

New media are filling Oregon news deserts



STEVE FORRESTER
WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

George Custer is a new player in the struggle to keep Oregon news deserts from happening.

Following closure of the Dead Mountain Echo, an Oakridge newspaper of some 50 years standing, a group led by veteran newsman Doug Bates started the Highway 58 Herald, an online newspaper. A former U.S. Marine Corps captain and a businessman, Custer is working on the newspaper's business side, and he has filled in as an interim editor.

Custer and I met at the City Club of Eugene's July 8 discussion of the topic, "Can local newspapers survive?" In response to that question, I had the easier task, because I could speak about our media company and its survival.

The Highway 58 Herald endeavor is much like the Ashland News, which is powered by retired journalists and business people such as Paul Steinle, who resides in Ashland, as well as on the Long Beach Peninsula. Steinle is a retired executive of King Broadcasting of Seattle.

These two startups and another in Yachats are emblematic of the drive to fill community news voids.

EO Media Group, the parent company of the East Oregonian, closed its books

on June 30, at the end of the fiscal year. I am pleased to report it was a financially healthy year. During that cycle, our newspapers gained subscribers, to both our print and digital editions.

Talent is the key to our company's financial health. Talent in the newsrooms of our 15 newspapers, talent among our designers and advertising sales staffs, talent in our one printing site in Astoria and in our call center.

News content is what drives readers to

late February that stretched nearly 2-miles long. Nearly 20 patients were taken to area hospitals and stranded motorists were taken to the Pendleton Convention Center, which served as a reunification hub for people involved in the crash.

In the years ahead, our company's path and the paths of new Oregon news outlets such as in Ashland and Oakridge may intersect. During the fiscal year, EO Media Group launched the Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism. This nonprofit

is a new generation of news entrepreneurs. In other words, young people who are equipped with reporting, editing and business skills to start community news organizations. These young talents can emerge from our journalism schools. Our company leaders have had that conversation with the leaders of the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication.

Journalism schools at the University of West Virginia and University of Kentucky are focusing on how to develop new generations of entrepreneurial journalists. Our conversations with UO are heartening.

By telling you that we've had a good fiscal year, I do not mean to disguise the challenges we've confronted and will confront. The newspaper business has never been easy for papers our size in communities such as we represent.

If you've read "Grit and Ink," the history of our company and family, you know that from the late 19th century into the 21st century, impediments such as the Great Depression, a massive fire in Astoria, pandemics — as well as shifts in the advertising industry — have come our way regularly.

The key to rural and regional newspapers' survival is resilience and innovation. And that is where you'll find EO Media Group in the year ahead.

Steve Forrester is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.

"THE KEY TO RURAL AND REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS' SURVIVAL IS RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION. AND THAT IS WHERE YOU'LL FIND EO MEDIA GROUP IN THE YEAR AHEAD."

our print and digital editions.

In one of our highest profile news initiatives, The Bulletin in Bend is in the midst of a yearlong series that profiles homeless persons in Deschutes County. Prior to the U.S. Supreme Court decision on Roe v. Wade, Katie Frankowicz of KMUN and Nicole Bales of The Astorian took an extensive look at the lack of access to abortion in rural areas of Oregon like the North Coast. The East Oregonian covered a 170-car crash on Interstate 84 in

venture is seeking philanthropic money that is dedicated to helping newsrooms thrive. FORJ aims to help rural newsrooms around Oregon build sustainable operations. Also we hope to build collaborations with other rural newspapers in shared news initiatives on topics such as water, housing and climate change.

What I like about FORJ is that it is a countervailing force against the national narrative that news deserts must be our future. What America and Oregon need



ANDREW CUTLER
FROM THE PUBLISHER

Newsroom addresses reader feedback

Feedback from readers is a key pillar to the success of any newspaper or news organization and in June we identified five areas to improve at the East Oregonian based on input from a reader survey.

The survey showed readers wanted a host of items to be addressed. Five key categories stood out in terms of better effort on our part — improving accuracy, more follow-up stories, more personality features and human-interest type tales, shorter articles and better coverage of Umatilla County government.

I want to outline to you, the reader, the steps we've executed to address each category.

In terms of improving accuracy, we've given every reporter access to a comprehensive fact-checking protocol and instructed each one on how to use this valuable tool. By the end of this month, I believe we will have a better understanding of how well this step is working.

In terms of improving follow up stories — especially with crimes — East Oregonian news editor Phil Wright is working through all of our crime reporting and court cases from the past few years to build a spreadsheet to help track cases and find ones we need to update. Already, Wright has completed follow ups on several recent cases, including a man facing kidnapping charges.

Our effort to enhance our personality features and human-interest stories has been, so far, the easiest to achieve. We've printed several profiles already and the latest is online now — and was printed in a recent weekend edition — about an Army National Guard pilot moving back to Pendleton.

Our dedication to producing shorter articles remains a work in progress. We are working daily to encourage our reporters to write in a more clear, concise and shorter way.

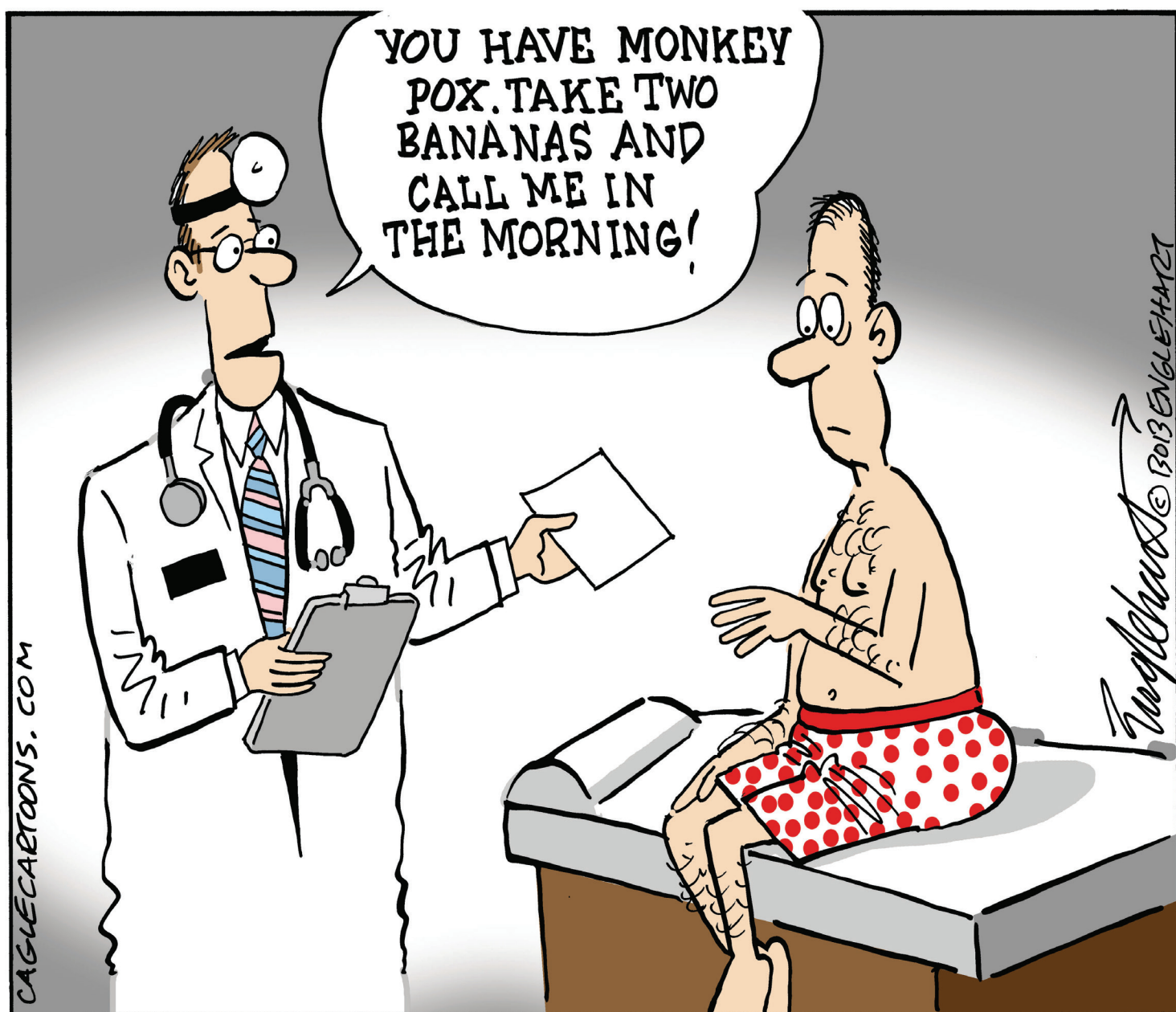
We also are still working to improve our coverage of Umatilla County government.

I hope to be able to report back within the next few months regarding our success with shorter articles and our coverage of county government.

The main point is a simple one — we care about you, the reader. We are making key changes to how we do our jobs because you, the reader, asked for it. I remain confident that we can meet all of the benchmarks outlined by our survey and I am excited about the feedback we received.

Feedback, critical or complimentary, is essential for us to be able to guide our pathway into the future.

Andrew Cutler is the publisher/editor of the East Oregonian and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the East Oregonian and five more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.



Parenting time plans and how to modify them



BLAINE CLOOTEN
ASK AN ATTORNEY

Q: I am happily divorced with two children ages six and eight, living in Hermiston. I work a regular 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday. I also tend to work overtime. My ex works as an educator and her schedule tends to coincide with my kid's school schedule. She also lives in Hermiston. She stays home with them during the summer.

My time with them is currently the first, third and when available, fifth weekend of the month. I also get Thursday night (5:30) until the next morning during the second and fourth week. I get two weeks during the summer, and we usually do a vacation. Custody isn't really an issue for me, and I'm not complaining about child support, but I'd really like more visitation. I didn't have a lawyer for the divorce, so I just agreed with what she put in the judgment. Is there a way for me to get more time with my kids?

A: You'll either have to come to an agreement with the mother or file a modification and ask the court for more parenting time.

If you come up with an agreement with the mother, it's recommended that it be put in writing, but you don't necessarily have to modify your judgment. About 75% of folks that have a parenting time plan in place from the court have deviated from the agreement in some way by mutual agreement of the parties.

However, agreements outside of the court are not enforceable by the court or law enforcement.

If you file a modification to the parenting

time plan, the court only will consider what is in the best interests of the children and the safety of the parties.

Here, the safety of the parties doesn't appear to be at issue, so the court's focus will be on what is in the best interests of the children.

You also are allowed to ask for equal parenting time, which the court may order. If the court denies equal parenting time, it must do so by written findings that equal parenting time is not in the best interests of the children or endangers the safety of the parties.

I have known judges to deny equal parenting time where one parent works a similar schedule to the kid's school schedule and the other parent works full time with overtime. This is because even if the full-time working parent had the children, they wouldn't be able to watch them during work hours and would instead have to find a sitter or family member to help until they get home.

The standard plan you are following is referred to as the "status quo." To disturb the status quo, the proposed change needs to better serve the interests of the children.

There's a couple of unknowns from your hypothetical. I understand you want more parenting time, but I'm not sure how much more time you want, and when that would occur. The judge is unlikely to give you every weekend at the expense of the mother's weekends. At age 7, you would be entitled to six continuous weeks of summertime under the standard plan (you currently exercise two weeks). I would encourage you to review the standard parenting time plan to maximize holiday and other time that is available to you on

the Oregon Legal Firm website.

Q: I have a 16-year-old who doesn't want to visit her dad anymore. Can my child write a letter to the court and tell the judge she doesn't want to do visits anymore?

A: I'm assuming that you must have a parenting time plan in place. The court cannot change a parenting time plan without first filing a motion to modify the parenting time. A letter alone will not be enough for the judge to change the parenting time plan.

Let's assume you file a motion to modify the parenting time. The child cannot decide where they want to live until age 18. During a trial, a child may be allowed to testify to the court. This is often done in chambers in the presence of the judge and counsel only (not the parents). This testimony is on the record but being out of the presence of the parents is intended to allow the child to speak more freely.

Children also have the right to be represented by an attorney during a custody and parenting time proceeding.

Another option is to reach out to the other party to see if family counseling is possible.

In closing, there is no substitute for having a longer discussion of your situation(s) and goals with a competent attorney. With a fuller discussion, an attorney can provide you with a greater understanding of what to expect during a modification and your chances of success at a trial.

Blaine Clooten is an attorney serving Umatilla County with a focus on family law, estate planning and personal injury cases. Questions answered do not create an attorney-client relationship. Facts and law may vary; talk to an attorney for more information.