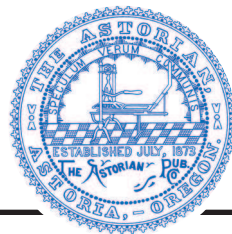


OPINION



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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SUNSHINE WEEK

Communities lose when newspapers die

It is a story of corruption that will stay secret, politicians who will need fewer votes to win, even dangerous communicable diseases that will spread faster as our best scientists struggle to fight them.

The story is the slow and painful demise of local newspapers, a story whose ending is not yet written but which — without bold intervention and strong reader support — could bring catastrophic repercussions.

Whether you follow the news or not, whether you trust journalists or not, the financial challenges slaying local newspapers will affect your community, your wallet, your quality of life. In some cities, they already have.



JOYCE TERHAAR

We've watched local newspapers lose revenue to tech giants for the better part of the last quarter century. In recent years, the outcome has become dire, with nearly one in five — almost 1,800 newspapers — closed in the last 15 years, according to Penelope Muse Abernathy, the Knight Chair in Journalism and Media Economics at the University of North Carolina.

Even more prevalent than closures are what Abernathy calls “ghosts,” newspapers that are a shell of what they were. Tens of thousands of journalists left newsrooms in the decade ending 2017.

You can blame the insatiable grab for profits from hedge fund ownership like Alden Global Capital and its Digital First Media. But even companies with deep commitments to their journalistic mission have been forced to issue one layoff after another, dismantling newsroom staffs that once kept a check on the powerful.

When they walked out of the newsroom, those journalists took with them their connections to the community and their knowledge of issues and people. We've all lived through the result: Your newspaper's best coverage still might be very good; there's just not nearly enough of it.

I used to think journalists in digital startups would replace newspapers



that disappeared. That isn't happening enough. Abernathy identified hundreds of cities with no credible news source left. And last July, Pew Research Center reported that in the decade ending in 2017, roughly 32,000 newspaper journalist jobs evaporated and only 6,000 were created by digital news startups. Newspapers still employed more journalists — 39,000 — than the 13,000 at digital sites.

What happens when a community loses a newspaper? Or when the newspaper no longer has enough reporters to cover the news? The Federal Communications Commission as far back as 2011 had a bleak prognosis: “More government waste, more local corruption, less effective schools, and other serious community problems.”

It was right: — It costs you money: Higher wages for government employees, higher deficits and — perhaps a more esoteric example — higher costs for municipal borrowing. Last May, researchers at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Illinois at Chicago found all three after looking at how local newspaper closures affected public finance. “... local newspapers hold their governments accountable, keeping municipal borrow-

ing costs low and ultimately saving local taxpayers money.”

— It might hurt your health: Scientists with the US Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization told the health news site STAT last year they use local newspaper reports to watch for the spread of infectious diseases and are handicapped in communities without newspapers. For instance, the CDC obtained urgent data about a 2016-17 mumps outbreak in northwest Arkansas only because of coverage from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

— Fewer people hold power: When local newspapers go out of business, several recent studies show, we don't vote as often or stay engaged with politics. That means fewer people elect our politicians. Think about the last time you voted. Did you vote in every race on the ballot? Or did you skip some because you couldn't easily find verified information about the candidates?

Without local newspapers, who reveals injustices like the widespread sexual abuse by Catholic priests reported by the Boston Globe in 2003? Or leads a community-wide discussion of race relations and the impact on housing, crime and education, as Ohio's Akron Beacon

Journal did in 1993? Or exposes high death rates among Las Vegas construction workers as the Las Vegas Sun did in 2009? These are just three examples of public service so exemplary they received a Pulitzer Prize.

We can't afford to lose this kind of journalism. You can help by subscribing to at least one local newspaper. The Knight Foundation last month announced a major effort to help, committing \$300 million to organizations including those that pay for local journalism, like the American Journalism Project, Report for America and the investigative journalism nonprofit ProPublica. Philanthropists around the country are funding nonprofit startups to help fill the void.

We should pay attention to what other countries are doing, and to Sen. Elizabeth Warren's proposal to break up tech company dominance, even though government intervention rightly raises some hackles.

Late last year, the Canadian government announced it would spend \$600 million to protect public service journalism, using tools such as tax incentives. A British inquiry into what it will take to sustain high-quality journalism last month rightly questioned whether it's time for government intervention given the market dominance of Facebook and Google, and made recommendations including possible journalism subsidies.

What about that market dominance? It is, after all, threatening public service journalism, an essential part of our democracy and citizen power. In January, we saw Facebook pledge to spend \$300 million in the U.S. to help local newspapers, a year after Google promised the same amount.

It's a good start, but not nearly enough: The duopoly controls most online advertising revenue, benefits from news content, yet doesn't pay for the substantial cost of quality journalism. Bold intervention is what we need. Will it take the British?

Joyce Terhaar is a board member with the American Society of News Editors and former executive editor of *The Sacramento Bee*.

Water under the bridge

Compiled by Bob Duke
From the pages of Astoria's daily newspapers



10 years ago this week — 2009

KNAPPA— Things look pretty good in Knappa right now. And the winning formula is the T-word — “teamwork.” The Logger boys basketball team did its own version of “winning one for the Gipper” Saturday night, earning the state Class 2A basketball championship for coach Craig Cokley.

It was especially fitting because Cokley had announced that he is retiring from the coaching job after a stellar career.

A settlement has removed the last obstacle preventing a controversial condominium project on the Columbia River waterfront in Astoria from going ahead.

Seldom has a residential development sparked as much public opposition as the condominium Jon Englund and his partners proposed for property between 15th and 16th streets on the Astoria riverfront. It was 2006 when Englund first floated the idea of a condo on the former site of his family's marine supply business, which is now located at the Port of Astoria.

The Oregon Department of Transportation is sending an extra \$895,000 in highway project funds to Clatsop County and its municipalities as part of the federal economic stimulus package.

In addition to the normal state distribution of Surface Transportation Program funds, Clatsop County will receive \$541,530, the city of Astoria, \$215,779, and city of Seaside, \$137,966.

The funds must be spent within a year on ODOT-approved projects.

Even from a cornfield in Illinois, someone can pan across the waves washing up at the Cove in Seaside.

From an internet café in Africa, a computer user will have a front-row seat while Fourth of July fireworks light up the ocean.

And, deep in the heart of Texas, a curious onlooker will be able to cheer on the runners in the Hood to Coast Relay as they spring down the Promenade to the finish line on the beach.

Watching the waves is already possible with a webcam perched on a balcony at the Lanai at the Cove, a vacation condominium complex on the south side of town. Set up by the Seaside Chamber



Millions of feet of lumber and no transportation in sight was the picture in 1969 at Pier 2, Port of Astoria. Port officials said the East coast strike of longshoremen, recently settled, prevented ships from maintaining normal schedules. More than 12,000,000 feet of lumber awaiting export is visible in this view, taken from the port water tower.

of Commerce on the chamber's website a month ago, the webcam enables viewers to see almost 3 miles away to the Turnaround.

In another two weeks, the chamber will install a second webcam at the Seaside Aquarium, which will offer a view that will reach to the mouth of the Necanicum on the north and Tillamook Head on the south.

50 years ago — 1969

Retired logger Henry Mooers of Skamokawa came in with a map. The map showed how much distance would be cut off travel to and from the beach if the present circuitous route over K-M mountain could be eliminated. This can be done, and must be done sooner than later, says Mooers, by simply extending the highway straight down the shore of the Columbia from Skamokawa, past Brookfield, Pillar Rock and Altoona, and either across Grays Bay on a low-level bridge, or around it, to connect with the present highway in the vicinity of Pt. Ellice.

It looks as if this would shave about 20 miles in distance. In terms of driving time, that would be around 30 minutes considering the nature of the road, up and over the mountain, being replaced.

Anyone who wonders why the road wasn't located along the river in the first place — why, after following water all way from Longview, it took off inland at Skamokawa — needs to understand a little lower Columbia history. There was a legislator named Meserve who had a large general store at the head of navigation on Grays River. He insisted that the new road, finished in 1930, go through his town rather than

Brookfield, Pillar Rock and Altoona. And he prevailed.

The manager of the Port of Astoria pleaded with the port commissioners Tuesday not to give up on the bill in the Legislature that proposes merger of the ports of Astoria, St. Helens and Portland.

“What you lose is so small, in comparison with what you gain, that it's foolish to question the Mosser bill,” Manager C.E. Hodges told commissioners skeptical of some provisions in Senate Bill 492, drawn by Port of Portland attorney John Mosser.

75 years ago — 1944

A committee to work out a plan of financing the proposed teenage recreation center was appointed at Thursday night's community council meeting by Chairman Don Mitchell in hopes that a survey of financial support might help in selection of a site for the recreation rooms.

No union of opinion was reached regarding location of the youth hall. In addition to the two sites previously favored, the YMCA and basement of the old Montgomery Ward building, now owned and offered free of rental by the American Legion, several others requiring rent were suggested.

A medium-sized plane from the Astoria airport facility of the U.S. Naval Air Station, returning with other planes from a routine flight, was forced into the sea 8 miles off Willapa Bay at 7:55 p.m. Sunday, and two men aboard were still missing today despite an all-night search.