

True journalism

In the social media era where information can be instantaneously shared around the world by almost anyone with no more effort than a few keystrokes and the click of a button, some may question the value of traditional journalism.

Why wait for the newspaper to report on an incident when you can simply tune in to the unfiltered gossip online?

The logic makes sense to a certain extent, and the strategy may work most of the time. Reading a Facebook post from someone whose house just burned down will often provide most of the pertinent information, and something like that is usually easy to confirm, if not completely accurate.

But, believe it or not, many of the “facts” floating around on the internet are not true. What then?

Do you believe the comments that get the most “likes” or the ones that get repeated the most or maybe just those that tell you what you want to hear? When everyone with a keyboard can spew information with no accountability for inaccuracy, discerning the truth can be difficult.

And this is why journalism is even more important in the age of Twitter and Facebook.

Contrary to what you may have read on the web, neither this newspaper nor any of its employees are part of a conspiracy to defraud the public. Nor will this paper stoop to the level of publishing unverified rhetoric to push a particular agenda.

Journalism requires digging for facts — public documents, official records, firsthand accounts — and representing both sides of an argument or issue. At the Eagle, we work diligently to provide the best verifiable information available to inform our readers.

As an example, we recently chose not to publish a letter to the editor that contained accusations against three local people without any corresponding evidence. The writer blamed these people for “coercing (him) to file a discrimination suit” against an elected county official and said he had formally withdrawn his complaint.

Rather than immediately publish the juicy gossip, which may or may not be true, we did what we would do with any information like this: We requested the relevant documents from the appropriate agency to provide a factual foundation before we broadcast it to the world.

We determined a complaint had been filed, but the case was still open, so most of the documents could not be released. The agency representative said, even if the complaint was withdrawn, it may take some time before the case was officially closed and the documents would be available to the public. We were encouraged to check back soon, and like any diligent news agency, we intend to do so.

In the meantime, the letter was published on a website of an organization claiming to be a news outlet. Publishing the letter was certainly their prerogative, but accompanying the letter was an explanation with

patently false claims about this newspaper. And the organization did not even try to contact the Eagle before publishing the false information.

The explanation claims the Eagle’s publisher contacted the letter writer, which never happened. It claims the Eagle said the letter would not be printed because the use of the word “coercing” was a crime, which is not accurate. Worst of all, it claims the letter writer was told the Eagle would publish the letter after the upcoming elections, which is ridiculous.

The Eagle’s editor did leave a phone message for the letter writer and informed him the letter could not be printed because it contained accusations of possible illegal conduct. Using the word “coercing” is not a crime, but accusing people of the crime of coercion without allowing them to explain their actions — or to deny the allegations — could be considered libel, which is printed slander or defamation. And a news organization can be found liable for damages for such claims, even for publishing a letter written by someone else.

And the letter writer was not told it would be published after the elections. That letter will never be printed on the Eagle’s opinion page, and the writer was told as much.

The letter contained no opinion. It was a list of allegations presented as fact. People are entitled to their own opinions, such as their favorite color, and we enjoy providing a forum for that on our opinion page.

When it comes to reporting facts, however, we hold ourselves to a higher standard and dig for verifiable truth. And this is much different than opinion. While people may argue about what, in their opinion, is the best color, the color of the agency’s date-received stamp on the complaint filed by the letter writer is most certainly blue. That’s a fact.

Finding the truth requires work. We contact the relevant parties. We solicit and publish their comments to provide the most complete story possible.

Then we publish the results of that work, of that journalism, as a news article — not on the opinion page. And if we get something wrong, we publish a correction to clear up the facts.

This is what separates real journalism from the rest of the information one might encounter.

It is thorough. It is vetted. It is not one-sided. It is accurate, and if ever it is proven to be inaccurate, it is quickly corrected to comply with the facts.

Be wary of any organization claiming to be a news outlet that does not follow this process, that does not attempt to contact the people it writes about, that does not dig for verifiable facts beneath the rumors and gossip. Be wary, even if they’re telling you what you want to hear.

Opinions are one thing. Facts are another.

In the modern era of information technology, a journalist that can tell the difference is more important than ever.



‘We stand firmly behind the Eagle’

To our customers:

In recent weeks, the Blue Mountain Eagle, its staff and its publisher have come under vicious attack by some members of the Grant County community. These criticisms have challenged the truthfulness of articles we have published and the integrity of Eagle employees. The comments — appearing mostly in social media platforms such as Facebook — contain false accusations about our actions and motives, some of which border on defamation.

We have owned and operat-

ed the Eagle since 1979. In that time, the newspaper has consistently practiced journalism that is accurate, fair and thorough.

The Eagle also has demonstrated community leadership in times of crisis — most recently during last summer’s wildfires, mill closures and the attempt in 2010 by the Aryan Nation to relocate in Grant County.

The Eagle will continue to report on local controversy as well as the activities, events and people that make up the community. We will continue to offer space in

the newspaper and its website for opinion, in the form of letters to the editor and op-ed articles. We do not publish personal attacks or unverifiable statements of fact. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and for content.

As the principal owners of EO Media Group, we stand firmly behind the Eagle, its employees and its publisher, Marissa Williams, in this unfortunate time of divisiveness in Grant County.

Steve Forrester
Astoria
Kathryn Brown
Pendleton

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Meeting attendees not encouraged to tear up grazing permits

To the Editor:

The newspaper has a rule that if one’s name is mentioned in a letter, then a rebuttal can be made that can exceed the one-letter-per-month limitation. Not to give a further opportunity to rant, the individual will be simply referred to as “You know who with a sign,” or just YK-WWAS.

YKWWAS reasoned the militia was present at the Grange in Mt. Vernon when an educational forum was presented because a bumper sticker with “Idaho 3%” was on a truck. Does that mean if an Obama or Hillary sticker was seen, then one can believe that escapees from an insane asylum were driving or lunatics were at the meeting? Works both ways.

YKWWAS did not attend the meeting but alleged ranchers were encouraged to tear up grazing permits. Delusional thinking because that did not happen.

YKWWAS cautioned there is a group, 90 strong, ready to get giddy and parade with signs at any indication anyone would entertain a thought different than theirs.

Prior to prohibition, a woman named Carrie Nation would storm into a saloon and attack the bar with an ax. A ditty came about, “Close the door, lock and latch it. Here comes Carrie with a brand new hatchet.”

Could this be coined? “Having a meeting, will YKWWAS come peeking? A sign in hand, along with the merry band. The truth doesn’t matter, YKKWAS is mad as a hatter.”

Louis Crabtree
John Day

Conflicts of interest endure

To the Editor:

Looking at the voters’ guide for the forest commission is much like looking at the who’s who of Forest Service contract holders or beneficiaries in Grant County.

Four men running for the Public Forest Commission, Mark Webb, King Williams, Dave Hannibal and Russ Young, each have a financial stake in seeing projects completed on the Malheur National Forest, at the expense of decommissioning roads, if it means seeing the Grant County stewardship project money paid out.

Just so we don’t lose track.

Russ runs Iron Triangle logging, sole contract holder of the “stewardship” contract. King represents Iron Triangle logging at meetings, Dave represents Grayback Forestry, which takes up the thinning contract work (through Iron Triangle) and Mark makes his paycheck by “facilitating” the “collaborative,” of which they are all members, to help Russ, King and Dave get their project work and money in the end.

The forest supervisor spelled it out very clearly about a year ago. If road closures were not in the projects, no projects would move forward. Which means King, Russ and Dave get no project payments, and Mark’s usefulness on the collaborative goes away too.

I support Tad Houpt, Howard Gieger, Jim Sproul, Mike Smith and Sam Palmer for the Public Forest Commission.

These five men can look at the situation and best represent the majority of Grant County and our needs to extract natural resources, while protecting open motorized access to our public lands. Instead of Mark, King, Russ and Dave, who represent their own personal interest of extracting the roughly \$70 million dollars in the stewardship contract at the expense of all of our open access to the forest.

I know King and Mark have already seen votes of no confidence before in positions. I see no reason to give them another chance.

John D. George
Bates, Oregon

Grant County residents are our own voice

To the Editor:

The message on our Blue Mountain Eagle Facebook page reads:

“oh wise ones! it’s so very special how you get a kick out of deceiving your readers. coming soon to your town. me! i so look forward to meeting all of you. love, -----” This, friends and neighbors, was the first shot across the bow by a pair of recent arrivals from Idaho who have launched a “media war” (their words) with a website pretending to be our voice — yes, that is yours and mine.

Since when does someone arrive from Idaho one day and the next day declares (and thinks) they are our voice? Incredible! Ridiculous! Insulting! While leaving it to you to research them and connect the dots leading to the locals who have brought this invasion to our community, I ask the people of Grant County this: Are we not intelligent and capable enough to recognize truth, evaluate evidence, choose our leaders and craft our policies for ourselves? These impostors of “truth” are beyond arrogant and manipulative, and they are truly not the voice of Grant County. We know that; apparently they don’t.

As the self-styled media reporter (who sat front and center at the candidate meet last Saturday) said, “i so look forward to meeting all of you.” Should you have the opportunity to do so, you may want to ask her to respect your ability to be your own voice; we don’t need the “help” of outsiders. Be forewarned, their expressed mission is this: “my job in Grant County is to get in their face and take all their sling. I’m going to ask them to send all their arrows to me.” Now whom do you suppose he is going to be protecting? He was the embedded reporter with the Idaho III%ers militia during the refuge occupation and worked in tandem with the infamous Pete Santilli. There is absolutely no doubt, in my opinion, what their end game plan is: telling you what is “truth” and whom to vote for in the coming elections. This has to be one of the most shameful election year tactics to strike this county, ever.

Kay Steele
Ritter

Letters policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to editor@bmeagle.com, or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.



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