

grassroots editor



*A journal
for newspeople*

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2012 Golden Quill & Golden Dozen Awards



Editorial skills and courage exemplified by winners
of the ISWNE contest

and the

The 37th Annual Gene Cervi Award

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2012 Golden Quill contest and Eugene Cervi Award

This year's Golden Quill winner is only the third Canadian to win the award, joining Jim MacNeill (1994) and Paul MacNeill (2002). Vernon Oickle was born and raised in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, where he continues to reside with his wife, Nancy, and their two sons.

After completing high school in 1979, Oickle moved to Lethbridge, Alberta, where he studied journalism. Upon his graduation in 1982, he returned to his hometown to begin his newspaper career at *The Liverpool Advance*. Since then, he has won many regional, national and international awards for writing and photography.

By the time he left *The Advance* in 1994, Oickle had been appointed editor and had helped the paper become one of Canada's best weeklies in its circulation class. Today, he is the editor of the nationally award-winning newspaper *The Lunenburg County Progress Bulletin*, based in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. He is the author of 17 books, including four novels.

ISWNE received 68 Golden Quill entries from 38 individuals this year. The 12 best are gathered together as the Golden Dozen. The summer issue of *Grassroots Editor* traditionally contains these editorials along with comments from the judge. It is an opportunity to see the quality of commentary in the weekly press.

Tim Waltner, the recipient of the 2012 Eugene Cervi Award, grew up on a family farm in southeastern South Dakota. His formal education began in a one-room country school two miles from the farm. He began working for the *Freeman Courier* in 1972 as a printer's devil and became editor the following year. After spending two years in Ohio, Waltner returned to the *Courier* in 1977 and ended up buying the paper seven years later.

According to one person who nominated Waltner this year, "If ISWNE's award for public service through community journalism hadn't already been named for Eugene Cervi, it could be named the Tim Waltner Award."

The Golden Dozen

The judge's comments & About the judge

By Lyle E. Harris Sr. Page 3

Golden Quill Winner School board has lost credibility

By Vernon Oickle, Editor, *The Lunenburg County Progress Bulletin*, July 12, 2011 .. Page 4

An explanation from the winner

By Vernon Oickle, Editor, *The Lunenburg County Progress Bulletin* Page 5

Protecting athletes' brains: One small test has big ImPACT

By Melissa Hale-Spencer, Editor, *The Altamont Enterprise*, March 17, 2011 Page 6

Politics of abortion were decided A LONG TIME AGO

By Paul MacNeill, Publisher, *Eastern Graphic*, November 30, 2011 Page 7

Is this what we really want?

By Missy Layfield, Editor, *Island Sand Paper*, January 21, 2011 Page 8

Democracy Arrested

By Ross Connelly, Editor, *The Hardwick Gazette*, December 7, 2011 Page 9

Teacher Fund Scam

By Robert B. Trapp, Managing editor, *Rio Grande SUN*, September 29, 2011 Page 10

Decide for yourself what words are offensive

By George Brown, Editor, *Ponoka News*, January 19, 2011 Page 11

Time for new technology

By Peter Weinschenk, Editor, *The Record-Review*, November 9, 2011 Page 12

Hear no evil: Cape Elizabeth School Board clamps down on public comment

By Mo Mehlsak, Editor, *The Forecaster*, July 1, 2011 Page 13

Why we printed 'cop killer's' obit

By Jim Painter, Editor, *West Valley View*, May 13, 2011 Page 14

The Occupy Movement has a purpose

By Joan Plaxton, Editor and publisher, *The Valleyview Valley Views*, November 30, 2011 Page 15

We're facing an environmental Ponzi scheme

By David Giffey, Editor, *Home News*, November 2, 2011 Page 16

The Gene Cervi Award

Tim Waltner and letters of nomination Page 17

Golden Quill Winners

1961-2012

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

The judge's comments

By Lyle E. Harris Sr.

Who will tell the people? In reading the many entries I was impressed, indeed, very impressed, with the number of editors who took on the key issue of challenging governmental agencies that tried to prevent public participation in public matters or who put up road blocks to the press in covering public issues. The Golden Quill Award to Vernon Oickle is a prime example of the passion and persistence of an editor who was determined to tell the people what the local school board was doing to block and control information about its work. In the end, the board was fired and the provincial legislature gave more power to the Minister of Education to handle such problems. Oickle told the people and caused the change.

From the days when the local news came largely from the local newspaper, radio and TV station to the unbelievable blur of constant "information" passed off as news in our online world, we must have, to survive as a functioning democracy, reliable, credible and dependable local news. Many weekly editors are working hard to fill that role with additional editorial commentary to challenge the people to think about the values they may hold at home. The entries this year examined the failure of control over federal funds for teachers, explained the need for new technology to stop water pollution from dairy farms, fought for an already approved library expansion project to be completed, called for changes in sports to prevent head injuries with long-lasting damage, and struck hard at censorship attempts in literature and music. That is what editors should do and they did it.

The ISWNE states its purpose well and

these writers met those standards: "Encouraging the writing of editorials or staff-written opinion pieces that identify local issues that are or should be of concern to the community, offer an opinion, and support a course of action."

The many community editors who submitted entries this year showed overall a respect for their craft by taking the time — many long and demanding hours — to continue the historic role they have of not just delivering the news, but putting their personal voice in ink on a printed page and calling for action on important public matters. That takes passion, persistence and stubbornness to succeed. That's how the people are told.

Thank you for allowing me to be your judge.

Lyle E. Harris Sr. can be contacted at leh98284@yahoo.com.

About the judge

Lyle E. Harris Sr., journalism professor emeritus, Western Washington University, was a reporter for some years before entering academic life. He was with UPI in Montana and Utah and later was a business reporter for *The Evening Star* in Washington, D.C. Harris was a fellow at the Washington Journalism Center, Washington, D.C.,

and later was director of the business journalism program at the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, where he earned his Ph.D. At Western, he was a member of the Canadian-American Studies Program and did comparative work on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the First Amendment as related to the press.



Lyle E. Harris Sr.

Thanks to the preliminary judges

Lyle would like to thank the preliminary judges who helped sort out the top entries from the 68 submitted. From that group of 19, he then chose the 12 winners.

Floyd McKay, journalism professor emeritus at Western Washington University, was a Pacific Northwest journalist for more than 30 years. He is a Nieman Fellow and currently contributes to Crosscut.com, a Seattle-based news website.

Joan Connell is a prize-winning journalist, educator and editorial consultant specializing in social media and ethics. She was executive producer for *Opinions* at MSNBC.com and was web editor at

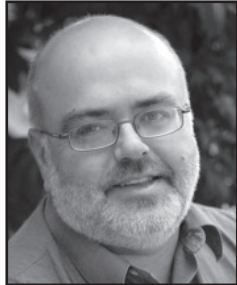
The Nation magazine. She currently teaches journalism at Western Washington University.

Lance Dickie is an editorial writer at *The Seattle Times*.

Cliff Rowe is journalism professor emeritus at Pacific Lutheran University. He is a former reporter in Portland, Chicago and at the *Seattle Times*.

Peggy Watt, chair of the WWU Department of Journalism, is a former senior editor with *PC World Magazine*, where she remains a contributing editor. She has more than 25 years experience in newspaper, magazine and online reporting and editing.

Golden Quill Winner



Vernon Oickle

Editor,
*The Lunenburg County
Progress Bulletin*

353 York Street
Bridgewater, NS B4V 3K2

July 12, 2011

*Vernon Oickle also won a
Golden Dozen award in
2009.*

School board has lost credibility

The elected South Shore Regional School Board has lost credibility and at the very least, the provincial minister of Education must step in and read them the riot act. At the most, she could remove members from office, but their actions must be carefully scrutinized.

As reported elsewhere in this week's issue, the tactics of many board members, while perhaps not breaking any legislation or bylaws, most certainly have crossed the threshold of fair and ethical behaviour, and in doing so have destroyed their credibility thus making it impossible for the public to have faith in the board's decision-making ability. It also raises serious questions about past decisions, a fact that does not bode well for the members' management of a \$74 million budget.

While Department of Education officials have remained silent on our requests for comment on this serious matter, there is sufficient proof that a major breach in ethics has occurred within the local board and it behooves the department to intervene. Instead, our efforts to get the department on the record have been met with a resounding "no comment." That is not acceptable.

When any member of the public is elected to serve on a taxpayer-funded agency of the government, such as a school board, they take an oath to be fair and accountable. Those individuals are expected to make well-informed decisions that are based on facts. They are also expected to make decisions that are in the best interest of the entire constituency they represent — in this case, Lunenburg and Queens counties — not to react on personal agendas fuelled by whatever motivates them, be it politics or protection of their own territory.

Clearly, in the case of the review process that was soundly defeated by the board earlier this spring in a plot that smacks of collusion, that process has not been followed. As a result, the board's entire planning process has been thrown into disarray and the future fallout from these actions — which could be significant — is not clear.

When 10 of 12 members of the board voted on March 30 to not put any schools under review for "possible" closure without even receiving the staff's identification reports on which the decision was supposed to be based, we knew something smelled fishy. We wondered how could a school board so hastily make a decision of such importance that dealt with millions of dollars and the education of thousands of children without even officially accepting the reports that were compiled by staff, an effort that took time and cost money?

Through the dogged determination of our education reporter, Stacey Colwell, we have now been able to expose the dirty laundry of under-the-table politics through a freedom of information request. It's not a pretty picture as a binder full of e-mails between school board members in the weeks leading up to the contro-

versial decision reveals proposals for secret meetings, paranoia, arm-twisting, lobbying and backroom deals — some apparently before the identification reports on which the decision was supposed to be based were even presented to board members — and much without the knowledge of staff, the elected chairman or the vice-chairman.

Incidentally, chairman Elliott Payzant and vice-chairman Gary Mailman were the only two members to vote against the motion not to proceed to the review process. Was it a coincidence they were excluded from the wheeling and dealing? We think not.

In preparation for the vote, the elected members had initially received draft identification reports a week before the March 30 public meeting. We would expect such, as it's important that board members be fully prepared to discuss, debate and even argue the "facts." The key word here being 'facts.' Under proper procedure, each report was to be presented, discussed, debated and received individually at that meeting but that did not happen as the process was stopped before it even got started.

We now know that the effort was derailed by members of the board who schemed and planned their strategy well before the meeting and before the reports were officially tabled. In some minds, the ends may have justified the means but what if this type of scheming had worked the other way and members had voted to close schools without carefully studying the facts?

This is not how publicly accountable boards are legislated to work and while the Department of Education has dragged its feet in dealing with this issue (publicly at least), it's time for the minister to lift her feet and at the very least censure the board for its handling of this important issue. The members of the board who shot down this review process may have won this battle, but it's a shallow victory for they have fired a shot across the bow of the entire education system of this region, a shot that could very well have long-term repercussions for every student.

That is not good management and it is not being publicly accountable.

So while the members were quick to celebrate their "victory" in fact, they have fallen flat on their mandate. They have crossed ethical lines that ought not be crossed when dealing with the future of our children and taxpayer money.

It's true that the review process is an emotional effort for some communities and it could very well have led to some school closures, but how on earth could any school board member vote with a clear conscience without knowing all the facts, without fully debating the issues and without full public disclosure? In fact, they can't and they shouldn't.

*Vernon Oickle can be contacted at
editorial@lighthouse.ns.ca.*

FROM THE JUDGE

Vernon Oickle and his newspaper, *The Lunenburg County Progress Bulletin*, spent months digging into why and how the local school board failed to inform the public about its review process on potential school closures and ignored its duty to engage the public in discussion about the issue. The newspaper was attacked and supported for the editorials opposing the board's action. The paper's education reporter filed a series of freedom of information requests for the board's reports and emails involving its actions. It took months to get the relevant emails and the board wanted to charge hundreds of dollars for the records. The paper prevailed and did not have to pay for the information because the emails were of vital public interest.

The outcome of Oickle's battle was that the board was fired by the Department of Education. Additionally, the provincial legislature created additional powers for the Minister of Education to review and remove school boards.

This story shows the passion and determination of a weekly newspaper editor to take on a major public issue in a small community and carry it to victory over a recalcitrant school board and serve the public's right to know. This is journalism at its finest!

An explanation from the winner

By Vernon Oickle

As experienced editors know, a good story often starts with a "feeling." So it was with a story dug up by our education reporter last year that ultimately led to an entire school board being fired by the government of Nova Scotia.

Some background is essential to understanding the issue. Our local school board consists of 12 members — 11 elected and one appointed by the provincial government. The board is mandated to deliver education to roughly 7,440 students in a region in Nova Scotia just south of Halifax. With a staff of 42 administrators and 525 teachers, the board manages an annual budget of approximately \$74 million.

Like most other places across North America, rural Nova Scotia is suffering the ill effects of a major population decline attributed to several factors including the aging baby boomers, a loss of the traditional resource-based industries and the lure of rich jobs in the oil fields of Western Canada. As a result of the young childbearing population migrating from rural communities, school enrolments have drastically fallen over the past two decades, leaving many aging school buildings in smaller communities functioning well below capacity.

That, combined with the provincial government's austerity program in recent years, has resulted in major reductions in education funding, which in turn has led school boards to cut operations and close schools, an often emotional and volatile process pitting school boards against residents in the communities of the targeted facilities. According to legislation in Nova Scotia, the process to close schools takes a year during which time the board and community must undertake a review process designed to examine all aspects of the targeted facilities including staff, programs, the physical structure and the school's role in the community. The results of this review can lead to many changes including realignment and amalgamations, renovations and expansions, the elimination or addition of programs, as well as the always-explosive possibility of closure.

This brings us full circle. Our year-long and tumultuous relationship with the school board started in March 2011 when members voted to abandon their plan to review up to a dozen schools for possible closure or amalgamation, with virtually no public debate, and then refused to release the formal reports on which their decisions were expected to be based.

The often-heated journey began when our education reporter, Stacey Colwell, returned to our offices the day following the meeting during which this decision not to proceed was made. We discussed the issue and the implications of the decision, not so much that the schools would not be reviewed, but because the board had acted irresponsibly and outside the realm of a provincially legislated process designed to make the public part of the effort. It was clear that the proceedings did not hold muster and our reporter was clearly disturbed by what he had observed throughout the proceedings. Admittedly, the entire affair smelled fishy and as we waded through the muck, eventually we uncovered a long inventory of unseemly backroom dealings instigated by several individuals and largely designed to

protect schools in their own communities. This protectionist deal making and collusion that was exposed through our efforts ultimately led to Nova Scotia's minister of Education firing all 12 members of the South Shore Regional School Board last December.

From the beginning of this process, we took a tough stand against the school board, repeatedly taking them to task for not meeting their democratically elected mandate and for breaching ethical and legislated bylaws. Our efforts were both supported and attacked by the public, often drawing the ire of board supporters who accused us of being on a witch hunt or creating a scandal just to sell papers. Those who argued we created the controversy also attacked us because they believed the board's decision not to proceed with the review process went against the editor's (my) agenda. This notion is absolutely false, but according to many board supporters, it was and still is their belief that the sole objective behind our paper's efforts was to see the closure of small schools in favour of larger, consolidated schools. What these people failed to realize or refused to accept was that we undertook this effort to expose a serious abdication of duty by the elected board members and the lack of public process, not to single out any one member or members or to further any cause.

Ultimately, the board's inappropriate actions — the same ones that we targeted — led to the schools being kept open without the legislated reviews, which is exactly what their supporters wanted and which is what pitted us, the paper, against them. Despite the landslide of personal and often scathing attacks, we pushed on. Following the ill-fated March decision, our education reporter filed a series of freedom of information requests not only seeking the reports, but also asking for board member and staff e-mails leading up to that decision. He also wrote a front-page story about the board's lack of transparency regarding the matter and I wrote editorials about the same, chastising the board members for engaging in covert tactics to further their own personal agendas at the expense of local children. I also repeatedly called for them to be investigated by the provincial Department of Education, for some members to be sanctioned and, ultimately, for their subsequent firing.

By May, our newspaper received the reports we sought and we followed up with a series of stories and editorials based on their content, which included important public information such as staff recommendations regarding specific school amalgamations and possible closures. It was clear that if personal agendas had not gotten in the way and if the board had carried through on its democratic mandate as set out in provincial law, the reviews and future decisions stemming from those reviews would have had major ramifications for the local education system, both positive and negative.

Meanwhile, we spent months haggling with the board's freedom of information officer over the requested e-mails that were sent on board equipment using a service paid for by the taxpayer. To start, the board had wanted to charge many hundreds of dollars for the records — a cost we argued was not necessary as the information, as generated by elected representatives working on the taxpayer dime, was clearly in the public

continued on page 10



Melissa Hale-Spencer

Editor,
The Altamont Enterprise

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March 17, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

Melissa Hale-Spencer's editorial does a powerful job of taking a national sports problem — concussions — and showing how it is relevant to local readers. She argues well for the means of protecting athletes and gives specific details that involved two local students who suffered head injuries. In one case, a young woman's hope to join the Army may be dashed by concussions she got from basketball games. Hale-Spencer used the student's heart-wrenching words to force the issue home: "But my brain is busted so I don't know if they'll want me."

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

Protecting athletes' brains

One small test has big ImPACT

Our brains, more than any other part of our bodies, define who each of us are — how we think, what we are able to do, the way we configure our lives. Our brains are vulnerable and worth protecting.

Vessels filled with fluid surround the brain. If someone hits her head hard, her brain compresses into her skull and then bounces back and hits the other side of her skull. This is known as a concussion.

About one in 10 people who suffer a concussion lose consciousness. Other symptoms include being dizzy, throwing up, losing balance, getting confused or irritable, being sensitive to noise or light, having headaches, and losing memory.

Brain injuries that don't rise to the level of a concussion can cause damage, too. Performing autopsies on football players who have died violently, scientists have discovered tau proteins, indicating chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE. The protein is released when nerve tissue in the brain is jarred. Repeated hits to the head, without time for repair, can lead to erratic behavior.

A large number of children and teenagers get concussed playing team sports. In the United States, as many as 3.8 million concussions related to sports and recreation occur each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has launched a program called "Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports."

It's something we all need to pay attention to. This month, in the midst of a semi-final sectional basketball game, a Berne-Knox-Westerlo senior fell to the floor. Seventeen-year-old Nena Ruiz had suffered her fifth concussion. Her coach did exactly what the CDC recommends — he took her out of play and sought medical attention.

Too often, in the heat of a game, especially an important sectional game, a coach will put an injured player back in, calling it just a "ding." Often, too, the player is eager to return to the action, not understanding the severity of the injury or the danger that could ensue.

"Sometimes players and parents wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured," says the CDC in its advice to coaches. "Discourage others from pressuring injured athletes to play. Don't let athletes persuade you that they're just fine" after they have sustained any bump or blow to the head."

The series of concussions Ruiz has suffered — women are more prone to concussions than men — has already changed the course of her young life. Ruiz wanted to play basketball in college or join the Army, she told our sports-writer, Jordan J. Michael, but her fifth concussion may have stymied those plans. "I already filled some paperwork out for the Army," she said. "But my brain is busted so I don't know if they'll want me."

We know kids aren't going to stop playing sports but we urge those who do, and their parents and coaches as well, to heed the CDC guidelines, insisting that safety comes first. Athletes should be taught the rules of play and techniques that are safe; they should wear the right protective equipment, like a helmet, that fits properly; and they should be aware of the signs and symptoms of a concussion. School districts as well as recreational teams should develop policies that follow these guidelines, are well publicized, and strictly enforced. While sports are a great

way to stay healthy and learn important team-building skills, the CDC says, "There are risks to pushing the limits of speed, strength, and endurance. And athletes who push the limits sometimes don't recognize their own limitations, especially when they've had a concussion."

A great way to help athletes understand the effects of a concussion is to establish a baseline for measuring their cognitive function.

The Guilderland School District, along with three other Section II schools, has adopted a testing program that we advise others to follow. It is called ImPACT, which stands for Immediate Post-concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing. Every Guilderland student who plays a contact sport takes a computerized test that establishes a baseline for his or her cognitive functioning. Then, when an athlete suffers a concussion, doctors and coaches alike have a baseline from which to measure the damage.

"We won't put a kid back into play unless he or she is ready," said Regan Johnson, Guilderland's assistant director for athletics. "ImPACT is there to hold a baseline. Say you get a concussion; take the test again and compare. If you're cleared, OK, you're free to go back out there if you're ready."

BKW's Nena Ruiz took an ImPACT assessment after her fourth concussion. She had no baseline to measure against, as her school does not require it.

The situation was different for Guilderland senior Jordan Weeden. He was among the 25 or so Guilderland athletes diagnosed with a concussion since the program started this school year after a pilot program last spring.

Weeden was hit with an elbow during varsity basketball practice and dropped to the floor, dizzy. His father, who himself had concussions playing football in high school and still suffers from headaches, didn't want Jordan to play football for that reason. Football causes more concussions than any other sport in America.

Jordan Weeden didn't play basketball for two weeks after his concussion; he had to take the ImPACT test three times before he passed it and was allowed back on the court. "It takes time to heal," he said. "It's like a brain bruise."

The school had a clear guideline, a way of setting limits, to know when he could return to the game.

Adhering to the state's slogan, "When in doubt, sit them out," Guilderland coaches do testing during a game on the sidelines if they suspect a player may have suffered a concussion.

"We've been right on most counts," said Johnson. "It takes the pressure off because the kids want to play. We save them from themselves. It's our job to educate and keep them safe. This is not a question of toughness."

He is right. There is nothing more important than teaching self-restraint to an athlete in such a situation.

The price for the ImPACT software — \$425 annually — is well worth the cost. It may be tempting in tough times, when it has been proposed to cut 44 jobs and many valuable programs from the school budget, to see this program as an extra. It is not.

If we put our children on the playing field, we owe it to them to keep them safe and protect their future.

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

Politics of abortion were decided A LONG TIME AGO

In the waning hours of the fall session of the legislature the long dormant issue of abortion suddenly jumped back to the fore. If any issue is guaranteed to show weak-kneed political leadership, it is abortion. And on that barometer, our Island politicians sadly did not disappoint.

Health Minister Doug Currie said he had no intention of changing the current PEI policy of only funding out of province abortions at accredited hospitals. He changed his tune slightly several days later when he said he is open to a conversation about the topic. That is code for the minister wants to maintain the status quo but doesn't want to appear completely dismissive.

The Tories trotted out new MLA James Aylward to state the party under Olive Crane supports the status quo. And that is surprising because according to some who helped elect her party leader, Olive Crane is pro-choice.

As a politician Crane makes decisions and lets the electorate decide whether she is right or wrong. But this should not be a political decision. The 'politics' of abortion was decided 23 years ago when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down Canada's abortion law and ruled abortion is a medically necessary procedure.

This is what makes Crane's silence so disappointing. Her decision is wrong politically. It is wrong legally. Her silence is supportive of the continued discrimination Island women face in obtaining a legal medical procedure.

We asked Crane to explain herself. At the time of this writing she remained silent.

Women in every province except PEI can obtain an abortion in their home province. Only PEI and New Brunswick refuse to pay for abortions at private clinics.

Fellow columnist Jack MacAndrew outlined the backroom maneuvering during the Joe Ghiz administration to concoct the current policy. The policy forces those seeking the procedure to receive not one, but two referrals, from Island doctors. It is the only procedure that requires two referrals.

The result of such a policy is to intimidate both doctors who may be inclined to refer women and women

looking to access the service. As leader of the Official Opposition, Olive Crane has a responsibility to stand up and defend Islanders when any government policy runs counter to the law and is discriminatory. She has a responsibility regardless of how popular or unpopular that decision may be.

In this case, it is a group of young, dynamic women who are leading the charge while our politicians remain silent. They've created an advocacy group, PEI Reproductive Rights Organization. The group has done more to raise awareness about abortion and the fundamentally unfair treatment Island women receive than any politician.

It is not acceptable that some Island doctors are not telling women what options they have under the law.

It is not acceptable that two referrals are required.

It is not acceptable that private clinic abortions are not funded.

It is not acceptable that Island women are considered pawns in a political game of stick your head in the sand.

Abortion is a polarizing issue. But this is not about convincing the other side of the error of their ways. Pro-lifers have every right to their beliefs, as do pro-choice supporters.

Opinions aside, Prince Edward Island women have every right to expect reasonable and timely access to a valid medical procedure, as determined by the Supreme Court of Canada.

This is not about money. The equipment and medical expertise are already on the Island. Taxpayers fund roughly 70 abortions a year. Slightly more Island women pay a private clinic for the procedure. This statistic tells just how discriminatory and imposing the current policy is. It is a policy that intentionally tries to impede access.

Island women deserve equal access. That is what the law says. Pathetically it is a principle timid Island politicians refuse to acknowledge and defend.

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Paul MacNeill

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November 30, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

Tackling the never-ending debates on abortion rights is tough, but Paul MacNeill of the Eastern Graphic on Prince Edward Island wades into the local dispute with full force. He reports that women in every province except PEI can obtain an abortion in their home province, but only PEI and New Brunswick refuse to pay for abortions at private clinics. He noted the Supreme Court of Canada settled the issue 23 years ago by ruling that abortion is a medically necessary procedure. MacNeill gives details on the difficulties of getting medical help and even obtaining valid information on legal rights on PEI. His call to action ends with calling for the "timid Island politicians" to acknowledge the law and defend women's rights.

Paul MacNeill also won the Golden Quill award in 2002 and Golden Dozen awards in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2009, 2010 and 2011.



Missy Layfield

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January 21, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

Missy Layfield develops details and dollars into a lengthy editorial in support of a planned library expansion for Fort Myers Beach, Fla. She strongly opposes groups who want to stop the expansion by providing the history of the plans for expansion and even commenting on a state statute that relates to the issue. She also notes that the project is fully funded. Layfield challenges a resident who says 300 persons have signed a petition calling the expansion a "wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars." Her job in the editorial is to explain the background of the planned expansion, provide specifics on funding and development and convince her readers that the project, planned 10 years ago, should now go forward. Her argument is thorough and convincing. Her final comment: "Build it!"

Is this what we really want?

I'm referring to the library controversy, which has gripped the Library Board, Town Council and their respective attorneys, as well as a group of citizens who are investigating their options to stop the planned expansion of the Beach Library.

What started with a few citizens questioning the funding for the expansion last fall has morphed into an ongoing battle pitting island residents against each other, the Library Board and the Town Council.

There is a lot of time, not to mention billable hours racking up on this issue. Maybe it's time to call a time-out on this and put some serious thought into where this is going and what we really want to accomplish.

For those of you who might have just joined us...

The Beach Library \$9 million expansion plans go back 10 years. Eight years ago the property was purchased. Five years ago, the community was asked for their input. Three years ago, the architects began to design the building. Two years ago, a fundraising effort was launched. In 2009, a bond for the last \$2 million needed was secured. In 2010, plans were finalized and permits applied for. Ground-breaking on the expansion is within sight.

The Library Board raised millage rates over the past 5 years to pay for the expansion. That money has been saved and along with the bond and donations, the project is fully funded.

On the other side of the coin, during those ten years, there were no contested elections for Library Board seats. The elections, as well as meeting notices were properly published according to state law. (Note that state law requires these to be published in a daily newspaper in the county the district resides in.) The economy has tanked since public input was gathered and the project began. The millage rate for the library has gone from .4719 in 2005 to .5989 in 2010. There is a general feeling that any tax is too much especially for something "non-essential," like a library. Throughout all of this, few citizens have shown any interest in the workings of the Library Board. Until last fall.

Chapter 189 of the Florida Statutes requires that all Special Districts provide a public facilities report to each local general purpose government, meaning in the library's case, Lee County and the Town of Fort Myers Beach. They also are to file a schedule of meetings. In addition, Chapter 189 provides for oversight review by Lee County.

It's safe to say that I can count on one hand the number of people living on this island who knew a whit about Chapter 189 prior to Town Attorney Jim Humphrey's discussion at a December Council meeting. Fire Chief Mike Becker, would be one person aware of the reporting requirement as he tells us the Fire District has been complying with Chapter 189 since before he became Chief.

Since Mr. Humphrey's discussion, the Library Director, Dr. Leroy Hommerding, has filed a report with Lee County.

Let's not be rushing to judgement on the basis of Chapter 189 just yet. Town Council seems to be taking the right tack in addressing the larger issue of special

districts within the Town, by asking each one for a facilities report. They are also opening dialogue with the Library Board, which is always a good thing.

From our viewpoint, we see a contingent of concerned citizens, maybe 10-15 strong, who are writing the letters and speaking up to the Library Board and Town Council in opposition to the Library expansion. I'm sure there are more because at this week's council workshop, a petition was presented by a resident who claims to have gathered over 300 Beach resident signatures on a petition that declares the expansion a wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars.

Where are these 300 residents who oppose the expansion? If they truly are opposed, they should be telling the Library Board directly. If they aren't serious enough about their opposition to do that, then they aren't very serious about it, are they?

I read letters to our paper and hear public comment in meetings from the same core of people. I admire their dedication and commitment, but where is the multitude they claim to represent?

Same goes for the supporters of the expansion. The expansion should not be considered a done deal. If you support the expansion, you should be telling the Library Board.

From my seat, the more likely options look like A) Library expansion as planned or B) The expansion is put on hold for several years until the economy recovers.

I don't envision a C) Give all the accumulated tax funds back to taxpayers. That option was suggested by one opponent at Council this week who explained in detail how to calculate your refund. That is so unlikely as to be called a fantasy. The money accumulated for this expansion belongs to the Library District and cannot be passed to any other taxing district, as has also been suggested by opponents.

Any postponement of the expansion should be considered in light of the likelihood of increased building costs in the future.

I'm left with option A, build the expansion.

Sure, the Library Board could have been more open to public comment on the expansion when the opponents woke up last fall and decided they didn't like the idea of a \$9 million expansion during a recession. As a Special District, they should have known about the Chapter 189 requirements. They also could have held a referendum back in 2005 when they sought public opinion, however saw no need for it at the time.

Do we really want a legal battle with the Town or County opposing the Library Board on this expansion? Is this what Beach residents really want?

The Library Board has the money and the plans all in place now to proceed with an expansion that has been in the works for a decade. I admire the Board's planning. It's not often that a long range plan like this comes to fruition with full funding in place.

Build it!

*Missy Layfield can be contacted at
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Democracy Arrested

Have the tea overboard! Such might have been the cry over 200 years ago when Sam Adams (the patriot, not the beer) joined fellow colonialists to protest the English Stamp Act. Adams and his compatriots threw boxes of tea into Boston Harbor as an act of civil disobedience. Immortalized as a foundation block of American democracy, the Boston Tea Party of Dec. 16, 1773 was not only a protest against what Adams and others thought was an unjust law, the protest was the intentional breaking of a law that is seen as unjust.

Move the clock ahead 238 years to Dec. 5, 2011 to the Lowell Mountains where a small group of local citizens took a stand of civil disobedience against what they consider to be an unjust application of the law. In parallel with the protesters in Boston over two centuries ago, who did not believe they should be taxed by the king, the modern-day protesters object to the Lowell Wind Project under construction on the ridge line and authorized by the state's Public Service Board. The wind protesters do not believe the PSB made a sound decision, and they also dispute the ownership of the land where a road leads up the mountain to the construction site. Thus, Monday, a group of six people stood in the roadway with signs reading, "Road Closed: Due To Environmental Destruction" and "Detour To Honest Energy Policy." Their intent was to be arrested as a way to advance their cause. They were charged with unlawful trespass and arrested, with Dec. 20 set as a court date.

A seventh person was also arrested: Chris Braithwaite, the publisher of the *Chronicle*, a weekly newspaper in Barton that covers Orleans County. Braithwaite was on site to report on the protest as part of the ongoing coverage of the wind project he has reported consistently for his newspaper. He identified himself as a working journalist to law enforcement officers but was arrested after he stated he was there to cover the event, needed to be in proximity to the police and the protesters and would leave after the arrests were made.

Green Mountain Power spokesperson Dorothy

Schnure said the arrests for trespassing were necessary because of safety issues. Apparently, safety of the U.S. Constitution and the public's right to know the truth were not an issue.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states, "Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people to peaceably assemble..."

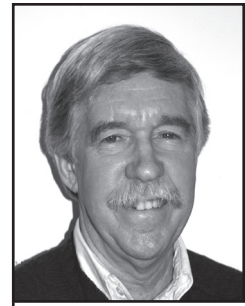
Yes, Green Mountain Power has the right to protect its property and to prohibit access to that property. And, no, journalists do not have any special rights not available to other citizens.

Citizens do have a right, however, to know what is done in their name. Had Braithwaite not been at the protest site, the press would not have been able to report on the behavior of protesters or the tax-paid police enforcing a public trespass notice, sanctioned by the state courts and enacted by the state Legislature. If a public act of civil disobedience cannot be seen by the public and the behavior of the parties involved cannot be seen, the public is denied knowing the truth.

Civil disobedience has a long history in this country, stretching from the time of Sam Adams, though the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s to the current protest on the Lowell Mountains. Had the press been prevented from covering the acts of civil disobedience in American history, we could still be living under English rule, women and people of color might still be denied the right to vote, people who labor could still be working unregulated, 18-hour days in unsafe conditions, public accommodations might still be segregated, the list goes on. Green Mountain Power, law enforcement officers, the courts and the Vermont Legislature undermine democracy when they sanction the arrest of journalists for doing their job.

The health and safety of American democracy require that the press be allowed to report the news.

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Ross Connelly

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December 7, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

During a protest against a wind development project that was approved by the Vermont Public Service Board, a publisher from a newspaper who was reporting the event was arrested along with the protesters. Editor Ross Connelly of *The Hardwick Gazette* argued that the press had a right to go onto the site under construction and report the event. He argued strongly that it would not be possible to tell the story unless a reporter was there to record the happenings. Connelly clarifies that reporters have no more rights than ordinary citizens, but writes: "If a public act of civil disobedience cannot be seen by the public and the behavior of the parties involved cannot be seen, the public is denied knowing the truth." He cites reporting from the Boston Tea Party in 1773 to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s as historical reference for the need to tell the people the news by having reporters on the scene. The editorial is well argued and clear.

Ross Connelly also won Golden Dozen awards in 1996, 2001, and 2011.



Robert B. Trapp

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Rio Grande SUN

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September 29, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

You can almost see the smoke coming out of Robert B. Trapp's keyboard as he wrote the editorial, "Teacher Fund Scam." When teachers signed up for a federal Teacher Incentive Fund five years ago, they expected to get bonuses for meeting high standards and did so for the first four years. But something went wrong in the fifth year: lack of funds and proper reviews. Trapp reports that the administrator of the federal funds for the teachers paid himself \$177,576 a year to send checks to two school districts, and, from a \$2.1 million fund, charged \$528,555 for management while distributing just \$451,752 to the schools. Trapp described this arrangement as "the most lopsided federal fund in existence." His editorial is based on a public records search and he tells the readers the school board "needs to own the problem and make amends." The editorial is clear and passionately argued.

Robert B. Trapp also won Golden Dozen awards in 2004 and 2011.

Teacher Fund Scam

I imagine your boss comes to you at work and tells you he has access to a pool of money that he can disburse to employees who sign up for an incentive program. Your boss tells you if you meet certain criteria over the next year and raise your performance level, he's going to give you a big fat bonus. You'd probably work hard and check in with your boss occasionally to make sure you're meeting the benchmarks.

Finally, your year is up and you have performed all the tasks your boss set for you. It's time for that bonus.

But the boss didn't read the fine print, set aside his share of the money and didn't really understand how that pool of money should be distributed. No check, no apology, no explanation.

We're referring to the Espanola School District.

Teachers five years ago were given the above scenario. Over 200 teachers signed up to participate in the Teacher Incentive Fund. Many of them met the list of things annually and got their money. However, in the fifth year, the District has to pay 75 percent of the cost or about \$1 million. The District also has to show student achievement improvement and multiple teacher reviews within the period.

To no one's surprise, none of the criteria was met, making the District ineligible for the funds. The District didn't budget for the cost and the Board is clueless as to what was agreed. Further to no one's surprise, they're going to try to blame "previous administrations."

National Educational Association liaison Charles Goodmacher told the District five years ago there would be an issue with the fifth year. The *Rio Grande SUN* stated pretty much the same thing in a story in March 2010.

We had problems with the Program from the start. The Northern New Mexico Network administers the federal money. It's a non-profit in Rio Rancho operated by Carlos Atencio. This guy is the poster child for abuse of federal funds. He pays himself \$177,576 a year to send checks to the Espanola and Taos school districts. From a \$2.1 million fund, his management runs \$528,555 and he only distributes \$451,752 to the schools. This must be the most lopsided federal fund in existence.

And Atencio is shameless. His beginning salary in 2003 was \$94,004. He has raised himself over seven years to almost double his pay. Really, does this guy care about teachers at all? He's milking this fund for all it's worth and no one seems to care.

Our school Board needs to step up, address all the teachers personally and explain what happened and how they can possibly make up for it in the future.

Sure, we're broke. Teachers know that. However, they were led to believe an incentive check was coming. The Board needs to own the problem and make amends. That's what mature adults do. That's what leaders do.

Robert B. Trapp can be contacted at mnged@riograndesun.com.

An explanation from the Golden Quill winner from page 5

domain. We persevered and eventually we received the reports free of charge based on our convincing argument the information was of vital public interest. The content of those e-mails was dramatic, revealing a laundry list of unethical transgressions by board members that had derailed the entire review process before it even left the station.

The explosive and controversial series of stories written by our education reporter and my supporting editorials eventually led to hundreds of comments on the newspaper's website, dozens of letters in our paper, a public apology by the board, an unsuccessful attempt by elected members to have one of their colleagues dismissed, an \$80,000 independent review commissioned by the Department of Education, the subsequent firing of the entire board, the creation of new provincial legislation giving the minister of Education more power to review and remove school boards, and national media coverage in publications such as the *Globe and Mail*.

As the membership of this prestigious society will attest, writing editorials for the local paper often means writing about people with whom you have become familiar and usually respect. In the case of our school

board, I've known some of the players for many years. I knew going into the process that my opinions would put me at odds with some individuals for whom I had previously had great respect, but the need to expose these backroom political games and protectionist agendas was paramount to maintaining the integrity of the education system for the good of the children in the classrooms.

As such, it became our goal to hold the board members accountable for their decisions. Our efforts exposed a series of inappropriate actions by the members that resulted in decisions that will have ramifications for the education system in our region for years to come. By delaying the review process by at least a year, the board's mishandling of the issue will cost millions of dollars and impact thousands of students. However, if it had not been for the dogged determination of our paper and the resulting exposé, the board members would have continued on with business as usual and the public whom they were elected to represent to the best of their abilities would have been none the wiser.

Vernon Oickle can be contacted at editorial@lighthouse.ns.ca.

Decide for yourself what words are offensive

Warning: This editorial may contain thoughts and phrases that might make you think about bigotry, censorship and free speech.

Nestled on my bookshelves between the journalism texts and autobiographies of important newsmen and politicians are books narrow-minded school trustees and prissy parents have for years attempted to ban from the library and from discussion in the classroom. In my personal library you would find *Of Mice and Men*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Deliverance*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the *Harry Potter* series, *Mein Kampf*, *The Lord of the Flies*, the *Little House on the Prairie* series, the *Holy Bible*, *Catcher in the Rye* and a few W.P. Kinsella novels, just for snickers.

These critically acclaimed books have been the targets of scissor-wielding censors because they deal with such issues as sexual orientation, violence, religious content and criticism, sexual situations, witchcraft and racial minorities.

My music collection is bound to have a few selections that would offend some school marms but get others up on the dance floor shaking their moneymakers. And that includes *Money for Nothing* by Dire Straits, a number 1 hit back in 1985.

Censorship is nothing new to Ponoka and Ponoka County. In 1994 Rimbey school trustee Susan Koots was offended by a story, Shirley Jackson's *The Witch*, that was contained in an anthology approved by Alberta Education for classroom discussion. Koots described the story as "sick" and wanted it banned. She somehow managed to convince her fellow trustees, who had not read the material or talked to their teachers about it, to confiscate the books. They were later returned to the classroom with *The Witch* and another story, *Images* by Alice Munro, cut out by staff using razor blades. Once the school board was amalgamated and populated with free-thinking trustees, the stories were reinstated.

Just last week the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) determined *Money for Nothing* by Dire Straits, a song that has been playing on radios around the world for a generation, contravenes the human rights clauses of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Code of Ethics and Equitable Portrayal Code. A single, solitary Newfie listening to a station in St. John's N.L. complained last year that the Grammy Award-winning song is discriminatory because it includes the word "faggot" in its lyrics.

The CBSC ruled the song would be acceptable for airplay if the song were "suitably edited." The panel ruled that even if "faggot" had been an acceptable word at one time, it has become unacceptable in most circumstances.

I don't think faggot has ever been an acceptable word to describe homosexuals, nor has nigger have been an acceptable word to describe Blacks. Yet, excising the words from our language, our literature and our history does not remove ignorance and racism from society.

Earlier this year (which is shaping up to be a banner year for censorship) a publisher in Alabama plans to release the New South edition of Mark Twain's 1884 novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, replacing the word "nigger" with the word "slave." It's not the first time a publisher, school teacher or parent has been offended by the use of "nigger" in a book and wanted it removed from schools and libraries. So in this sanitized version of the American classic, "Nigger Jim" would become "Slave Jim."

You don't have to have a Confederate flag hanging in your bedroom window or as a bumper sticker on your pickup to know that not every slave is a nigger and not every nigger is a slave.

Twain wasn't writing from the point of view of an educated man, he was embodied as a dirt-poor Southern kid who is finding himself and his way in pre-Civil War America. As Huck travels with Jim, his attitudes about slavery and life change just as you might expect of teenagers who read and discuss this book with their teacher. The book is a statement against racism.

In *Money for Nothing*, lyricist Mark Knopfler recounts an experience when he overheard a bigot disparaging musicians performing in an MTV video. Dire Straits is singing the song in the character of the racist deliveryman, an Archie Bunker type, and ridiculing him. "See the little faggot with the earring and the makeup/Yeah buddy, that's his own hair/That little faggot got his own jet airplane/That little faggot, he's a millionaire."

The irony and satire of working class attitudes toward high-rolling musicians played out in the song seems to be lost on the CBSC panel.

Canadians should not accept sanitized, versions of books and music from people who want to decide what you can read or listen to. As individuals, surely we can determine for ourselves what is offensive and put down a book, turn the radio knob or watch a Disney movie instead of going to the Mapplethorpe exhibit at the art gallery.

We view the world through our books and our music. Removing now-offensive words from classic literature and from contemporary works written to jar readers into challenging society's precepts is a slippery slope we slide down far too often in today's politically correct society.

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George Brown

Editor,
Ponoka News

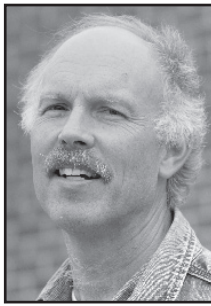
5019A Chipman Avenue
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January 19, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

George Brown begins his editorial with a tongue-in-cheek approach: "Warning: This editorial may contain thoughts and phrases that might make you think about bigotry, censorship and free speech." And from there he rips into school trustees and parents who attempt to ban widely admired books. Censorship is a recurring and international issue that is relevant to the local community the Ponoka News serves. Brown addresses the issue in Canada and the United States, using powerful examples of censorship that succeeded, or failed, and tells his readers that removing words in classic literature that today are offensive is a harsh disservice to readers' rights to be challenged in their thinking.

George Brown also won Golden Dozen awards in 2006 and 2008.



Peter Weinschenk

Editor,
The Record-Review

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November 9, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

Peter Weinschenk's editorial calls for new technology on a major topic of farming: how to get rid of tons of manure from dairy farms. Two citations for overweight tankers on public highways caused a major fear across Wisconsin's dairy country and Weinschenk tackles the issue with details and a powerful argument for the sheriff to continue citing haulers who egregiously violate the law. One vehicle, he reports, weighed 134,860 pounds, 54,860 pounds over the legal limit. That sentence alone sums up much of the problem: building roads to accommodate the heavier loads would cost taxpayers a lot of money. Farmers, he argues, need to take on new technology, possibly piping the waste to fields where it can be injected into the ground. He calls for the dairy industry to move toward better methods of disposal.

Peter Weinschenk also won the Golden Quill award in 2011 and a Golden Dozen award in 2010.

Time for new technology

Our dairy industry is constantly in motion. In spring, fields are fertilized, plowed and planted. Over summer, the crops mature and hay is made. Come fall, crops are harvested and fields, again, are fertilized. Following winter, it all starts again in spring.

But what happens when this production cycle is abruptly stopped?

We found out this past two weeks. Basically, all hell breaks loose.

In late October, Marathon County Sheriff's Department wrote out large-dollar fines to two customer manure haulers for overweight loads. One citation was for a hauler whose rig weighed 134,860 pounds, that is, 54,860 pounds over the legal limit. The citations sent, in the words of one farmer, "tremendous fear" rippling across western county dairy country. Another farmer said the citations rendered him "speechless." Without large tank manure haulers willing to transport illegal loads, farmers don't know whether their manure pits can be emptied before freeze-up in December. There is trepidation that unemptied manure pits will overflow in spring, sending rivers of pollution to surface water.

A coalition of manure haulers and farmers are now pushing back. Phone calls have been made to Assembly Transportation Committee chair Rep. Jerry Petrowski, Wisconsin Secretary of Ag Ben Brancel and Governor Scott Walker. A group of 50 last Thursday told the Marathon County Infrastructure Committee to back off on its weight enforcement campaign, part of a strategy to protect taxpayer-funded roads. The committee, faced with a room of stern-faced farmers, agreed to a small compromise. On Tuesday, the committee unanimously voted to send to the full board a resolution asking Gov. Walker to allow "implements of husbandry" to exceed weight limits by 15 percent both on an emergency basis this year, and also permanently in the months of September, October and November going forward. The county board will vote on the resolution this Thursday.

These gyrations, while understandable, unfortunately do not deal with the real issue here. It is that, flat and simple, the county, which is under a tax levy freeze, can no longer afford to have overweight manure haulers beat up local roads.

Marathon County Highway Commissioner Jim Griesbach tells us the county would have to spend \$1 million a mile to upgrade roads to handle big manure hauling equipment. This is \$800,000 more per mile than what is spent now. With the county reconstructing/resurfacing 20 miles a year, making this upgrade would cost an additional \$16 million a year or, figured otherwise, cost the owner of an average priced house in Marathon County (\$137,023) an extra \$219.24 in higher property taxes. A county board majority would never vote for such a thing.

The county board can approve the Infrastructure Committee's resolution but, in reality, this is only an empty political gesture. The manure tankers cited in October were 60 percent overweight, not 15 percent. It could take years, maybe a decade, for the county board resolution to change state law. Even then, manure haulers would still run afoul of the law.

The best course in this situation is for the sheriff's department to continue citing only the most egregious hauling violators for the remainder of the year and, looking forward, to have both producers and the county look to new technology to replace ever-bigger manure tankers. Some farmers already pipe manure through drag lines to fields miles from cattle barns. Manure is knife injected into the ground where it can't stink and won't run-off. The county can facilitate this technology shift by granting easements along highway right of way and through land use planning, helping to keep farmlands contiguous. It is true that drag line technology cannot fertilize every small parcel scattered over the countryside, but there is no perfect answer that will fix the tangled situation we have before us. Anaerobic digestion, where manure solids are dewatered, is another future technology that holds promise.

Wisconsin is the Dairy State. It is a scandal that farmers and the haulers they employ must routinely break laws to efficiently manure their fields, returning nutrients to the soil. The solution is not to leave unprotected the public investment in roads. It is, instead, to move the dairy industry forward with better technology.

Peter Weinschenk can be contacted at pweinschenk@tpprinting.com.

Hear no evil:

Cape Elizabeth School Board clamps down on public comment

You're a Cape Elizabeth parent whose child comes home from school on a Tuesday with news that raises your eyebrows.

Maybe it's the way cafeteria employees handled that day's lunch food. Maybe it was the behavior of another kid on the school bus. Perhaps it wasn't even disturbing: maybe your son or daughter has high praise for her social studies teacher.

Good news or bad, you decide to attend the School Board meeting that night to share with the board and the other community members in the room, and those watching at home on TV.

Forget about it. After last week's board meeting, you're out of luck.

That's because the School Board changed its policy on public participation. From now on, if you don't provide at least seven days' notice about your intention to speak about something that isn't already on the agenda, you can't say a word. And even if you do provide the notice required to speak at the next board meeting, whether you get on the agenda is up to the superintendent of schools or the board chairman.

So much for true public participation at School Board meetings.

How many residents actually plan their comments for a school board a week or more in advance? The purpose of public comment is just that — to hear from the public. It may not be legally required of school boards, but it's part of the tradition of elected boards to respect the public and hear those comments, whether the comments are informative, ridiculous or infuriating. It all comes with the territory and with the open, responsible conduct of the public's business.

Cape Elizabeth's acting superintendent, Ken Murphy, says the change is "good policy" that will give board members time to prepare thoughtful discussion of the issues residents raise.

But members have that opportunity without the notice requirement. All they have to say is "gee, we don't know the answer; we'll look into it and discuss it next time." In fact, many school boards actually prohibit their members from discussing non-agenda issues raised by the public for precisely that reason — they can't be expected to provide intelligent responses on issues for which they're unprepared.

But they don't cover their ears and refuse to listen by preventing the public from speaking.

Murphy went on to say there's nothing "undemocratic" about the new policy and even suggested that most spontaneous public comments about items not already on board meeting agendas come from people for whom criticizing and humiliating school department employees is "almost a recreational activity."

We seriously doubt that, and are disappointed by

Murphy's attitude toward the public. Most school boards, including Cape Elizabeth's, already have policies prohibiting defamatory comments and discussion of personnel issues. Why not just enforce the existing rules instead of adopting a restrictive policy that's a solution to a problem that doesn't exist? Our fear, however, is that what underlies this policy change is a desire by the School Board and Murphy to maintain tight control over discussion and the flow of information. The Cape Elizabeth School Board is one of the few elected bodies in our coverage area that officially opposed changes considered this year by the Legislature that would have expanded the public's rights under Maine's Freedom of Access Act. Is it surprising that now the board is restricting public participation and leaving it up to the school chief and board chairman to decide who gets to speak and who doesn't?

One more thing: Murphy also claims that "most" school boards already have policies that don't allow public comment on non-agenda issues.

We don't know if that's true statewide. But in fact, of the 12 public school districts from Scarborough to Bath covered by *The Forecaster*, nine — Portland, South Portland, Scarborough, Falmouth, School Administrative District 51, Regional School Unit 5, Chebeague Island, Brunswick and RSU 1 — have no such restriction and seven of those expressly allow comments on any subject.

Another, SAD 75, does have a published policy that prohibits non-agenda comments and requires notice to speak. But in practice, according to Superintendent Michael Wilhelm, the policy is not enforced and the public is allowed to speak on any issue.

That leaves Yarmouth as the only other town or city we cover where members of the public can't step up to the podium at any meeting and discuss whatever they believe is important enough to share with the local school board. And even there, the policy requires the School Committee to conduct two open-agenda meetings a year to allow residents not interested in making appointments to speak to the board. There's no such accommodation in the Cape Elizabeth policy.

Yarmouth, by the way, is where Murphy was the longtime school chief before he took the interim job in Cape Elizabeth.

We hope Cape Elizabeth's School Board shows more respect for the public and the flow of public information under Meredith Nadeau, who becomes superintendent in a few weeks, than it has recently demonstrated under Murphy's interim guidance.

For a start, the board should reverse last week's policy change.

Mo Mehlsak can be contacted at mmehlsak@theforecaster.net.



Mo Mehlsak

**Editor,
*The Forecaster***

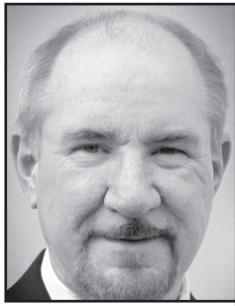
5 Fundy Road
Falmouth, ME 04105

July 1, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

When *The Forecaster* of Falmouth, Maine, reported that the Cape Elizabeth school board clamped down on public comment about items not on the agenda at its meetings by requiring a week's advance notice by persons who wished to address the board, Mo Mehlsak developed an editorial carefully and powerfully refuting the board's argument for the new rule. His research found that only one of the other 12 districts in the newspaper's area had such a rule, despite the acting superintendent's comments that most districts had restrictions. Mehlsak argues that speaking before the school board is a right of public participation that should not require advance planning. When issues arise, he said, they should be open for discussion at the very next meeting. His voice is a strong and logical call for open and immediate discussion related to the schools.

Mo Mehlsak also won the Golden Quill award in 2010 and Golden Dozen awards in 2007 and 2011.



Jim Painter

Editor,
West Valley View

1050 E. Riley Dr.
Avondale, AZ 85323

May 13, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

Jim Painter did what is necessary in his editorial. He told the readers why newspapers print items that may upset or offend people. When the *West Valley View* of Avondale, Ariz., published the obituary of a person who killed a local policeman, some readers were enraged. Painter saw his job clearly: explain the role of the newspaper to the community. In a well-argued editorial he pointed out that the paper prints free obits because they are news. He told his readers the obits should be presented in a dispassionate manner, free of opinions and with no consideration of whether the deceased "deserves" an obituary. He went into detail, including Biblical references from Ezekiel that the sins of the father are not passed on to the child. In his thoughtful and well-supported editorial he said the newspaper has no role in making moral judgments about who "deserves" an obituary and who doesn't. Powerful!

Jim Painter also won Golden Dozen awards in 1994, 2004, 2006, and 2009.

Why we printed 'cop killer's' obit

Every once in a while, those of us in the news business face a unique moral or ethical dilemma that we've never faced before and we're forced to make decisions on the fly in order to meet deadlines.

We came up against such a dilemma last week and are dealing with the consequences of our decision this week. Before last week, the *West Valley View* had never before received obituaries for an accused murderer and his victim on the same day. Last Thursday, as we were preparing Friday's paper, a local funeral home sent us the obituary for Buckeye police officer Rolando Tirado, who had been shot to death by Cesar Thomas Quiroz-Leon in a May 1 shoot-out at a Phoenix swap meet. On the same morning, another local funeral home sent us the obituary for Quiroz-Leon, who had been killed by Tirado's partner, Officer Christopher Paz, who himself was wounded in the gun battle.

The funeral home representing Officer Tirado asked that we not publish Quiroz-Leon's obituary Friday, on the same day as Officer Tirado's. Out of deference to the Tirado family, we withheld Quiroz-Leon's obituary until Tuesday's paper.

On Tuesday morning, our phones started to ring. Many of our readers were angry that we published the "cop-killer's" obituary at all. Neither he nor his family deserved that "honor" and the *View* did our readers and Officer Tirado's family a disservice by publishing his obituary, they said.

So, why did we do it?

We publish free obituaries because they are news. Like other news stories, they should be presented in a dispassionate manner, free of the opinions of the newspaper's editorial staff, including our opinions of whether or not a specific person "deserves" an obituary.

We don't publish obituaries for the sake of the deceased. They are no longer of this world and gain no benefit from publication of their obituaries. Obituaries are published for the sake of their families, friends, acquaintances, co-workers and anyone else in the community who might be interested or want to offer consolation to people who are going through an extremely difficult time in their lives.

Quiroz-Leon's family did not murder Officer Tirado, but like the Tirado family, they are dealing with their personal loss. They are also dealing with the hatred of many in the community. They do not deserve to be punished further by a newspaper for a crime he, not they, committed. And besides, it's not a newspaper's job to mete out punishment to anyone.

A debate is currently raging in this country over whether or not the United States was founded on Judeo-Christian principles. Those who believe it was have an obligation to live by those principles, one of which is that a person's family cannot be held responsible for the sins he committed. The "sins of the father" principle is mentioned several times in the Bible, but perhaps the passage that explains it the best is Ezekiel 18:20: "The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them."

Based on that principle, it is wrong to hold Quiroz-Leon's family responsible for the crime he committed; therefore it would be wrong for a newspaper to refuse to publish his obituary.

If a newspaper were to adopt a policy of refusing to publish obituaries for people who committed heinous crimes, where does it draw the line? Who decides which sins are bad enough to justify withholding an obituary? Some editors might adhere to the belief that abortion is murder, and refuse to publish obituaries for women who got abortions or the doctors who performed them. What about people who committed suicide? Should newspapers punish their families as well? Should adulterers be afforded the "honor" of an obituary?

Our goal is to present local news as impartially as is humanly possible. That means making no moral judgments as to who "deserves" an obituary and who doesn't. Our job is to present the news as objectively as we can. Obituaries are news.

*Jim Painter can be contacted at
editor@westvalleyview.com.*

The Occupy Movement has a purpose

The numbers are split when it comes to understanding and supporting the Occupy Movement around the globe. People either believe the peaceful gatherings have a purpose or that they're a bunch of n'er do well slackers and even wing nuts.

Did the majority of people really understand what this movement was all about when Occupy Wall Street (in New York City) took root the middle of September?

Of course, it spread from there to most countries around the world — some in sympathy and support of the Wall Street group, others because they felt their situation was at least as unjust, if not more than the citizens of the United States.

Perhaps the Occupiers' message wasn't as defined and front and centre as it should have been. Perhaps not all the sites in the various countries had a good spokesperson or not one at all. This could be why the general populace not participating in the movement isn't or haven't been convinced of its validity and merit.

On Sept. 29 the group calling themselves the New York City General Assembly occupying Wall Street in Liberty Square presented a Declaration of the Occupation of New York City. The document provides a summary of its purpose and then goes on to present 22 facts to people assembled at the location.

Below is the introduction:

As we gather together in solidarity to express a feeling of mass injustice, we must not lose sight of what brought us together. We write so that all people who feel wronged by the corporate forces of the world can know that we are your allies.

As one people, united, we acknowledge the reality: that the future of the human race required the cooperation of its members; that our system must protect our rights, and upon corruption of that system, it is up to the individuals to protect their own rights, and those of their neighbors; that a democratic government derives its just power from the people, but corporations do not seek consent to extract wealth from the people and the Earth; and that no true democracy is attainable when the process is determined by economic power. We come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments. We have peaceably assembled here, as is our right, to let these facts be known.

To give a reader an idea of the facts the group brought forward only six of the 22 are noted.

- They have taken our houses through an illegal foreclosure process, despite not having the original mortgage.

- They have taken bailouts from taxpayers with impunity, and continue to give executives exorbitant bonuses.

- They have perpetuated inequality and discrimination in the workplace based on age, the color of one's skin, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.

- They have poisoned the food supply through negligence, and undermined the farming system through monopolization.

- They have consistently outsourced labour and used that outsourcing as leverage to cut workers' health care and pay.

- They have influenced the courts to achieve the same rights as people, with none of the culpability or responsibility.

What likely stirred up Americans to the point of creating Occupy Wall Street was the huge bailouts given to banks to offset their potential failure, thus creating greater negative havoc on an already bloodied economy in need of a transfusion. To add insult to injury, executives of these financial firms received obscene bonuses for their role in toppling the system.

In addition to foreclosure on homes, many people employed by these institutions lost their jobs. It was vital to *trim the fat* to keep these businesses operating, but *trimming the fat* was only applicable to the lowly peons, certainly not the executives.

Our banking system in Canada is regulated entirely different than the U.S. so consequently our country suffered considerably less during the self inflicted recession.

People had simply grown tired of being used as pawns and the lack of true democracy. A democratic government derives its power from the people, not when the process is determined by economic power.

Some Occupy groups have referred to the majority of people falling into the 99 percent of the population; the remainder are considered the 1%. This can be rather misleading because it's more complex than that.

Data on net worth distributions within the top 1% indicate that one enters the top 0.5% with about \$1.8m, the top 0.25% with \$3.1m, the top .10% with \$5.5m and the top .01% with \$24.4m. Wealth distribution is highly skewed towards the top .01% increasing the overall average for this group.

The net worth for those in the lower half of the top 1% is usually achieved after decades of education, hard work, saving and investing as a professional or small business person.

While an after-tax income of \$17K to 250K and net worth in the \$1.2m to \$1.8m range may seem like a lot



Joan Plaxton

Editor and publisher,
The Valleyview Valley Views

4713 – 50th Street
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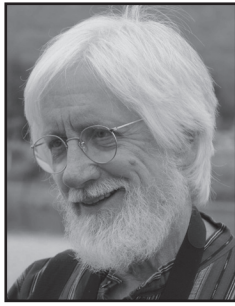
November 30, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

Joan Plaxton sees the Occupy Movement in international, national and local terms and addresses her readers with facts and figures that provoke thought about what the movement means. She tackles the issue of the 1 percent and the 99 percent and comments that "change is only possible when people are willing to stand up for what they believe benefits themselves and their fellow human beings." She calls for people in Valleyview, Alberta or in New York City to "prevail over greed" and consider the needs of the global community.

Joan Plaxton also won Golden Dozen awards in 2000, 2002, and 2011.

continued on page 24



David Giffey

Editor,
Home News

121 W. Jefferson Street
Spring Green, WI 53588

November 2, 2011

FROM THE JUDGE

David Giffey turned to lines in Coleridge's poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," to address Spring Green's severe water pollution problems: "Water, water everywhere, Nor any drop to drink." Water testing in the years following devastating floods in 2008 show that the level of nitrate-nitrogen is more than double the legal state and federal maximums allowed for public consumption. He cites warnings from the Department of Natural Resources on the danger to babies, called "blue baby syndrome." The pollutants come from run-off from farm fields, septic systems and naturally occurring nitrogen. But only about 20 percent of the state's farmers use nutrient management planning, which can reduce the danger. Giffey develops his editorial with details and specifics, and concludes forcefully by warning that the area is facing an "environmental Ponzi scheme."

David Giffey also won a Golden Dozen award in 2010.

We're facing an environmental Ponzi scheme

Recent events in the River Valley underscore universal truths, like the truth recorded in poetry by Samuel Taylor Coleridge who two centuries ago wrote: *Water, water everywhere, Nor any drop to drink.*

If ever you've craved a drink of water and had no immediate source of its life-saving properties at hand — no faucet, no fountain, no thermos, no convenience store — you might relate to the poet's description of sailors becalmed for days in a filthy polluted sea.

And every tongue, through utter drought/Was withered at the root.

We could not speak, no more than if/We had been choked with soot.

That was the horrific scene imagined by Coleridge.

Fortunately, the predicament of our neighbors in the Town of Spring Green hasn't reached the epic proportions described in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

With due diligence, the ancient mariner's sort of disaster might be averted. But extreme concern about the purity and availability of precious life-giving water is never misplaced or overstated.

For years the Town of Spring Green has served as a laboratory of water science. Most recently, devastating floods in 2008 destroyed buildings and crops and changed people's lives, bringing more attention to the township from scientists who already had spent years here gathering data about water. Township residents have shown remarkable resilience in their determination to recover from disasters and their genuine interest in learning about water science.

They jammed town hall on Kennedy Road for meeting after meeting to pay attention to the state's best-informed and most professional water scientists who shared the results of their studies in the River Valley. Sitting with the townspeople at many of those meetings, I've learned — with them — much about water, its fascinating behavior, its power, and its vulnerability. Last Thursday's meeting was no exception.

Another standing room only crowd at town hall showed up for a meeting called by the town board and resident Douglas Jones, who, with his neighbors, has well water pollution problems. A test in August, Jones said, showed 20.8 milligrams of nitrate-nitrogen per liter (ppm) in the water. That's more than twice the legal state and federal maximum allowable level of 10 ppm. The laws apply to public water supplies, and are advisory for private wells.

"Infants who are fed water or formula made with water that is high in nitrates can develop a condition... called 'blue baby syndrome'...caused by a lack of oxygen in the blood," warns a DNR brochure. Pregnant women and nursing mothers are warned to avoid or reduce their intake of high-nitrate water. Connections

between cancers and nitrates are being studied.

As the three-hour meeting unfolded, several residents described alarming situations with their private wells. A growing number of residents, including Jones and town board supervisor Dave Radel, recently installed reverse osmosis (RO) systems at home to purify drinking water. The systems force water under pressure through a fine membrane to filter out contaminants, which are flushed down the drain.

After the meeting, Jones said he rents the RO system for about \$25 a month. They can be bought and installed for about \$1,300.

Where do the nitrates come from and how can they be controlled? The scientists had much to say about sources of pollution including run-off from agricultural fields, septic systems, and naturally occurring nitrogen. Farmers are being urged to use nutrient management planning to balance fertilizer applications with crop yields in order to reduce nitrate leeching. It was said, however, that only about 20 percent of the state's farms use nutrient management planning.

Equally important is the use of expanses of woods or grasslands as "buffers" to remove nitrogen from water. Buffering is a role played by the Sauk County-owned pine forest in the Town of Spring Green, where well tests show marked differences in water quality depending on the location of wells with respect to the forest. With water quality in the balance, township residents are correct to insist that Sauk County refrain from selling the forest for development.

"We really do not have clean water to drink," Jones said to the crowd at the meeting. Some noted that property values plummet with the lack of clean water. That should concern the town board as budgets are strained, the economy is suffering, and the tax base shrinks accordingly.

Repeatedly stressed was a need to deal with nitrate pollution as a community effort. That would involve cooperation between everyone, a broadening understanding of the need for clean water, and a shared concern for the wellbeing of neighbors.

"The way we can progress in life," Jones said, "is to make things better."

In Coleridge's poem, the old sailor concluded: *He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small....*

Without community solutions, we're facing an environmental Ponzi scheme through which we squander the well being of our children and grandchildren. That's another story.

*David Giffey can be contacted at
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The 37th annual Eugene Cervi Award

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

The award is presented not for a single brave

accomplishment, however deserving, but for a career of outstanding public service through community journalism and for adhering to the highest standards of the craft with the deep reverence for the English language that was the hallmark of Gene Cervi’s writing. The award also recognizes consistently aggressive reporting of government at the grassroots level and interpretation of local affairs.

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

This Year’s Winner Is...

Tim Waltner

From printer’s devil to owner and publisher

By Tim Waltner

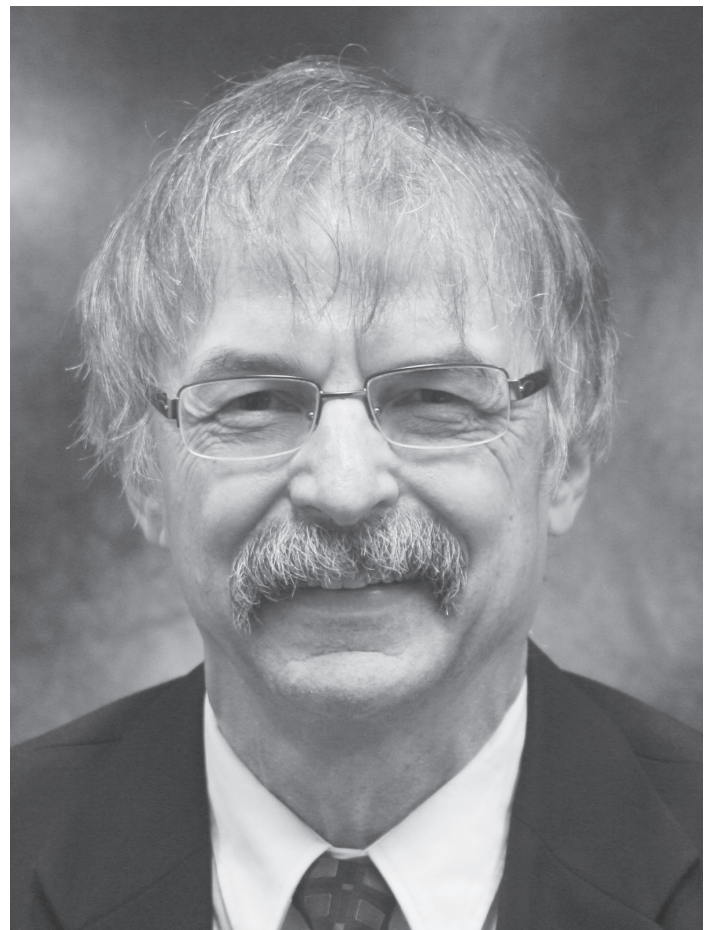
Editor’s note: Tim Waltner wrote the following narrative of how he entered the newspaper business at the request of ISWNE Executive Director Chad Stebbins.

It was the fall of 1972; I had just turned 22 and, with two years of college, I still had no clear-cut career goals. After completing two years of conscientious objector service to fulfill my Selective Service obligation, it was time to regroup and refocus. And so we — Mary “Bix” Bixel and I were married in 1970 — returned to my home community, Freeman, S.D. I found a job there as a printer’s devil for Glenn Gering, who operated a printing company and was publisher of the *Freeman Courier*, the weekly newspaper. I explained this would likely be a short-term stay but that I would perform any task he asked me to. I swept floors, melted lead, set type, and learned to run a press, a folder and a variety of printing tasks.

In the spring of 1973, Glenn told me the editor of the *Courier* was leaving and asked me to fill in while he advertised for a new editor. While I had worked with school publications as a student and had limited journalism skills, I told Glenn I’d do my best. After six weeks of writing stories, taking photos, collecting ads and helping put together the paper, Glenn informed me he had stopped looking for a new editor; he was giving me the title and the responsibilities.

It was a jolting introduction to community journalism and a generally positive experience. But after two years as editor, the uncertainty that had brought us to Freeman in 1972 was still there. While I enjoyed community journalism, I had no formal training and our return to Freeman had not been designed as our final destination. And so, Bix and I resigned our jobs and left Freeman, moving to southeastern Ohio where her sister was living. When I landed a full-time job in the graphic arts department of a large printing company, I put my plans to return to school on hold.

In the summer of 1976, the combination of two personal developments helped set the stage for our next move. Shortly after the birth of Jeremy, our firstborn, my mother received the diagnosis of breast cancer. With Bix’s family living in northwestern Ohio and mine in southeastern South Dakota, we began to sense the growing importance of family. That prompted us to consider another move and Minnesota seemed geographically logical. That exploration led to a job offer from a public relations company in Mankato in



Tim Waltner

the summer of 1977, an easy one-day drive from both our parents. But a phone call to Glenn Gering back in Freeman, informing him of our plans changed everything.

"If ever there was a time to consider coming back to Freeman, this is the time," he said. Glenn encouraged me to bring the skills I had acquired working in Ohio back to his printing operation. It was an agonizing weekend as we weighed our options and concluded we were heading back to South Dakota.

We arrived in Freeman in September and three months later, Glenn called me on a Saturday morning and asked me to come to the office. The editor who had replaced me two years earlier had given notice and Glenn wanted me to resume the position. I suspect he knew that was coming when he urged me to return that summer.

And so I was back as editor of the *Courier*. A combination of reading books and other publications, the influence of other editors, and trial and error helped me improve my journalism skills as I settled into my role as editor. I enjoyed the stimulation and diversity of the job and the opportunity to share information through our news coverage and editorial voice.

In the early summer of 1984, Glenn took me aside and told me that someone had approached him about purchasing the *Courier*. "I told him," Glenn told me, "that I was ready to sell the paper, but if I sell it, I'll give Tim Waltner the first chance to buy it."

"If you want it," he said, "we'll find a way to make that happen."

Four months later, Bix and I became the owners of the *Courier*. We moved

the operation from the printing plant into a small office on Freeman's Main Street. That was something Glenn insisted on — kicking me out of the nest, so to speak. With Glenn's blessing, I hired two members of the *Courier*/printing staff along with a former co-worker and we published our first issue September 12, 1984. In 1995 we moved into a more spacious historic building that we adapted to our needs, also on Main Street.

Two years later I hired my first editor; until that point I had served as both editor and publisher. While it wasn't by design, that opened the door for our son, Jeremy, who had shown an interest in journalism already as a junior high student, to join the staff as news editor in 1999. His involvement in the paper has been important in helping strengthen our service to the community and it's been a rewarding relationship, both professionally and personally.

Although Bix has never been active in the day-to-day operations, she's been extremely supportive from the very start.

In addition to involvement in the Freeman community, I've also been involved in the South Dakota Newspaper Association as a board member, president as well as the SDNA legislative and First Amendment committees. In 1993 I attended my first summer conference of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors and quickly found that the people of that organization to be a great resource. The influences of SDNA and ISWNE have been — and continue to be — very important in helping me be a better community journalist.

ISWNE can do no better than Tim Waltner

By **Richard W. Lee**

Professor Emeritus of Journalism

Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, 1978-2002

South Dakota State University

I have the pleasure of nominating Tim Waltner, editor of the *Freeman* (SD) *Courier*, for the Eugene Cervi Award in 2012. Tim puts into practice all of the requirements of the Cervi Award — that is, he has had and continues to have a career of outstanding public service to his community and he expresses that beautifully each week in editorials, in writing and in news content.

Tim became editor of the *Freeman Courier* in the early 1970s and publisher in 1984, almost 30 years ago. He has fit well into the conscience of Freeman, a vibrant town of about 1,300, fulfilling the role of agenda-setter, critic and supporter.

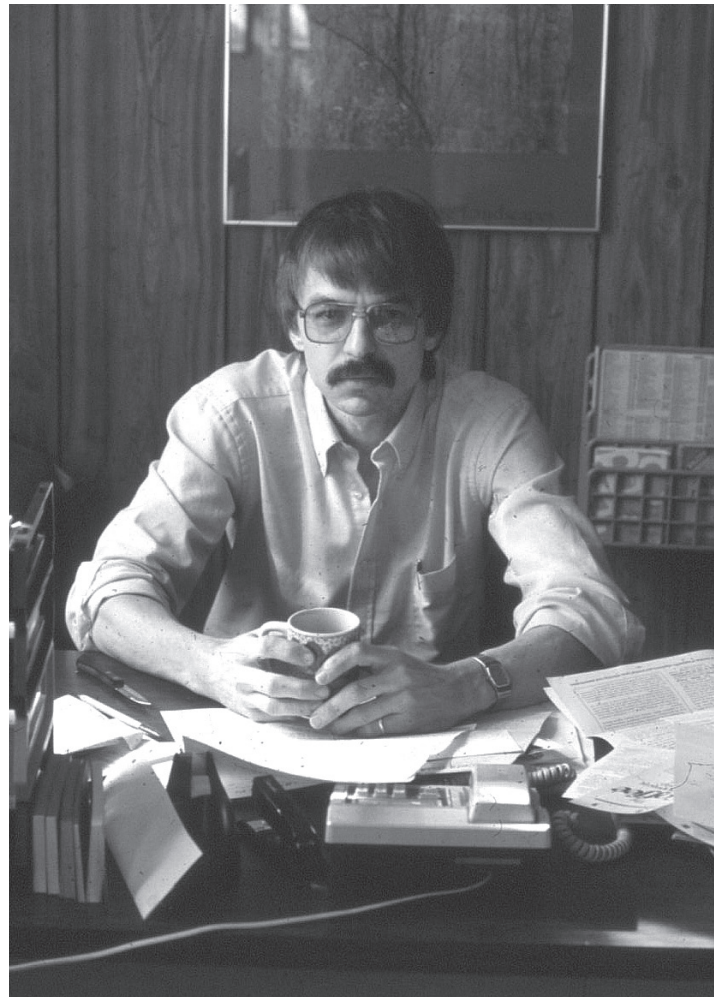
Tim came to his first ISWNE conference in 1993. It was in Brookings, S.D. He was a scholarship recipient at that conference, chosen because he was one of the state's leading weekly editors — one who produced biting editorials and led his community through his news columns. Since then, the *Courier* has only gotten better. It racks up stacks of awards each year at the South Dakota Newspaper Association conventions. It is now THE state's example of the role of a community newspaper.

If one were to count, the *Courier* has won the South Dakota Newspaper Association Sweepstakes Award nine out of the last 10 times. It has won the SDNA General Excellence Award 13 of the last 15 times. Tim's editorials have been in the ISWNE's Golden Dozen seven times, and his son, Jeremy, who is the *Courier* news editor, has won the ISWNE Golden Quill.

The *Courier* was the subject of a recent study by a master's candidate, David Stoltz, in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at South Dakota State University. David found that *Courier* editorials were wide ranging. Over a year he counted 69 subjects, with 60 percent of the editorials being on local subjects, 20 percent being national and about 20 percent being state.

Tim has been a fearless advocate of First Amendment rights. He worked to develop and continues to be a strong voice in SDNA's First Amendment Committee. He has served SDNA twice as its president. He has served ISWNE as its president, as a conference co-host (Rapid City in 2007) and an enthusiastic speaker. He has become a sought-after speaker in the United States and in Canada on editorial writing and on newspaper excellence.

Tim Waltner is cast perfectly from the mold of what the Eugene Cervi Award is about. ISWNE can do no better.



Tim Waltner contemplates the topic for an editorial in 1987.

Knowing Tim made me a better editor

By Vickie Canfield Peters

I met Tim at the 1993 conference in Brookings, S.D. That was the beginning of our 18-plus-year friendship. From the start, I recognized Tim as the kind of editor who not only covers the events of his community but is involved in them. Although there is much discussion in the industry about an editor's ability to remain objective while sitting on committees and chairing events, Tim's reporting is fair and even-handed, even when faced with difficult situations involving people he knows. Let's face it: in a town the size of Freeman, S.D., you'd be hard-pressed not to know more than you'd like about most people!

Tim and I exchanged newspapers for several years when I was still active in the business. His writing is concise and clear. His editorials are often hard-hitting and he's taken on many sensitive issues, including supporting a movement to eliminate racially biased names for sports teams.

The *Freeman Courier's* editorial pages have become stronger over the years, thanks in part to the annual ISWNE critique sessions. In a bold move two years ago, Tim decided to institute a policy that allowed unsigned letters to the editor. It was an experiment to increase reader participation in the editorial process. The policy was abandoned after a year once Tim discovered that the change generated no more reader interaction than running signed letters. He is always open to new ideas and willing to implement them in an attempt to improve his newspaper.

Tim is not a bombastic, fiery editor and publisher. He doesn't employ rhetoric as a tool and has no use for sensationalism. He reports the facts and uses them as the basis of his editorials. His pieces are well-researched and well-penned. He never fails to offer a solution to what he views as a problem. He presents



Tim Waltner multi-tasks at his desk in the "old" Courier office in 1985.

both sides of an issue, when needed, and respects his readers enough to allow them to draw and express their own conclusions.

Small-town politics are often the bane of weekly newspaper editing. Tim covers every local governmental meeting and makes sure his readers are aware of what's going on at city hall. He doesn't hesitate to point out questionable school board or mayoral decisions and is quick to praise government when it works

as it should.

Knowing Tim made me a better editor. We occasionally discussed situations that arose as part of our jobs, and his advice was always sound and reasonable. It's obvious by reading his newspaper that he cares for his readers and believes he has a sacred trust: to report the news fairly, impartially and factually. He is an excellent candidate for the Eugene Cervi Award.

A humble, hard-working country editor

By David Bordewyk

General Manager
South Dakota Newspaper Association

It is my pleasure to write a letter in the nomination of Tim Waltner for the Eugene Cervi Award.

The bottom line: Any time someone asks me for the name of someone who epitomizes the best in South Dakota newspapering, I send them to Tim Waltner.

Tim publishes and edits one of the best, if not the best, weekly newspaper in South Dakota. And he has been doing it for more than three decades. The

awards he and his newspaper have won in the SDNA Better Newspapers Contest through the years bear this truth. His peers know of his excellence. Former and present South Dakota governors, U.S. senators and congressmen know of his excellence. Most importantly, his community and his readers know and appreciate his excellence.

The respect he has earned through the years comes not from the awards he has won, but from who he is as a community newspaper editor and how he goes about that business. Tim is as fair-minded and respectful as a journalist as anyone I know. Through his newspaper's pages, he gives voice to the under-represented, sheds light on

wrongdoings and lifts up excellence and generosity. All this from a rather humble, definitely hard-working country editor.

Tim is the only person to have served twice as president of SDNA. He has been a longtime member of our association's legislative committee and served for more than 10 years as chairman of our association's First Amendment Committee. His service to the association has never been about personal gain or spotlight. To the contrary, Tim's work and service to South Dakota newspapers is driven by a vision and passion to see our newspapers, our communities and our state move forward. He truly is a leader in our industry and our state.



The Waltner family on vacation in Colorado in 1982. Son Jeremy was born in 1976 and daughter AnnaMarie was born in 1979.

Tim represents journalism's gold standard

By **Bill Haupt**

ISWNE Foundation President

Former editor and publisher of the *Lodi (WI) Enterprise*

I first met Tim at the ISWNE conference in Brookings, S.D., in 1993. Since that time, I have developed a close personal friendship as well as an abiding professional relationship with him. In addition to connecting with Tim annually at ISWNE conferences, I have probably visited Freeman on perhaps 20 occasions. I have also been a regular reader of the *Courier* for more than 15 years, and have also contributed a handful of columns to the paper over the years.

Tim and I have also represented ISWNE at a number of editorial critique sessions throughout the country. Given this background, I feel capable of offering a qualified assessment of his contributions to the journalistic community.

Simply put, I feel Tim Waltner represents the gold standard of community newspaper journalism. This high praise is attributable to three primary factors:

1. He has consistently edited and published one of the very finest small community weeklies in America for more than 25 years.

Space does not permit a listing of formal award recognition from state and other press organizations to support this claim. More importantly, perhaps as much as any paper I have ever read, the *Courier* is a real mirror of the Freeman community. Thanks to Tim's enlightened leadership, the paper's leadership role in Freeman's social, political and economic life is unassailable. Whether boosting the community or providing helpful criticism, there is never a doubt that's Freeman's best interests are always foremost.

2. He lives and breathes Freeman.

Any editor or publisher who aspires to greatness must absolutely love his or her community. In many ways, Tim defines Freeman. He was born on a farm just east of the community, and has lived in Freeman almost his entire life. He is remarkably visible in the community, and is involved heavily in economic development efforts.

Tim Waltner leads without shouting

By Garrett W. Ray

I am pleased to support the nomination of Tim Waltner, publisher of the *Freeman, SD, Courier*, for the 2012 Eugene Cervi Award.

The consistently high quality of the *Courier* and Waltner's thoughtful, humane editorials could justify this recognition by themselves. Seven times, his editorials have been among ISWNE's "Golden Dozen," including three years in a row (2000-2002). Several of his winning entries have called calmly but courageously for tolerance and justice in inflammatory community issues.

Gene Cervi was known not only for his courage but also for his confrontational, even belligerent personality. Waltner — cool, firm and self-effacing — could hardly seem more different. Yet both journalists exemplify "...a career of outstanding public service through community journalism...adhering to the highest standards of the craft."

In addition, Tim has led in strengthening local newspapers within and beyond the ISWNE. Since attending his first conference in 1993, he has worked to

expand and enrich connections among small community papers. When the society sought a new home in 1999, Tim served on the search committee that recommended Missouri Southern State College. He was a founding board member of the ISWNE Foundation. Beginning in 2000 and continuing for a decade, Tim handled the complex arrangements for the editorial critique that anchors each year's conference. In 2001 Tim enlisted state press associations as partners in conducting regional editorial writing workshops, and he continues to promote and coordinate the program today.

More than once in its 57-year history, the ISWNE has appeared to be nearing the end of its distinguished service to weekly newspapers. The organization's leaders have lamented, "How can we attract new and younger editors? How can the ISWNE continue its unique role in strengthening the editorial voice of community newspapers?" At each crisis point, new leaders have emerged to reinvigorate the organization. Tim has been among the most important.

His work reflects his character and personality. In the conference room, on the streets of his community, or in his editorials, Tim Waltner leads without shouting. I urge his selection as the recipient of the 2012 Eugene Cervi Award.



Jeremy Waltner (pictured here with Tim in 1993) began working at the Courier while he was in junior high and continued as a part-time writer and photographer through high school and college. He became a full-time employee when he became news editor in 1999. In addition to his writing and photography skills, he also has been invaluable in helping the Courier keep pace with emerging technology over the years, ranging from our transition to digital photography to an evolving online presence.

Tim Waltner is Mr. First Amendment

By Jack Marsh

President/Chief Operating Officer
Freedom Forum Diversity Institute

Our friend and colleague Tim Waltner is most deserving of the Eugene Cervi Award because of his passion for our free press rights and responsibilities and his unwavering commitment to the highest standards of

our profession.

In South Dakota, Tim Waltner is Mr. First Amendment. He is a model journalist and newspaper executive who understands and embraces the media's watchdog role over government, public officials and public institutions. He is a founder of the South Dakota Newspaper Association's First Amendment Committee and continues to be at the forefront of advancing government access and

accountability.

Tim Waltner inspires others with his strong qualities: leadership, courage, integrity, honesty and truthfulness, decency and civility.

If ISWNE's award for public service through community journalism hadn't already been named for Eugene Cervi, it could be named the Tim Waltner Award. These two exceptional journalists have much in common.



Tim and Mary "Bix" Waltner were married on July 25, 1970. While not active in the newspaper business, she's been an active partner in every sense of the word (1991 photo).

Tim is a distinguished leader in all aspects of journalism

By Al Neuharth

Founder/*USA Today*

Founder/The Freedom Forum

This letter is in support of Tim Waltner, who runs the *Freeman* (S.D.) *Courier*, for a Eugene Cervi Award. Tim is a founder of the South Dakota Newspaper Association's First Amendment Committee and a distinguished leader in all aspects of journalism in my home state of South Dakota.



Tim Waltner standing behind the sign atop the small building on Freeman's Main Street that was home to the Courier from 1984-95 (1987 photo).

GENE CERVI

AWARD WINNERS

- 2012 **Tim Waltner**, *Freeman Courier*, Freeman, S.D.
 2011 **Jack Sigvaldason**, Northern News Services, Northwest Territories
 2010 **Tom, Pat & Ben Gish**, *The Mountain Eagle*, Whitesburg, Ky.
 2009 **Garrett Ray**, Fort Collins, Colo.
 2008 **Burt & Ursula Freireich**, Litchfield Park, Ariz.
 2007 **Guy & Marcia Wood**, Angel Fire, N.M.
 2006 No award given
 2005 **Frank Wood**, De Pere, Wis.
 2004 **Frank Garred**, *The Port Townsend Leader*, Port Townsend, Wash.
 2003 **Gary & Helen Sosniecki**, *The Lebanon Daily Record*, Lebanon, Mo.
 2002 **Bill Meyer**, *Marion County Record*, Marion County, Kan.
 2001 **Marg Hennigar**, Lighthouse Publishing, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia
 2000 **Allan A. Seiler**, *The Pike Press*, Pittsfield, Ill.
 1999 No award given
 1998 **Jack Authelet**, *Foxboro (Mass.) Reporter*
 1997 **Carol Wilcox & Cary Stiff**, *Clear Creek Courant*, Idaho Springs, Colo.
 1996 **Charlotte & Marvin Schexnayder**, *Dumas (Ark.) Clarion*
 1995 No award given
 1994 **Jim MacNeill**, *The Eastern Graphic*, Montague, Prince Edward Island
 1993 **Bob Bliss**, *The Montgomery County News*, Hillsboro, Ill.



J. Sigvaldason



G. Sosniecki



H. Sosniecki

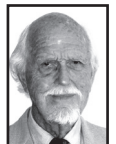


F. Garred

- 1992 **Robert Trapp**, *Rio Grande Sun*, Espanola, N.M.
 1991 **Henry Gay**, *Shelton-Mason County Journal*, Shelton, Wash.
 1990 **Karl Monroe**, *Collinsville (Ill.) Herald*
 1989 **William Rotch**, *Milford (N.H.) Cabinet*
 1988 **Bruce Brugmann**, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*
 1987 **James Russell Wiggins**, *Ellsworth (Maine) American*
 1986 **Rollin McCommons**, *Athens (Ga.) Observer*
 1985 **McDill (Huck) Boyd**, *Phillips County Review*, Phillipsburg, Kan.
 1984 **Richard McCord**, *Santa Fe (N.M.) Reporter*
 1983 **Homer Marcum**, *The Martin Countian*, Inez, Ky.
 1982 **Kieth Howard**, *Yellow Springs (Ohio) News*
 1981 **Edward DeCourcy**, *Newport (N.H.) Argus Champion*
 1980 **Robert Estabrook**, *Lakeville (Conn.) Journal*
 1979 **Houstoun Waring**, *Littleton (Colo.) Independent*
 1978 **Tom Leathers**, *The Squire*, Kansas City, Mo.
 1977 **Charles & Virginia Russell**, *Dewitt County Observer*, Clinton, Ill.
 1976 **Blair Macy**, *Keene Valley Sun*, Kennesburg, Colo.



M. Hennigar



A. Seiler



R. McCord



R. Estabrook

Waltner reflects on 36.5 years at the Courier

By Tim Waltner

Editor's note: Upon hearing that he had won the 2012 Eugene Cervi Award, Tim Waltner reflected a bit on his 36.5 years at the Freeman Courier. Here are some of his observations.

Changes that came after I became editor of the Freeman Courier:

- Commitment to writing an editorial every week, which eventually expanded the content to a full page every week devoted to opinion to include letters, columns and comment from other weekly newspapers. *Tim estimates that he has written approximately 1,800 editorials during this time.*
- Initiated regular coverage of city council and public school board meetings; that had not been the practice prior to my arrival.
- Gave increased attention to not only good reporting and good writing but also to graphic design and packaging, including strong emphasis on effective use of photos.
- More attention to a healthy balance of breaking news, ongoing news and feature stories.
- A highlight was "Freeman in Print," a two-year, 13-part project on the occasion of the Courier's 100th anniversary in 2001. It involved reading every issue published starting in 1901 and creating a week-by-week/decade-by-decade recap of the history of the community as recorded by the weekly. We produced 13 special 40-page tab monthly sections, which were included with the regular issue starting in April 2001 and concluding in May 2002. We overprinted and created boxed sets of all 13 sections. It continues to be an invaluable historical resource.

Among the highlights:

- A three-part series in which I shared the reflections of Dr. Earl Rose on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Rose, who married a Freeman woman, was the county medical examiner in Dallas at the time of the 1963 assassination and had remained silent for decades. He shared his perspectives with the Courier on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the assassination; incidentally, he died in spring 2012.

- A three-part series sharing the experiences of a Freeman woman and her husband who were in Bosnia working with victims of that war-ravaged country. We traveled to Bosnia to spend time with them and shared their observations, perspectives and experiences with their home community.

- A two-year project reporting citizen-landowner opposition to a proposal to build a high-voltage power line across South Dakota including prime farmland near Freeman. The grassroots opposition expanded to a major movement that ultimately helped stop the project.

- Reporting on events that began when a fire destroyed a rural Freeman church in the summer of 1985. It was the result of arson by two young men from the community and the reporting included how the congregation dealt with it, what happened in legal process and, more than a decade later, a story of forgiveness between the congregation and one of the perpetrators.

Observations

I strongly believe that aggressive, but fair, news reporting and bold opinion writing are at the heart of the mission of a community newspaper. That includes striving to be connected with the various aspects of the community and thus creating community dialogue. I am convinced that newspapers can and do help communities thrive.

I believe editorials should be thoughtful and clear. They should include a basis for the opinion, provoke thought and issue a call to action. While focusing on local issues is a priority, it is a mistake to ignore issues of regional, state, national and international importance. The key is to find ways to make those issues matter to the readers in our small community, because they often do – whether those readers realize it or not.

I strongly support the ideals of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. While it forces us to defend speech and actions that can, at time, be unpopular and make us uncomfortable, there is nothing more basic to our civil liberties than those 45 words.

Tim Waltner can be contacted at timwaltner@gmail.com.

The Occupy Movement has a purpose from page 15

of money to most Americans, it doesn't really buy freedom from financial worry or access to the true corridors of power and money. *That doesn't frequent until we reach the top 0.1%.* (The stats are from 2009 and are likely worse now).

Based on those statistics it would appear the Occupy group is more upset with the 0.1% of the 1% group. How did they acquire their wealth if they didn't have decades of education, hard work, saving and investing as a professional or small business person? Does the name Bernie Madoff ring a bell?

If the Occupy Movement is serious and it would appear they are, then they have to take their peaceful protests to the next level. This requires well-versed, personable and knowledgeable spokespeople, to not only uphold the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City, but continue to get the message out. In order for them to increase their numbers which translates into greater clout for their movement, they have to move forward strategically by the best possible means if they want to be heard.

One last thing. Over the past decade and likely longer, the middle class has been annihilated with its numbers becoming poorer by the day. The highest echelons of the richest demographic are getting wealthier. The disparity in equality has progressively widened in a most alarming manner.

Don't believe for a minute this hasn't or won't drastically affect the economy in smaller communities like Valleyview. It will. Whether one supports or opposes the Occupy Movement, remember change is only possible when people are willing to stand up for what they believe benefits themselves and their fellow human beings.

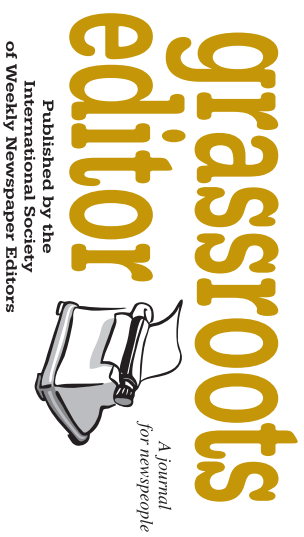
People must prevail over greed, self-interest and oppressions for the global community to survive and thrive in the future.

Footnote: In most cities around the world Occupiers are asked to move out of their sites. This has caused dissatisfaction as they believe they are demonstrating peacefully. In the odd case it has led to confrontation.

Likely the Occupiers will resort to moving out of their temporary quarters and return during the day to carry out their mandate.

As for druggies, the homeless, even professional lobbyists infiltrating these sites this is not surprising. There will always be infiltration by other groups of people for various reasons (i.e. food, shelter, stir up the movement to suit their purposes, etc.).

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