

Commentary...

A newspaper's enduring legacy

By Erik Dolson
Guest Columnist

I felt sadness and pride when Kiki Dolson told me she'd sold *The Nugget Newspaper*.

Sadness because my family owned *The Nugget* for nearly 40 years. In 1978 my father, Hull Dolson, and his wife, Evelyn Borning Dolson, became publishers, buying the paper six months after it was started by Leonard Sundvall, who published *The Nugget* off his kitchen table. Evelyn had married my father not that long before and thought she was moving to the beauty of Central Oregon for a much-deserved retirement. Instead, Evelyn would soon be typing out my father's scrawls on an IBM Selectric typewriter.

Pride because after all these years, *The Nugget Newspaper* is still a vital and important member of the community.

The recession of 1980 that no one remembers was hard. Contractors and realtors had been driven into the ground by interest rates that surged to nearly 20 percent. Upon my father's death in 1982, Kiki and I came over from Portland restaurants to run the newspaper — which was usually two sheets of paper folded, 8 pages.

We didn't have a clue. A family friend suggested I call the editor of the *Medford Mail Tribune*.

"Don't forget your place. You're not the *New York Times*," he said. "Focus on your community."

So we focused on what is called "refrigerator journalism," stories that would be taped to refrigerators in and around Sisters, Oregon.

There was doubt we'd make it. The publisher of the *Bend Bulletin* at the time wrote that we would not. We shared a one-room, 14x14 office with a single phone line. Our first major purchase was a calculator. It wasn't long — months if not weeks — before we realized we'd have to have two phones and separate areas of responsibility. I took on what we called editorial and Kiki was responsible for production & advertising and paying the bills.

I'd write stories and she'd sell ads and everything would be typeset by a graphics company in Bend on Monday, long sheets of silvered photo paper to be brought back and cut into columns and ads, waxed and pasted onto sheets late on Monday night. While Kiki put the pieces together, I'd

be in the darkroom developing film and printing pictures. Then there was the exhausted scramble to finish Tuesday morning so it could be printed by *The Bulletin* that afternoon and distributed on the street and through the post office first thing on Wednesday morning.

The recession ended, we bought a typesetter, opened a printshop, kept making our deadlines. When computers began changing the world in the 1980s, newspapers were among the first impacted. I hacked a Kaypro 64 into an additional typesetting terminal. Then we bought a couple of Macintoshes and a printer, sold the printshop and moved the office into the building it still occupies today. Local writers had surprising talent, and we needed them.

The Nugget was the first newspaper in Oregon on the Internet. In the early 1990s I was invited to give a speech to the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association (ONPA), where I said the laws of economics would eventually not tolerate grinding up trees, spitting ink at the dried pulp and burning barrels of gasoline

to distribute information that was essentially weightless and free. I still thought quality information had value.

We also believed that *The Nugget* was of greatest service to our community and advertisers if every person had access to a copy, so we refused to charge for the newspaper and remained advertiser-supported, even though that meant our paper was looked down upon by "real newspapers" and not allowed full membership in the ONPA though we were a member of the NNA (National Newspaper Association).

Many of those "real newspapers" are no longer in business and many of the rest no longer charge. But our survival wasn't brilliant foresight. It was mostly due to Kiki's hard work and an amazing group of employees. Our small business provided a living for multiple families through the years and I am proud ... no, I am honored ... to have been part of that. Jim, Leith, Teresa, Jess, Erin ... worked for us for decades, through marriages, births, divorces, and college for those children born. I left the newspaper

after Kiki and I divorced 10 years ago.

I am disheartened by what has happened to newspapers in the last 20 years. Freedom of speech is critically important, but only as long as speakers are willing to own their opinions and willing to speak them over their own name. All arguments are not equal — and there is such a thing as truth. Determining what is truth requires a civil discussion.

I do not believe Facebook and Twitter, now the primary sources of news for many, serve society well. Aside from, or because of, a business plan dependent on addictive behavior, they do not bring people together in a central forum where different voices can honestly disagree with open minds about difficult issues.

They allow cowardice and spite to flourish under the cover of anonymity. They require neither the accountability nor courage essential in a force for good. They give what their algorithms have determined each

person wants to see, and in exchange they sell knowledge of personal lives to corporations and governments.

The Nugget Newspaper, run by neighbors you know and can talk to, requires this accountability, and demonstrates that courage. A local paper that is part of the community still must write and publish facts and opinions that will not, that should not, please everyone. For this reason, Kiki was extremely selective when it was time to sell *The Nugget*.

The new family ownership has far more experience than we did 35 years ago, and brings faith in the future of newspapers and a commitment to the ideals of journalism. They recognize the value of the strong and able crew already in place that has served, and will continue to serve, the Sisters community. They understand *The Nugget's* role.

I join others in thanking everyone for the years of support and the opportunities to learn from and appreciate so many.



Metamorphosis
hair | massage | nails
facials | makeup
541-549-1784
161-C N. Elm St.

Offering Aveda™ Skin & Body Care!

AVEDA

the art and science of pure flower and plant essences



FIVE PINE ANNUAL
Breakfast with Santa!
Sun., Dec., 10 • 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Conference Center • 1021 Desperado Trail, Sisters

Breakfast Buffet
Picture Time with Santa
Story Time
\$17 Adults
\$12 Children 3-12 Years Old
Free Ages 2 and Under

— Lodging Special —
Sunday Night, December 10
Only \$99+tax with ticket purchase

Reservations Required
541-549-5900
fivepinelodge.com

100% proceeds go to Family Access Network

Sarah Conroy, Chiropractor

Est. 2002
Sisters Owned

Prevent • Heal • Feel Better

Feeling down and tired this fall?

Shorter days and too much raking, hauling, chopping...come in for our combo therapy and feel better again.

Call 541-588-2213
392 E. Main Ave. | www.sisterschiropractor.com
Shena Fields LMT#7439 | Harmony Tracy LMT# 21211

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE



Transportation System Plan Refinement Community Open House

Tues., Dec. 5 • Drop in: 5 to 7 p.m.
City Hall, 520 E. Cascade Ave.

The City has been working to develop near and long-term options to improve the transportation system on the east side of town.

Come tell us what you think of these ideas!

- Drop in any time between 5 and 7 p.m. (formal presentation at 5:15 p.m.)
- Review and provide feedback on refinements to the following elements of the transportation system plan:
 - Eastside Circulation, including potential improvements at US 20/OR 126, Buckaroo Trail, and the US 20 corridor east of Locust Street
 - US 20/Locust Intersection, near and long-term improvement options
 - Barclay Drive/Locust Street Intersection
 - Barclay Drive Realignment
 - Pedestrian and Bicycle System Plan
- Talk directly with City staff and consultant

For more information call 541-549-6022.