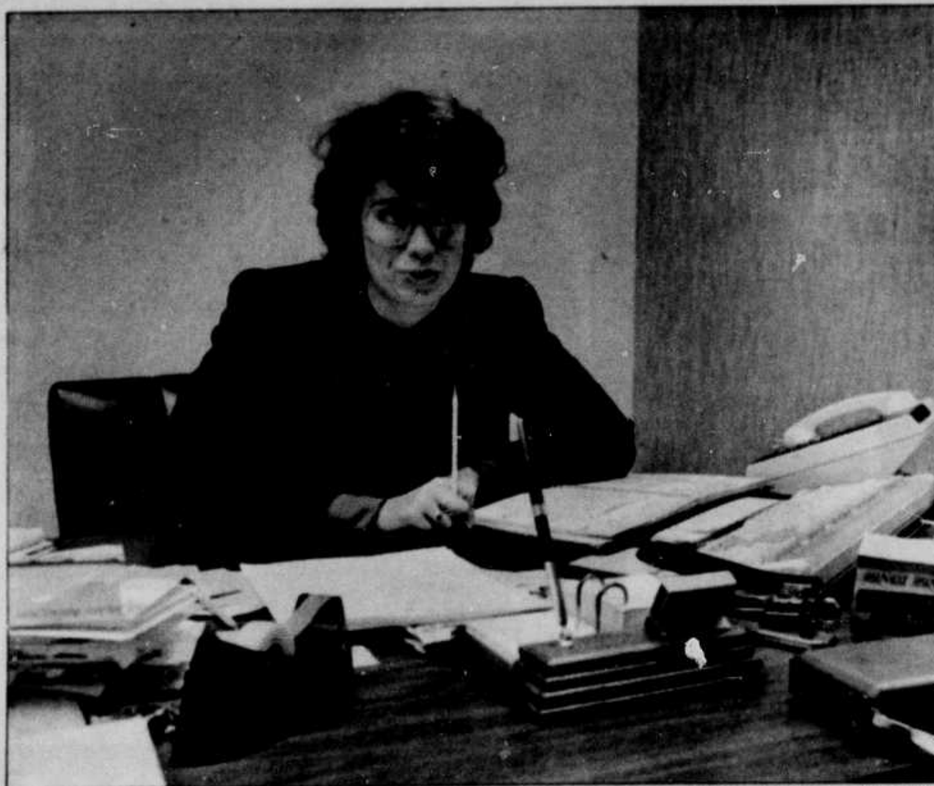

Photo by Derrel Hewitt

Bridget is a third-generation Baker at The Register-Guard. The next generation of Bakers have the opportunity to work at the Guard, or any of the family's other newspapers.

tion, the Eugene Gleemen, the Eugene Chamber of Commerce, and the Congregational Church. He also was the general chairman of the drive to build Sacred Heart Hospital.

Ironically, his community work also had a part in his death. While attending a Boy Scout convention in Yakima, Washington, Alton F. Baker Sr. suffered a heart attack and died on Oct. 27, 1961.

The obituary in that evening's edition of The Register-Guard praised his ability to not interfere in editorial decisions.

"Mr. Baker's guidance of the Eugene Register-Guard was unusual," it read, "in that he concerned himself most directly with the business operations of the newspaper and gave his operational news executives a free hand within only the bounds of basic principles."

Coincidentally, Tugman died five months earlier, also of a heart attack. At the time, Tugman was working for government officials after having sold the Courier.

In March of 1982 Edwin Baker took over as publisher with Alton Baker Jr. remaining as chairman and editor. Then last September Tony Baker moved from managing editor to editor.

According to Bridget Baker The Register-Guard publisher has always maintained a policy of leaving editorial decisions to his staff, especially during elections.

"The three editorial writers interview every single candidate," says Bridget Baker. "They send out a questionnaire and try to do a face-to-face interview with them, too.

"The three of them meet with the publisher and talk about who they think is the best person, and in almost every instance the publisher defers to the editorial people, and in particular to the one who did the actual interview with that particular person. It's only in very rare instances that he would be overruled."

Tony Baker feels the paper has strong ties to the community.

"Certainly, there's a feeling on the part of our staff, and I think it should be the case on any local community newspaper, that we also use the libraries, patronize the stores, and make use of the police services, and we have to remain sensitive to their concerns," he says.

"I'm not suggesting in any way that we're soft, either," he continues. "When issues come up, we report them as aggressively and thoroughly as anyone. But I think that as a family paper, there's a feeling that we have a stake in what's going on around here, too."

The operations of the paper have varied little over the past 60 years. The one big change came three years ago. On Sept. 12, 1983 The Register-Guard switched from evening to morning delivery.

"We did a study and looked at the trend across the country," says Bridget Baker, "and evening papers matched against morning papers were losing circulation. Many of them had closed or gone out of business. That was in head-to-head competition, which we were not facing.

"We heard about a lot of newspapers in Oregon that were going to morning only delivery. We didn't want to be behind in doing that, for fear that someone else would try to come into our market.

"For example, the Albany paper was switching to morning delivery, and we found out about it and switched a month or two before they did. And far more successfully, I might add, but they are only 40 miles away, and they could have come down here with a morning paper the would have been attractive to people."

The paper did a study and discovered that a surprisingly high number of people would prefer a morning paper. Also, the switch made it possible to cover local news more quickly.

"We think that local news is the most important thing we do," says Bridget Baker. "We would cover city council meetings, and the reporter might come back and write the story that night or wait until the next morning. It wouldn't be printed until noon, and people wouldn't read it until 5 or 5:30, almost 24 hours after the council had met.

"Now the reporter sits with a terminal at the meeting, writes the story there, and zaps it to us electronically. We can have it in the paper at 6 in the morning. Same with local sports scores."

The move was clearly a popular one. Only three people called to cancel because the paper had made the switch, while they gained over 2,000 subscribers in six months.

The move did not have such benefits for The Oregonian, according to University Journalism Professor Galen Rarick.

"You can bet the move hurt The Oregonian," he says. "When a local paper goes head-to-head with a more distant paper, the local paper almost always wins."

Bridget Baker feels that The Oregonian, centered in Portland with a circulation close to 300,000 subscribers, is of little concern to The Register-Guard.

"I don't think The Oregonian causes us to lose any sleep at night," she says. "The percentage of subscribers that they have in this area is so small — 3,000 subscribers, or something like that — and we have over 70,000, so if someone is really interested in coverage of the Eugene-Springfield area, buying an Oregonian is not really going to do it for them.

"The Springfield News is certainly more competition than The Oregonian, and they only come out twice a week. The Daily Emerald is more important, maybe, than the Springfield News."

Lack of competition is certainly one of the key reasons why The Register-Guard has been able to survive relatively easily with completely local ownership. The paper has not had to compete against anyone with the financial backing of a chain.

Bridget Baker sees other reasons why chains are growing to dominate the newspaper business.

"Chains aren't swallowing up family newspapers," she says, "the families are getting greedy. They go 'Oooh, we could make millions of dollars if we sell this baby. Why should we sit here, and work and work, and make our thousands, when we could make millions of dollars and not do anything at all!' And, for example, at the Tacoma paper no family members were interested in running the paper in the next generation, so they sold it last year.

"We don't have that problem here. We have an overabundance of family members."

There is such an overabundance, in fact, that the Bakers have expanded and bought other papers, in part because more Bakers wanted to be in-

Decline of Family Papers

While The Register-Guard remains safely in family hands, other family newspapers around the country are being gobbled up by the big media giants.

"A very large degree of control of the newspaper industry is in the hands of relatively large companies," said Ben H. Bagdikian, dean of the school of journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, in a recent Washington Post article. "Politically and socially, that is something to be concerned with. It gives them enormous political power."

Others say, however, that such monopoly control has little meaning today because of the emergence of network and cable television, and suburban newspapers.

Historically, there have always been sell-outs by newspapers to media companies, usually during periods of economic well-being when potential acquirers have built up cash reserves.

Today, however, no company is too big to be swallowed up or too big to avoid an unwelcome takeover. With many newspapers collecting profits of 20 percent of revenues or more, the interest in acquiring newspapers is at a peak.

Among that group, of course, is the family newspaper, long the symbol of community commitment and luxury. In the past, ties to the community resulted in a deep reluctance by family members to sell. Members of the community also would favor the paper staying in the same hands because it would continue as the stable voice they knew and trusted.

But in recent years an avalanche of family newspaper sales have occurred mainly because of family strife and concern over estate taxes.

For the most part, the family members willing to sell have been the brothers, sisters and cousins of heirs who have few tangible ties to the old family and are instead interested in becoming idly rich. Unfortunately for the family members who wish to keep hold of the paper, their counterparts usually outnumber them.

In 1923 the total number of daily newspapers owned by media groups was only 7.5 percent. By 1945, it had climbed to 21 percent, and by 1970, it had reached 50.3 percent. Today, 71 percent of the newspapers are controlled by media groups, the most notable being Gannett, Knight-Ridder, Newhouse, Times Mirror, Dow Jones and Capital Cities Communications. And according to Bagdikian, 97 percent of the 1,674 daily newspapers in the U.S. are monopolies.

The examples of family newspapers selling out are numerous. In 1985, the Cowles family, wrought with family strife, sold the Des Moines Register for $200 million to Gannett. In May of this year, a dispute in the Bingham family over the removal of four female members from the board of directors brought on the sale of the Louisville Courier-Journal and the Louisville Times to Gannett for $415 million.

Not all family newspapers have fallen to the wayside or been gobbled up, however. Earlier this year in St. Louis, the heirs to press baron Joseph Pulitzer fought a battle over the family's St. Louis Post-Dispatch and their 62 suburban papers. When some family members wanted to sell out to Detroit investor Alfred Taubman for $870 million, others, including Joseph Pulitzer Jr., refused to sell their 54 percent holding. The dispute went to court but in the end the smaller shareholders were bought out.

Although the relative strength and value of the large media groups can be seen on the stock market where Gannett is trading at 26 times earnings and Knight-Ridder at 25 times earnings, many analysts don't see a problem with so concentrated an industry. They point out that even Gannett, with 90 dailies, has only a small percentage of the 1,674 dailies in the country. And as a result, the newspaper industry remains diverse.

Others aren't so sure and predict that the management of a few national media groups will one day control the editorial and news policies of individual papers, resulting in stagnant communication.

— STEPHEN MAHER