

Better quality key to newspapers' future, editor says



Jonathan Marshall

By Kimberley Bardin
Emerald Contributor

There is good news for the future of newspapers, despite continuing readership declines, a long-time newspaper editor and publisher said Thursday.

Newspapers are slowly dying because they are overly cautious and dull, but new life can be breathed into them with dynamic, hard-hitting news coverage, said Jonathan Marshall, who published the *Scottsdale Progress* for 25 years until 1987.

Only 55 percent of respondents were loyal newspaper readers and those under age 30

felt they didn't have the time to read the paper, according to a survey conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Low readership stems from people not getting what they need from newspapers, Marshall said. Editors are frequently out of touch with their readers' wants and needs.

Readers believe the best covered news articles include classified ads and national sports, while the worst covered news articles are about local and regional issues, according to the survey.

Marshall said he believes this lack of quality in local coverage

is one of the biggest reasons for declining readership.

"My newspaper covered every major national and international news event, but the major emphasis was on local stories ... and it was a heck of a good newspaper," Marshall said.

Newspapers should have personality, with colorful writing and solid local news coverage. They should be objective and not afraid to hit hard or admit when they're wrong, he said.

If newspapers implement these changes, readers will start to come back, Marshall said.

In addition, there needs to be a creative effort to encourage

people to read again. One place to start is a nationwide campaign requiring head-start programs to teach children to read before they begin school, Marshall said.

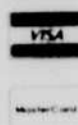
The young adults of today were not introduced to analytical reading until the fourth or fifth grade and by then their reading habits are set, he said.

Marshall received his master's degree from the University's journalism school in 1962. Two years ago, Marshall endowed an annual teaching award for innovative teaching at the school. Professors Tim Gleason and Bill Ryan are this year's recipients.

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