

**Siuslaw News**  
P.O. Box 10  
Florence, OR 97439

# Opinion

## Celebrating the role of community newspapers in Democracy

Whenever I enter the Siuslaw News, a wave of nostalgia overcomes my senses. The scent of newsprint and sight of the old presse take me back to my days as a community newspaper reporter and editor, reminding me that journalism is still delivering truth, justice and cartoons as it has since America's first broadsheet in 1721.

My love affair with the truth-telling trade began as a girl during a visit to Santa, who sat enthroned every December in the lobby of the New York Daily News building. With its giant orb spinning in the lobby — the world's largest indoor globe — and dozens of reporters scurrying about with their fedoras and notepads, the newspaper enthralled me.

That passion continued as editor of my high school paper and then my first job at The Miami Herald, then the nation's fourth largest daily, where I felt like a guppy in a sea of cigar-smoking sharks.

It was the height of the Cronkite era and modern-day muckrakers Woodward and Bernstein had just exposed corruption in the Oval Office. A beehive of workers produced over a dozen daily editions and 4-inch-thick Sunday papers on

IBM Selectric "Correcto-Space" typewriters, pasted together with razor blades and glue instead of Quark and Adobe software.

As the lone female in a football-field-size newsroom, I ended up with the "Women's Pages" where my first writing assignments consisted of wedding gown descriptions for the bridal column.

Still, these mundane tasks exercised the writing biceps as I learned journalism ethics from inspiring mentors like editor Marty Baron, who later went on to lead the "Spotlight" investigative team featured in the recent Oscar-winning movie, demonstrating the critical role that newspapers serve.

It didn't take me long to trade the smoky, boisterous metro newsroom for the greener pastures of a rural community newspaper, where my desk consisted of an unfinished door from the hardware store stretched across two file cabinets topped with an old manual typewriter — no slick "Correcto-Space" technology.

There I discovered that some of the most meaningful, breaking stories find their humble roots in small-town papers after one of my local reports was

**GUEST VIEWPOINT:**  
**National Newspaper Day**  
CATHERINE J. ROURKE  
JOURNALIST

picked up by the AP wires and turned into a statewide debacle that eventually resulted in consumer-protecting legislation.

I never forgot that and never looked back, spending the next 38 years at community newspapers dedicated to genuine public service journalism.

More than just a patchwork quilt of police blotters, weather reports, obituaries and sports scores, these papers serve as the glue that binds people together in rural areas in one united voice.

If journalism is called the "soul of democracy," then community newspapers represent its heart.

Our forefathers established freedom of speech and freedom of the press as the FIRST Amendment, not the fifth or the 15th, and designed the American newspaper to serve as the watchdog for the common good.

At small-town papers I was able to focus on the ordinary Joe and invisible people, the

single moms and homeless vets and the guy next door — telling their stories, voicing their concerns and helping to solve their problems.

The media has changed dramatically in the 21st century, but small-town newspapers now have an unprecedented opportunity to safeguard this sacred public trust. While not always the most glamorous of journalism jobs, community reporters make an enormous contribution in generating stories that often trickle down to larger papers and broadcast audiences.

Many national breaking news reports often trace their sources to community papers like the Siuslaw News.

According to the Harvard's Nieman Foundation, which focuses on the future of journalism, community newspapers are expanding their role in paving a sustainable future for the media as large metro dailies fold and Twitter-length headlines replace investigative

reporting.

Through community outreach, citizen engagement, industry collaboration, expanded audiences and building new partnerships, they can adapt an integrated and balanced approach of marketing, advertising and quality original content to provide to a lively platform for civic discourse and the exchange of ideas.

Citizens rely on reporters to ask tough questions, read in between the lines, translate both sides of the story and reveal the truth behind the facts in a way that illuminates today's often contradictory issues so readers can make their own educated decisions.

With greater in-depth analysis of the issues that affect the everyday needs and concerns of their readers, community newspapers can uphold journalism's moral responsibility to serve the common good and give readers a greater sense of ownership in their media.

The power of the press today lies in its magnificent capacity to deliver information to wider audiences instantaneously across both digital and print platforms.

What must never change, however, is journalism's time-

honored Code of Ethics and commitment to accuracy, integrity, responsibility and credibility.

Journalism isn't dying but simply undergoing transformation like many other paradigms, such as health care, and community newspapers remain the industry's most resilient survivors.

I, for one, look forward to reading my copy every Wednesday and Saturday over a cup of coffee in Old Town, my fingers smeared with the familiar black smudges as they clip coupons and columns to share with others.

As one of my former colleagues said, "It's nice to see that the printed word is still, at least for now, the most powerful medium for reporting on the death of the printed word."

For community papers and journalism in general, I truly believe the best is yet to come.

*Catherine J. Rourke is a native New Yorker who worked as a newspaper reporter and editor around the country and now lives in Florence. In 2006 she received a "Community Journalist of the Year" award from the Arizona Press Club.*

### LETTERS

#### Support education

The Lane Community College Board of Education unanimously endorsed Ballot Measure 97 at its September meeting. We strongly encourage all Lane County voters to vote "yes" on this important measure. The State of Oregon faces an historic revenue shortfall in the 2017-18 biennium, which may require massive spending cuts to education and social services in order to balance the state budget.

The Lane Community College Board of Directors resolves to formally endorse and urge community support of Measure 97. In doing so, the Lane Community College Board joins the "A Better Oregon" coalition effort to raise the

corporate minimum tax on the largest corporations doing business in Oregon — Corporations with more than \$25 million in Oregon sales — to fund education and social services in Oregon.

We know Oregonians value education. That's why we hope you will join us in voting YES for Ballot Measure 97.

*Sharon Stiles, Chair  
LCC Board of Education  
Florence*

#### Wrong kind of 'genius'

Perfectly legal real estate loopholes and the help of the "wealth defense industry" apparently have permitted Donald Trump to avoid all income taxes on as much as \$50 million dollars a year, annually, for 18 years.

We can't know for sure because Mr. Trump refuses to release his tax returns. While Trump has lived a life of ostentatious luxury, his accountants and lawyers have enabled him to pay nothing for the public good, leaving that bill to be covered by all those who have not had the benefits of Internal Revenue Code provisions bestowed by a lobby-driven Congress.

According to Mr. Trump, "That makes me smart."

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie agree. As Giuliani says, and Christie echoes, paying no income taxes is a sign of "genius — absolute genius."

Self-serving genius since the \$914 million business-failure deduction on Mr. Trump's personal tax return was of no benefit to the scammed investors, and stiffed suppliers and unpaid laborers who actually lost their money in Trump's business bankruptcies.

So much for the traditional American ideal of "equal under the law" fairness where, while grumbling about taxes, people are more offended when super-wealthy individuals pay at lesser tax rates.

A Pew Research poll found 60 percent of Americans were troubled that the rich weren't paying their fair share. In 2012, Romney's 14.1 percent tax rate was seen as unfair.

In 2016, should Trump's zero percent be admired as genius? Especially as he complains of "Our country becoming a Third World country" while decrying the condition of our publicly-financed infrastructure, schools and military.

Could those conditions be because Mr. Trump and others like him don't pay federal income taxes?

Is cynically using the loss of other people's money and lobbyist-inspired tax-reducing tools that increase the tax burden for the rest of us the kind of "absolute genius" needed in the White House?

Or is Trump's self-serving genius just plain dumb.

*Arnold Buchman  
Florence*

#### Fearsome path

While our presidential candidates are busy name calling and other inane malarkey, the country continues down a fearsome path. Examples are myriad and here is just one.

Forget for a moment the Federal budget of \$3.95 trillion and consider that in 2016 we will be short by between \$600 billion and \$616 billion; the little old deficit.

This is the amount we are borrowing just to cover costs.

It is easy to become inured to these huge numbers so think about it this way. The Federal Government is now spending \$69.6 million per hour — money that it does not have.

Now they tell us not to worry because it is only 3.3 percent of GDP. If you believe that to be a reason not to worry and you want to buy a nice old bridge across the Siuslaw, just give me a call.

*Jimmie Zinn  
Florence*

#### A Republican for Roblan, McKeown

For the past two decades I've been fortunate enough to be involved in many facets of the

political and economic development arenas on the South Coast. It has been both an honor and a pleasure.

From that experience I can honestly say that I've worked with three elected individuals who have truly stood up as stalwart advocates for this region: Former State Senator Joanne Verger, current State Senator Arnie Roblan and current State Representative Caddy McKeown.

As a mayor, port commissioner, educator and member of many boards, panels and committees, I have seen both Arnie and Caddy up close, personal and in action. They are superb representatives of this region and for our concerns.

At each and every turn they have fought for economic development, better schools and more efficient state services.

One of the things that I find most impressive is their terrific ability to work across the aisle in Salem. Because they work so well with members of both parties they have earned the respect of Democrats and Republicans alike.

In today's political world that is rare indeed. And while they are both Democrats and I am a life-long Republican, I most appreciate the calm demeanor that they take with them to Salem. It is an attitude rooted in their dedication to good governance.

I certainly don't agree with them on each and every issue (I don't even agree with my wonderful wife on each and every issue), but I've been around long enough to know that what they bring to government is exactly what we should wish all elected officials to bring: Respect, common sense, wisdom, the ability to listen and to get things done.

This Republican is casting his vote for Democrats Arnie Roblan and Caddy McKeown. I am proud to know them, proud to work with them and prouder still that they represent you and I.

I encourage you to vote to send them both back to Salem.

*Keith Tymchuk  
ReedSPORT*

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous and anonymous letters or poetry will not be published.

All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

Write to:

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John Bartlett  
Jenna Bartlett  
Ned Hickson  
Susan Gutierrez  
Cathy Dietz  
Ron Annis  
Jeremy Gentry

Publisher, ext. 327  
General Manager, ext. 318  
Editor, ext. 313  
Advertising Director, ext. 326  
Office Supervisor, ext. 312  
Production Supervisor  
Press Manager

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**Saturday Issue**—General news, Thursday noon; Budgets, two days prior to publication; Regular classified ads, Thursday 1 p.m.; Display ads, Thursday noon; Boxed and display classified ads, Wednesday 5 p.m. Soundings, Tuesday 5 p.m.

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WHERE TO WRITE

Pres. Barack Obama The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Washington, D.C. 20500 Comments: 202-456-1111 Switchboard: 202-456-1414 FAX: 202-456-2461 TTY/TDD Comments: 202-456-6213 www.whitehouse.gov	202-224-5244 541-431-0229 www.wyden.senate.gov	FAX: 503-986-1080 Email: Sen.ArnieRoblan@state.or.us
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U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden 221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg Washington, DC 20510	U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (4th Dist.) 2134 Rayburn HOB Washington, DC 20515 202-225-6416/ 800-944-9603 541-269-2609/ 541-465-6732 www.defazio.house.gov	West Lane County Commissioner Jay Bozievich 125 E. Eighth St. Eugene, OR 97401 541-682-4203 FAX: 541-682-4616 Email: Jay.Bozievich@co.lane.or.us
U.S. Sen. Arnie Roblan (Dist. 5) 900 Court St. NE - S-417 Salem, OR 97301 503-986-1705		