

From the Editor



Recently I read a New York Times article with the headline “Over 360 newspapers have closed since just before the start of the pandemic.” For someone in the newspaper business the article felt like “bad news, good news, more bad news,” and went on to discuss a report from Northwestern University’s journalism school.

The bad news in that report was right there in the NYT headline – 360 newspapers have gone out of business. The good news – those 360 closures actually mirrored the same pace of newspaper closures prior to the pandemic. In other words, while many analysts predicted the tough economic times and a drop in ad revenue would force more newspapers to close during the pandemic, that in fact did not happen. They continued closing at the same pace.

I know, not really good news, but right now, we’ll take what we can get in these troubled times.

So what’s the rest of the bad news? Well, overall, 2,500 newspapers in the United States, a full quarter of them, according to the NYT, have gone out of business since 2005. And the Northwestern University report found that most investments in local journalism are happening in larger markets. That has led to what has been described as “news deserts,” places without access to local news; the report found that 20 percent of Americans now live in places with limited access to local news, which can be extremely detrimental in a small community. As the author of the report, Penelope Muse Abernathy, noted, “Truth of the matter is, who I elect to the school board affects me much more than who I vote for for president.”

Back to some good news – you don’t live in one of those places. This June *Vernonia’s Voice* celebrated our 15th year as your local newspaper. And here’s some

even better news – we’re expanding! That’s right, we are currently putting the finishing touches on a brand new website, which we hope will go live in the next month, and will provide us with a new tool to help get you the local information you need. We’ll tell you more about this exciting addition as we get closer to the launch.

We wouldn’t be here today without my original business partner, Evan Doyle, in what was, in 2007, a bit of a crazy idea. Evan’s inspiration, excellent writing and photography skills, hard work, and dedication, were instrumental in making this venture a reality. Thank you Evan for your guidance, patience, and encouragement. And also to Rebecca Jensen Wright whose graphic design talents and creativity first brought our vision to life.

It’s important to take note of our business model that has allowed us to sustain our operations for the past 15 years. As you are probably aware, since you are reading this, you can get a copy of the Voice in one of two ways – pick up a free copy locally or subscribe and have it mailed to you – most people pick up their copy. That means most of our publication costs are subsidized by advertising revenues – which come from the businesses, local organizations, and events that purchase ad space.

So, all of us owe a big thank you to the advertisers who support us and help keep the Voice showing up twice each month, and help keep you informed. We couldn’t do it without our advertisers!

While we greatly appreciate ALL our advertisers, we would really like to acknowledge a few special local businesses who took a chance with a new newspaper in Vernonia and have been advertising in the Voice since those first few issues: R&S Market (Sentry Market back then), Wauna Credit Union, Grey Dawn Gallery, Vernonia Dental, Muffy’s, Vernonia True Value, R&R Motor Company, Mike

Pihl Logging, New Day Massage, Absolute Marble, Payroll Plus, Steve Hemeon, Robert Watts Construction, Storage Too, The Black Bear, and KLS Surveying. I also feel the need to mention Sharon Bernal, one of the early, and really cornerstone advertisers until her retirement a few years ago. Thanks to all of you for your long time support of the Voice!

Over the years we’ve had numerous contributors who have written monthly columns for the Voice. These writers, which are too many to list, have shared their expertise or unique perspectives on particular subjects. Currently we enjoy columns by Tobie Finzel who writes about Vernonia’s history, Chip Bubl on gardening, Damien Cox for the American Legion, and Vernonia Library Director Shannon Romtvedt. All of our contributors over the years have helped make this newspaper the voice of Vernonia, and we are deeply grateful to them.

Last year, in the middle of the pandemic when many businesses were struggling, we decided to ask our readers to contribute financially to the Voice and also become supporters of their local newspaper. Your response was not only overwhelming but also extremely touching! From small donations of \$5 and \$10 to large checks in the hundreds of dollars, the readers of the Voice have stepped up and showed us they value their local newspaper. Thank you to all who have offered this important contribution, which not only provided financial support but also offered us your much valued

encouragement and inspiration to continue. As a small way of showing our appreciation and acknowledging your support, we have published the names of all those who have become supporters of the Voice on page 6.

The role of a community newspaper is, first and foremost, to inform. But it is also many other things. Originally, when Evan and I first started this venture, we hoped to tell the good stories that were happening around this community – the businesses, the volunteers, the service organizations, our youth and their accomplishments. And that’s why, when we published our first issue, we chose the tagline “Reflecting the spirit of our community” which still graces the masthead of each issue. And while each of us may have our own idea of what that spirit here in Vernonia actually is, we’ve tried to stay faithful to that idea over the years. A newspaper can provide many things beyond just information – entertainment, education, opinions, and alternative perspectives.

As we enter into another year of publishing the Voice, we are certainly aware that we are in a time when there are plenty of issues on which many of us disagree. We are well aware that we don’t always represent everyone’s views, opinions, ideas, and perspectives. But my hope is that you continue to value and appreciate *Vernonia’s Voice* as your local newspaper.

Scott Laird
Editor and Publisher

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reflecting the spirit of our community

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