislature about FOIA for a bill that would limit what government bodies can charge people who request information. It would take me some time to gather all this, as I don't have it all linked together. But, that's probably the one we're most proud of. It wasn't our original plan when the year started, but as we continued to push we noticed a growing problem and focused on exploiting and ultimately fixing it.

Additional Links:

[Supervisors criticize Daily Sun over public records request](#)
[Editorial: Yes I have an agenda](#)

Weight loss contest and health stories

Akin to the Biggest Loser, we sponsored a weight loss competition in our paper. While we had done this before, our efforts were ramped up this year, with two teams of competitors working out three times per week at competing gyms in town. The results were quite impressive as everyone lost a bunch of weight. Local businesses sponsored the prizes and we had each challenger blog on our website each week for readership. We even had the trainers blog periodically and did a few stories about fitness to better inform the public. The contest was awarded first place in our Nebraska Press Association's annual banquet for reader contests among daily newspapers.

Billings Gazette (Steve Prosiniski)

State of Despair

A series by the Billings Gazette exploring the epidemic of suicide in Montana. The series will explore how the crisis affects American Indians, the elderly, teenagers, veterans, the LGBT community and survivors left behind.

Description:

There's a romance to Montana that beguiles. Ask anyone to define the state and they'll mention the mountains, the wide-open spaces, the stoic, hardworking cowboy culture.

Like all great places, though, it comes with trade-offs.

Those distances, that stoicism, the frontier pockets of the state where jobs are scarce can be overwhelming. And it may be why the state that residents regard as the "last, best place" has been near the top in the nation in the rate of suicide for 35 years.

"Montana's suicide epidemic is a public health crisis," said Matt Kuntz, executive director of the Montana chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

During 2010, at least 227 Montanans killed themselves. In 2011, the number was closer to 225. That's about 22 people per 100,000 residents, nearly twice the national average.

The victims are military veterans, American Indians, senior citizens and teenagers. Often, they are depressed and hundreds of miles from the nearest mental health professional. Even where they can get help, they tend to "cowboy up," afraid their illness will be seen as weakness. Not only has Montana's suicide rate hovered in the top five nationally for decades, in the past few years it has gone up. That spike is reflected across the nation.

In the past five years, the state's suicide rate has crept from 20.1 per 100,000 people to 22.5. Nationally five years ago, the rate was 10 people per 100,000. Today, it's closer to 12 people per 100,000. And those are the ones who succeed. A recent federal study suggests that 8.3 million Americans — 3.7 percent of all adults — have serious thoughts of suicide each year; 2.3 million make a plan, and 1.1 million attempt suicide.

The result is an estimated 37,000 suicide deaths annually, and the Rocky Mountain region shoulders the bulk of the deaths. In Montana, every one of the 452 Montanans who killed themselves last year had a face, be they a troubled father, a confused teenager, or a lonely, elderly widow. The majority who took their lives — 77 percent, or 350 — were males. The

victims came from all age groups, although most of them — 91 people — were 55 to 64. Another 88 were 45 to 54, and 75 of the victims were between the ages of 24 and 34. Another 5,600 Montanans — an average of about 15 per day — attempted to kill themselves last year.

“We’ve got a lot of hurting people,” said Jim Hajny, executive director of the Montana Peer Network, a nonprofit organization of individuals who are in recovery from mental illness, substance abuse or both. “We have to get at this.”

Suicide figures vary from community to community, with the bulk of them occurring in Western Montana and pockets on the eastern edge of the state. The highest rate of suicide in the state is among American Indians, 27.2 per 100,000; followed by Caucasians at 22.2 per 100,000. For 2010-2011, there were 38 American Indian suicides, compared to 410 Caucasian suicides. American Indians make up 7 percent of the Montana population.

RESULTS:

--The Montana Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness has posted the entire series on its homepage. It has posted each installment on its Facebook page and sends an email blast after each installment is published. The Global Health Equity Fund, which has helped fund a theater production aimed at getting people to talk about depression and suicidal thoughts, has also posted parts of the series on its website.

--A lobbyist is working with the Montana Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness to lobby the state Legislature for a psychiatric residency program in the state. We sent a letter and early installments of project to state legislators as they consider health care proposals during the legislative session, which convened Jan. 7.

--Reporting on Health has published our series on its website.

--On Nov. 29, four days after The Gazette published its first installment in the suicide series, U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., referred to the article on the Senate floor. An emotional Baucus told his Senate colleagues that the stories “hit me in the gut.” The senator was on the floor to discuss the latest initiative Congress has adopted to combat the rising numbers of military suicides.

-- For the first time in at least nine years, a master trainer in suicide prevention has been invited to Montana to prepare educators, clergy, medical personnel and others to teach suicide prevention in communities throughout the state. The training, set for May 9-10 in Helena, is prompted by mental health professionals in Montana calling the state’s suicide epidemic a “public health crisis.” Topics will include common mental illnesses; social media, isolation and suicide; adolescent self-injury and cutting; and substance abuse, addiction and suicide.

We’ve received several letters to the editor thanking us for our series. Here is one:

On behalf of those of us involved in the Montana Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the local Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley, a commendation and an appreciation are expressed to Cindy Uken and The Billings Gazette for the recent series pertaining to suicide. This also is extended to those members of our community who contributed information of personal experience related to this important problem. The articles explained both the frequency of completed suicides in Montana and in the nation and the cause of 90 percent of those being medical illness, most often depression, which may be associated with other illness. In helping people to be informed correctly, the stigma about mental illness and suicide is being counteracted.

Also appreciated are the excellent editorials by Pat Bellinghausen and other articles on the Opinion Page of The Gazette that reinforce the importance of understanding mental health problems as medical illnesses. This further combats the stigma that emanates from being unaware of the truth.

Suicide can be prevented with recognition of warning signs of risk (printed in The Gazette articles) and with proper mental health treatment and care.

The Montana Suicide Prevention Life Line is 800-273-TALK (8255). The Community Crisis Center number is 406-259-8800.

Donald Harr, M.D., president

*Montana Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Billings*

Casper Star-Tribune (Darrell Ehrlick)

School's Out – Publishing later this year

Overview: Three out of every 10 students in Wyoming will not graduate from high school. Virtually nowhere in the Intermountain West is performance quite that low. Once you cross the border into any neighboring state, the graduation rate spikes five, ten, even close to 20 percent in one case. Even more shocking: Few people seem to be outraged or concerned. This series will examine what has been taken for just another Wyoming anomaly. Instead of re-tracing the well worn path to local and state education officials who struggle identifying the causes of the problem, we're going to look in other places along with education experts to see if the answer to Wyoming's chronically low graduation rates is out there beyond the classroom. We'll take a look to see if the traditional arguments given by state and local officials are the reason, or just an excuse.

Problem or perception? This segment will look at the fundamental statistic – only seven in 10 graduate from a high school in Wyoming. For most politicians, leaders and the media, this fact is a troubling talking point. But is the problem that garners so much attention really a problem? We'll examine the employment rate; we'll talk to employers within the larger business sectors; we'll talk to city leaders to find out if the lack of education hurts Wyoming in an appreciable way. Is the problem just one on paper?

Creative deficit. One of the biggest challenges facing Wyoming is its clustering of sectors that drive the state's economy. Energy, tourism... those are two of the largest drivers in the least populous state in the union. There seem to be plenty of jobs, and energy and tourism have maintained such a big place for so long, is the problem that the culture doesn't really value or support entrepreneurship? Is there a link between how education is valued and the culture that has such little economic diversification? Let's talk to small business owners (incubators, small business development). What are they seeing? Where is the economic development coming from? Are they having to import talent to start here? Businesses looking to expand or move want a well-educated workforce. Has that been a problem for us? Are we getting passed up because of our workforce that might not be as well educated or forward thinking?

10 Year Reunion. Anecdotally, we've heard that one of the reasons students don't stay in high school is because there's good money to be made in the energy industry. Let's see if we can track down students who may not have finished high school 10 years ago. Where are they? Do

they regret not finishing? Did they finish? What did they find when they left? Has it paid off even without a high school diploma?

Other means. Educators have always quibbled with the statistics used to measure graduation. They say Wyoming's abysmal graduation rates aren't really accurate. Instead, there are literally hundreds of students that aren't accounted for; for example, if students move, they're counted as drop-outs. If students get a GED or go to an alternative high school, those aren't counted either. Is it possible that answer is plausible? How are the statistics kept? Do neighboring states report in a different way that skews the results? And, does the local school district or the state have any evidence that students who – for whatever reason – leave a traditional Wyoming high school finish? If so, how do they track them?

The earning myth. One of the driving forces behind education is the very practical benefit of earning power. It's always been held as true that a person without a high school diploma will earn more during the course of a career than someone without. A person with a college degree will do better than one who doesn't. And so on. But, in Wyoming could graduation rates being so low actually be a result of this earning axiom not working? In other words, generally speaking what happens if having a high school diploma doesn't really hinder you from making comparable wages? Does it actually hurt? That is: Does two or three more years in the oilfield actually pay off? What happens if the wage earning gap really isn't much of a gap at all?

Culture. Is this problem really just a part of our culture, and therefore, it's hard to pin down? Does Wyoming value education? If so, how would we know? No one comes out and says, "I am anti-education." That would make them Luddites. But, let's look at graduation rates and people with high school education and compare with other states. Children often reflect the values and what they learn at home. If education isn't valued, then the cycle of dropping out will repeat during the course of many generations.

Higher education. Does the problem follow to college? Look at Wyoming's higher education offerings. They are small, even when compared to small intermountain states like South Dakota or Montana. Is that because of the population or is that a demand issue? Philosophically, is higher education valued?

Where's the outrage? Most states in the region would be upset even outraged if they had the grad rates we do, yet there is no outrage, but a lot of lip service. The problems that vex other states with low grad rates don't seem to carry over per capita here. Are politicians worried? And, if so, has that worry translated into action? Do they know what they're worried about beyond just the statistic? Is it costing the city employers who worry about the workforce? Is it causing demonstrable brain drain?

Grad rates vs. employment rates. Is there a correlation? That might suggest the graduation problem is purely an economic issue. Has there been higher graduation rates during bust times? Education, especially a high school diploma, would become more important if there were more competition for jobs.

Success stories. We know that a lot of students in Wyoming are falling through the cracks. That's a given if three out of every 10 students don't graduate. But what is being done in school districts to ensure students don't fall through the cracks? What programs are being

implemented – assuming there are – to address the problem? And how do we know if they are working?

Education dollar. The story is simple. Take an education dollar in Wyoming. Let's look at how it is spent. How does that compare to other states, and does it seem like it's being divvied up correctly?

Hidden costs. There is a cost to the workforce and the general population not being well educated. In addition to earning more, those who have a better education tend to be more mobile and have more resources to draw upon if financial calamity strikes. So let's look at what it takes to support those who don't graduate from high school after high school? What do we know about the systemic costs of those who aren't well educated? Are there a higher number on welfare? If so, what are those costs? What about supporting families of those who don't graduate? Does dropping out cost a lot more in the long run to state taxpayers?

Central Illinois Group (Bloomington, Decatur, Charleston, Mattoon) (Gary Sawyer)

Lincoln Developmental Center

During the past year, the state of Illinois has shut down some 50 facilities – primarily prisons and juvenile detention center. But shutting down a facility doesn't mean all of the costs end and it has a tremendous impact on local community. Last August, while the shutdowns were in the proposal stage, we looked at the impact of shutting down the Lincoln Developmental Center. We explained the site is still owned by the state, and the costs associated with that and the impact on the community.

Dredging Lake Decatur

Lake Decatur is a rather shallow lake that serves the commercial and residential needs of Decatur. Because of its location in Macon County, it is susceptible to silt accumulating on its bottom, which reduces the amount of water it can hold. To combat this, the city of Decatur has had to regularly dredge the lake.

The past couple of summers have been dry, lake levels have dropped and mandatory water conservation measures were issued and, in fact, are still in effect. This summer, the lake was particularly low.

Dredging has been a topic of discussion the entire time I have lived in Decatur, which is now pushing 17 years, and few people really understand dredging, how it needs to be done and the processes that needed to be followed. We conceived of this idea when the lake was so low that large expanses of the lakebed were exposed. Many people wondered why the city didn't take heavy equipment on to the lake and remove silt that way.

The accompanying stories, maps (the main graphic took up nearly half the front page), photos and video laid out the dredging process and demonstrated vividly how dredging should be conducted. It also demonstrated that if a 120-pound reporter sinks into the mud, then driving trucks on to the lakebed is probably a bad idea.

One compliment that was paid to us that let us know we performed a huge public service came from Decatur City Administrator Ryan McCrady who said that after the article came out, no one has called the city wondering about dredging and why they can't drive trucks on to the lakebed to get it done.

Mahomet Aquifer

The Mahomet Aquifer provides 4 trillion gallons of water a day for public use, irrigation and industry in 15 Illinois counties. The Clinton landfill sits directly on top of the Aquifer. So, an attempt by the landfill to be disposing of PCB's at the site was greeted with a lot of controversy. In these stories, we examined the importance of the aquifer and examined the controversy over the storing of PCB's. We have followed this story since and the issue is currently tired up in regulatory issues and a court case has been filed.

Racial profiling/citizen complaints

Since 2009, the Bloomington Police Department has received 105 citizen complaints against its officers, but until a few months ago the department had not fully resolved, and in some cases even begun investigating, more than 25 percent of them.

A Pantagraph review of the complaints showed BPD failed to complete 27 complaints from the last three years. Chief Randy McKinley admitted that his department had no proof that 11 of them were ever investigated.

In addition to incomplete follow-up, The Pantagraph found complaint investigations sometimes relied on audio and video recordings that were either nonexistent or of poor quality, and were carried out by supervisors who worked closely with the officers against whom the complaints were issued.

TIF districts

A TIF, or tax increment financing district, uses anticipated property tax increases to spur development. TIF districts freeze property tax revenue going to governments, with additional revenue generated by property improvements put into a special fund used to reimburse the developer for infrastructure expenditures. The districts can be controversial in some communities, and are widely used in other communities. In this joint review by The Pantagraph and the Herald & Review we looked at several TIF districts and examined some that were successful and others that did not deliver on the promises.

Columbus Telegram (James Dean)

Where now for downtown Columbus?

For more than a century, downtown Columbus was the retail and social hub for the city and surrounding communities. In the late 1990s and after 2000, attention turned to the periphery as Wal-Mart expanded not once but twice, opening a megastore in 2005. A medium size strip mall took J.C. Penney from the downtown. The Sears store was downsized and no longer a corporate operation. The theater closed. Restaurants struggled as the main arterial became dotted by the various fast food chains.

Now, interest in downtown has been renewed. The city is blessed with a substantial inventory of fairly well preserved early 19th century buildings and a core of solid businesses. Two anchor restaurants have thrived in recent years. But more must be done to create a thriving downtown.

Our project will explore the challenges and opportunities, including:

- A look at who owns the downtown and what the owners' plans are. Absentee versus hometown owners.
- Results of community surveys.

- Visits to comparable size downtowns that have achieved successful revitalizations — or failures.
- A look at the potential for more downtown residents and what that could mean.
- The entertainment or other possibilities that would be needed to make downtown a nighttime destination.
- Case studies of successes and failures in our downtown.
- Other relevant information that is uncovered in the process of our inquiry.

Additional Links:

[Library, cultural arts center key to downtown plan](#)

[Downtown residence numbers quality increase](#)

[Downtown leadership will be key to vitality](#)

[Owners see challenges, benefits](#)

[Changes in last 15 years](#)

Corvallis Gazette-Times (Mike McNally)

Town & Gown

As students flock to Corvallis -- a town where affordable housing is scarce and decent, reasonably priced apartments even scarcer -- the fabric of the community increasingly feels like it's unraveling, especially if you're a longtime resident. As a fledgling collaborative effort between the city and OSU, the town's dominant institution, gets under way, we want to investigate what's at stake, including a tough-minded examination of other cities that have grappled with town and gown issues -- what's worked in other communities? What hasn't? What is the university's responsibility for dealing with this growth? What is the city's? What are the implications for Corvallis' future? We anticipate an occasional series of stories on the topic and will schedule time soon to flesh out the project.

Daily Citizen (Beaver Dam) (Aaron Holbrook)

Access to Mental Health Care in Rural Communities

We ran three stories based on the information below. The project was awarded an APME grant that helped cover an equipment purchase. Reporters Trista Pruett and Megan Sheridan presented the stories at the APME convention in Nashville in September 2012.

There have been no significant changes in mental health expenditures in Dodge County at this point. There has been an effort to reduce waiting lists, but we have not reported the results. This calls for a follow up and we will do so this summer.

In Sept. 2010, the Dodge County Board approved 1.5 positions in the Health and Human Services Department to assist in managing and treating those with mental illness. At that time, the waiting list for a non-emergency appointment was six to nine months. The county hoped that before a year passed that the wait time would be down to one month. In Jan. 2011, when a county mental health initiative came to the county board with a request for additional hours, the wait for mental health care was still at around six months. A combination of area provider retirements and insurance issues has pushed an influx of people into the Dodge County Human Services department seeking mental health care. Both times, these additions to psychiatric care in Dodge County were contingent upon having enough "carryover dollars" at the end of the year.

The Daily Citizen would like to address the issue of mental healthcare in a rural community. Are Dodge County citizens in need receiving proper care with a six month waiting list? What sort of care are they seeking/receiving? What is it like for a person/family to deal with mental healthcare needs in a rural community?

Daily Journal (Park Hills) (Sherry Greminger)

Caught Being Kind

A struggling economy. The lack of adequate health care. Violence and criminal behavior on a regular basis. These are just a few of the problems that leave Americans sad, frustrated and angry, and lead them to see only the worst in people. The ability to comment anonymously on the Internet often encourages criticism and accusations instead of understanding or compassion. The kind things people do on a daily basis are overlooked or ignored.

Not anymore.

The Daily Journal will include a new weekly report, "Caught Being Kind." Each week, we will tell the stories of kindness that readers reported the week before. We will combine that effort by placing these weekly stories onto our Community Pages to have a bit of a contest between the numerous communities we cover to determine which community shows the most compassion. Not only will this drive more traffic to our main Web page, but will direct more eyes to the different community pages we have developed.

The Daily Journal will challenge readers to look for kind acts and share them with us for publication. Stories may be submitted online, or they may be called into the newsroom and directed to reporters who cover a particular community. Reporters will use Facebook and other social media to gather Acts of Kindness.

Elko Daily Free Press (Jeff Mullins)

Drunken Driving

One of the biggest safety issues in a 24/7 casino town like Elko is drunken driving. With one in four adults here classified as excessive drinkers, according to a recent Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study, drunken driving not only poses a danger to life and limb, but also results in dire personal consequences. It's the number one offense handled by law enforcement and the courts, costing taxpayers ... how much? This series will quantify the problem in both dollars and human terms. Stories will focus on those who have suffered injuries, lost their jobs, or caused harm or death to others. Partnering with local organizations and schools, we will help raise awareness at the high school level and illustrate how adults set the example for their future behavior. We will also look at how technology can be used to reduce the frequency of drunken driving today, more cheaply than ever before.

Update

Our interactive Blood-Alcohol Level Calculator was an effective online component that brought readers into the series.

Crime reporter Caley Cook's emotional video of a couple recalling the loss of their 15-year-old daughter because of a drunken driver was another powerful online piece. We received the following thank-you from the mother, along with a request to use our video in her own DUI

awareness programs:

“Thank you for your sensitive approach to our story, it was thoughtful, accurate and we hope effective. The video essay gives a sense of the emotion that is often missing with the printed words and photos. We pray that your DUI series will have an impact on the serious (and too often deadly) problem of Drunk & Drugged Driving. The thousands of deaths and injuries yearly are 100% preventable, and with your combined efforts we feel certain that lives will be saved. Thank you.”

In the print edition, a graphic added up the dollar amounts paid by each DUI offender. For the online version we converted it into an interactive timeline.

The segment titled “Get Home Safely” included an animated scenario about how to handle someone who wants to drive after getting drunk.

We also interviewed several people about their views on the problem, and posted them on an interactive layout with their photos and affiliations.

Reader comments on our “24-hour Town” segment included:

“If I was Mayor, I would assign a task force, strictly for DUI detail. ... Drinking and driving is just STUPID and unnecessary.”

Reader comments on our segment titled “The Human Cost” included:

“Maybe alcohol companies need to be as accountable as tobacco companies.”

Reader comments on our segment titled “A Lifestyle Problem” included:

“The problem is education. ... We need to start teaching people how to be responsible. ... You leave the keys at home or put them somewhere else. You plan your fun without the possibility of getting behind the wheel, period.”

Our series happened to coincide with a national panel on alcohol and drug abuse in which local students participated. We used the opportunity to write an editorial entitled “Community is safer Above the Influence.”

Globe Gazette (Mason City) (Jane Reynolds)

On The Jobs

A year ago we had a Job Series in April that talked to folks who were looking for work, had white collar and blue collar layoffs and programs that helped them.

We are going back to them this year to see what they are doing now. Many have jobs but making a lot less than previous work.

Even though “they” in government tell us the economy is improving, well, for a lot of folks “it’s news to them.”

Independent Record (Helena) (Holly Michels)

Broadwater County Concerns

Broadwater County, a small county of about 5,600, is growing rapidly and facing serious growing pains. The county commission is struggling to deal with that growth, as well as internal conflicts within the commission and between the commission and public employees. After hearing about a closed-door meeting that should have been open, county business being conducted by email and some very tense public meetings, our special projects/investigations reporter Eve Byron went down to attend several meetings and bring to light what was happening in the county. Broadwater County residents reached out to the IR for help explaining what was going on in their community, and wrote several letters to the editor to say how much they appreciated our coverage.

La Crosse Tribune (Chris Hardie)

Your Right To Know

The River Valley Newspaper Group public-service journalism project for 2103 was Your Right to Know, a public records project that culminated in the marriage of data with interactive charts published on our websites and a series of stories published in conjunction with Sunshine Week.

Public information requests are a fundamental part of journalism, as we seek how public officials spend our money and make decisions. This project involved taking that data and writing stories – the traditional part of journalism – but also involved using specific web tools like Tableau.

That became important with databases like property taxes and crime stats, as we found ways to publish on the web that are more interactive and informative than just running a chart in the paper. We did these projects to prepare for the final Sunshine Week effort.

Your Right to Know wrapped up with a region-wide project (including all the papers in the River Valley Newspaper Group) that was published to coincide with Sunshine Week. We sent reporters to all of our counties to request public documents. The results of that audit was compiled by the Tribune staff and converted into a chart with Tableau and also published in our papers.

The Winona Daily News used Sunshine Week to launch a series of daily stories that highlighted public records requests, such as a look at school safety drills, the costs of county commissioners, tracking hazardous materials on train cars, filing claims against the city, the top 35 Winona County farmers who received federal subsidies since 1995 and how courts are going paperless.

The public reaction to the project has been very positive. It accomplished our goal of informing the public and reaffirming that public records are not just for journalists, but for the public.

Here are links to the project's stories and databases:

http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/property-taxes-calculate-and-compare/article_044bf42a-57b5-11e2-bdb5-001a4bcf887a.html

http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/crime-wave-despite-high-profile-killings-alcohol-and-domestic-violence/article_54be9ec4-4add-11e2-891e-001a4bcf887a.html

http://lacrossetribune.com/coulee-region-sunshine-audit/table_88f3e2c8-8771-11e2-b6ad-001a4bcf887a.html

http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/audit-public-records-are-open-most-of-the-time/article_48b1760a-8940-11e2-9d02-001a4bcf887a.html

http://lacrossetribune.com/news/opinion/our-view-records-audit-shows-good-results/article_dece1fc6-883c-11e2-94f8-001a4bcf887a.html

http://lacrossetribune.com/council-bestows-annual-opee-awards/article_a3bcad78-8943-11e2-971e-001a4bcf887a.html

<http://www.winonadailynews.com/special-section/sunshine-week/>

Lebanon Express (Emily Mentzer)

Crime along the Santiam River

Things began to get interesting in our city council and city administration. The editors at the Express have long said a city the size of Lebanon (15,000) does not need an assistant city manager (which we had). We had received many anonymous tips and rumblings from current and former city employees that Ginger Allen, the assistant city manager and human resources manager, was a bully, who ruled the city with an iron fist. If you got on her bad side, it was only a matter of time before you were forced to resign or, more likely, laid off as your position was eliminated as redundant.

The city council, many of whom had sat on the council for 30 years, showed adoration and confidence in Allen. It had been long suspected that the reason city council meetings were so short was because they were making decisions outside of the public eye, either at morning coffee, at church (many of them attend the same church), or on the phone by polling.

Finally in July, a citizen brought things out in the open, calling Allen a “cancer” in the city. Strong language, yes, but it allowed us to pick up the ball and start asking hard questions. We were able to ask for more documentation. We began digging into the atmosphere and writing strong news and editorials about Allen and the council.

We followed up on leads to show that the city owed Lowe’s Distribution Center up to \$7 million, money that had not yet been paid and that was not budgeted. Although we still haven’t answered the question: how much does Lebanon owe Lowe’s and how will it get paid? We will continue to work on that, and it made us take a look at other economic development agreements. It also helped us show that, although economic development is a great thing, at what cost?

All of this showed that our city council, mayor and city manager did not necessarily have Lebanon’s best interest at heart.

Elections were held last fall. Every seat was contested. The city manager announced he would retire at the end of the year, and the plan pointed to having Allen as interim, and eventually hiring her as city manager. Worst case scenario for Lebanon would have been re-election of the

old guard. That would have meant Allen would have been a shoe-in for city manager, and the city would crumble with corruption.

Audrey Gomez took over the city beat from me, and she started with interviews of the candidates. I endorsed the new guys. Come Election Day, we had a (mostly) new city council and mayor. We went through five police chiefs in three years. When we discovered the fifth had been forced to resign because of Allen, we went after his personnel files, including reviews. We were able to show that Allen is perceived as a bully and fosters an unpleasant and hostile work environment.

Last month, the mayor announced her position was eliminated. The new council and mayor have been making strides toward more open communication with the public and the press. The atmosphere in Lebanon is one of hope and moving forward.

We had a big part to play in that. In fact, one of the old city councilors who lost the election told reporter Jennifer Moody (Democrat Herald) that the reason he lost the election was because of me and the Express. Not sure that's 100 percent true, but we definitely helped. And now we have an interim city manager from Corvallis who has a reputation for honesty and hard work. We have a national firm helping recruit and hire a new permanent city manager, who the council expects to have hired by July this year, and the chances that it will be Allen are slim to none.

Of course other things will come up in our newly elected city government, and we're not done keeping a close eye on them and the management, but having new faces and a change of guard (and attitude) is a big step for Lebanon's future to be brighter.

Mike McNally, Alex Paul and the editorial board at the Democrat Herald helped with this one, as they had excellent coverage and editorials as well, meaning two papers were shining lights instead of just one. I believe the additional coverage in the daily helped drive home that we weren't trying to pick on someone, but rather we were trying to do something good. And we did.

We made a positive impact on our city, and the comments on the links will show that.

In fact, here is one that sums it up: [dworrier](#) - April 10, 2013 12:48 pm

So good to see the new mayor giving Lebanon a strong turn-around. I hope these new actions by Aziz & council stay directed on a practical path. Also glad to see mayor address change on water & waste management.

Also Emiley, it's probably pretty safe to assume that most people who have followed what has been going on really appreciate your open & frank assessments in your reporting of the unfolding events in Leb Adm that have educated us all with valuable details. Thanks.

Additional Links:

- [About Allen's elimination](#)
- [About the chief of police's forced resignation](#)
- [About the investigation into unlawful harassment, a decision by the mayor and council without a public meeting](#)
- [Blog post by Mike McNally with more information and links](#)

Lee Central Coast Newspapers (Marga Cooley)**School Safety**

Four-part series examining school safety. It included main stories, sidebars, photos, video, an online poll, interactive Facebook commentary in which fans responded to a question on the topic and their responses were printed with some of the stories, an editorial on the issue, and graphics.

The series includes really important information that I think served our readers well.

Lincoln Journal Star (Dave Bundy)**Hunger in the Heartland**

Nebraska – the breadbasket of America – may be among the top corn- and beef-producing states in the nation, but in our midst people are going hungry. In Lincoln and Omaha, many of the hungry are easy to spot frequenting food pantries and soup kitchens. But the problem runs deeper in urban areas, and it can be even harder to see in rural parts of the state.

In an ongoing series of stories, we will tell the story of the hungry, wherever they are. We will tell personal stories and profile the struggles of real people and families. We will tackle the social issues that lie behind the hunger, and the government, nonprofit and personal efforts at work combating hunger. We will advocate on our opinion page for solutions to help our most vulnerable find enough to eat amid the bounty of the plains and work in the community to make things better.

This is from our editor's note with the most recent piece: "Today's story on food pantries at Lincoln High School and North Star High School is part of a yearlong occasional series called "["On the Edge of Hunger."](#) It started with an [introduction to the incredible food machine](#) that helps feed hundreds of local people and included a profile on [Randy Hand](#), who cooks at the People's City Mission. During the coming months, Journal Star journalists will continue to show the faces of those among us who live on the edge of hunger and those who help."

In the course of reporting, we learned that while there are some who are truly "hungry," a far greater situation is that people are "food insecure," not sure where their next meal will come from or with little access to healthy, fresh food.

We did full-page or double-truck photo packages in print with lots of photos. Online our photo galleries are linked to each story.

There's much left to do with this topic, so we intend to continue to write stories off a list we developed after the staff met with food bank executives. An editorial later this week will address the high school food pantries written about Sunday.

Less publicly, the Journal Star provides volunteer staffers at the Matt Talbot soup kitchen in Lincoln, and we cover routes for Meals on Wheels for senior citizens.

Missoulian-Ravalli Republic (Missoula, Hamilton) (Sherry Devlin)[University of Montana sexual assaults](#)

It started in mid-December with a Monday morning tip about two gang rapes allegedly committed over the weekend by members of the University of Montana football team. A few phone calls netted the first in months' worth of exclusive Missoulian stories that vastly changed the landscape in this town in which the university is a driving force.

Among those stories – that members of the football team were indeed the alleged perpetrators of the assaults; and that the Missoula County Attorney's Office declined to prosecute allegations of a similar assault by football players a year earlier, after which police met with the UM football coach to inform him that his players wouldn't be charged.

UM launched its own investigation into sexual assaults involving students, and announced a series of changes aimed at keeping students safer. But two weeks after that announcement, a Saudi Arabian exchange student accused of rape fled the country because the university alerted him to the allegations without telling police, in violation of UM's own policy.

The Missoulian broke the stories that the university had kept the allegations secret from police and that the foreign student had left the country; then, less than a month later, that the dean of students and the associate provost for international programs -- both of whom were involved in the incident -- would leave their positions.

A subsequent public records request for UM administrators' emails was particularly fruitful, yielding a testy exchange between the dean of students and UM's executive vice president, who objected to the use of the words "gang rape" rather than the university's preferred term of "date rape" to describe allegations of several men attacking a single, possibly drugged, woman.

Another story showed that same vice president inquiring whether an alleged rape victim could be punished for speaking publicly about her ordeal.

And the Missoula mayor publicly apologized to a Missoula police officer after the Missoulian revealed he chastised the officer – at the behest of the UM vice president – for sending a private email criticizing UM's handling of the rape cases.

The list of exclusives goes on.

The results?

- The University of Montana's vice president, football coach, athletic director, dean of students, lead counsel and the associate provost for international programs have either been fired or reassigned, or resigned outright.
- Women, including the daughter of an outraged police officer, who'd unsuccessfully sought prosecution for alleged sexual assaults came forward to tell their stories - corroborated by police reports - to the Missoulian.
- The U.S. Justice Department instituted a first-of-its kind investigation into how the UM police, the Missoula Police Department and the Missoula County Attorney's Office handled three years' worth of rape and sexual assault cases.
- The U.S. Education Department is investigating harassment allegations against members of the UM Grizzlies football team.
- And the NCAA is investigating unspecified allegations involving the football team.

- Two members of the football team, a running back and the starting quarterback, have been charged with rape; one entered a guilty plea in mid-September. Five students either were expelled or left the university as a result of internal UM procedures involving sexual assault cases.
- Perhaps most important, the Missoulian's reporting has sparked a widespread community conversation on issues surrounding sexual assault, with lively discussions both at community forums and in the Missoulian's editorial pages.

Missoulian reporter Gwen Florio's reporting on this issue has been groundbreaking. Rather than sit back and wait for "what happens next," she has done the street-level investigative journalism that propelled the story forward -- and shed light on the handling of sexual assault cases by the University of Montana and the city and county of Missoula.

Without her tireless dedication and dogged determination, this issue would never have come to light -- as UM and city officials had successfully kept so many allegations quiet in the past. Now, because of the Missoulian's reporting, this community is moving forward, committed to the fair and thorough investigation of sexual assault reports. A new openness pervades the university and a new slate of administrators are taking their place on campus.

Muscatine Journal (Steve Jameson)

[DiverseCity](#)

We did a progress section devoted to Progress in Diversity in our communities. Follow up stories will be done monthly between now and the end of the fiscal year.

Original description: Muscatine and the small towns around us have a large and growing minority population, primarily Hispanic but also Liberian and other ethnicities. Despite these large populations, these groups seem under-served in our community, especially in positions of leadership (government representation, business, etc.). We are going to try to find out why more in these communities aren't stepping up for government roles. Do they feel disenfranchised? Do they think they won't be able to make a difference? Do they feel like they can't win a general election despite their large and growing numbers? Is it a mistrust of government and institutions? By addressing these questions we hope to create more dialogue by everyone within the community.

Napa Valley Register (Michael Donnelly)

[Public School Funding](#)

A detailed look at the funding disparity between two neighboring school districts.

The story was the Sunday centerpiece on our winning General Excellence contest entry. It is the first time we've finished first or second in General Excellence from the California Newspaper Publishers Association at the Napa Valley Register since 1974, so we're pretty proud.

Quad-City Times (Davenport) (Jan Touney)

[Can our third-graders read?](#)

Educators are putting more and more emphasis on making sure that students, by third grade, have the critical basic skills they need to succeed. A 2010 report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation states that "reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a crucial marker in a child's educational development." An increasing number of states, including Iowa, are

considering so-called third-grade retention legislation. That would require third-graders to pass a battery of basic skills tests to be promoted to fourth grade.

Reporting premise: Are our area's third-graders prepared to meet this challenge? What needs to be done to make this happen? How are our third-graders performing now? (we have scores from standardized tests given area school districts in both Iowa and Illinois and plan to compare them to state and national averages). What are the indicators (if any) that students might run into problems with reading by third grade? Are there red flags that put them at-risk, like attendance issues or behavior issues, in the grades leading up to third? We plan to go into classrooms to find out how reading is taught. These visits can be reported through print and multimedia.

Newspaper's community service angle: How can parents, grandparents, baby sitters, volunteers, businesses, organizations help in the effort to strengthen basic language skills in students from K-3? Establish tutoring programs, reading initiatives, run quizzes and stories in print and online. Bring in a noted educator or a Mr. Rogers-type to address the community. Review reading skills apps to help parents. A major concern in reading proficiency is how much students lose over the summer break. We could concentrate on summer activities. There are many fine efforts to encourage reading in our community, but many people are not aware of them. We would put together a complete list of resources for parents. We also know that early childhood education is a priority of the United Way of the Quad-Cities Area, so perhaps there are collaborative possibilities there.

Rapid City Journal (Bart Pfankuch)

Big trouble in Box Elder

For years, rumors had swirled that there were major problems within the government of the city of Box Elder, the home of Ellsworth Air Force base about 10 miles east of Rapid City.

So this spring, after a quick-hit piece that arose when two council members called for the mayor's resignation, the Journal decided to make a play to find out whether tales of systemic dysfunction were really true. And boy, were they ever.

Using documents obtained by the Journal, tapes and minutes of past meetings, numerous interviews, and deeper coverage of community meetings, the newspaper was able to paint a portrait of a city where government officials and their process had run amok.

Stories written by reporter Joe O'Sullivan include:

- [A piece on how the former police chief](#) frequently harassed women in government, in the community and even a female state agent, but was not reprimanded, allowing the behavior to continue. When he finally left, he was allowed to quietly resign and apply for chief positions elsewhere.
- [A look at how the city broke state laws](#) by not filing required financial reports, had improper financial checks in place, and misspent taxpayer money in ways that were so muddled they could not be fully reviewed.
- [A deeper look at the history](#) of financial problems, showing how the major financial problems went back more than a decade, and how financial audits due to the state were not filed for a period of several years.

- [A final piece](#) on how dysfunction reigns at Box Elder City Hall to this day, to the point the current mayor faces allegations of improper sexual comments, and has been ordered by his council to get a psychological evaluation and then to receive treatment.

The stories, ran in March and April, have led to a renewed commitment by Box Elder to clean up its act, including possibly hiring an outside firm to come in and get the books straight. Also, voters spoke in April by not electing a former mayor who, the stories pointed out, had allowed the financial improprieties to continue for his five years in office.

Sioux City Journal (Chris Coates)

Missouri River flooding response

One of the key questions we were left with following historic Missouri River flooding in 2011 was “why?” The flood created millions of dollars in damage, resulted in substantial travel headaches and threw municipal budgets into disarray.

Many blamed the Army Corps of Engineers for releasing too much water from upper dams and reservoirs, which were inundated following heavy snows. Others criticized environmentalists who wanted to protect animal species over having flood protection, Congress for not providing enough money, farmers who fought any changes in acreage and officials from the various river states who had vastly different priorities.

In this climate, we decided to take a careful, forensic look at the major players who had a role in the disastrous 2011 flood. The result was a multi-part series that, for the first time, broke down the complex nature of the flood.

We relied on federal reports and high-placed sources familiar with the issues, including Gov. Terry Branstad, South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard and former U.S. Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D, to tell the story.

We also used maps and online reports to show the impact of the flood and offered a look at how the Army Corps of Engineers is balancing various interests to address future natural disasters.

Additional Links:

[Missouri River Navigation Faces Hurdles](#)

[Corps Progressing on Missouri River Repairs](#)

Child care in Iowa

In January 2012, six-month-old Peyton Pottebaum died at an at-home day care in Sioux City, Iowa.

An autopsy showed he had head injuries, but there wasn't enough evidence to file criminal charges in the case. The death is still under investigation.

In reporting the Pottebaum case, it got us thinking: What safeguards are in place to protect kids at-home day cares?

The result is “Safety first?” by Nate Robson. The powerful public service piece took months of investigation into Iowa’s unregistered child care providers and the state oversight that’s supposed to keep children safe.

The results are upsetting. Among the findings:

- Iowa has one inspector for every 408 in-home child facilities.
- The state has no central database for complaints against in-home providers. It’s impossible to track if a person has multiple violations.
- Inspectors visited only 44 percent of facilities in 2011, despite a mandate from Iowa lawmakers to check out at least 60 percent.

We found many of the issues are rooted in a lack of state funding, a common issue in many cash-strapped governments. State officials say they would like to inspect more facilities, if only they had more resources.

Other officials said there is a resistance by lawmakers to overburden operators or infringe on a parent’s ability to pick a care provider.

We also found child care professionals who care deeply about day care safety and think more precautions are needed.

There are no easy answers. But we hope our story shed new light on this troubling issue.

Cyber bullying

We wrote extensively about the reaction to the April 2012 suicide of Kenneth Weishuhn, 14, of Primghar, Iowa, who was harassed online for his sexual orientation. In talking about the case, our sports reporters brought up the harsh nature of many comments on high school athletic online message boards. Students – children, really – are subjected to ridicule about game performance. It often becomes personal, bordering on cruel.

Our stories examined the issue and how students, coaches and families deal with the pressure.

The coverage dovetailed with our continuing coverage of the bullying issue, which was prompted by the Weishuhn suicide. We’ve extensively reported on the fallout from the case and the international attention it caused. This coverage includes numerous opinion pieces advocating for community members to take a stand against bullying in all forms.

Additional Link:

[Everyone’s a critic of student athletes on message boards](#)

Bad bridges

In the aftermath of the August 2007 collapse of the Interstate 35W crossing in Minneapolis, there became an increased attention on bridge safety. The incident killed 13.

State and county officials across the country vowed to increase inspections and provide money for infrastructure fixes to make sure a similar incident was prevented.

Five years later, the Journal found that Iowa still has 125 bridges considered deficient. The information came through public data and state documents.

While that number is a fraction of the state's crossings – about 3 percent – we decided it was important to examine the local bridges that fall below state and federal standards.

We did this through alternative storytelling, highlighting key bridges and explaining what's wrong with each one. Our front page included a centerpiece map showcasing the various problems.

We also used an online map to show all of the bridges with problems statewide and provided state bridge documents online.

We also thought it was important to point out the logistical issues of replacing bridges and how state officials plan the process, which can often take years.

Our Opinion page also has advocated for additional investments in our infrastructure and the role of an increased state fuel tax.

Recently, the Woodbury County Board voted to create an additional tax to fund rural bridges.

Additional Link:

[Tax increase adds bridge projects to Woodbury County's 5-year plan](#)

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Gilbert Bailon)

Death on the Rails

The story began with a single death. A 14-year-old boy was fatally struck by an Amtrak train as he walked on the tracks in a St. Louis suburb last May. Attention came and went.

The accident seemed like an aberration.

But reporter Todd C. Frankel was curious to learn more about when pedestrians were killed by trains. Using Federal Railroad Administration data, disparate databases and newspaper clips, he discovered that, in fact, the teen was the 11th pedestrian since 1996 to be killed along just this one set of railroad tracks in the metro area. More importantly, he found that regulators could not even see this rash of deaths because of lax accident reporting standards. Casualties were reported only by county – making it impossible to identify hot spots.

A pattern was emerging, one that helped explain how pedestrian railroad accidents had quietly become the leading killer on the nation's tracks. More than 7,200 pedestrians have died and another 6,400 have been injured on U.S. railroad tracks since 1997. At the same time, deaths at railroad crossings dropped dramatically. The industry had made dramatic safety improvements. But pedestrian deaths continued unheeded.

Why? We confess we were skeptical initially: Walking on the tracks is stupid and it's your own fault if you get hit by a train. But Mr. Frankel's reporting changed our reaction.

After reading thousands of pages of court documents and regulatory filings, and conducting more than 90 interviews with victim's families, railroad workers, regulators and safety experts, he showed:

- Railroads for years fought efforts to provide more precise detail of where pedestrians were being killed, making it impossible to identify sites where safety improvements could reduce deaths. For example, he found a short stretch of track in the Washington, DC, suburbs where four people have died in three years.
- The rail companies admitted in litigation that they had ignored obvious signs of people walking on their rails. At two death sites in St. Louis County, he found paths that indicated people had continued to cross the tracks at those sites.
- Engineers at times failed to brake or even slow down significantly when they did spot people in the path of a train. One train failed to slow down even though an engineer on another train had warned that two girls were on the trestle ahead. The girls frantically tried to run to safety but both were killed.
- While citing Operation Lifesaver as the answer to keeping pedestrians off the tracks, the railroad industry had been cutting funding and staffing for the program.
- And while many states require railroads to take steps to prevent cattle from being killed on the tracks, they don't have similar rules requiring action to keep people from being killed. State regulators are largely powerless to address the problem. And federal regulators are stymied by laws and regulations favorable to the railroad industry. The Post-Dispatch also highlighted how communities have tried, with mixed results, to fight this danger lurking in their backyards.

The three-day Post-Dispatch series showed how this problem affected communities across the country, from California to Chicago to the Washington, D.C., suburbs.

As one former executive of a railroad industry group said, "Railroads don't want any legal exposure, so they don't accept any responsibility."

And so the deaths continue. Last year, the number of pedestrian railroad deaths were on pace to jump 10 percent over 2011.

Online the project page includes all our stories, the multimedia we produced, including a video and an interactive map of pedestrian deaths and serious injuries nationwide, and an editorial.

The Bismarck Tribune (Ken Rogers)

[Curbside recycling](#)

We plan to look at why Bismarck does not have curbside recycling. The project will include stories, graphics, live blog with city officials and streaming video of a live blog. We'll look at an earlier pilot project for curbside recycling and why it wasn't implemented, what businesses are doing in the community and what the city's master plan envisions. We'll also look at what neighboring Mandan does and at some similar-sized cities in the region. We plan to run the series in late June, or, at the latest, early July.

The Chippewa Herald (Ross Evavold)

[Prescription Drug Problem in Chippewa County](#)

TOPIC: Prescription drug abuse

REASONING: The head of our treatment facility noted that more than half of their patients were seeking treatment for opiates (prescription drugs and illegal drugs). A half-dozen years earlier, the treatment was overwhelmingly for alcohol abuse. Prescription drug abuse cuts across all age groups and income levels, and is a growing concern.

STORIES: Being told in traditional storytelling forms in print and online, augmented by photos, graphics and sidebars. As we get closer to the end of the project I will encourage people who deal with the problem to write op-ed columns for our Opinion page.

IMPACT: Too soon to tell. Verbal reaction has been good, but that's all we have to go on thus far.

Follow-up/Additional Links:

[Physical mental health a focus at Libertas treatment center](#)

[Task force focused on combating prescription abuse](#)

The Citizen (Auburn) (Jeremy Boyer)

Impact of Domestic Violence

Our three-day series (four days counting online material) on the high rate of domestic violence in our county is scheduled to run Sunday, April 21-Wednesday, April 24. Highlights will include in-depth analysis of the numbers, the root causes and efforts to reduce the rate; deeply personal stories of families that have lost loved ones to domestic violence; programs in schools and elsewhere aimed at preventing domestic violence; multimedia that will include video with interviews and a live blog Q&A on Wednesday lunch hour featuring local experts.

The Courier (Waterloo-Cedar Falls) (Nancy Newhoff)

Hunger in Northeast Iowa

While Iowa is considered the breadbasket to feeding the world, there is a very real and hidden problem of hunger in Northeast Iowa. We are a community that has 67 percent of its children on free and reduced lunch in Waterloo schools, and our most vulnerable senior population in the rural areas is really at risk. There are also approximately 50,000 people considered in "food insecurity" in the 16-county area surrounding Waterloo, meaning one parent may have a job, but it is not enough income to feed the family.

The Courier will look at this issue from many angles, looking at the whys and what is being done. But in the true sense of public journalism, we want to work on solutions. There is a real need in our community also to get a new food bank built so that more people can receive services. We are going to talk about this need and how the community can help finish the project. But we also will look at other solutions --- a push for more community gardens, a push to get farmers to be actively involved, a push for volunteers, a push for businesses to post job listings in one central location. We plan to begin running our series in late June or early July. We will include interactive graphics, videos and a community chat on the subject.

We had tremendous feedback from our series, and it resulted in the food bank raising the final money it needed to complete its building project. The Courier held a community food drive over the holidays as well.

From Publisher David Braton: We had great response to our "Hunger Series" and effort to build a new Food Bank and provide food last fall. We not only raised awareness, we raised funds for the building project and food for those in need.

The Daily Herald (Provo) (Heidi Toth)

[Probe of troubling financial practices in high school athletic programs](#)

Timpview High School football coach Louis Wong established a dynasty in Utah. Success built upon success built upon success on the field. Off the field, however, a pattern of financial abuse by Wong and his supervisors eventually cast a cloud on the program.

It was ugly: A review of financial records at the school by the Utah State Office of Education revealed a troubling pattern of lax oversight and possible unethical or even illegal behavior on the part of a number of employees, including the principal; trips for family members were paid with school funds; the coach had his personal vehicles repaired at the expense of the drivers' education program; tens of thousands of dollars have come up missing; expense reimbursements flowed like liquor in a Prohibition-era speakeasy, with little or no documentation; a private loan was serviced with tax dollars. The problems appear to extend to a community of wealthy boosters.

Preliminary reporting indicates that problems like these were not limited to Timpview High School but have been widespread across Utah schools — especially those that place a strong emphasis on athletics. At least two coaches have resigned since the Wong incident broke. Schools and school districts have been warned by the state to get their financial houses in order. A number of laws appear to have been broken, from ethics to criminal statutes. A pattern of sloppy and ineffective management practices have emerged at the school district level.

While investigations are yet in progress, we will address the larger question of how Utah got to this point. How is it that mismanagement could be so widespread? And who failed? Certainly the local high school and school district in the Wong matter did. But why? Who failed to put accounting systems and procedures in place to monitor the money?

Plenty of others in Utah failed, too. How did the state Legislature fail in its duty to conduct performance audits of school financials? How did the Utah State Auditor fail? A preliminary look shows evidence that the Auditor spotted problems but then failed to follow up with the proper offices charged with oversight. It's not my job, he said. How did the state Office of Education fail? Or the governor?

We will probe all these angles to show how a systemic malady of poor personnel management and financial accountability gave rise to corruptions both large and small across the state of Utah. In the process, we will touch on the upcoming election and seek points of view -- and answers -- from candidates.

This will be a fast-moving story. The case of Timpview High's coach Wong continues to develop. He was fired by the school board but is now making an appeal. He won't be coaching but he may yet be teaching in the school district. Our investigation will use the Wong case as a springboard to look at a statewide problem. This project's sweep will extend far beyond the immediate community and will propose answers. We'll use all the tools at our command, from print to multimedia. Our object is to shine a light on the underlying issues and serve as a catalyst for reform.

Addition: [Continuing coverage: Louis Wong](#)

The Daily News (Longview) (John Markon)**Conflicted Over Coal**

This is our major News Desk project and was undertaken in response to proposals to build and operate three coal export terminals at locations within our circulation area on the Columbia River. A \$600 million facility has been proposed for Longview with two others of lesser size near Port Westward on the Oregon side of the river. Environmental groups have been quick to raise objections while the terminals are favored by both local business interests and labor organizations. We've already seen many claims and counter-claims on the impact these terminals would make on the quality of life in our area and, primarily from the environmentalists, on the world as a whole.

Our goal is to educate our readerships (and ourselves) on coal – including, but not limited to, what some of the partisans are putting in front of the public. We don't plan to skirt environmental questions concerning coal dust and the effect of long coal trains on regional traffic, but we're also getting into larger questions including where and how the coal is mined, the source of the demand and how long coal might be reasonably expected to be used as a prime energy source in countries other than the United States.

One of our first installments, for example, addressed the question of whether or not enough world demand existed for coal to make all three terminal proposals – plus a fourth terminal that would be sited in the northern part of Washington near Bellingham – commercially viable. While this series has begun, it does not have a planned stop date. The permitting process is likely to be protracted and extensive and the flexible nature of the series will allow us to schedule new topics and updates as the need arises. Series installments carry an identifying logo and will be collected on our website and maintained for readers who'd like to see all the content in one place. I fully anticipate running installments of "Conflicted Over Coal" into 2013 and 2014.

The Journal Times (Racine) (Rob Golub)**Mental Illness**

Description: Mental Illness: the Power, the System, and Success was a nine-day series. The first several days brought us close to personal stories demonstrating the power of the illness. Next, we journeyed inside the system, with photos and coverage of a local hospital wing for those in crisis and descriptions of what's working and not working. Finally, the series focuses on the path to success, with a report on efforts to improve legislation and the story of one woman who found peace.

Local impact: The impact has been strong. We've been told more people have attended groups and contacted professionals for help in the wake of the series. We've received a great many letters and comments praising the series. The new director of the local mental illness advocacy group, NAMI Racine, tells us he was inspired to take the job partly because of our series. I'll accept an award on our behalf from NAMI Wisconsin this weekend at their annual convention – it's the NAMI Wisconsin Media Award for 2013. Our local representatives, including state Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, have a growing interest in mental illness issues. A reporter even got ambushed with a bear-hug by a committee chair over the series!

Storytelling: We told strong, personal feature stories, with powerful photos and video, while taking care to protect the privacy of sources coping with mental illness. We collected our coverage into a single page at journaltimes.com/mental-illness. We left stories open to

comments as appropriate to engage the public. We integrate Twitter, Facebook and other platforms into everything we do.

Schools and Energy Efficiency

We are following the energy efficiency project as it moves forward, with a story regarding lighting upgrades earlier this year providing an update on the project:

The district is still doing work, with a large portion to be done over the summer. To compare energy savings, we will follow up on this next year when data will exist comparing the last year without the energy efficient items in place to the first year with them. In the meantime, we will be watching progress on this and covering developments.

The Ledger Independent (Maysville) (Mary Ann Kearns)

Impact of manufacturing plant closure

Additional Links:

[The history of browning manufacturing](#)

[Closure of EIA Browning Plants Looming](#)

[Despite concerns residents ready to move forward](#)

[Industrial outlook still good in Mason County](#)

[Video](#)

The Post-Star (Glens Falls) (Ken Tingley)

Who Takes Care of Us?

Publication – May 1-31 – Four parts spread out over four Sundays.

Part 1 -- The Numbers – Baby Boomer stats on an aging generation. How many are in nursing homes now, how much growth will take place and how many people and homes will be needed to take care of them. This part will establish what the problem is. Lots of stats, numbers graphics, pie charts, bar graphs all would work. – To be assigned

Sidebar – Nursing homes as growth industries – Interviews with private sector CEOs. Are there other models. – To be assigned

Sidebar – How much do nursing homes cost.

Online/Interactive – Interactive numbers charts online.

Part 2

The People – Close up look at the integral players in the nursing home. Can we follow around an aide for a day, a LPN, activities coordinator? Show us what it is like in a nursing home. To get the access, we could grant anonymity about where we went in some instances. Find a family that had to grapple with putting a loved one in a nursing home. – Meg or Doug

Sidebar vignettes on key players in nursing home.

Video of day in life at a nursing home (activities maybe).

Part 3

How do we pay for it? The state of Medicare, how it works, its sustainability for the long term – To be assigned

Sidebar on How you can protect your money and get it to loved ones – To be assigned.

Sidebar on nursing home insurance – To be assigned.

Sidebar on bed tax you pay to stay in nursing home – To be assigned.

Online component?

Part 4

The nightmare of nursing homes. Is there abuse, neglect and how do you fight it. – To be assigned.

Sidebar - What is the future model; What has to change? How will we take care of our seniors? – To be assigned

Sidebar on hiring of aides and LPNs. – Jamie Munks

The Sentinel (Carlisle) (George Spohr)**[Air Quality](#)****The Sentinel (Hanford) (Jackie Kaczmarek)****[Election 2012](#)**

Our Public Service Journalism for FY2013 featured the election in 2012. We had comprehensive print and online coverage, and are being honored by the California Newspaper Publishers Association for this project.

The Southern Illinoisan (Carbondale) (Gary Metro)**[Balance of Power at Southern Illinois University](#)**

The Southern Illinoisan examined the struggle for power among the leaders of Southern Illinois University, the state's second-largest university and our region's essential economic engine. The power struggle is continuing and may result, some say will result, in the termination of the SIU president.

We told the story digital-first when warranted by events. Some examples:

- Fiery press conference with the SIU president and trustees' chairman publicly sparring with heated words;
- Legislation proposed to split SIU Carbondale and SIU Edwardsville into separate universities;
- Dismissal of three incumbent trustees seeking reappointment by the governor.

Our efforts through social media, most notably Facebook, built an audience for the project.

The watchdog aspect, the meat of the project, was told simultaneously online and in print, which teased to the online body of work.

The project is continuing as much as the turmoil in SIU leadership. There are calls for the resignations of both SIU President Glenn Poshard and Trustees Chairman Roger Herrin, who are the main combatants. Lawmakers are looking into the role Gov. Pat Quinn played in handpicking Herrin as chairman, and purported attempts to micromanage the board through the removal of

experienced trustees and attempted replacements with political allies – blocked by the State Senate in an unprecedented action.

At present, the trustees lack three members with still-serving incumbents refusing to meet recently in a scheduled meeting chaired by Herrin. There also is pending legislation calling for changes in the selection process for trustees, a behind-the-scenes task for the governor which we've fully described. Herrin and Poshard both behaved badly in public and are not assured of staying in their posts as the fallout continues. The outlook is most gloomy for Poshard, who has failed to stem a declining enrollment trend or effectively deal with ethical lapses (including claims of plagiarism and nepotism) that have marred his presidency and been covered by The Southern.

Our coverage has been ahead of the curve and copied by our competitors. Reader reaction has been strong. We've printed letters to the editor calling for leadership changes and raising concerns about the kind of leadership their tax dollars support.

The Times and Democrat (Orangeburg) (Lee Harter)

Crime and Credibility

The public service project we outlined in 2012 gave way to "Crime and Credibility," an effort that absorbed our staff and produced top work over an extended period. Our submission in the state contest for public service earned a first-place award.

Judges said of the public service project "Crime and credibility": "The Times and Democrat staff must be applauded for their efforts to uncover and report the escalating mismanagement at S.C. State University and to keep the public informed. Simultaneously, The Times and Democrat spent the year fighting with uncooperative officials for information about increasing crime in Orangeburg County."

Of particular note, Dale-Linder Altman's role in the S.C. State University aspect of the project earned her the inaugural South Carolina Press Association "Assertive Journalism Award" for daily journalists, the individual equivalent of the state FOI award for newspapers.

After the 2012 project letter...

After a year that produced a presidential resignation, major investigations, firings of top officials and legislative efforts to oust or revamp the board of trustees, the South Carolina State University story continues in 2013. And it continues to be bigger than one person, though Staff Writer Dale Linder-Altman is on the front line.

She and the staff reported on major stories in the second quarter, from a guilty plea by a former university police chief to federal corruption charges against a former trustee chairman and an associate, from an interim president trying to cope with a fiscal crisis to a push by students and alumni for her to become the permanent president, from a race for the board that features 15 candidates seeking six seats to the present board refusing to delay its presidential search process and, in the process, rejecting the interim president as a candidate for the position.

Good Friday brought an example of the relentless nature of the story: The board search committee announced three presidential finalists even as reporting on candidate hearings before the Legislature was ongoing. In response to the board's action, the interim president

announced that she has been ordered by a leading accreditation agency to explain from her official position the validity or lack thereof in media reporting about board interference in school operations.

The Times of Northwest Indiana (Munster) (Bill Nangle)

Children in Peril

Following disclosure of problems with the Indiana Department of Children's Services by The Times and Indianapolis Star, major changes were instituted. This included the resignation of the agency's director and a legislative oversight committee adopting a roadmap of recommendations to improve services by the agency.

The outgoing director had managed to place the agency \$3 million under budget but did so at the expense of services to children and their families. Programs were cut and contact for help from the agency funneled through Indianapolis rather than locally. The Times led coverage of the impact from such a policy.

Today, a new director – a former juvenile judge from Northwest Indiana – is righting wrongs in the agency and working closely with local officials to craft a program that fully meets the needs to help children in Indiana. Reporter Marisa Kwiatkowski won a national SPJ award for this project.

The Times-News (Twin Falls) (Autumn Agar)

Help Wanted

Between Aug. 19 and Sept. 30, the Times-News published an eight-part series examining issues facing our area work force.

Each story was paired with a supporting editorial.

The series, titled "Help Wanted," was written in response to complaints from local business owners that they must lower their standards to hire in the Magic Valley – our coverage area.

It was an important time for the Times-News to shine a spotlight on the challenges of our work force. Chobani, the Greek yogurt company, opened an almost 1 million square foot facility in Twin Falls that summer. The plant now employs 600 people and has plans to expand. With their opening, the community and the state are waking up to the economic opportunities that exist in southern Idaho. However, our work force issues could be the barrier to that economic development.

We approached the series as a team, with each reporter taking a different angle on the issue.

Week 1: Who's Minding the Store?

Employers admitted they easily found minimum wage and unskilled labor in the Magic Valley, but had to go elsewhere to find managers and employees to fill the higher-wage, skilled positions.

Story came with two sidebars: 1. A list of our largest employers; 2. A stat-heavy story about the lack of degreed workers in the Magic Valley.

Week 2: Location, Location, Location (brain drain)

We tracked down valedictorians and salutatorians from years past and asked them why they didn't come home after college. Instead, they took jobs in Boise and other cities that offered higher salaries and wider social and cultural opportunities.

Week 3: Students and roadblocks

We examined the barriers that keep many Magic Valley residents from going to college. The biggest barrier is paying for it or figuring out how to navigate the system when their parents didn't go to college and don't know how to help.

Week 4: Matchmaking and the Magic Valley

It's not easy getting highly qualified employees to move to the Magic Valley. Not everyone wants to live in a remote, ag-centered community. Some skilled positions stay open for more than a year while companies recruit. Employers and recruiters talked to us about what kind of people are willing to move here and what they do to get them here.

Week 5: Modern Agriculture and the Work Force

There are lots of jobs in agriculture, but they aren't all manual labor jobs in the field. Farmers need degrees in science and genetics to make it these days. They need computer skills and business acumen. We talked to farmers about what local students could be doing now to prepare themselves to succeed in modern-day agriculture.

Week 6: Transportation Tribulations

Transportation is the biggest barrier for many workers to success. There is no public transportation and few taxis in the Magic Valley. If you don't have a car or if your car breaks down, workers have a difficult time getting to work.

Out of the 10 most populated cities in Idaho, Twin Falls is the only one without a public transit system. And the city's efforts to start one have stalled for lack of funding and political will.

Week 7: Refugee population has untapped potential

We interviewed refugees with degrees in math, physics and biology from their home countries whose credentials don't translate when they are relocated to Idaho. We looked at what transitional programs are available to those refugees and what local employers are doing to keep them here once they have the credentials for employment.

Week 8: Job Seekers Get Creative

Help Wanted was originally planned as a seven-part series, but as we published the stories we heard from so many people who were looking for work. They asked us to do an additional story about the search for work. We met a lot of mid-career professionals who were unemployed and showed the creative ways they were networking and searching for work in the Magic Valley.

Addition: [Brownfields](#)**The World (Coos Bay) (Clark Walworth)****[Growing Up Poor In Coos County](#)**

In an area where the unemployment rate regularly tops 11 or 12 percent, lack of living-wage jobs is the primary issue. About 70 percent of children in the Bay Area live in poverty. How does that shape our community identity for the future? How does it affect their life prospects? What should the community do?

Winona Daily News (Brian Voerding)**Sunshine Week 2013**

The Sunday to Sunday series ran from March 10-16 and looked at a number of public-records stories, from a review of records on school safety (everything from busing to bullies), a look at the hidden costs of a county commissioner, an investigation into whether area farmers are using subsidies appropriately, and lots of public-service information for our readers on how to do records requests of their own.

We had overwhelming positive feedback from the community--especially from our crustiest readers. We found that government at all levels was instantly more responsive when they learned what we were working on. In part because of our work, Winona County is considering a process to streamline data requests to make them less confusing. And readers told us how empowered they felt to do document requests of their own once we taught them how.

Most important was the work we did on reporting what the public can't get. That culminated in a first-person story written by reporter Nathan Hansen showing that it's impossible to tell what hazardous and potentially life-threatening chemicals move through Winona by rail--and how our first responders and emergency management folks don't even know.

Flood Anniversary

A weeklong series on the fifth anniversary of the disastrous flood of 2007. It was a strong, forward-thinking series that ran last August, and allowed us to tell lots of new stories about the disaster five years later. The community feedback was excellent, and included a number of people submitting their stories, which we ran as part of the coverage.

Wisconsin State Journal (John Smalley)**Doctor Discipline**

When it comes to serious discipline against doctors, Wisconsin consistently ranks near the bottom among states, according to the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen. Yet the Wisconsin Medical Examining Board managed to reprimand doctors who wrote questionable "sick notes" for protesters at the state Capitol in 2011 -- the same sanction the board routinely gives to physicians whose errors and/or negligence frequently cause patients to die or undergo serious harm.

State Journal health reporter David Wahlberg set out to understand why the Wisconsin medical board ranks so low. He inspected files for dozens of complaints to the medical board or to a separate state agency that mediates malpractice claims. He also looked at lawsuits in those and other cases. But to review all 218 cases leading to discipline by the medical board from 2010 to 2012, he had to create his own database. He read each disciplinary order, available online in narrative form, summarizing and labeling each one in a spreadsheet.

The analysis found that over half of the cases resulted in reprimands, including at least 36 cases involving serious injury and 15 cases involving patient deaths. Public Citizen and other groups don't consider reprimands to be serious discipline. In one case resulting in a reprimand, a doctor doing a routine procedure ordered an epinephrine injection to stop bleeding for Nicole Johnson, a 35-year-old mother of four, but at a dose 100 times too high. Johnson died from suffocation after the excess dose caused fluid to fill her lungs. In another case, a physician used a new medical device that he had never operated with before (and with which he had received no

training) to help remove a spleen from a six-year-old girl. The “blender-like” device cut through several major blood vessels and the bowel, causing a medical emergency that left the child with permanent brain damage.

The series also looked at cases in which doctors weren’t disciplined at all. It documented a trail of minor disciplinary actions for some doctors who repeatedly made medical errors involving serious injury or patient deaths. In one case, the physician under investigation simply moved to a neighboring state and continued to practice medicine. Leaders of the medical board said a lack of money and authority prevent them from meting out more serious discipline, a problem critics feel may attract sub-standard physicians to the state. Despite the board’s difficulties, a recent reorganization reduced its 10.5 attorneys, paralegals, and investigators to 7.7 positions, officials said.

Hundreds of people joined a live chat with Wahlberg on the last day of the series. He received many calls and emails from patients (some of them doctors themselves) wanting to bring public attention to alleged malpractice experiences. Some patients also contacted him to learn how to file complaints against their doctors. At its first meeting after my series ran, the medical board talked about needed changes, more resources and training for members and staff. The board has scheduled a retreat in May to discuss many of the topics raised by the series.

David Wahlberg's "Doctor Discipline" series has had an impact on public policy in Wisconsin. The state Medical Board is looking to change its policies and procedures, in direct response to some of the issues that David reported on and brought to light for the first time.

Nursing Homes

As Wisconsin prepared to make nursing home inspection reports available online, State Journal health reporter David Wahlberg requested and analyzed reports for Dane County’s nursing homes over a three-year period. Five facilities received nine of the most serious violations for some alarming incidents. Among them: A 95-year-old woman died after a morphine overdose; a 75-year-old woman fell 26 times before breaking her pelvis; another elderly woman was found outside, shaking from the cold and rain, after falling out of her wheelchair.

The findings came as lawmakers and regulators were easing up on the industry. State laws passed in 2011 capped malpractice awards against nursing homes and eliminated state fines when federal fines are imposed for the same problem. Nursing homes are seeking state incentives to build new facilities with home-like environments, like those exemplified by the Green House model. The series highlights other improvements the industry is making and offered guidance on how to choose a good nursing home.