

Keizertimes marks 40th anniversary

A look back on Keizer's history of local news

On Thursday, Oct. 3, the *Keizertimes* will be celebrating its 40th anniversary.

While the newspaper industry has been roiled by changes large and small in recent decades, we wanted to celebrate our award-winning, locally-owned paper's successes with the community by publishing this giant-sized edition of the paper and looking back on the history of news in the Keizer community.

While the *Keizertimes* published its first edition on Oct. 3, 1979, the history of newspapers in Keizer goes back even further, to the 1940s and the *Keizer News*.

Clarence Zaitz, father and father-in-law of the current Keizertimes owners Les Zaitz and Scotta Callister as well as dad to current publisher Lyndon Zaitz, arrived in Salem to work for the *Capital Journal* in 1963. In 1964, he purchased the *Keizer News*, a weekly community paper in what was then a mostly agricultural area of Salem.

"It was an eye-popping experience," Clarence said. "That was back in the days of printing with hot lead before

offset printing. Fortunately, I also acquired an itinerant, drunken printer. He stayed with me long enough to teach me the basics."

He switched to offset printing as soon as he learned about it and could make the switch. Offset doesn't involve the dangers of molten metals.

Clarence and his wife, Joanne, who already had five kids when they took over the *Keizer News*, fed each copy of each edition of the paper through the printing press by hand and then through a folding machine. The office was located on the southeast corner of River Road North and Chemawa Road Northeast where Shari's is now.

"We'd be there till midnight or one o'clock in the morning to get enough papers to take to the post office. Some nights, the kids would all be asleep on the news-

print," Clarence said.

Unfortunately, the business of running the paper took him away from his first love, reporting, but he and Joanne enlisted a small team of "neighborhood reporters" to feed them the stories for each edition.

Joanne sold ads and helped manage the business end throughout their ownership.

"I took care of all the office stuff after taking the kids to school, but we always tried to have a babysitter on the nights we went to press," she said.

They also offered print services to others in the community and printed some of the first student ID cards for McNary High School when it opened in 1965.

The most memorable news event was a winter flood in 1964. *Keizer News* was the first publication to have printed photos of the devastation on the streets, beating all the

local major newspapers at the time.

"The flooding happened overnight. I raced around to get photos in the morning, brought them back to develop them, made paste-ups and we had a flood edition on the street by noon," he said.

That was one week the decisions came easy, but that wasn't always the case.

"Sometimes on the day that we're supposed to put the paper together, I still didn't know what I was gonna put on the front page," he said.

Living in the moments like those were as exhilarating as they were exhausting, but despite victories like the flood edition, running the business became a grind.

"There was a constant strain to make enough money to survive between getting advertisers that were reluctant and inheriting equipment we were totally unfamiliar with," he said.

He and Joanne shuttered the paper in 1969 and Clarence took a job running the Oregon capital bureau for United Press International.

While Clarence was running the paper, his enthusiasm for journalism was infecting his sons, Les and Lyndon.

Les was acting as a reporter for the *Keizer News* by the age of 13. The office was just across the street from the all-volunteer Keizer Fire Dis-

trict and Clarence sent him out to find out what happened every time the crew got back from a call.

"I would trudge across the field and they'd give me all the details. It was cool to have the inside information that young, and share it with other people," Les said.

Lyndon was a student at Whiteaker Middle School one day when a plane crashed in a nearby field. His first stop was the main office to call his dad and report what happened.

QUOTE from LYNDON

Les went on to a career with *The Oregonian*, but he and his wife, Scotta another break-out *Oregonian* reporter, were looking to own a paper of their own.

They scouted papers throughout Oregon and Washington, but Les thought the *Keizertimes*, which was started by John Ettinger in 1979, had the most potential.

"John was not a newspaper guy, but he had done a good job of building a publication on a shoestring budget. Keizer was growing and I thought the newspaper could serve the community better," Les said.

Les and Scotta purchased the paper from Ettinger in 1987.

While Les had prior experience in the community, he found running a business to be just as challenging as his father.

"We had to be a successful business to be a successful paper, but we also wanted to upgrade the quality of the journalism and give the paper a more professional look," he said.

While his dad's legacy in the community didn't play a huge role in Les's return to Keizer, their paths diverged again when Les ended up covering another major flood in the area in 1996.

"We had to evacuate our office. It was a huge issue for Keizer and we leaned into it hard and worked around the clock. There was great fear at the time that the water would keep rising and the dyke would breach," Les said.

The waters finally ebbed saving the community from more damage. Improvements to the water management upstream have spared the city continued flooding problems.

Whether it is the big community-wide issues or just the small, everyday victories that make Keizer the place it is, Les said the presence of a newspaper is still as important as ever.

"In this day and age, the *Keizertimes* continues to succeed and that is an important legacy. Local news is not an accessory, it's essential to life and is part of the success of a community. Having good journalism that reports honestly about a community is a point of pride," he said.



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