

News media in transition is opportunity to shine

By LAURA SELLERS
The Daily Astorian

There is something inherently historic about our nation's news editors gathering in Philadelphia for the News Leadership Conference presented by the Associated Press Media Editors, American Society of News Editors and the Associated Press Photo Managers.

Amid some hand-wringing about troubled times in the news industry, there could loudly be heard bell ringing for freedom of information, transparency, innovation and, most importantly, the declarations that, without journalists, society could be lost.

Pretty stirring pronouncement, that. But here is Eddy Cue, Apple's head guy for internet software and services — he led the creation of the iTunes store, Apple Music, Siri, and now Apple News — to back it up: "I think as you look at the world today, all over the world, it's really important that we have great, successful, expanding news organizations in the world," he said. "You guys do incredible work that's extremely valuable and makes society better. Without you, it would be a disaster."

Not that we have any time to rest and reflect on that. Time is of the essence.

In fact, Cue added, he wakes up every day and thinks about surviving, because basically no industry is safe anymore. And he said that "Steve Jobs taught me that in order to do great things you have to be able to say 'no.'" So we must put our energy behind what's most important.

And further, he notes that Apple News will never be a moneymaker, but they did it because news is an important part of society.

Marty Baron, executive editor of the Washington Post and former editor of the Boston Globe when it was profiled in the movie "Spotlight," said, "I went through my own period of mourning, of what I thought was being lost amid all the change. It was hard not to," he said. "Mourning must come to an end at some point ... The truth is that it is futile and counterproductive to resist the inevitable changes in our profession. We can't just adapt to this dramatic change, we have to embrace it. Even as we do that, we also have to remember what doesn't change and that is our mission."

Civility is the word

In this tense election year, one breath of fresh air was the winner of APME's Innovator of the Year award, The Northwest Times of Indiana. This smaller publication beat out two Pulitzer Prize winners for the honor, selected in live voting at the conference.

Their innovation? Civility Counts, which uses this as their vision: "As we witness incidents of disrespect, discourtesy, intolerance, bullying and violence in all of our communities, we see the need to raise the conscious level of everyone and those from every walk of life. Whether in politics, business, education or our personal lives, we can be better. We must be better in order to live in a civil manner and in a civilized society."

The Times partnered with the Gary, Indiana, chamber, schools and other groups and led the way by refusing to publish vitriolic speech. There was some pushback from those who thought their ability to speak out was being taken away.

"Eighteen months in, the feedback has completely changed," said Summer Moore, digital and audience engagement editor. "Now all we're getting from the community is they're so excited and so happy that we're not putting that stuff in our paper anymore."

Editor Bob Heisse is a former president of APME and a personal mentor.

"This is something any of you can do in your communities," he said at the conference. "It's a concept that our community has embraced."

Now, our area is fairly civil on the surface, but dip into the comments section on our website or try to hold a political discussion about the presidency or race or immigration and watch the fur fly.

So, maybe this is an idea rearing its head just in the nick of time.

Joining forces

One trend in the industry is combining resources with former competitors to serve the greater good.

Witness the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, and the Tampa Bay Times joining forces in a series about the many dangers in Florida's mental health institutions and winning a Pulitzer Prize and an APME sweepstakes award for Public Service for Insane. Invisible. In danger.

Incoming APME President Bill Church said when asked by a student journalist at the conference if his newspaper and the Times could have collaborated in that way 50 years ago,



Ralph Archbold has been impersonating Benjamin Franklin since 1973, and Philadelphia has declared him the city's official Ben Franklin. He was actually born on Franklin's birthday, Jan. 17. He is seen here at the opening reception in the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia with newsroom leaders from around North America.



Associated Press Media Editors President Laura Sellers welcomes newsroom leaders to the 2016 conference in Philadelphia with American Society of News Editors President Pam Fine looking on. The reception was held in the National Constitution Center.



Incoming Associated Press Media Editors President Bill Church, center, sits among other attendees at the #newsleaders2016 conference in Philly.

"No. That's the short answer. There's a significant amount of incentives right now because everyone is always looking for an opportunity to continue to do what's important for our audiences."

Another example would be the sense it made for three journalism leadership groups to come together into one conference for the third consecutive year. Alone, not one of our groups could attract enough attendees to lure Cue and Baron to our midst. And, we were able to learn in the hours after the sessions from our counterparts in other areas of the newsroom and business.

That's a win. Locally, here is one more example of the power of working together.

A couple of years ago, The Daily Astorian's parent company, EO Media Group, got together with the Pamplin Media Group and launched our Capital Bureau, using shared resources and

reporters dedicated to statehouse coverage to tackle the void that existed in solid statewide news.

It's paid off.

Those reporters consistently break news on all fronts, including much during the Kitzhaber/Hayes governor scandals last year.

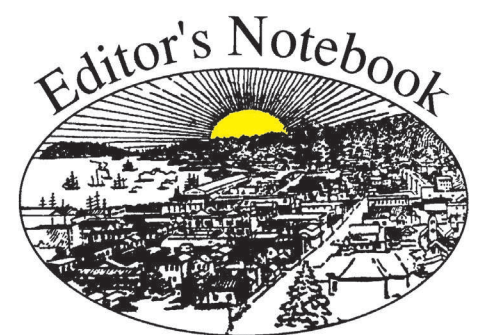
In an era when newspaper media is shrinking, we found a way to grow.

End of an era

I am the outgoing president of the Associated Press Media Editors, and our close collaboration and communication with AP is one of reasons for our existence.

For 14 years, Kathleen Carroll has been the top news leader at the Associated Press. She's signing off at the end of the year.

When we think about transformation and innovation in our industry, there are few who overlook the changes she has wrought.



Kathleen Carroll delivers the opening keynote speech at the #newsleaders2016 conference in Philadelphia.



She was the opening speaker at our conference and provided some historical context.

From our student journalist: In 1864, they could send news from Europe to North America by telegraph at a rate of eight words per minute, she said.

"Unthinkable speed. Eight. Words. A. Minute," she said, with long pauses in between.

During her tenure, she helped establish bureaus in North Korea, Myanmar and Saudi Arabia, and she led the AP's transformation from a newspaper-focused agency to one that produces multimedia on all channels.

Under Carroll's watch, the AP won five Pulitzers, including one this year for public service, six George Polk Awards and 15 Overseas Press Club Awards.

She has been an inspiration and mentor to many, including me. I asked some of our board members to describe Kathleen. Here is a sampling.

Moore of the Northwest Times said of Carroll: "A fierce defender of journalism and the AP. From fielding foreign dictators to the DOD, Kathleen never wavered from her mission to do right by our industry. She led the largest news agency in the world and somehow managed to instill incredible pride in every person."

We should all aspire to do just that.

Laura Sellers is The Daily Astorian's managing editor and a longtime member of the Associated Press Media Editors board of directors and its 2016 president.



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